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The “librarian’s library” in transition from physical to virtual place:  
A case study of the Library & Information Science Library  
at the University of Illinois, USA

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Abstract

At the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign, a system of distributed, departmental libraries has been in place since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A separate Library & Information Science (LIS) Library existed from the 1920s until May 2009, when its collections were merged into other libraries. The new model for LIS library services combines a more robust virtual presence on the web with an intensified human presence in the Graduate School of Library & Information Science building. The changes in LIS library services are part of a much larger initiative to create a more flexible organizational structure for the University Library that recognizes the increasingly interdisciplinary nature of academic inquiry, the critical importance of digital information resources, and the opportunities for collaborative approaches to the provision of library services and collections using information technology. This case study explores several questions: What factors impelled the University of Illinois Library to embark on a re-organization of public and technical services? How were librarians and library users involved in the decision process? What values informed the decisions? Who resisted the changes and why? By posing and answering such questions in the context of a single departmental library, this paper examines issues that affect space utilization in many large academic library systems today. The transformation of the LIS Library demonstrates that the successful transition from a traditional service model to a new one must be grounded in the unique needs and customs of the library, university, and population of users. Because the University of Illinois LIS collection is among the best in North America, its fate is relevant to LIS scholars worldwide.

Introduction

At most large research universities in the United States, a central library serves scholars in the humanities and social sciences. Separate facilities support the sciences, the arts, and professional fields such as law and business. At the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign (a large state-supported university about 220 kilometers south of

Chicago) a system of distributed, departmental libraries has been in place since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Today 37 separate libraries and archives function as branches of the University Library. While some of the UI's departmental libraries are free-standing (e.g. Engineering) or housed in academic department buildings (e.g. Architecture and Art), an equal number are sub-locations within the large Main Library building. The Library & Information Science Library had been located in its own space on the third floor of the Main Library from the 1920s until May 2009, when it closed its doors forever.

This case study explores several questions: What factors impelled the University of Illinois Library to embark on a re-organization of public and technical services, called the New Service Models Programs, with the goal of centralizing technical service functions and reducing public service points? How were librarians and library users involved in the decision process? What values informed the decisions? Who resisted the changes and why? By posing and answering such questions in the context of a single departmental library, this case study examines issues that affect many large academic library systems today, as the rapidly evolving print-and-digital environment forces a re-balancing of physical and virtual services and necessitates changes in the utilization of library space. The LIS Library is a revealing object of study, because its users (primarily students, professors of library and information science, and practicing librarians) are highly knowledgeable about library services and operations. They do not hesitate to articulate their needs and preferences, but at the same time they are very aware of the shifting scholarly information environment and of the challenges that library managers face in today's economy.

The University of Illinois libraries and the LIS Library in particular

The University of Illinois Library is famous for the depth of its collections and the quality of its services.<sup>1</sup> Founded in 1867 and situated in a farming region in the nation's heartland, the university aggressively built its library collections throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in order to recruit the brightest students and to attract prominent scholars from the urban East Coast to join its faculty. Today the campus libraries collectively own nearly 11 million books, and the Library employs 205 FTE (full time equivalent) professional staff, including librarians and graduate student assistants, 204 FTE support staff, and hundreds of part-time student workers.<sup>2</sup> For more than a century, library services have been organized on a departmental, or subject-based, model. Each departmental library houses a collection of books and journals, carefully selected for the users affiliated with particular schools or departments. The departmental libraries are administrative and budgetary units of the University Library, and each is managed by a librarian with disciplinary expertise. The departmental library organizational structure is common at large universities in the United States, but Illinois is considerably more decentralized than most of its peer institutions.

The Library and Information Science Library was one of the departmental libraries. The Graduate School of Library & Information Science (then known simply as the Library School) was founded in Chicago in 1893 and moved to the Urbana-Champaign campus four years later. From the start, the school gathered a collection of print resources to

support its curriculum.<sup>3</sup> Until 1971, the school was administered jointly with the library. The director of the University Library was also the director of the Library School, and the school's classrooms, faculty offices, and separate library collection were all located within the Main Library building. The school established a reputation for excellence early on, and today is it ranked as the best LIS school in the United States (a title it shares with the University of North Carolina).<sup>4</sup>

In 1979 the Library School moved out of the library to a building across the street. In 1993 it moved again, this time to a building about 0.8 kilometers away. The LIS Library remained in the Main Library. The reasons for the library's failure to move with the school are not documented, but I believe they included: lack of sufficient space in the buildings to which the school relocated; lack of money or motivation within the University Library to furnish a new space; and a desire by the working librarians, who use the collection to support their research and professional practice, to keep the collection close at hand. Although the distance between the Main Library and the School was not great, visits to the LIS Library began to drop off noticeably in the mid-1990s and have trended downward ever since.

The rise of online scholarly publishing, the widespread adoption of email, and the increasing availability of information and texts from non-academic sources like Google are often credited for the decrease in on-site usage of academic libraries, especially those with out-of-date facilities, like Illinois's eighty-year-old Main Library. Changes in the LIS curriculum and research programs also affected the use of the LIS Library. In recent

decades, many new faculty members at the school possess advanced degrees in fields other than librarianship, and thus they utilize literatures housed in other departmental libraries. Furthermore, the school established strong programs in electronic publishing, community informatics, bioinformatics, and so on, which relied on newer digital content more than the traditional print collection. The LIS Library alone could no longer satisfy all the information needs of an increasingly diverse group of researchers. In addition, the distance education option for the masters degree in LIS, now in its twelfth year, has been highly successful.<sup>5</sup> Students at a distance make heavy use of library resources and services, but not of the physical library.

