Measure by Measure: Assessing the Viability of the Physical Library

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Academic Branch Libraries

• Definition:
  A library service unit under the management of the library administration, with collections and staff, which is physically separate or divided from other library service units.

ACRL Guidelines for Branch Libraries in Colleges and Universities 1990

• Attributes:
  – Many evolved from departmental reading rooms
  – Often associated with large research universities
  – Most common in sciences, fine arts, business, engineering, and health sciences
  – Traditionally able to offer more specialized and personalized services
North American Academic Branch Libraries: Recent Trends

- Declining use, especially with the advent of full-text electronic resources
- Multidisciplinary research and learning is on the increase; traditional disciplinary boundaries blurring
- Facilities need upgrading; few new academic branch libraries built or substantially renovated
- New library service models emerging that emphasize local support delivery rather than local collections
- University budgets and space stressed
- Closures and mergers on the increase
- Are (collection based) academic branch libraries still viable and how can we measure that viability?
Print Use Declines: UW Annual Loans and In-Library Use 1995-96 to 2002-03

Graph showing the decline in loans and in-library use from 1995-96 to 2002-03.
## UW In-Person Visits Declined and Remote Use Increased 1998/2001 (% who use library at least weekly)

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<td>47%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>73%</td>
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<td><strong>Grad</strong></td>
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<td>59%</td>
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<td>61%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Change</td>
<td>-9%</td>
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Reasons for Visiting Libraries 2001: UW Faculty and Students (Among those visiting at least weekly)

- Recent North American closures/mergers driven by:
  - Budget reductions
  - Space needed by academic departments
  - Desktop delivery of information resources and services
  - New service models that focus on people not collections

- University of Washington measures (1994-95)
  - Distance from main library
  - Size of primary user community
  - Degree of multi-library use by primary user community

*ARL Spec Kit 255, Branch Libraries and Discrete Collections, 1999*
Branch Libraries Closure Criteria: Public Libraries

- **U.K.** (after Sheffield University)
  - Book issue totals and trends
  - Book issues per hour open
  - Net cost per book issue
  - Total visitors per week
  - Visitors per hour open
  - Population/population trends of the local catchment areas
  - Distance to nearest library and to District/Central Library
  - Public transport availability
  - Social value and impact

*Sheffield University Centre for the Public Library and Information in Society*
Performance Measurement Criteria to Assess 10 UW Branch Libraries

• Develop a “basket” of viability measures
  – Measures that relate to the library’s physical presence and location
  – Measures that are balanced
  – Measures that use available data or data that can be easily obtained
  – Measures that can be clearly presented and understood
  – Measures that incorporate trend data as appropriate

• Viability measures that can provide a “road map” for long term strategy of merger and consolidation . . .
  – Mergers based on “objective” criteria rather than political or budgetary considerations
  – Measures that enable the library to have more control over the process

• And identify those libraries where we could invest in facility upgrades for the short to mid term
UW Branch Library Viability Measures

- Measures developed in 4 broad categories:
  - Use
  - Primary user population
  - Facility quality
  - Library dependency of primary user community

- Caveats:
  - Compared branch libraries with each other, not against any standard
  - Didn’t use as initial measures:
    - Operational costs
    - Collection size (unless > 100,000 volumes)
    - Facility size
    - Distance from main library
Library Use Measures

• Print materials use (latest year)
  – Includes loans, in-library use, and print reserves

• Print materials use change 1995-97 to latest 2 year period
  – Includes loans, in-library use and print reserves

• Photocopies/prints made (latest year)
  – Sheets copied on library photocopiers and sheets printed on library printers (cost to user for both)

• Reference inquiries (latest year)
  – Number of non-directional inquiries

• Entrance gate count (latest year)
In-Library and Reserve Use: Science and Fine Arts Branch Libraries 1996-97 to 2002-03

Science In-Library | Fine Arts In-Library | Fine Arts Reserve | Science Reserve
Use Scores  Values Assigned to each measure ranging from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest)

Print Collection Use  Print Use Change  Copies Made  Reference Questions  Gate count
User Population Measures

Branch Library Primary User Groups

• Undergraduate majors (latest year)
• Undergraduate majors enrollment changes 1995-97 to latest two year period (2001-03)
• Graduate students (latest year)
• Graduate students changes between 1995-97 and latest two year period (2001-03)
• Number of faculty (latest year)
Student Enrollment Change 1995-97 to 2001-03 by Branch Library

