Advancing Campus Priorities through Informed Space Allocations

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Introduction

How do we allocate library spaces as user needs and institutional priorities shift? Is it based on the squeaky wheel method or can assessment lead us to shape an informed approach?

This paper shows how one library addressed the issue by crafting a progressively comprehensive assessment program with each step building on previous findings and with data from the program used to strategically reallocate library spaces. What began as a longitudinal set of campus-wide surveys led to a six-month multi-methods study into renovating, repurposing, and strategically reallocating space on the library's first floor. While that renovation was still underway, planning began for the current project which is employing data to take a floor largely dedicated to print collections and thoughtfully carve out space for two university-wide strategic priorities: creating new student learning spaces and developing a faculty technology innovation lab. Data elements being utilized include: collection overlap analysis, current and potential deaccession rates, impact of potential additional back file purchases, item-level transactions, and availability of storage space. In addition to seeking a balance between competing uses of floor space, library leaders are seeking to optimize the human and financial resources being deployed to successfully complete the project. The faculty technology innovation lab is being developed with a campus partner so the library also had to factor in consideration for that partner's time schedule and financial contributions to the project.

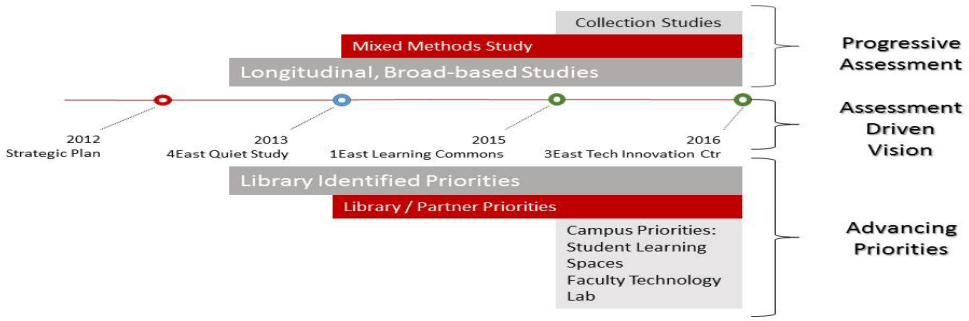
The paper demonstrates how a series of assessment projects can successfully build on each other and how data can be used to advance key library and campus space priorities not only for this library, but also with methods and results generalizable to other libraries.

The strategic plan for the University of Louisville libraries states that "Our knowledge about users comes from reliable, relevant data related to their preferences, activities and needs, and this knowledge drives future changes." This quote notes how our libraries will use data from and about our users to help meet their needs.

In addition to the strategic plan anticipating the use of data to drive changes, we said in a vision statement that we wanted to deploy assessment data to move forward with strategic opportunities. While we have used data to move forward with a number of areas in our strategic plan, for this paper, we are focusing on how we used data to inform space allocations in our library that also advanced key campus initiatives.

The aforementioned strategic plan went into effect in 2012 and is the first item noted on the timeline of activities featured in Figure 1. Under the new strategic plan, the first renovation and reallocation of space using assessment data was a renovation to create a quiet study floor. This paper, though, focuses on two subsequent space reallocations: one completed in 2015 and one from 2016. On the timeline, we note how we have employed a series of progressive assessments moving from very broad campus-wide surveys to specific collection analysis techniques. We also note how the priorities advanced by the projects went from being library-specific to those addressing more campus-wide issues.

