

## ALEXANDER LIBRARY:

## Transition to the Future

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Within the unified system of the Rutgers University Libraries, Alexander Library has been established as the research library for humanities and social sciences, and delivers services and builds collections on this basis. It is a repository of scholarly resources which provides access to worlds of information inside and outside the building; an environment conducive to the process of information seeking, analyzing and synthesizing; and provides assistance to patrons in need of these resources. All library activities being carried out by librarians and staff are for a single purpose: providing meaningful services effectively to the target audience—library patrons in the Rutgers community and beyond.

In keeping with its service mission, the Library must be sensitive to the needs of Rutgers students and faculty of today and tomorrow, support the philosophy and goals of the university, and must operate effectively within a constantly changing environment.

A major factor which will continue to affect the Library's operations is the rapidly developing computer and telecommunications technology. The impact is as significant as the invention of movable typesetting on the publishing world.

Today, formats in which information is stored are no longer limited to manuscripts, books, journals, microforms, CDs, or laser disks. Electronic means for generating, retrieving and disseminating information have already broadened the concept of library services beyond the walls of the building.

In order for the library to deliver meaningful services effectively, librarians must constantly reassess service priorities, learn and apply new technology, and make decisions on emerging issues. The newly expanded and renovated Alexander Library building must be responsive to this on-going transition.

The speed of the transition is such that the program report for the Alexander Library Expansion and Renovation Project, Phase I, written in 1990, has already become outdated in many areas.<sup>1</sup> Before the construction started in November 1991, at least three changes were made in the original plan.

Currently, the Alexander Library director and the University libraries' central administration are working on a major fund-raising effort to complete the fourth floor shell of the Library's new wing which will utilize the latest computer and telecommunications technology. The shell, which is being constructed on the top floor of the new wing of the Library, was an addition to the original plan and came about as the result of low bids for construction. Funding for completing the shell has yet to be fully secured.

It is expected that by the end of 1993, the plan for the completion of the Alexander Library fourth floor shell will be in place and ready for implementation in 1994.

### *Changes in the Original Plan*

As the oldest and largest library within the system, Alexander Library had been identified as a general main library where the system-wide (central) libraries' administration also resides. Following the university's major reorganization of its academic departments and faculty on the New Brunswick campus in the 1980s, the Rutgers University Libraries also reorganized and formed a single unified system. As a result, each of the 18 university libraries have assumed more distinctive identities and focused collection responsibilities.<sup>2</sup>

The central libraries' administration focuses on coordinating library resources and services throughout the system and on the libraries' overall linkage with the university and beyond. The location of the central offices was changed from the heart of Alexander Library's service area to the top floor of the new wing, an attractive and visible location, leaving more space for the Alexander Library's reference service area where numerous and involved interactions between librarians and patrons take place. The Alexander Library administrative function will remain close to the reference service area, easily accessible to the public. As will be discussed in more detail, the offices of most of the Alexander librarians will be located there as well, thus enhancing interaction with library patrons.

Next, the rapid increase of microforms in the recent past has mandated the expansion of the microform reading area into the adjacent

technical services working space. Between 1990 and 1992, Alexander Library transferred its major technical services functions, such as acquisitions, to the Technical and Automated Services unit on the Busch Campus, and subsequently reduced the number of the staff by scaling down its overall operation. As a result, the Library was able to expand another heavily used service area.

Prior to 1990, most librarians of Alexander Library identified themselves with either the information services group or collection development, regardless of the librarian's subject or format expertise. Increasingly, electronic resources have blurred this traditional distinction, particularly in the eyes of library patrons. It is more effective if library patrons receive services tailored to their particular subject needs, from collection development to an array of reference services. Cohesive services offered in a single location ("one-stop-shopping") will enhance effective delivery of services thereby fostering a positive relationship between the patron and their library.