#### Literature review

A vast number of publications in our field address change management, the administration of academic libraries, the provision of library services on the Web, and other topics relevant to this case study. In this section, I concentrate on two specialized topics within the professional literature: departmental libraries, which have a long history in academic settings; and the relatively new concept of the “embedded librarian.”

#### *Departmental libraries*

The changing fortune of the LIS Library echoes themes found in the professional literature about academic branch libraries. Debate simmered in the U.S. throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century over the virtues and drawbacks of decentralized libraries on university campuses.

Judging by citations in the bibliographic databases *Library Literature & Information Science* and *LISA: Library & Information Science Abstracts*, departmental libraries have been a troubling issue for librarians in Europe, Asia, and South America as well as in North America.<sup>6</sup>

In one of the earliest American articles on the topic, which appeared in *Library Journal* in 1925, Louis T. Ibbotson explained how departmental and laboratory libraries came into existence as American colleges transformed themselves into universities on the German model. Falling outside the control of the central university library, departmental libraries gave rise to costly duplication of resources and fragmentation of knowledge. Ibbotson wrote, “Today, we find that library after library, having reached the point where the departmental system from mere point of size becomes impracticable, is centralizing its book resources.”<sup>7</sup> Two decades later, in an historical article in *Library Quarterly*, Lawrence Thompson complained that “in spite of the great volume of material dealing with departmental and collegiate libraries that has appeared in library periodicals and books on university and college library administration, there has been relatively little original thought on the subject.” He declared that there was emerging, in the early 1940s, a general trend away from departmental libraries and toward centralization.<sup>8</sup> Robert A. Seal provided a thorough review of writings about the characteristics of academic branch libraries and the arguments for and against them in a chapter published in 1986.<sup>9</sup> It is clear from Seal’s chapter that space issues were only one dimension of the debate. Costs, user needs and preferences, and interdisciplinary scholarship were also common themes. Seal also discerned a theme of “accessibility”—the proximity of materials to users-- which we

might subsume today under discussions of the importance of place.<sup>10</sup> Although Seal referenced earlier writers who perceived a trend toward centralization, his own conclusion was cautious: “it could be that the predicted trend is more wishful thinking by librarians than actual fact. An in-depth study of this ‘trend’ is in order.”<sup>11</sup> In fact, a survey undertaken by the Association of Research Libraries three years earlier discovered that even as some libraries were closing and consolidating departmental branches, other institutions were founding new branches.<sup>12</sup> The same fluidity was evident when a similar survey was conducted in 1999.<sup>13</sup>

Nearly all American writers on the subject of departmental libraries admit that campus needs and politics drive both the creation and the abolition of departmental libraries, more so than any general philosophy of library service. In 1991, Leon Shkolnik ably summarized the arguments for and against decentralized collections and services, and then concluded, as did so many before him, that “local conditions more than anything else will dictate the nature and organizational scheme of the library.”<sup>14</sup> Around the same time, after remarking that “a large amount of writing has been done on whether departmental libraries should even exist,” Patricia A. Suozzi and Sandra S. Kerbel made the provocative claim that departmental libraries should not be viewed as “organizational misfits” to be eliminated but instead should be promoted as the best model for service-oriented libraries in the digital age.<sup>15</sup> More recent writings by John K. Stemmer and John Tombrage and by Charlotte Crockett explicitly address the impact of technology on the concept of the academic branch library.<sup>16</sup> Other authors have published case studies of departmental libraries that have been closed, merged, or transformed.<sup>17</sup>

### *Departmental libraries as physical spaces*

On the whole, the American literature on departmental libraries does not concentrate on issues of space and place. Still, there is evidence that the concrete, physical nature of libraries, not merely their abstract organizational structure, is a key element in the rise and fall of departmental libraries. Nearly seventy years ago, Thompson suggested that “one of the principal reasons why university librarians countenanced the growth of departmental libraries was that [library] buildings had become too crowded as the natural result of the rapid increase in accessions around the turn of the [20<sup>th</sup>] century.”<sup>18</sup> Today, however, the opposite dynamic may be at work. The space needs of academic departments may be forcing central libraries to re-absorb departmental collections. Karen S. Croneis and Bradley H. Short, in their 1999 survey of large academic libraries, noted that when a departmental library was closed or merged, the vacated space typically reverted to the academic department. On-site services were either continued in a new location or (less commonly) replaced by online services. Noting the “complexity” of the relationship between a departmental library and the department that hosts it, the researchers suggested that the closure of specialized libraries often results from a struggle for control of space. A department’s pride in its designated library may be outstripped by its desire for more offices, laboratories or classrooms.<sup>19</sup> These observations apply to libraries housed in academic buildings but tell us little about departmental libraries located within a library building.



