A Library of Design: Electronic Collections Inspire

Modern Research Spaces

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Abstract

The Xavier University of Louisiana Library Resource Center was built in 1993. After Hurricane Katrina filled the library with 18 inches of water in 2005, its first floor was re-carpeted, its bookshelves refurbished and the reference room was returned to its original state. In 2013, the Xavier Library began acquiring electronic resources to replace the majority of its print reference and print journal collections. As more virtual resources were purchased, less shelving space was needed, inspiring Xavier librarians to seize this opportunity to create a more inviting library that students could use for research, gathering, and studying. This article describes how discarding items formally collected in print and currently collected electronically, gave new life to the research spaces at the Xavier University Library.

Xavier University of Louisiana, founded by Saint Katharine Drexel and the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, is both a Catholic and historically Black university. During times of slavery and segregation, historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) were the only institutions that would admit African-American students. The higher education act of 1965, as amended, defines HBCUs as "any historically black college or university that was established prior to 1964, whose principal mission was, and is, the education of black Americans" (Lucisano, 2010). Today, HBCUs provide critical higher education opportunities for African-Americans, as well as low income, and educationally disadvantaged Americans. In addition, HBCUs play an increasing role in strengthening our workforce (Lucisano, 2010). It was the mission of Saint Katharine Drexel and the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament to educate both black Catholic and Native American students (Xavier University of Louisiana, 2014).

With 3,178 students, Xavier offers undergraduate degrees in the sciences, arts and humanities as well as doctoral degrees of Pharmacy, Psychology and Education (Xavier University of Louisiana, 2014). The Xavier University Library Resource Center provides access to information in various formats including books, ebooks, academic journals, media and electronic resources for all of Xavier's disciplines (Xavier University of Louisiana, 2014).

At Xavier's inception, the library resource center was located in what is today the Music Building, a gothic structure that opened in 1937 with the words *Library Xavier University Anno Domini 1936* engraved over its front doors. Majestic with marble stairs and high ceilings the building proved to be too small as the library collection of books and periodicals grew along with the addition of an Archives Department.

In 1993, Blitch and Associates and Bills-Manning Architects completed the construction of a new library on the far north side of Xavier University's campus (Xavier University of

Louisiana, 2014). It was decided that the first four floors of this six-story building would be used for the library and the top two floors for classrooms, department offices, and meeting rooms. The new building allowed for environmental controls to be implemented along with more modern research spaces and an infrastructure that supported new technologies (Xavier University of Louisiana, 2014).

The library's collection grew into its new space over the next twelve years. The scope of the Archives Department expanded to include manuscripts, rare books and artifacts that dealt with the city of New Orleans and Xavier University. The Archives Department also began collecting materials that relate to Black Catholics. The Institute of Black Catholic Studies (IBCS) Master of Theology Program was started at Xavier University in 1980 and is the only graduate program in the United States for the study of Black Catholic Theology and Pastoral Ministry. The Xavier Archives Department is most often used by researchers whose focus is on the integration of the Roman Catholic religious traditions and the distinct experience of African Americans and people of the African Diaspora residing in the United States (Xavier University of Louisiana, 2014).

The print journal collection also expanded with its long runs of science journals. The library's archival collection of *Advances in Botanical Research*, for example, stretched from the year 1974 until the year 2010 creating bound periodical tomes that occupied 9 linear bookshelves. The archival collection of *Acta Chrystallogrphica* from 1980 through 2013, did not cover as much time, however, its size required eight shelving units (54 linear bookshelves).

These scholarly peer-reviewed journals were not being touched while on the shelves which was evident from the layer of dust that covered them. Faculty members would request articles from these print journals electronically via our interlibrary loan system. From this the

library faculty surmised that teaching faculty did not want to find journal articles on bookshelves and then photocopy them.

Leisure reading magazines were also under used by faculty and the students whom they were initially intended to entertain. Sporadic collections of such titles as *Ms.*, which was collected between 1981 and 1986 and *O, The Oprah Magazine,* which was collected from 2000 until 2003 and then again from 2010 until 2014, were bound and consumed one linear bookshelf each. These collections had typically been gifted to us from faculty members clearing out office spaces. The intent was to continue these gifted journal subscriptions at some point, but this proved cost prohibitive as print was losing its popularity. Further, as collections became larger, spaces where the growing student population could study became increasingly limited which led, at one time, to discussions of expanding the library up to the fifth and sixth floors.

