

One Library in Two Places: Coping with a divided collection

From the Director, Ginger Saha

“A collection divided against itself cannot stand,” it is said. However, when that collection exceeds the shelving capacity of either “house,” the choices are few and hard. The staff – and users! – of the Cleveland Health Sciences Library have lived with a divided collection since 1965 when the Allen Memorial Medical Library’s books and journals were joined by the books and journals held by the [C]WRU Schools of Dentistry, Medicine, and Nursing, and the Department of Biology, to form one aggregated collection then housed across those 5 sites. When the Health Center Library opened in 1971, the school and departmental library collections were consolidated into the new facility. While the book collections were mostly unique, and came together to form a very strong resource, there was much duplication of journal holdings. The multiple runs at the Health Center were weeded down to a single run. Of course, many of those journals were also at the Allen, which had existed as a stand-alone research and clinical collection since the early 20th century and had “everything.”

The operating philosophy of “One Library in Two Places” required the first of the hard choices: New acquisitions were distributed between the Allen and Health Center **by discipline**, i.e. clinical medicine went to the Allen, and dental, nursing, biology, nutrition, and basic sciences materials went to the Health Center. This policy applied to books and journals, and duplication has been kept to a minimum. Back runs of journals were left on the shelves, though, since they were “not hurting anything.” In fact, this helped our rankings in the Association of Research Libraries because ARL counts pieces, not titles, and two runs of a journal that began in 1879 added up to a lot of pieces!

Things are different 30+ years later. Although we now have two sections of compact shelving at the Allen, and we will be adding additional bookshelves in the renovation of the Health Center Library, we have too many “pieces” to continue to house duplicate runs of journals. For several years we have been “de-duping” the journal collection, and the “One Library” philosophy dictated that we keep our back runs at the library currently receiving the journal. We didn’t see this as a hard decision, although it has had its critics.

Now comes the next hard choice: We have subdivided the discipline-split journal collection **by date** by moving all pre-1970 journal volumes to the Allen. This decision was justified by the “One Library” philosophy, but was dictated by the *reality* that basic sciences journals are growing much faster than clinical medicine journals, with some titles pumping out 30 volumes each year! Although many of these titles are available to us in electronic form, the library’s commitment to print requires that we have shelves available to hold those new volumes. Full disclosure requires me to add that at both libraries, the journals are sub-subdivided by date again: The Allen houses its journals from 1980 to date on the 5th stack level, and earlier volumes are distributed across other stack levels. In the post-renovation configuration, the Health Center will house its journals from 1980 to date on the 1st floor, and 1970-1979 will be on the 2nd floor.

It’s not ideal. We know that. But at least everything is here under the two roofs of our “One Library” and not in remote storage across town or in another state. Our state-of-the-art document delivery capabilities will help to minimize the inconvenience.