One must reach back forty years to find an article focused solely on departmental libraries as physical places -- in a 1969 issue of *Library Trends* devoted to university library buildings. Examining branch libraries from an architectural perspective, Robert R. Walsh compared free-standing branch libraries to those that shared a building. He noted the arguments being advanced at that time for consolidation and centralization (which were not much different from the justifications advanced today), yet concluded that branch libraries will endure and “the planner must be prepared to deal with them.”<sup>20</sup> More recently, Crockett briefly discussed “the physical attributes of the new branch library,” portraying the library as a comfortable gathering place furnished with the latest technologies for information discovery and communication.<sup>21</sup> These writings are the exception. Across the decades, our professional literature has focused far less attention on the spatial significance, whether practical or symbolic, of departmental libraries to their users, than it has on departmental libraries’ costs and management problems and whether, indeed, they are necessary at all.

### *Embedded librarianship*

The future of Illinois’s LIS Library involves the delivery of services in a combination of virtual and physical spaces. Of course, the LIS print collections will continue to have a physical presence, integrated into other general and departmental collections at the university. Reference and consultation services will continue to take place in the less tangible realm of the telephone and email, and increasingly, in face-to-face mode outside the library. Starting shortly after the conclusion of this conference, I will be

moving into an office at the Graduate School of Library & Information Science, where I will be accessible to students, faculty and staff for 15-20 hours each week. This model of service by subject specialists has been labeled many things – outreach services, satellite reference, library outposts, field librarians, librarians-in-residence, and most recently, “embedded librarianship.”

In the United States, there is a growing interest in providing library services outside the library. A 2004 survey sponsored by the Association of Research Libraries found that a third of the country’s large academic libraries offered some form of scheduled, in-person services in academic departments or other non-library campus spaces.<sup>22</sup> These programs arose in response to the well documented decline in on-site use of libraries at colleges and universities across the nation. Five years later, the number of libraries providing such services has most certainly increased. The ARL survey reveals that embedded librarian programs are typically initiated by a single enthusiastic librarian. Only one survey respondent provided service outside the library as a direct result of closing a branch library. An office or workspace in an academic department is the typical location, but library services have also been offered in hospitals, computer labs, dormitories, study halls, career centers, student unions, writing centers, research labs, and elsewhere. Librarians are typically present only on weekdays; the majority of them provide service seven or fewer hours per week. The library funds the staff costs; some hosting units provide additional support beyond space and equipment. Interestingly, 42% of the survey respondents had started such services but discontinued them. The reasons for discontinuation included low

usage, failure to secure appropriate space, and the departure or reassignment of the instigating librarian.<sup>23</sup>

Phyllis Rudin's literature review showcases the varieties of embedded library service, from librarians who set up temporary reference desks in student unions during the intense final weeks of a semester, to the "live-in approach" of the University of Michigan's "field librarians" and Virginia Tech's "college librarians."<sup>24</sup> A recent article by David Shumaker looks at embedded librarianship from a managerial perspective.<sup>25</sup> According to Shumaker, the adjective "embedded" is apt "because the librarian becomes a member of the customer community rather than a service provider standing apart."<sup>26</sup> More important than the location, in Shumaker's view, is the development of new relationships and partnerships, which result in the integration of the librarian into the host department. Rudin concurs: "For this office-hours model, success is not wholly defined by statistics sheets that monitor the number of questions asked, but rather by the networking opportunities embraced."<sup>27</sup>

There is almost no scientific research on embedded librarianship. Most articles and conference papers on the topic are descriptive accounts of single programs, often concluding with advice to librarians who might wish to initiate such services themselves. Many of these articles are relevant to envisioning a new service model for the LIS Library, and by reading them together one can derive a set of best practices. I've been inspired by the experiences of a business librarian at Murray State University<sup>28</sup>, a history and political science specialist at Loyola University<sup>29</sup>, and science librarians at the University of

Buffalo<sup>30</sup> and the University of Calgary<sup>31</sup>, among others. They all stress the importance of being located in a high-traffic area (for example, on the path to the coffee machine) with a good internet connection.

### The Progress of the “New Service Models Programs”

At the University of Illinois today, the departmental library model is being replaced by a more flexible organizational structure. The change process is centralizing core technical operations, such as cataloging, and reducing the number of discrete service points where activities such as circulating books and answering questions occur. At the same time, the potential exists to forge stronger links to academic departments and schools across the university. The elimination of departmental libraries has been quietly underway for several years, but the momentum has increased dramatically in the past 24 months, due to the economic recession and strong encouragement from the university’s administration. The inefficiency of maintaining several separate, full-service departmental libraries within the Main Library building can no longer be ignored.

In the summer of 2007, the University Library’s leaders announced a bold new direction, which they called the “New Service Models” initiative. They supplied several reasons why the time was ripe for major changes:

Over the past several years, the service and collection models that defined excellence in academic libraries throughout the 20th century have been challenged by new models of scholarly communication, new mechanisms for licensing and accessing digital content, the introduction of transformative technologies like the World Wide Web, new methods for teaching and learning, new approaches to interdisciplinary scholarship and scientific inquiry, the arrival of a new generation

of faculty and students who, as "digital natives," bring new approaches to information use (and higher expectations for access to digital services and content), and broad changes in the higher education environment.<sup>32</sup>

The expressed goal was to “embrace new service models that recognize the increasingly interdisciplinary nature of academic inquiry, the critical importance of digital information resources, and the opportunities for collaborative approaches to the provision of library services and collections using information technology.”<sup>33</sup>

All librarians and library staff were invited to submit written proposals for improving the library organization and services. From over sixty submissions, a committee of library leaders selected twenty-five proposals to implement within a three-year span. “Services” was defined broadly to include technical as well as user services. Thus, a recommendation was made to transfer the work of cataloging Chinese, Japanese, and Korean materials from the Asian Library to the central cataloging and metadata unit, while another proposal aimed at developing Library-wide strategies for digital content life cycle management. Many of the proposals, however, centered on direct services to library users and on the integration and merger of departmental library collections. Most of these proposals, if implemented, would require rethinking the purpose and configuration of existing Library space. After an interim report was issued in November 2007, a series of open “town hall” meetings were held, at which faculty, students, and library staff were encouraged to share their reactions to the proposals. As expected, many library users were distressed at the prospect of change. New information came to light through the open meetings and through a web form for written feedback, and as a result some of the original proposals were abandoned or modified.