In 2005, the flooding from Hurricane Katrina left 18 inches of water on the ground floor of the library and damaged portions of the Reference Collection and the most current issues of the print journals, which had been housed on the first floor. At a time when replacing library materials was critical, Xavier University was forced to cut the library's budget. Interlibrary loan became a lifeline for Xavier's students and gifted items were added to the collection almost reflexively as librarians were desperate to supplement a sparse collection. Even as the budget improved, replacing print materials lost during the storm proved difficult as the cost of backfiles can exceed the cost of current subscriptions and some publishers had moved resources to an entirely digital platform.

In the spring of 2013, the library director, Dr. Lynette Ralph, decided that the collection of the Xavier Library needed to be evaluated. Outdated print materials were literally collecting dust while students increasingly requested that they be allowed to access library resources

online. Ms. Shawn Tonner of Library Building Consulting was hired to conduct a building needs assessment for the Xavier Library. On July 29, 2013, Ms. Tonner conducted a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) exercise with all 19 employees of the Xavier University Library. While this exercise concluded that the library's "beautiful building, large space, furniture, windows, and appealing entrance" were among its strengths, it was also determined that the library's "no digital collections, no new books" was a weakness, lost opportunity and threat (Tonner, 2013).

For the month of September 2013, a white board (40 inches by 72 inches) with the statement "Tell Us What You Think" was placed in the entrance of the Xavier Library. Sticky notes of various sizes and colors were placed on a table next to white board and students were encouraged to write down their top suggestion for the library on a sticky note and attach it to the white board. By the end of September, 382 students had written legible suggestions that the library could record. The top suggestion for the library, with 104 mentions, was to acquire a library café. The seconded highest recommendation, with 52 mentions, was to add additional electric outlets in the building for the charging of electronic devices. Library resources were only mentioned by 13 students while improvements to the computer lab equipment were requested 20 times. See "Tell Us What You Think" in Appendix A.

The library faculty considered their concern for the library's collection (as reflected in the Building Needs Assessment SWOT exercise) and the student's concern for access to computers and outlets, before determining that electronic resources were the most cost efficient way to replace reference materials and journal subscriptions. The costs of processing new print materials were estimated to be $150.00 per item when considering the amount of employee time expended by processing each item. On occasion there was a backlog of non-processed new print

items, which proved frustrating to both reference librarians and patrons. Frequently used reference materials and journals were sent to the bindery for binding and repairs incurring an approximate cost of $15,000 per year; enough to purchase several electronic reference books. At the same time, massively discarding print materials and replacing them with electronic subscriptions would have a drastic impact on the physical layout of the library.

The library director first updated the collection development plan to create guidelines for collecting electronic resources. An ad hoc library learning commons committee was created next to discuss how to best repurpose newly cleared spaces that were once used for bookshelves. The ad hoc learning commons committee consisted of the library director, the assistant director for access services, the systems librarian, the head of collection resources, the coordinator of collection assessment, the head of metadata management, and the metadata librarian. The library director chaired the committee and distributed articles for committee members to read prior to the first committee meeting.

The assistant director of access services was invested in the outcome of the project because the reference librarians in her department worked on the floors of the library that would be directly impacted by the physical changes. She was able to advise the committee of the types of queries being asked by students and the assignments given annually by faculty.

The systems librarian was able to recommend electronic platforms that would work seamlessly with our electronic catalog as we purchased electronic resources to replace most of our print reference and journal collections. He advised the committee as they purchased new hardware. Further, the systems librarian understood how our resources would work within the university information technology system server and was aware of the optimal spaces where outlets could to be added to the learning commons.

The head of collection resources and the coordinator of collection assessment worked with library liaisons and department liaisons to determine which print materials to keep and which titles to de-select. They also checked for the availability of electronic reference titles, journals and backfiles. When titles were available electronically, they compared packaging price options to patron driven access prices and a la carte titles. The head of metadata management and the metadata librarian were charged with removing the de-selected records from the catalog and uploading thousands of new electronic records.

Once the collection was analyzed, every print item that could be purchased as an electronic resource, was selected to be discarded. Librarians created lists of print titles that were slated for discard to show to their liaison departments. Faculty members were offered withdrawn materials for their personal collections. Reference books and print journals that faculty wanted were deleted from the catalog and stamped withdrawn. Most faculty picked up these items from the library; however, some library student workers were charged with the task of delivering withdrawn library items to faculty offices. The entire set of *Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC)* was requested by several English professors who prefer to conduct research with print materials and wanted to create a departmental book collection for their office suite. An education professor took the 2009-2014 copies of the *American Journal of Education*.