Figure 1

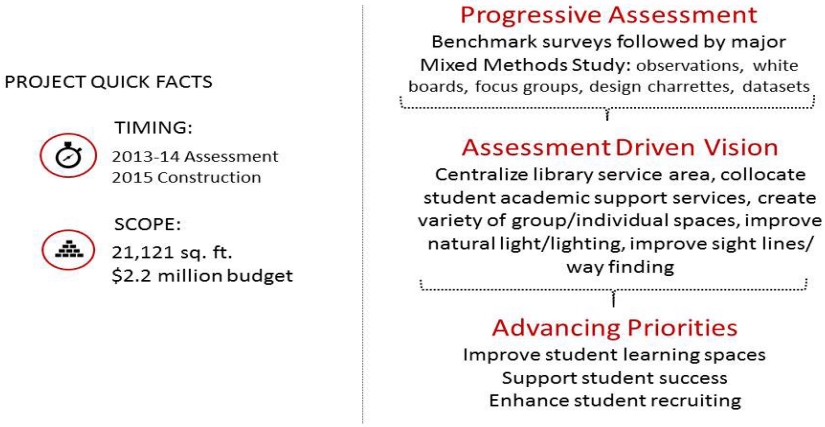


1E Learning Commons Project

The first project that we address is the renovation of the first floor commons in the older east side of the building. The assessment portion of the project ran from 2013 to 2014. Preliminary information came from the 2012 and 2014 campus-wide surveys that we conduct every two years. This was followed by a mixed-methods study targeting the space that included observations, focus groups, white boards, design charettes, and an analysis of transactional data from the service desks in that space.

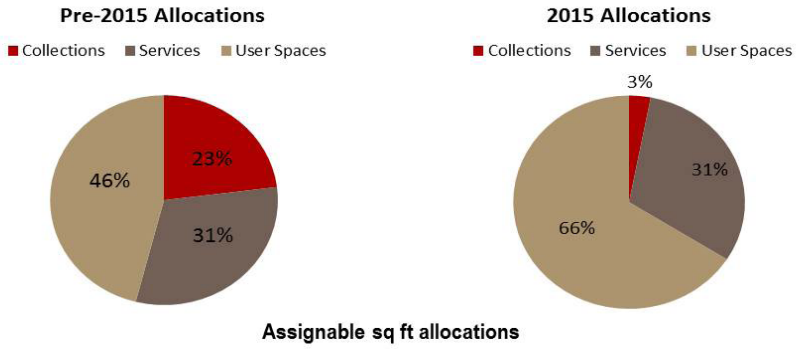
Construction took place in 2015. Based on our analysis of the assessment data, student needs that were addressed by the project included centralizing service at one desk, co-locating several academic support services to increase both their visibility and their ability to more closely align their programs, increasing seating by nearly 250 in individual and collaborative spaces, and improving natural lighting and wayfinding. What at first started as a library project to improve seating and services ended up gaining campus attention for advancing student success and recruiting initiatives. An overview of the project is included as Figure 2.

Figure 2



In addition to the project accomplishments noted above, another outcome was the significant reallocation of space on the first floor. Figure 3 details how the project increased user spaces by reducing the collections footprint.

Figure 3



Technology Innovation Center and Improved Student Spaces Projects

A second project that is being executed in two separate phases also demonstrates the progressive impact of assessment and the advancement of campus priorities. Both phases of this project are reallocating space on Ekstrom Library's third floor.

Phase one of the project reassigned and renovated an estimated 10,000 square feet of the third floor from print journal shelving to a new faculty technology innovation center. The total cost for phase one, which was completed summer 2016, was $2.5 million.

Phase two, scheduled for 2018, will repurpose approximately 25,000 square feet of space that is currently print monograph shelving and redundant office space. The projected cost for this phase is $3.5 million.

The origins of this project began with benchmark user surveys already described as part of the first floor renovations. The surveys indicated that students wanted and needed more learning/study spaces. The assessment techniques broadened to include collection usage and overlap studies.

For some time, library leadership hoped to repurpose a large portion of the third floor for student learning spaces, but recognized that underutilized print collections needed to be downsized in that area. As leadership reviewed options for downsizing and storing collections, the parallel space needs of a campus partner (with funding) offered an opportunity to link needs. The campus partner had a mandate from senior university leadership to develop a faculty innovation center. We saw that we could advance campus priorities for student and faculty learning spaces through this reallocation.

What was clear from the benchmark surveys (2012, 2014, and 2016) was that the library needed more learning space for students. To do that, it was also clear that something had to be done with the extensive print collections on the third floor. But it was not clear what we should do with the print collections and how we could fund options for collections and renovations.

