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Disappearing Stacks: No Books but Everything Else

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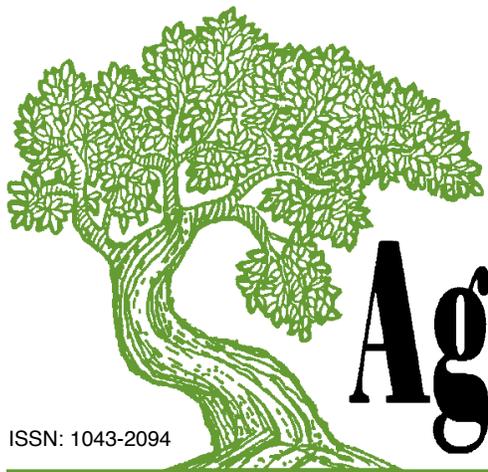
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Against the Grain

“Linking Publishers, Vendors and Librarians”

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Disappearing [print] Stacks — No Books, but Everything Else

by **Audrey Powers** (Associate Librarian, University of South Florida) <apowers@usf.edu>

When the article “Save Our Stacks” appeared in *Slate*¹ there was a flurry of email activity among academic librarians. The article begins with a description of how **Colby College** moved 170,000 books to storage to free up space in the library for administrative offices. At a time when academic libraries are repurposing library space due to the diminishing footprint of print books, the article sparked a passionate outcry and allegiance from faculty and students at **Colby College**. The article points out that repurposing library space is a current trend in libraries; however, the underlying argument for repurposing library space is complex, and opposition can sometimes appear to be driven by the old guard protecting tradition. I don’t think this is the case.

Repurposing library spaces and reducing the footprint of print books sparks controversy among faculty and students, particularly when

the decision is to reconfigure the space for non-library programs and activities. Altering the use of library space can become a contentious issue when the needs of the community served are not taken into consideration. One of the arguments used to justify these actions is the increase in the procurement of electronic resources which frees up floor space. As we travel down the road of *rightsizing*² library collections and retooling library spaces, it is incumbent upon administrators to be cognizant of the use of library resources, trends in publishing, current topics and initiatives in collection development, management and assessment, staffing levels, funding, and most importantly, the needs of the community being served.

The academic library I work in is busy all hours of the day and night. It continues to expand services for students by assimilating these departments into the Library: the Writing

Studio; Tutoring & Writing Services; SMART Lab; Digital Media Commons; Office for Undergraduate Research; Computing and Information Technology; Job Shop; and of course, **Starbucks**. In order to be positioned to achieve this, we began collecting eJournals more than 15 years ago and concurrently discontinued print journals whenever possible. More recently we weeded the reference, ready reference, monograph and serial collections and installed compact shelving. These activities afforded the subject librarians the opportunity to be proactive in collection management activities.

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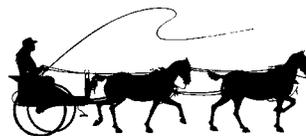


Debbie Vaughn has another baby girl, **Elizabeth Rose Crader**. She was born on Thursday, March 26th, weighing in at 6 pounds 8 ounces and measuring 19.4 inches. Congrats to **Deb** and her husband, **Bo**!

If Rumors Were Horses

Once again, lots has been going on.

According to **Laure Haak** at **ORCID** there are two new **ORCID** team members: **Alice Meadows** is joining **ORCID** as Communications Director and **Douglas Wright** as Membership Director, both starting in May. **Alice** and **Doug** will be supported through a grant to **ORCID** from the **Helmsley Charitable Trust**. <https://orcid.org/blog/2015/04/15/introducing-doug-wright-director-membership>



And April is the month that the astute **Dean Smith** becomes **Director of Cornell University Press**. **Smith** succeeds **John G. Ackerman**, who retired in January 2014 after 33 years at the Press including 26 as director. **Cornell University Press** was established in 1869, the first university press formed in the United States, for a university whose founder, **Ezra Cornell**, was committed to inclusiveness: “I would found an institution where any person can find instruction in any study.”

<http://www.cornellpress.cornell.edu>

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As we repurpose library space once used for print books, we have significantly reduced developing our print book collection. Traditional collection development activities have gone by the wayside, and much of our collection development is accomplished via Purchase-on-Demand or Patron-Driven Acquisitions. I can only speculate the reason for this is primarily due to budgetary considerations. As staffing levels drop, library budgets are flat, and costs continue to rise, the academic library is faced with a situation where the most efficient, expeditious, and least costly collection development methodology is accomplished by our patrons. Traditional collection development activities have ceased with a few programmatic exceptions. We no longer do business the same way.

And yes, I get it.

We don't have books sitting on shelves collecting dust, and we do provide multiple users access to books 24/7. It harkens back to the old mantra: "just in time" instead of "just in case." But are we supporting the learning process most effectively by providing the best library services and collections for our students?

In a recent study, **Anne Mangan** observed that students navigate print books more easily than digitized books, "making it less taxing cognitively, so you have more free capacity for comprehension."³ Although the advantages of eBooks appear to be obvious (portability, access to books at no charge), the disadvantages of screen-reading may outweigh the advantages: multi-tasking; distractions; less navigational control; and skimming rather than reading content.⁴

Is there a substantial difference in students' preferences and the effectiveness of learning when using print versus digitized books? Students prefer to read print books for a variety of reasons. Their concentration is improved, they have better understanding of what they read, and they have more control of the book. The tactile and olfactory experience beyond just, "I like the smell and feel of a book," plays a significant role in how the information within the book is managed by the user. They have the ability to navigate the text more easily, flip back to locate a part of the text they remember, skip ahead, etc.⁵

Reading patterns are disordered when using new technology such as reading on a screen or mobile device. Reading is a linear process and is disrupted by links and other distractions which cause us to read in a nonlinear fashion. Aside from the sentimentality of the tactile experience of holding a book in your hands, how we navigate a book has a significant effect on comprehension, focus, memory, and in-depth processing.⁶

At the 2014 **Charleston Conference**, keynote speaker **Anthea Stratigos** from **Outsell, Inc.** cited a survey of undergraduate students in which 86% of the students preferred print textbooks over eTextbooks.⁷ Other studies continue to support the premise that ultimately students prefer the traditional book versus the convenient eBook or eTextbook.