The interim report proposed to combine the LIS Library with the much larger Education & Social Science Library, which was similarly located within the Main Library building.<sup>34</sup> The two libraries' collections overlapped significantly in the area of children's literature, and the social science holdings supported GSLIS faculty with specializations in community informatics and e-government. However, merger with the Education & Social Science Library was not a feasible solution, primarily because of space constraints, so the final report proposed instead to merge the LIS Library into the Communications Library to create a new Media & Information Studies Library.<sup>35</sup> This proposal also had weaknesses. The Communications Library is located in a building with the departments it serves – journalism and advertising. It is close to the Main Library, but it is not a building that LIS students or researchers frequent. Spatial synergies in this case were non-existent.

I argued that if a physical library devoted to LIS remained necessary, then it ought to be situated where the users are. If the physical library was deemed essential, nothing would be gained by halving its collection, as well as halving the collection of the Communications Library, in order to squeeze two libraries into one space. I insisted that a down-sized physical library was not an appropriate service model for LIS, and that there was nothing “new” in the idea. Nonetheless, following a pre-announced process for implementing the recommendations, a team was appointed to plan for the merger of the two libraries. It included librarians and staff from both the LIS Library and the Communications Library as well as professors from the College of Media and the Graduate School of Library & Information Science. The team's charge was intentionally open-

ended, and its members rapidly came to agree with me that a merger was ill-advised. Instead, the team recommended a transition to a largely-digital service model, which would nonetheless establish a stronger face-to-face service presence in the Graduate School of Library and Information Science's own building.

The team took several months to study the impact of the change and to create a detailed plan. Last November it issued a preliminary set of recommendations, which were finalized in January. Between January and May we worked hard to prepare for the closing of the library. May 15 was the last day of operation. In the waning hours of May 15, we held a "retirement party" for the LIS Library, which was attended by hundreds of library users and former employees. By June 15, all print materials had been dispersed to other campus libraries and the rooms were empty. As I speak to you now, the space is being remodeled to house the offices of the Illinois Informatics Initiative, a university-wide, interdisciplinary research and teaching program. The allocation of library space to what is perceived as a non-library program has riled some librarians and users, but it is a visible sign that the New Service Models Programs will foster new partnerships to expand the library's role in the university.

The evidence and context for change

At the heart of the decision to close the LIS Library was the realization that the field has become so interdisciplinary that no physical library can encompass its scope. The interdisciplinary nature of LIS was vividly illustrated by a network analysis of responses to

a spring 2006, campus-wide survey about the University Library.<sup>36</sup> Among other questions, professors were asked to name their “primary” departmental library – the one they use most – and to identify other libraries that they use regularly. Compared to their colleagues in other fields, professors who chose the LIS Library as their primary library identified more other libraries as necessary to their work. These other libraries included the Education Library, the Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, the Engineering Library, and the Biology Library – a very diverse group! The interdisciplinarity of LIS, and the pre-existing scatter of resources needed by LIS scholars, were arguments advanced for discontinuing the physical LIS library.

Use metrics also strongly influenced the decision to close the library. Hourly head counts clearly indicated a pattern of declining on-site use. Reference queries, sampled for a week twice each year, had also fall steadily over the past decade. Meanwhile, although reliable metrics for virtual use are harder to come by, the available data reinforced what we instinctively knew – our users make heavy use of online resources, notably of electronic journals, but also of e-resources created in-house, such as digitized readings for classes and our popular virtual new book shelf.

One obvious factor driving the declining use of the physical LIS Library was the growth of distance education. In 1996, the Graduate School of Library & Information Science launched the LEEP distance education program, which now enrolls as many masters-level students as the resident degree program. The students and faculty at a distance depend heavily on internet-accessible information sources to accomplish their



teaching and learning. Therefore, I acquire digital content whenever possible, and, quite naturally, 24/7 access online to LIS information is valued as highly by my colleagues in nearby offices as by students in Alaska or Belgium. If anyone is tempted to blame the closure of the LIS Library on failed management or the irrelevance of the library in the era of the internet, I will vigorously dispute them! Rather, declining on-site use signaled the success of our digital collection building and the resulting shift in how students and faculty conduct their searches for information.

The clientele of the LIS Library understood the reasons for the new service model. They appreciated and accepted the evidence of use metrics, and they saw how the principle of cost-effectiveness was being applied. For GSLIS students, it was a real-life example of the library management principles expounded in their textbooks. However, that doesn't mean they were happy to see the library close. Users' emotional attachment to a physical library, and to the particular affordances it provides for serendipitous discovery, is very strong.

