

Not All Information is Electronic: Print collections still matter

From the Director, Ginger Saha

A few columns ago I discussed the Library's commitment to *print* information. This may seem reactionary in today's robust electronic information environment, but we feel there are good reasons to grow the collection in both print and electronic formats. This means, of course, that we need bookshelves to hold all those new print volumes! Relief is on the way. With the opening of the Peterson Rare Books and Archive compact shelving in the Allen Memorial Medical Library early in 2003, the 9th stack level will become available for "regular" books and journals. And, as part of the upcoming renovation of the Health Center Library, we are adding bookshelves to both the first and second floor stack areas. This is definitely going against the trend in academic libraries, many of which are taking out shelving and putting in coffee bars or cybercafés. "Adding bookshelves" sounds benign enough, but it is actually a very complex process, especially since we are juggling esthetic concerns along with a logical shelving arrangement for current and future materials in a revised stack "footprint" that will necessitate moving every volume we have at least once, and perhaps several times.

The esthetic part of the process comes from arranging different size shelving units – "skinny" 20-inch shelves vs. "wide" 25-inch shelves – that are now different colors – beige, gray, dark brown, black – in rows that are interrupted by different size columns, all the while meeting aisle-width standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The solution to the skinny vs. wide differences is to have like-size shelves on the same floor. The variable colors will be solved by electrostatic painting of all the shelving units to match the color of the newly purchased units. In addition, new wood end-panels will be attached to the perimeter sections and spiffy new labels will be made to identify what is in each section. Narrower "filler" units of 24-inches and 30-inches will be purchased to accommodate the different column widths, and rows will be shifted as much as necessary to comply with ADA clearances. At least to start with, all the shelves will look sparkling new, and all the books will be in order.

The new book stacks footprint involves adding blocks of shelving in areas that now have study carrels, thereby changing the linear sequence of journal titles and call numbers. On the first floor where most of the journals are shelved, the "A's" will start in such a new area, so every volume will have to be shifted!! The second floor layout will incorporate a jutting out mechanical room wall with 3-unit sections in some places. Both floors will offer extra wide aisles defining the north/south and east/west axes, providing a geographic reference point and allowing light from the windows to brighten the area.

The logistics of moving bookshelves into interim positions during construction, and then incorporating new shelving units into the final configuration, is akin to the small, flat, square slide puzzle that requires one to move tiles into a pattern while having only one open space to work with. Remember those? The company that will accomplish this feat will have to disassemble some units, but will also be able to move whole ranges of intact shelving units (loaded with books!) using special shelf movers. We are all curious how they will make the tight turns that some maneuvers require!

When it's all finished, the Health Center Library will boast not only fresh, attractive, highly functional public spaces, but also increased shelving capacity to house the print collection. The Cleveland Health Sciences Library is indeed in a fortunate position during this transition period of co-existing print and electronic information resources. Heartfelt thanks go to the foundations and individuals that have made this possible!