In other related spheres of the academic library world, a study done at **Murray State University Libraries** concluded that overall library users are twice as likely to be retained at the university as non-library users. In summary, the use of library resources and services increased the odds of retention by 96%, checking out items increased the likelihood of retention by 36%, and logging into electronic resources, particularly later in the semester, increased the odds of retention by 24%.⁸ Although electronic resources may be an effective way to get information to a larger number of people, reading an eBook may not be the best way to comprehend and retain the information.

Are we developing balanced collections of print resources and electronic resources in an informed manner? Conclusive research needs to be done before it is too late and we disassemble our print collections. There are several facets of this conundrum that need to be addressed: balancing our collections; the best use of library space; user preferences for eBooks and print books; and the effect of using electronic and print resources on learning outcomes. With what is known at this point, we need to approach collection development and "rightsizing" academic library collections with caution. As we repurpose library spaces we need to continually be cognizant of the needs of the communities we serve and effect changes that support teaching, research, and learning.

Maryanne Wolf of **Tufts University** most aptly said, "There is a physicality in reading maybe even more than we want to think about as we lurch into digital reading — as we move forward perhaps with too little reflection. I would like to preserve the absolute best of older forms, but know when to use the new."⁹ And to bring this essay full circle, **Colby** history professor, **Rob Weisbrot**, said, "While we laud the impressive advances in digitizing resources, these should supplement, not substitute, for keeping physical texts in the main library building."¹⁰

In this issue of *Against the Grain* there are several articles and opinion pieces about the disappearance of print materials from academic library collections as well as practical advice and case studies about rightsizing collections. Two articles are from librarians at special libraries at **Northwestern University** (medical and law) in which the remote storage unit, **Oak Grove Library Center**, is shared.

The authors represent a variety of academic libraries. Most of all, we are all passionate about this topic and want to share our perspectives with you.

The authors in this issue include the following librarians:

Audrey Powers, University of South Florida, "No Books, but Everything Else."

Ann Okerson, Center for Research Libraries, "Books Do Furnish a Room."

Cris Ferguson, Murray State University, "A Case for the Use of Collection Analysis Tools in Deselection."

Jack Montgomery, Western Kentucky University Libraries, "Disap-

pearing Stacks? What is Appropriate is Still the Issue."

Sue Woodson and Blair Anton, Welch Medical Library, Johns Hopkins University, "Update on the Welch Medical Library."

Andrea Twiss-Brooks, Mansueto Library, University of Chicago, "The Joe and Rika Mansueto Library at the University of Chicago."

Eric C. Parker and Maribel Hilo Nash, Pritzker Legal Research Center, Northwestern University, "Remote Storage and Pritzker Legal Research Center — Figuring Out How to Do More with Less."

Heidi Nickisch Duggan, Mark Berendsen, and Mary Anne Zmaczynski, Northwestern University, "Galter Library's Disappearing Stacks."

Our hope is that you find the articles contained within to be practical, insightful, and inspiring. Many thanks are extended to my co-editor **Cris Ferguson** and **Ramune Kubilius** who coordinated the Chicago librarian authors. 🌱

Endnotes

1. **Rebecca Schuman**. "Save Our Stacks." (*Slate*. May 12, 2014), <http://www.slate.com/articles/life/education/2014/05/college-libraries-should-keep-their-books-in-the-stacks.html>.
2. **Suzanne M Ward**. *Rightsizing the Academic Library Collection*. (Chicago: American Library Association, 2015).
3. **Anne Mangan, Bente R. Walgermo, and Kolbjørn Brønnick**, "Reading Linear Texts on Paper Versus Computer Screen: Effects on Reading Comprehension," *International Journal of Educational Research* 58 (2013): 61-68, doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2012.12.002>.
4. **Naomi S Baron**. "The case against e-readers: Why reading paper books is better for your mind." (*PostEverything. The Washington Post*. January 12, 2015), <http://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2015/01/12/the-case-against-kindle-why-reading-paper-books-is-better-for-your-mind-and-body/>.
5. **Ferris Jabr**. "The Reading Brain in the Digital Age: The Science of Paper Versus Screens." (*Scientific American*. September 2013), <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=reading-paper-screens#>.
6. **Rachel Grate**. "Science Has Great News For People Who Read Actual Books." (*Arts.Mic*. September 22, 2014), <http://mic.com/articles/99408/science-has-great-news-for-people-who-read-actual-books>.
7. **Anthea Stratigos**, "Being Earnest in the New Normal" (presentation, **34th Annual Charleston Conference**, Charleston, SC, November 6, 2014).
8. **Adam Murray**, "The Punishment for Dreamers: Big Data, Retention, and Academic Libraries." (presentation, **34th Annual Charleston Conference**, Charleston, SC, November 8, 2014).
9. **Grate**, "Science," *Arts.Mic*.
10. **Schuman**, "Save," *Slate*.