After the decision to pursue a new service model for LIS was taken, but before a final decision to close the library was announced, the users of the library were surveyed. The findings drove the planning and enabled us to set priorities for new services, and also to understand what elements of the old service model were most important to translate into the new one.<sup>37</sup> The faculty, staff and students of the Graduate School of Library and Information Science and the faculty and staff of the University Library were invited to take the web-based survey. 328 people completed it. All user groups except Library support

staff reported using the virtual library more often than the physical library. The most commonly reported frequency of using the virtual LIS Library was “weekly.” By contrast, the most commonly reported frequency of using the physical LIS Library was only “once or twice a semester” (that is, once or twice within a 16-week period).

### *Virtual services*

Virtual library use clearly exceeded physical library use, but what did people actually value about virtual library services? A survey question prompted users to complete this sentence: “The most important service(s) that the virtual LIS Library provides to me are...” The findings are guiding us as we build a robust web presence to replace the physical library.

Access to “LIS databases” – indexes such as *LISA* and full-text aggregators such as *Library Literature* – emerged as the most important service that the LIS Library provided virtually. The word “access” and other terms that connote convenience (“quick,” “easy,” “direct,” “efficient,” “handy”) appeared quite frequently in the survey comments. The LIS Library website served as a familiar “gateway” leading users to resources elsewhere in the University Library and on the open web. Respondents stressed the value of a website designed explicitly to meet the needs of LIS students and faculty. Of the unique digital content created or assembled by the LIS Library faculty and staff on the library website, the Virtual New Books Shelf was most highly valued. Respondents also emphasized the importance of resource pages for course assignments and the librarian-selected, topically-arranged web links.

The responses of students and faculty differed regarding virtual services. Library faculty and GSLIS faculty alike placed the highest value on the Virtual New Books Shelf. (The Virtual New Books Shelf was a monthly bibliography of newly acquired books, which LIS Library staff produced by scanning book covers and tables of contents when the books arrived in the library, and linking the citations to the books' online catalog records.) Databases and e-journals were next in importance. Consistent with past campus-wide Library surveys, the most important "services" of the library, in the eyes of faculty, revolve around its print and digital collections.

Students valued access to the LIS-specific databases far more than any other service. Next in importance, according to the students, are electronic journals, easy access to pre-selected LIS-focused information, and librarian-created content that helps them find information on a topic or for class assignments. Compared to on-campus students, distance education students placed somewhat greater emphasis on e-journals and on the organization of resources for easier and quicker information-seeking.

### *Physical services*

What did users fear losing if a distinct physical space for the LIS Library were eliminated? Could we create alternatives to a dedicated departmental library that would adequately substitute for the most valued services in the physical environment? To no one's surprise, many respondents expressed a strong appreciation of physical collections

and services. Two questions elicited data about physical library services: “The most important service(s) that the physical LIS Library provides to me are...” and “The thing I’d miss most if the LIS Library didn’t exist as a physical space is...” From these two questions, four prominent themes emerged: 1) collections and their use; 2) other uses for the physical space; 3) the importance of knowledgeable, friendly, and helpful staff; 4) the symbolic and affective meanings of physical space. To keep the following information in perspective, remember that more than half of the respondents identified themselves as infrequent users of the physical space. However, even infrequent visitors can feel a strong attachment to a place. For example, some distance education students, who come to campus for only one or two days each semester, engage in intense use of library spaces during their visits.

~ Collections and their use

Respondents identified a number of components of the physical collection which they valued: current issues of periodicals; older bound journals that have yet to be digitized; new books; course reserve materials; reference works; cataloging tools (not all of which are online); and special sub-collections, like a small collection of LIS-related fiction. Users appreciated the “one-stop-shopping experience” of having relevant materials in all these categories co-located and readily accessible in an easy-to-navigate physical space. Some respondents stressed that even when materials are available online, they find it more convenient to access and read print versions. Survey respondents feared that they would

need to spend more time locating relevant resources if the collection were dispersed. They placed a high value on browsing physical collections to stimulate research ideas.

~ Other uses for the physical space

For some respondents, the LIS Library was a refuge from busy lives of study and work. It was viewed as a quiet and comfortable place in which LIS students were explicitly welcomed. The large tables encouraged groups to work on collaborative projects, while cushioned armchairs beckoned solitary readers. For some librarians, the LIS Library was a place to “hide” from the pressures of daily work and immerse themselves in research. The library functioned as a teaching space for library-intensive activities during periods when the distance education students were on campus. Bulletin boards with postings of recent articles by GSLIS and Library faculty, the dust jackets of new books, and miscellaneous information from the field (including cartoons) provided a casual way for users to stay informed. The word “community” was used several times by survey respondents to describe the LIS Library’s intangible impact.

~ Importance of staff

Respondents praised the LIS Library staff and described them as “knowledgeable,” “friendly,” and “helpful.” The service ethos of the staff created an atmosphere supportive of study and research. In-person communication and informal learning occurred often in the physical space of the library. The collocation of staff expertise with physical

collections was beneficial: “knowing when I walk in that the person at the desk knows my specific needs and assignments.” Distance education students, who interacted with LIS Library staff by telephone or email, expressed the same sentiments: “Knowing that there is a location to call actual people to whom I’ve been introduced.” Users seemed to think that quality customer service depended on the staff being associated with a physical collection and service point.