- Undergraduate Majors
  - Social Work
  - Chemistry
  - Forestry
  - Architecture
  - Mathematics
  - Fish-Ocean
  - Drama
  - Art
  - Music

- Graduates Students
  - Physics

- Chart showing percentage changes in enrollment for various majors.
Facility Quality Measures: Libraries Are Student Spaces

• **Students per user seat**
  – Number of students from primary academic area per general user seat

• **Students per computer seat**
  – Number of students from primary academic area per library computer

• **Quality of user space**

• **Quality of collection space**

• **Quality of staff space**
Facility Space Quality: Methodology

- Discussed facility issues with unit staff
- Reviewed user survey comments from 2001 and 2002
- Developed list of criteria
- A team of 3 walked through each unit
- A second walk through was conducted 2 months later
- Each member of the team assigned a score of 1 to 5 for quality of staff, collections, and user spaces.
- Scores were compared and made consistent.
Facility Quality: Key Attributes

• **Staff spaces**
  – Privacy
  – Light and noise levels conducive to work
  – Furnishings and equipment
  – Staff area separated from public area

• **Collection spaces**
  – Growth potential
  – Theft detection system
  – Collection arranged in a user friendly manner
  – Environmental conditions suitable for preservation

• **User Spaces**
  – Diversified and sufficient user space
  – Light and noise levels conducive to work
  – ADA compliant
  – Furniture and equipment
  – Ambience and amenities
Library Dependency Measures:
Tied to Use of On-Site Print Collections

- Percentage who visit library to use collections
- Frequency of faculty in-person library visits
- Ratio of faculty use of primary library to main library
- Importance of certain print collections to faculty
  - Books
  - Journals published before 1980
    - Percentage of core journals currently available electronically
Primary User Community Dependency on Physical Library: Sources

• In-Library Survey Spring 2002
  – Distributed short survey that asked about their library visit
  – Survey distributed during five 2 hour time blocks
  – 4000 completed surveys returned

• Library Triennial Survey 2001
  – Survey sent to all faculty and a sample of students
  – Survey asked about library use patterns, importance of books and journals, priorities
  – 1345 faculty surveys returned (36% response rate); 600 graduate student surveys returned (40% response rate)

• ISI Journal Citation Reports
  – Develop list of highly cited journals by subject and then check for electronic availability
Importance of Books and Older Journals by Faculty Primary User Group (Scale of 1-not important- to 5-very important-)

Books

Journals Published>1980

- Architecture
- Mathematics
- Physics
- Fish-Ocean
- Forestry
- Chemistry
- Drama
- Social Work
- Music
- Art

3 3.1 3.2 3.3 3.4 3.5 3.6 3.7 3.8 3.9 4 4.1 4.2 4.3 4.4 4.5 4.6 4.7 4.8 4.9 5

Books
Branch Library Viability Measures Score (Use weighted 2x)

Use Primary User Population Facility Quality Library Dependency

Architecture 34 17 12 16
Art 34 13 8 19
Chem 26 12 14 26
Drama 26 8 17 21
Fish-Ocean 28 17 21 17
Forestry 14 15 17 17
Math 24 10 17 17
Music 17 13 10 17
Physics 15 16 10 17
Social W 14 21 10 17

Legend:
- Use
- Primary User Population
- Facility Quality
- Library Dependency
What’s Next at UW?

• Report and recommendations on merging 4 libraries during next 2 years accepted by library administration
  – 1st merger into main library anticipated December 2003
  – Merger of 2 science libraries possible in 2004-2005 year
  – Potential merger of a fine arts library into main library

• Developing and implementing new service models where the Libraries can maintain a presence (but not house print collections) in the academic unit
Future Viability of Branch Libraries

- Use measures will continue to decline
- Branch library closures and mergers will accelerate in those subject areas with substantial electronic resources available and in libraries with stressed budgets
- New service models will evolve for providing library service and support within the space of the academic unit
- Surviving physical libraries will emphasize student work and support space in collaborative teaching and learning environments
The Future of Branch Libraries?
(From *The Simpsons*, after robots run amok at Itchy and Scratchy Land)

Professor Frink: Man, if this is happening here, I'd hate to think of what's happening in Euro Itchy and Scratchy Land.

[shot of empty parking lot in said park]