Communicating with liaisons to the library also resulted in the librarian's decision to keep some of the titles initially identified for de-selection. The Biology Department requested that we keep our bound print copies of the Scientific American as its electronic version did not always have the accompanying illustrations, tables, or graphs mentioned in its text. The Art Department requested that the library keep its bound copies of *Print, A Quarterly Journal of Graphic Arts* not only for its photographs and illustrations but also for its advertisements, which

are not available digitally.

Some of the print reference books and journals that Xavier faculty did not want were offered to other institutions. Most academic libraries were not interested in acquired dated print materials. Some public high school libraries accepted science journals "with photographs" to use for collages and other science projects. One high school teacher accepted two sets of World Book encyclopedias. The remainder of our discarded items were stamped "withdrawn" and dumped into either the recycle bin or trash bin.

In addition to electronic books, iPad Minis were purchased and Kindle Apps were downloaded onto each one for the acquisition of reference books and some textbooks from Amazon.com. The rare books that we found in our reference collection were placed in the rare book collection and those few reference print materials that we needed to keep were placed on the fourth floor on a condensed shelving unit. Community connections were made with the donation of old journals and encyclopedias to schools and local museums.

Another issue that plagued Xavier's Library prior to 2013, was its three-year contracts with several online journal providers. These package title deals were set and unchangeable which did not always meet the needs of our patrons. Once these contracts ended we did not automatically renew. Instead we insisted on being able to subscribe to titles that we knew from our Interlibrary Loan statistics were in demand. We also opted to go from three-year agreements to just one-year agreements. While this prevented us from obtaining the savings offered by publishers when signing contracts for set packages, it allowed us to be more flexible when responding to the ever-changing needs of our patrons.

We decided to purchase backfiles of journal titles frequently requested via Interlibrary Loan and discard the print copies. We also discarded short runs of gift journals along with

leisure journals that had been bound and kept at a time when print was at a premium. We did keep some print journals (159 titles total) still in use whose backfiles are too expensive to purchase at this time.

The deadline for the ad hoc learning commons committee to complete their de-selection was December 15, 2013. The Facilities and Maintenance Department planned to remove all of the bookshelf units from the first floor over the holiday break. Once all of the shelving units on the first floor were removed, worn out carpeting was exposed compelling the ad hoc learning commons committee to replace it immediately before students returned for spring semester classes. Using the information commons model (Carpenter, 2011), the committee executed its plan to use the first floor for comfortable seating, new books, computer terminals and leisure reading journals. Additional electronic outlets were installed where shelving units had been located. The old comfortable chairs that Blitch and Associates and Bills-Manning Architects had originally placed in the library were reupholstered to match the new carpeting on the first floor. Some new chairs were purchased and plants were added to bring tranquility to the atmosphere.

Our library space was greatly impacted by all of these decisions. The first floor was freed up improving its ambiance and promoting the library as a destination community space with comfortable seating and more outlets and charging stations.

The patron response from both students and faculty has been positive to enthusiastic. In December 2014, when the library was open for twenty-four hours during finals, no fewer than 40 students were in the library at any given hour. In the past two years since Xavier has offered twenty-four hour service during finals, we have typically had 13 – 24 students in the library every hour.

Faculty members have always made good use of the Xavier Library interlibrary loan

service but in the fall of 2014 many faculty members began making use of the electronic

resources offered at Xavier. One education professor wrote a thank you email to the library

director for the eBooks she was able to access from home. Another professor wrote an email

acknowledging that he is "a novice with these online databases" but grateful for Project Muse.

Faculty have also been using the library learning commons as a comfortable place to read

between classes. One English professor met with his class in the learning commons to review

and correct the first draft of their term papers.

Furniture on the first floor is regularly re-arranged to accommodate study groups or

academic club meetings. This is still a work in progress. While the first floor is fantastic the

second floor is not yet finished as we continue to discard journals and anticipate the dismantling

of more bookshelves. In the spring of 2015 we plan to conduct a university-wide online study

that we hope will yield more positive feedback as well as insightful suggestions.

References

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Appendix A

Tell Us What You Think Board

Category	Value
PCs & LAB	20
Furniture	13
Resources	13
Building Gen	49
Food	104
Hours	30
Outlets	52
Printing	11
Group Study Rooms	18
General	9
Staff	6
Lights	32
Noise	25