~ Symbolic and affective significance of physical space

A number of respondents valued the physical space for its symbolic properties. They stated that the LIS Library has "a very special feel" that conveys "a sense of history, pride [and] continuity." The departmental library symbolizes the legitimacy or identity of LIS as a discipline. Many students also had an affective response, again signaling the link between the physical library and a sense of community: “knowing there is a place on campus that I actually belong.” One student wrote movingly, “The LIS Library feels like home to GSLIS students.”

#### *Desired services*

Users were asked about desirable services not currently offered: “I wish the LIS Library offered additional services, such as...” The most frequent answer to this question was an expression of complete satisfaction with the current services. While this answer was a gratifying affirmation of the efforts made by me and my staff, it provided little guidance, since maintaining the status quo was not an option. As the inevitable closure of

the physical library approached, we realized that, although we could not replicate all the qualities of a physical space, we needed to preserve and translate those qualities as much as possible in a new, more virtual context. We asked ourselves, for example, whether we could we re-design the LIS library website to provide more of a one-stop-shopping experience for information seekers. Could we invent a way to continue our popular Virtual New Books Shelf, even after LIS books ceased to be housed in a single place? Could we provide more immediate and interactive options for asking questions through the website?

Despite their attachment to the concept of a departmental library, the survey respondents admitted that they relied on the internet as their primary mode of interaction with LIS content and with LIS specialists on the library staff. While many respondents argued for maintaining, and even strengthening, a full-service branch library for LIS, an almost equal number expressed excitement about re-envisioning library services to the LIS community. The survey enriched our understanding of library users' needs and desires, and it continues to be an important resource for planning.

### Resistance to change

The conflicting views expressed by survey respondents foreshadowed the reactions from users when the final decision to close the library was announced.<sup>38</sup> On the whole, users understood the reasons for the closure and the opportunities it opened up, yet most expressed sadness and a sense of loss. Some users engaged in acts of resistance and protest. A doctoral student mounted a petition on the web to stop the closing, which 294 people signed. Many of the signatories were alumni; others were current students, faculty,

and campus librarians. The petition served as an important outlet for affected library users who did not avail themselves of the open meetings and online comment forms, or who did use those channels but felt their voices were not heard. Many of the signers of the petition added brief comments alongside their names.

Many of the comments reflect a sense of outrage:

- “To eliminate the LIS Library would be a disservice to current students and faculty, and a disgrace to those of us who have utilized and benefited from it.”
- “I assume this is only so some administrator will get more office space. Think of the students for once.”

Some who signed the petition linked the reputation of the Graduate School of Library and Information Science to the existence of the LIS Library:

- “What's a library school without a library? How embarrassing!”
- “I can't believe you would consider this. The TOP library school in the country won't have its own library!?!”

Other signers saw in the closure of the library an ominous trend in the discipline:

- “The library's closure would be another nail in the coffin of LIS as a research discipline.”
- “What message does it send to potential GSLIS applicants when a library dedicated to their education and chosen field is no longer deemed valuable...?”



Many signers attested to the importance of the LIS Library in their own success as students or faculty members:

- “As a student, I found the LIS Library extremely helpful in my studies, especially in getting reference help.”
- “This collection creates a useful space to view, read, and learn about LIS resources with LIS-centered assistance.”

Several remarked that closing the library would negatively impact the information-seeking process:

- “I think it would be harder to have access if you had to run about.”
- “Breaking up this collection will destroy the ability to browse for like titles.”
- “I feel that the loss of the LIS library would have a negative impact on the GSLIS program's ability to encourage its students to do self-directed, comprehensive, and high-quality research.”

Some petitioners stressed the renowned quality of the LIS Library’s collections and services:

- “Dismantling the LIS library would be a travesty. Its collection and usefulness as a research tool is unmatched.”
- “[It is] a unique resource that has made Illinois a center of learning for LIS.”

A few comments echoed the theme of the library as a central force in creating community:

- “The LIS library is the soul of the library school and the professional librarians at Illinois.”
- “At an institution the size of UIUC, a departmental library remains an important community-building center for students in the department....”

In addition to the petition, unhappy LIS Library users formed the “Save the LIS Library” group on the popular social networking site, Facebook. It attracted 221 members, many of them the same people who signed the online petition. Because of this outpouring of support, we established an email account and invited people to send in their memories of the LIS Library. These have since been collated and made available on the web.<sup>39</sup>

While the organized resistance came too late to halt the closure of the LIS Library, it highlighted for us the dimensions of the physical library that users felt were most important and most vulnerable. This was useful information, because it enabled us to weigh specific proposed changes against the reactions from users, and to consider alternatives when warranted. Even more crucially, the heartfelt feedback from users touched us deeply and prompted us to respond in a compassionate and thoughtful way to the emotional needs of our users during the transition.

Creating a virtual place / establishing a new physical presence

The new service model for the LIS Library combines a more robust virtual presence on the web with an intensified physical presence close to a major cluster of users. This section describes the evolving two-pronged service profile.

Many precedents exist for websites that serve as gateways to information in an academic discipline or applied field. At the University of Illinois, models were already in place for websites devoted to gender studies<sup>40</sup> and labor and employment relations<sup>41</sup>, both fields which previously had separate departmental libraries which were merged into the general library collections. Illinois librarians have also created informational websites for interdisciplinary fields served by more than one library. Examples include the Global Studies Virtual Library<sup>42</sup>, the Health Information Portal<sup>43</sup>, and the Biotechnology Information Center.<sup>44</sup>

All of the local models for subject-focused websites are tailored to their unique user communities, so I was not mandated to follow any single template. I decided to involve GSLIS students in the transformation of the LIS Library's website. Two students enrolled in independent study courses with me as their instructor, and the three of us formed the web project team. We drew on the survey data to set development priorities for the website. For example, because students so clearly value access to bibliographic and full text databases, we convinced staff at our Engineering Library to program a customized federated search feature. Using the LIS Easy Search, which is prominently displayed on the home page, one can search simultaneously across the major English-language LIS databases.

