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Keep Those Booktrucks Rolling: Strategies for a Major Move of the Library Collection

Edward F. Lener
Virginia Tech University, lener@vt.edu

Leslie O'Brien
Virginia Tech University, lobrien@vt.edu

Ladd Brown
Virginia Tech University, blbrown@vt.edu

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Edward F. Lener, Associate Director for Collection Management, Virginia Tech University

Leslie O'Brien, Director, Collections & Technical Services, Virginia Tech University

Ladd Brown, Head of Acquisitions, Virginia Tech University

Abstract

The University Libraries at Virginia Tech recently completed an extensive move of the physical collection and reduction of the stacks footprint in our main facility. This session relates key elements of what we learned during this multi-year process and share tips and strategies for an effective and efficient large-scale move. We cover ways to address such issues as project management, communications, staffing, identifying materials for storage or deselection, and processing of materials as well as how the process we used may be applied elsewhere.

Background

Between 2012 and 2015 the University Libraries at Virginia Tech moved its entire circulating collection in its main on-campus library facility. In the process significant numbers of volumes were moved to off-site storage or withdrawn from the collection entirely. The resulting reduction in the physical footprint of the stacks enabled targeted repurposing of spaces throughout the building for other needs.

We still have more moves ahead but would like to share some tips and strategies that we learned so far from our experiences.

The text and tables below are adapted from a poster session presentation given at the Charleston Library Conference in November 2015.

Some Major Milestones in the University Libraries (with approximate completion dates)

Construction of SCALE-UP classroom—February 2013

Expansion of 4th floor commons—summer 2014

Leased new warehouse space for 10 years—December 2013

Construction of library multipurpose room—January 2014

Downsizing and renovation of veterinary medicine branch—summer 2014

Completed upgrades to warehouse infrastructure—fall 2014

Table 1. The incredible shrinking collection—Newman Library, Virginia Tech.

Volumes by Floor	FY12	F13	FY14	FY15	Difference
2nd	172,907	73,808	72,935	0	
3rd	550,237	594,441	490,268	562,211	
4th	362,130	280,700	339,289	336,294	
5th	148,409	122,360	120,556	119,794	
TOTAL	1,233,683	1,071,309	1,023,048	1,018,299	−215,299

Construction of ICAT studios—January 2015

Construction of R&I offices on 4th floor—summer 2015

Expansion of 2nd floor commons—summer 2015

Construction of digital humanities workspace—summer 2016

Construction of reserved faculty space on 3rd floor—summer 2016

Expansion of 4th floor commons phase 2—summer 2017

Tips and Strategies

The tips and strategies below are based on our experiences at Virginia Tech and are divided into four main categories. Each situation is unique, but these recommendations should help you better prepare for a move at your own library.

Project Management and Workflow

- Make a plan, but be willing to change it—Most helpful to us were detailed floor maps showing every range and the call numbers it held

- Seek to minimize the number of times any item is handled—Sometimes items must be moved more than once but doing so hurts efficiency

- Get started early and keep at it—Time moves quickly when the clock is ticking

- Identify what needs to happen next and try to keep at least one step ahead—Focus your time and energy wisely

- Expect the unexpected—In our case the only freight elevator was out of service for weeks

Staffing

- Have the staff on hand you need to do the job—Adding back two recent retirees

made a world of difference for us, and no extra training was needed!

- Hire extra students—Moving is hard physical labor and turnover will be high

- Utilize staff from other areas during slow periods—Circulation staff provided valuable assistance during summer and breaks

Identifying Materials

- Find low-hanging fruit—We started with remaining print indexes and then moved to journal archives; both freed up large runs of shelf space fast

- Use overlap analysis to good effect—Tools such as Serials Solutions 360 can help identify what packages to buy

- Maximize archive/backfile purchases with a single vendor—Significant discounts can often be negotiated this way

- Rely on your partners to carry some of the load—We are part of a shared print repository system through ASERL

- Walk the stacks—All that dust is there for a reason!

Making It All Work

- Be strategic—Finding "push-back" from many humanities and social sciences faculty about moving their books on-site, we instead focused on journal runs, especially in the sciences

- Be strategic part II—We tried to add back extra study space along outer walls, which had both natural light and electric power

- Capitalize on opportunities—We were able to integrate much of our remaining reference collection back into the stacks

- Communicate fully—Misconceptions can crop up and the sooner you address concerns the better!