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Library Profile-Millsaps-Wilson Library: On the Brink of Change

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Library Profile — Millsaps-Wilson
Library: On the Brink of Change

by Allison P. Mays (Collection Development Librarian) Millsaps-Wilson Library

The College

Millsaps College is a small, liberal arts college located on a beautiful 100-acre campus in the heart of Jackson, Mississippi. It was founded in 1890 by the Methodist Church with a grant of $50,000 from Major Reuben Webster Millsaps—thus, the name “Majors” for the athletic teams. Current enrollment is about 1,400 students, (54% out of state), with a student-faculty ratio of 13:1. Many older buildings have been renovated over the years, the most recent being the student and activities center, which were just finished in January. The biggest change will be coming this summer. Dr. George Harmon, president for the last 22 years, will be retiring and Dr. Frances Lucas-Taucher has been chosen as the 10th president—the first woman president in the college’s history.

Millsaps College has not only a strong tradition in liberal arts, but of being a leader in Mississippi. It was the first institution of higher education in Mississippi to voluntarily integrate, which it did in 1965, and it was also a strong defender of the teaching of evolution in this state. Millsaps is one of four private colleges in the U.S. to have a Phi Beta Kappa chapter, and last year was ranked by the U.S. News & World Report as the 3rd best liberal arts college in their list, “Great Schools at Great Prices.”

The Library

The first library at Millsaps College was founded in 1892 in a room in Old Main Hall, which was heated by an open fireplace. The Carnegie-Millsaps Library was built in 1907, but in 1924 it was discovered that a “treacherous crawling man” had caused foundation damage, and a second Carnegie-Millsaps Library was erected. In 1955, the current Millsaps-Wilson Library was built; the library space was doubled in 1971 with the completion of the Academic Complex adjacent to the library. In 1998, several renovations were made to the library, including a new computer lab. Jim Parks, the College Librarian for 50 years and the last librarian to receive tenure, retired from the library in December 1999; Tom Henderson is the current interim College Librarian.

The library has a collection of over 200,000 print titles, 650 print subscriptions, and access to over 1,700 electronic journals and the Internet. There is seating for over 350 in study carrels, study rooms and tables, and over 50 computers. The Web version of the DRA catalog, TAOS, was brought up in the summer of 1999; other Web-based modules in acquisitions, circulation, and cataloging will be added later. There are five full-time professional librarians, and five full-time and two part-time staff. Special collections include the Eudora Welty Collection, the Paul Ramsey Collection in Applied Ethics, the Kellogg Collection of juvenile books and curriculum materials, and the Lehman Engel Collection. The library houses the Mississippi Methodist Archives and the Millsaps College Archives; there is also a separate rare book room. In 1997, the decision was made to withdraw from the U.S. government depository program because of concerns about shelf space and processing costs.

Two things plague the library: space and money. The money issue has been alleviated somewhat by a four-year insurmountable of funds from an endowed account, to be used for books only. Everyone on the campus recognizes the need for a new library as the older section of the library is becoming so very dated, but other building projects on campus have taken precedence. Another part of the problem is that no one knows what libraries will be like in the next few years, especially with the rapid changes which are taking place, such as e-books and e-journals. Do we need a classic library building or a gigantic computer lab, or some combination of the two? We can look to other colleges as they build new libraries, such as Rhodes College in Memphis, to see what solutions they work out, and learn from their mistakes and successes.

Serials

The Serials Assistant has two student workers, and she uses an in-house program to check-in and invoice serials. Because the DRA system did not have certain necessary features, a library staff member created an in-house program for serials, using Professional File. This program has been retained and used side-by-side with DRA, but it will eventually be abandoned as we migrate to the Web serials module of DRA. We do not have much of a problem with missing issues (mercifully, nothing is routed outside the library!), and we do not participate in any duplicate exchange programs. This department is also responsible for the binding, which is done by National Library Bindery; our serials vendor is EBSCO.

Since the serials budget has been frozen for some time, we are not doing much in the way of acquisitions in this area. The Serials Assistant maintains the databases, deals with title changes, billing and ship...
Nothing Stays the Same

I subtitled this article "On the Brink of Change" for several reasons. Not only will we have a new president who will bring her own style of management, but there will be a search for a new library director in another year. Will we be able to retain our current director, or will it be an "outsider," an unknown? This could drastically change things! We also hear rumors of a new library being built in a few years, which will be exciting, and, hopefully, rewarding. The college is currently undergoing the process of self-assessment in preparation for the new president, and also for re-accreditation with the Association of Colleges of the South; changes may come as a result of this process. And last, but certainly not least, are the changes in technology — print versus electronic, easier access to e-journals, the proliferation of free databases — that will impact the library and our users. It will be very interesting to see where we are in a few years.

A Personal Observation

I have the feeling that Millsaps is standing on her toes, ready to spring into the future. There is an enthusiasm here that is infectious, and it's exciting to be part of it. When I saw the announcement for this position, I remember thinking, "It's time to go home." And that's exactly how it feels.

And finally, my thanks to Debra McIntosh, College Archivist, for her assistance.