As noted above, faculty highly valued our Virtual New Books Shelf, which challenged us to find a way to continue it, even though books would no longer be flowing into a dedicated library. The answer was to add a new capability to the existing new book list generator that accompanies our online catalog. The existing program permitted users to customize new book lists by library location or by Dewey classes. Additional programming was necessary to permit new book lists to be generated by fund code. Since I continue to have a dedicated budget for LIS acquisitions, the fund code has become the best way to track relevant new LIS books in various locations.

The closure of the physical library intensified my desire to enhance our digital collections. One of the LIS Library's historic strengths is its collection of American library annual reports and newsletters, largely received as gifts. We ceased retaining most of these in print, and instead created records in both the online catalog and the local web-based database of online resources that point to the publications on the web. Wherever we had a choice between print and online journal subscriptions, we opted for online. With special funding to support the new service model, we purchased a major set of e-books in information studies. Furthermore, the University of Illinois is a partner in the Google Book Project, and we hope that a good portion of our historical collections in library science will someday be digitized and available to all.

Our enhanced virtual presence is complemented by a renewed commitment to face-to-face interaction with users. As I noted earlier, users came less and less to the LIS

Library for routine services. Instead of browsing the shelves and carrying books to our desk to check out, they searched the online catalog and requested books through our delivery system. Instead of borrowing copies of books on short-loan for classes, they accessed their readings online through the central electronic reserves system. Instead of appearing in person to pose reference questions, they emailed us, telephoned us, or contacted the central Ask-a-Librarian virtual reference service. Yet there was abundant evidence in surveys, assessment instruments, petition comments, and spoken feedback that our users still valued the interpersonal aspect of our services. It became a priority, therefore, to make face-to-face reference and liaison services more accessible and convenient.

For several years, I and a senior staff member have held “Librarian’s Office Hours” at the GSLIS building, just one hour a day, two or three days a week. At busy times – for instance, when the distance education students were on campus – we held office hours every day, including on the weekends. However, the daily demands of running a library prevented us from expanding office hours further. Soon, however, we will be spending approximately 15 hours per week at GSLIS. The dean of the school has arranged for us to share an office with the coordinator of the Information Technology Help Desk, who like us works directly with students both on-site and at a distance to resolve their problems. We are all optimistic that the proximity of library and IT services at GSLIS will foster a stronger partnership and suggest fruitful areas for collaboration. Already, there is a strong foundation of cooperation and support from the School. For example, I have a key to the

building and a login ID for their intranet; I attend meetings of the faculty; and I write a regular column for their alumni newsletter.

## Conclusion

Because the closure of the library was so recent, some details of the new model are still being worked out. The print collections have been dispersed, but I'm still buying print materials, for which I must find homes on other libraries' shelves. The enhanced web portal to information sources in LIS is not finished, although it's been active for several weeks. The future, I'm certain, will bring new uses of both physical space and virtual space to deliver content and services. We will continue to seek feedback from users to inform service improvements.

Most academic libraries will someday reach the tipping point between physical and virtual services. The transformation of the LIS Library demonstrates that the successful transition from a traditional service model to a new one must be grounded in the unique needs and customs of the library, the university, and the particular population of users. The University of Illinois's LIS collection is among the best in North America; its future is relevant to LIS scholars worldwide. Freed from maintaining a collocated physical collection and discrete service point, the LIS Library has the potential to serve a much wider community of researchers and information professionals through enhanced virtual services and electronic collections.

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I will end this case study with the same words that Louis T. Ibbotson wrote at the conclusion of his 1925 essay in *Library Journal*: “If there are hindering rules and regulations, or physical obstacles, let them be modified; if there are prejudices, may they be overcome; that the university library, whether physically disunited or centralized, may be used and thought of as an intellectual unity.”<sup>45</sup> Intellectual unity in the field of library and information science, accessible to all, is the goal of the new service model at the University of Illinois. Only time will tell if we have achieved it.

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For concise histories of the UI Library, see: D.W. Krummel, "University of Illinois Library," in *International Dictionary of Library Histories*, ed. David H. Stam (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), 833-835; and "About the University Library," <http://www.library.uiuc.edu/geninfo/history.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Association of Research Libraries, *ARL Statistics 2006-2007*, ed. Martha Kyrillidou and Les Bland (Washington, DC: ARL, 2008), <http://www.arl.org/bm~doc/arlstat07.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Patricia Stenstrom, "The Library and Information Science Library," in *Ideals and Standards: The History of the University of Illinois Graduate School of Library and Information Science, 1893-1993*, ed. Walter C. Allen and Robert F. Delzell (Urbana, IL: Graduate School of Library and Information Science, University of Illinois, 1992), 68-80.

<sup>4</sup> "Best Library and Information Studies Schools," *U.S. News and World Report* (2009), <http://grad-schools.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-graduate-schools/top-library-information-science-programs>.