We knew that we needed space for student learning, but could that space come from an addition to the building or through repurposing existing space? The answer to that question was fairly obvious. There was no funding for or land on which to build so we had to reallocate how we used existing space. But it was still not obvious how we could fund any initiative.

In looking at options to clear space, one immediate option was to review print journals for deaccessioning. Ekstrom Library had never systematically weeded print journals even when there was reliable online access. Utilization reports affirmed that was an obvious way to make space. It was also clear that deaccessioning alone would not clear enough space to meet the need and opportunity. We also needed to purchase more journal back files and expand higher density storage. (Ekstrom Library has a high-density automated storage facility that was designed with a capacity for 1.2 million volumes, but only installed with equipment to accommodate 600K volumes. Building

out storage for an additional 600K volumes was possible but would still require substantial funding.)

We also had to identify the potential funding streams. The primary options were central campus funding or other campus partners. (Development staff had worked for years to solicit external funds and this kind of project had little donor appeal.) Given the budget climate, there were limited funds available from the central campus administration. While they had a high level of interest in moving forward on these priorities, they had little funding available. Through this period of assessment, a campus partner (and current building partner) emerged who had funds, who needed space, and who had a mandate to advance faculty learning and innovation space. After review, it not only became clear that this partnership could provide funds to advance library priorities but also clear that the library could assist in advancing other campus priorities. The library would allocate some space to the faculty technology innovation center but gain a greater share of space for student use.

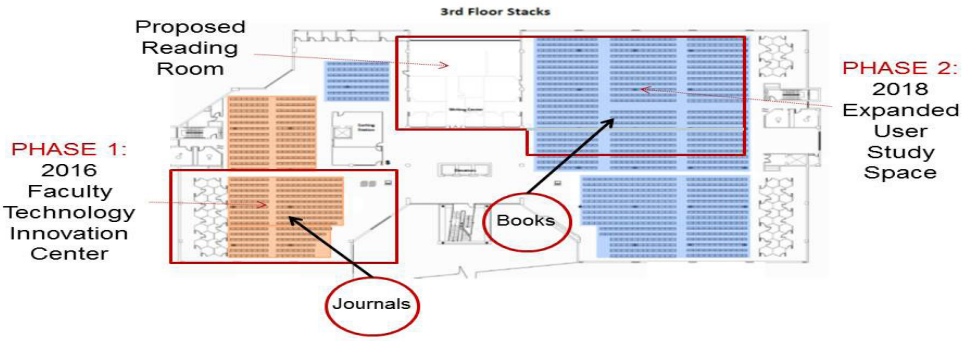
By merging our original priority for expanded student learning spaces with the campus/partner priority for new faculty innovation space, the library would have access to funding from the partner. The decision to partner provided financial assistance for purchasing back files and expanding the high-density storage. It would also position the library as a leader in addressing campus priorities for students and faculty.

The floor plan (Figure 4) for Ekstrom's third floor shows the space prior to the summer of 2016 with the project phases, the kinds of materials in the zones, and the areas to be repurposed for faculty and staff learning zones. A large segment of print journals was relocated to provide space for the faculty technology innovation center. The phase one project area was cleared of journal content in early 2016 and the new faculty technology innovation center was completed during the summer of 2016.

Phase two will provide the student learning space and is targeted for 2018. That space currently has a substantial number of monographs and some office space that has been unoccupied since 2015.

Assessment for this whole project fairly quickly became focused on a range of collection measures. In parallel with the decisions to work with a campus partner for funding, to reallocate space, and to develop the space in two phases, we needed to know where on the third floor we could locate the partner's project. A first level of analysis was to review the scope of the content on the floor and to assess the relative rates for deaccessioning and/or moving to storage.

