Galter Library's Disappearing Stacks

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Northwestern University's Galter Health Sciences Library is located on an urban, population-dense campus in Chicago. The Chicago campus includes an academic medical center and law school. In 2001, **Northwestern University Library** completed the 12,000 square foot **Oak Grove Library Center (OGLC)**, a state-of-the-art off-site, high-density storage facility with the initial capacity to house nearly two million items. Shortly thereafter, we made plans to move the majority of our print collections in order to create space to better meet critical user needs and plan for a future library renovation. At that time, our collection exceeded 205,000 print volumes. Unlike some other medical libraries, we had strong support from our administration to re-purpose stack space into vibrant, flexible, and active learning space, and were under no threat of reduced square footage.

Like our peers, we had already been transitioning our collections from print to electronic format. Our users prefer to access information from any location, so an emphasis on electronic delivery, whether through more robust licensing or interlibrary loan, was required. As the demand for electronic access grew, the use of the print collections, particularly print journals, waned.

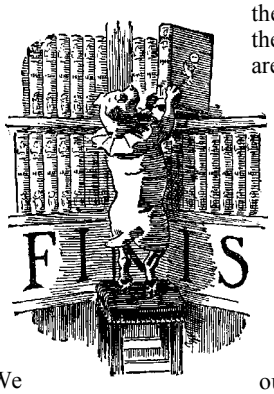
The **Galter** staff, particularly our Collection Management Department and Reference Teams, engaged in a planning process to determine which materials to keep on site, which to move, and how to manage materials that didn't fit either category. Our User Services Department staff were critical to our ability to actually put plans into action.

Ultimately, we kept the following print collections on site, numbering fewer than 20,000 volumes:

- Course reserve books at the circulation desk
- Reference collection books
- A current, five-year collection of print monographs
- Rare books and internal medical school publications not available electronically to be used for historical reference in the Special Collections department
- High-use books (i.e., Atlases, statistical manuals, seminal textbooks)

The materials selected for off-site storage included:

- Theses and dissertations
- Print monograph collections 1800-2005
- Print journal volumes



All collection moves were coordinated with the Evanston campus libraries. **Galter** and **OGLC** staff jointly determined a move schedule based on how many volumes **OGLC** could process from the various university libraries as well as how quickly our own staff could prepare a shipment. We ultimately sent one shipment of 104 tote boxes per week for approximately 20 months. We developed procedures for problem items we could not immediately send to **OGLC**, such as those items that were damaged, missing barcodes, and the like. We intend to continue sending older materials to **OGLC**, albeit in much smaller shipments, yearly or bi-yearly. There is no intention at this time, however, to weed the **OGLC** collections in the future.

We were interested to see what impact, if any, our disappearing stacks project would have on our patrons. We were careful to communicate project goals and status clearly and frequently with our users via newsletter and Website articles, informing them why we were moving our collections, and reassuring them that item recall from **OGLC** was not only possible, but swift.

Items housed at **OGLC** are currently available for document delivery and interlibrary loan, and currently make up about 45% of our total ILL/DD volume. The ILL/DD department sends article requests to the **OGLC** staff who then scan the articles and deliver them directly to the patron; books are delivered to our library within a day or two and are available for pickup by the patron or are mailed to the requesting library. Monographs that are requested by local users more than once are deemed "higher use" and relocated to the **Galter** stacks. This occurs extremely rarely, however.

In truth, there has been no hue and cry for the print stacks, our electronic collections receive more use than ever, and users are genuinely interested in future plans for the library space.