<sup>5</sup> "Online Education: LEEP," <http://www.lis.uiuc.edu/programs/leep/>.

<sup>6</sup> For example, the German periodical *Zeitschrift für Bibliothekswesen und Bibliographie* devoted eight articles in one issue to changing organizational models for higher education libraries, including case studies of libraries moving toward greater centralization of collections or "functional centralization. See: "Hochschulbibliothekssysteme im Wandel: Zweischichtigkeit und funktionale Einschichtigkeit." *Zeitschrift für Bibliothekswesen und Bibliographie* 49:2 (2002).

<sup>7</sup> Louis T. Ibbotson, "Departmental Libraries," *Library Journal* 50 (1925): 854.

<sup>8</sup> Lawrence Thompson, "The Historical Background of Departmental and Collegiate Libraries," *Library Quarterly* 12 (1942): 49.

<sup>9</sup> Robert A. Seal, "Academic Branch Libraries," in *Advances in Librarianship*, vol. 14, ed. Wesley Simonton (Orlando: Academic Press, 1986), 175-209.

<sup>10</sup> Seal, 200.

<sup>11</sup> Seal, 205.

<sup>12</sup> *Branch Libraries in ARL Insitutions*, SPEC Kit 99 (Washington, DC: Association of Research Libraries, 1983).

<sup>13</sup> Karen S. Croneis, and Bradley H. Short, *Branch Libraries and Discrete Collection*,. SPEC Kit 255 (Washington, DC: Association of Research Libraries, 1999).

<sup>14</sup> Leon Shkolnik, "The Continuing Debate Over Academic Branch Libraries," *College & Research Libraries* 52 (1991): 350.

<sup>15</sup> Patricia A. Suozzi, and Sandra S. Kerbel, "The Organizational Misfits," *College & Research Libraries* 53 (1992): 513-522.

<sup>16</sup> John K. Stemmer, and John Tombarge, "Building a Virtual Branch," *College & Research Libraries News* 59 (1997): 244-248; Charlotte Crockett, "Reconfiguring the Branch Library for a More Virtual Future," *Library Administration & Management* 14 (2000): 191-196.

<sup>17</sup> For example: Jian-Zong Zhou, and Leilani Hall, "Taming the Two Cultures: Integrating the Science Divisional Library into the Main Library," *Science & Technology Libraries* 24 (2004): 219-238.

<sup>18</sup> Thompson, 66.

<sup>19</sup> Croneis and Short, 11.

<sup>20</sup> Robert R. Walsh, "Branch Library Planning in Universities," *Library Trends* 18 (1969): 221.



- <sup>21</sup> Crockett, 193-194.
- <sup>22</sup> Gordon Aamot, and Steve Hiller, *Library Services in Non-Library Spaces*, SPEC Kit. 285. (Washington, DC: Association of Research Libraries, 2004).
- <sup>23</sup> Aamot and Hiller, 9-13.
- <sup>24</sup> Phyllis Rudin, "No Fixed Address: The Evolution of Outreach Library Services on University Campuses," *The Reference Librarian* 49 (2008): 55-75.
- <sup>25</sup> David Shumaker, "Who Let the Librarians Out? Embedded Librarianship and the Library Manager," *Reference & User Services Quarterly* 48 (2009): 239-42, 257.
- <sup>26</sup> Shumaker, 240.
- <sup>27</sup> Rudin, 69.
- <sup>28</sup> Linda Bartnik, "The Embedded Academic Librarian: The Subject Specialist Moves into the Discipline College," *Kentucky Libraries* 71 (Summer 2007): 4-9.
- <sup>29</sup> Daniel K. Blewett, "The Librarian is In," *College & Research Libraries News* 56 (1995): 701-703.
- <sup>30</sup> A. Ben Wagner, and Cynthia Tysick, "Onsite Reference and Instruction Services: Setting Up Shop Where Our Patrons Live," *Reference & User Services Quarterly* 46 (2007): 60-65.
- <sup>31</sup> Jennifer Lee, K. Alix Hayden, and Don MacMillan, " 'I Wouldn't Have Asked for Help if I Had to Go to the Library': Reference Services On Site," *Issues in Science and Technology Librarianship* (Fall 2004), <http://www.istl.org/04-fall/article2.html>.
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- <sup>33</sup> "Challenge, Change, and the Service Imperative," op.cit.
- <sup>34</sup> *Library Services for the 21st Century at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign: Interim Report of the Budget Group Plus on the New Service Model Proposal Process* (November 14, 2007), 9, [http://www.library.uiuc.edu/nsm/background/Numbered\\_NSM\\_Interim\\_Report\\_November07\\_Final.pdf](http://www.library.uiuc.edu/nsm/background/Numbered_NSM_Interim_Report_November07_Final.pdf).
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- <sup>39</sup> [URL not yet available.]
- <sup>40</sup> "Women & Gender Studies Information Resources," <http://www.library.illinois.edu/wst/>
- <sup>41</sup> "Labor & Employment Relations Digital Library," <http://www.library.illinois.edu/ler/>
- <sup>42</sup> "Global Studies Library," <http://www.library.uiuc.edu/cgs/>

<sup>43</sup> “Health Information Portal,” <http://www.library.uiuc.edu/health/>

<sup>44</sup> “Biotechnology Information Center,” <http://www.library.illinois.edu/biotech/>

<sup>45</sup> Ibbotson, 857.