Figure 4



Limited weeding was taking place in government documents, the print book collection, and the high-density storage area, but it was not fast enough to accomplish the clearing needed for phase one. We had some recent data on deaccession rates and calculated how long it would take to clear enough space for phase one. It became clear that, to meet the timeline for the partner, we had to focus on weeding print journals. We found that we could weed 85K print journal volumes in 120 days versus 15K monographs in one year (assuming current rates for each type).

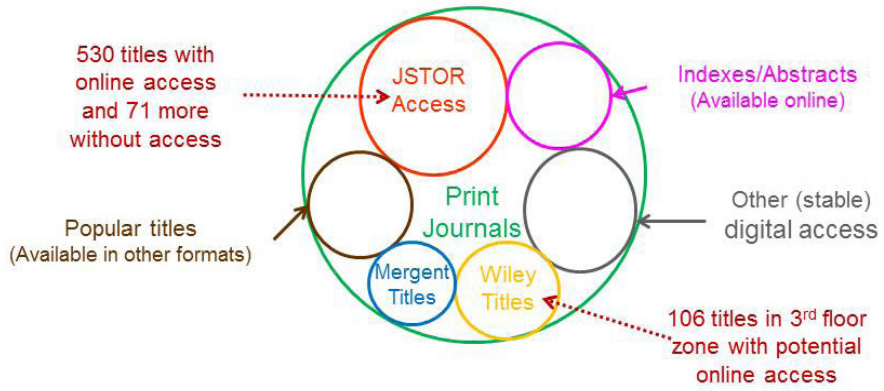
We identified that the first phase of weeding would need to be the print journals. We began an analysis of what we had on the shelves, what we had online with perpetual access, and what we could quickly move to storage.

Ekstrom Library had not previously weeded any bound journals—even those for which we had JSTOR back file access. We learned that we had 530 print titles with current JSTOR back file access that could easily be withdrawn. We were also comfortable withdrawing print indexes and abstracts.

We also knew that we had items in print for which we could purchase online back files and then withdraw the print (Figure 5). We found 71 titles that were available in JSTOR for which we did not have perpetual access rights. With the dean's support, to allow weeding, we purchased those titles as well as 106 additional Wiley back file titles. We also purchased ongoing access to a range of Mergent business titles. For the Wiley titles we also assessed the cost of the back file titles per linear inches per title to maximize the linear feet we could clear.

Even with the quantitative data gathered to inform deaccessioning the print journals, an additional layer of qualitative data was reviewed before we discarded the print holdings. The primary categories of qualitative data that we reviewed were availability, use, condition, and special features. Availability: e.g., were all associated titles available in JSTOR? Use: for some print titles, there were known patterns of use by particular faculty and courses that warranted retaining the print. Condition and/or special features: were there mitigating factors for some titles that warranted retention or discarding—e.g., a complete run of *Punch* in excellent condition?

Figure 5



What actions did we take as a result of our analysis and the data we gathered?

We made major decisions about space allocations. The new faculty technology innovation center is now located where a portion of our print journals were a year ago. We decided to move forward with this partnership and to reallocate this space based on a data assessment.

We purchased additional JSTOR, Wiley, and Mergent back files. These decisions were made based on usage data, budget information, costs per linear inch/feet, and online availability.

We withdrew 50K bound journal volumes and shifted/stored another large number. These decisions were made on the basis of strong quantitative and qualitative data. We also initiated planning for and committed to expanding our high-density storage capacity. Finally, we had conversations with faculty about journal retention and which monographs to relocate to high-density storage.

Conclusion

This paper sought to demonstrate how a series of progressive assessment projects can successfully build on each other and be used to advance key library and campus space priorities. The University Libraries' commitment to assessment revealed the need for major improvements and reallocation of space on Ekstrom Library's main floor. Through that project, the library positioned itself to meet the campus priority of improved student learning spaces. That increased campus profile and additional assessment work led to an additional two-phased project expanding the library's role in meeting student and faculty learning space needs. Phase one of that project was completed in 2016 and phase two is scheduled for 2018. Through assessment and reallocation of space, Ekstrom Library has an expanded role in supporting and advancing campus priorities.