

TO E- OR NOT TO E-?
THE LIBRARY IN TRANSITION

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As librarians we were as surprised as the rest of the Ricks College faculty and staff at the announcement on June 21, 2000 that Ricks was to become a four-year university. Although we had done a great deal of planning during the recent accreditation process and for the construction that is now going on in the McKay Library, our focus was still on providing an outstanding library for a two-year institution. Since the announcement, we have tried to understand what must take place in order to become an excellent university library which will support the curriculum that is now being contemplated.

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Public statements by accreditation officials have reinforced the significant role that the library must play in this transition. Gerald Day, the president of Snow College and an accreditation commission member, expressed concern about whether “the library can provide support for upper-division work” (Haney). Larry Stevens, deputy director of the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges, identified “Library and information technology” as one of the five main areas which the accrediting body will look at. He asked, “Does the library have the resources needed for higher-level classes? Are there enough computers on campus?” (Hem).

THE LIBRARY UNTIL NOW

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In order to meet the challenge of becoming a university library, we must certainly look to the future; however, a look at the recent past may also be fruitful. Approximately three years ago a committee was formed to determine how the old Administration Building should be remodeled after it was vacated. That building had served as the college library until 1976, when the present McKay Library was built and occupied. Now the Administration Building was to return to providing library services again. The main library building, or west wing, would also undergo modest updating during the remodel. All departments in the Library and Media Services areas and the Learning Assistance Labs prepared and submitted requests for space in the planned expansion. Interestingly, we were told to not plan for very many years into the future during this process. At one point, we were told by our Board of Trustees that since no one knew what a library

might look like in the future, we should only plan for the next few years in the remodel design.

The focal point of the remodel was actually to bring the library facilities into compliance with the accreditation standards for junior colleges at the time. Our surveys of faculty, staff, and students—and the accreditation standards—showed much need for more student seating, computers, and group study rooms in the library. The end result of the remodel will be a modest increase of 34% in the square footage allotted to library services. (The rest of the space in the two wings will be occupied by Media Services and the Learning Assistance Lab.) This additional space represents added group study and seating area; there is no increase in book shelving space. We are very pleased, however, that the number of group study rooms will increase from 8 to 20, the number of computers will go up from 300 to 400, and student seating (including computer seating) will increase from 750 to about 1150 seats. Also, additional seats and group study rooms will be available in the Learning Assistance Lab areas in the evenings and on Saturdays.

One example of foresight relative to the transition process is the fact that the Library only recently considered eliminating the government document collection. Some felt that it occupied valuable space and its use seemed to be limited. The decision was made to retain it, however, and now as we move toward a four-year university, this collection will likely take on greater importance. Although much of the future growth in federal documents is expected to be through electronic means, certain materials in print and microform will remain valuable historical resources for on- and off-campus patron research.

Another look in the past reminds us that it has only been a few years since emphasis began to be placed on shared resources among the Church Educational System (CES) institutions of higher learning. The personnel of the CES member libraries have been meeting regularly and discussing shared resources and services for the past 3-4 years. This has helped and will continue to be a valuable asset as we undertake the transition to a four-year university library.

LOOKING AHEAD

What does the future hold for the McKay Library? To where will our cheese move? Briefly stated, to support the new curriculum, we will 1) make a careful assessment of our existing holdings, 2) communicate that information to the individual campus departments, 3) make modest acquisitions where needed, both printed and electronic, and 4) utilize interli-

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brary loan services, principally using the new ILLiad program via BYU, for the remainder of the materials. There is no question that increasing amounts of library information will be delivered electronically, i.e., via the Internet, especially for journals and some reference materials. This will necessitate dramatically improved Web access both on and off campus, and remote access to as many of these materials as possible. It will also consume increasing portions of library resource funding. Annual fees for Web delivery of reference information, for example, are typically three-fold the one-time cost of the same information in printed format.

Indeed, the concept that an academic library can provide all information necessary to support the curriculum at a four-year university solely by means of digital information is simply not a reality in the year 2000. The digitization of contemporary books is still only in its infancy, and the vast majority of books published during previous centuries most likely will never find their way into any computer database. The largest vendor of digitized books in the world, netLibrary, has holdings of only 3,500-4,000 current titles (their other holdings are merely public domain works freely accessible elsewhere online). We anticipate starting a trial subscription with netLibrary in 2001. The advantages of keyword searching and the absence of a need for additional shelf space are obvious and significant with electronic access. At the same time, libraries the world over are admittedly anxious about the paradigm shift of leasing their library materials rather than buying them, effectively re-purchasing them every 5-7 years, with no control over what is and is not included in the collection and no archivability, with nothing to show if the online vendor goes out of business. Twenty years from now, computers will have roughly 10,000 times their present processing power if current trends hold (Haseltine 85). That makes it impossible to predict just how library information will be delivered at that time. Nevertheless, with a resolution up to 277 times sharper than that of an average computer monitor, books are “stable, cheap, durable, lightweight, and a hassle to pirate, virtues that e-books of any kind will be hard-pressed to emulate in a mere 20 years” (Lemley 94).

OUR TASK

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Although the announced change to a four-year university was a great surprise to library personnel, in retrospect we can see that inspiration was involved, and some basics were already in place for the change. The library expansion project was extremely well timed and will allow us to provide better facilities and services for more students. Resource sharing has greatly

increased among the CES libraries, especially in the areas of interlibrary loan (available over the Internet through programs like ILLiad) and electronic database subscriptions. Our resources, though somewhat limited, will increase through careful planning and budgeting as well as through the shared resources of other CES libraries. Additional staff have been hired to help maintain excellent service levels as we deal with a larger physical area and increased numbers of students; this will undoubtedly need to continue as the transition is made toward a university library. Compared with other university libraries in Idaho, our library collection and budget are very small. The wise counsel we have received is that we should not compare ourselves with other university libraries, but that we should consider our unique curriculum program with its integrated approach and support it with all of the means possible. This we will do. ☺

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SOURCES

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