In order to realize this notion, however, librarians with different expertise must share information on new resources, discuss scholarly trends and technical skills, jointly develop a back-up system, and form a truly collegial and professional team. They need individual offices within close proximity, as well as a common area to share ideas. Instead of continuing to group librarians' offices on two separate floors, a change was made so that most of the Alexander librarians will move into one location close to the reference service area originally designated for the libraries' central administration.

### *Immediate Proposal and Opportunities*

The university has committed \$16.5 million to the current construction project primarily through a 1988 bond issue. The highlight of the project is the addition of a new wing with 48,000 net sq. ft. and the renovation of 22,000 sq. ft. of the existing structure. Four key components of the library's operation—seating, collection space, staffing, and service—will be enhanced when the addition and renovation are completed.

As the present construction bids came in below budget, one of the additional alternate plans was implemented: the new wing will have an additional shelled floor with 12,800 net sq. ft.

The budget allocated for the overall project has been exhausted and neither the state nor the university can appropriate additional funding. Private support is therefore essential for completing the project and, in

particular, the additional fourth floor shell. According to the Hillier Group, the architectural firm responsible for the construction of the project, approximately \$1.5 million will be needed to complete the shell.

Because the library is the centerpiece of the academic community at Rutgers, President Francis L. Lawrence has authorized the libraries to launch a fund-raising campaign for this purpose. The concept for the fourth floor includes: a Scholarly Communications Center; an Innovative Outreach Hall; and an Electronic Resources Instructional and Research Center. If realized, the fourth floor will offer three much needed opportunities to the university community. The concept has been developed in support of the mission statement in President Lawrence's recent report on research and graduate education at Rutgers: "A first rate graduate education and research program is essential at Rutgers to...strengthen teaching at both the undergraduate and graduate levels through the discovery and transmission of cutting-edge knowledge by research-active teachers."<sup>3</sup>

The first opportunity is a Scholarly Communications Center (approx. 4,500 sq. ft). Today's technology enables live voice/image transmissions between distant locations in real time. For example, Alexander Library can share its resources or provide instruction with other libraries within or outside the Rutgers University system, or to distant locations such as state or local government agencies, or the corporate sector. Full-motion interactive video systems can link several distant locations for scholarly events, including seminars, lectures and conferences. The Center will be able to accommodate 100 people and equipment, including large viewing screens with projection capabilities for televising interactive lectures, computer networks, and a storage/operating room.

The Center will facilitate distant learning and stimulate research, and make more accessible the benefits of higher education. Incorporating all the above possibilities and more, the Scholarly Communications Center is proposed as the major occupant of the fourth floor shell.

The second possibility for the shell is an Innovative Outreach Hall (approximately 3,800 sq. ft.). Timely and focused displays or demonstrations of new technology pertinent to higher education will be a service to regular library patrons and an effective means of outreach to the university community. Outreach programs will introduce valuable scholarly resources, stimulate instruction and research activities on all levels, and help students appreciate scholarly endeavors of the past and present. The Innovative Outreach Hall can display resources in many formats as

well as new technologies. For example, an exhibit with a workstation creating a "virtual reality" of political theory is a possibility. The Hall will be equipped with movable and fixed stacks, display cases, and other computer and communications equipment.

The third possibility for the fourth floor shell is an Electronic Resources Instruction and Research Center (approximately 4,500 sq. ft.), a cluster of independent instructional or research facilities, using electronic resources. Since the spring semester of 1992, Alexander Library has been the home for the Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae Project (Lexicon) and the Center for Electronic Texts in the Humanities (CETH).<sup>4&5</sup> Both projects are internationally acclaimed for their use of advanced computer technology. Each operation is funded by external sources such as the National Endowment for Humanities, and their contributions extend to scholars and researchers in the humanities worldwide.

Lexicon, CETH, and Alexander Library have already benefitted tremendously from coexistence under the same roof. The projects stimulate library patrons' instructional and research activities, while Lexicon and CETH find the general environment and resources of the Alexander Library to be of real value.

According to the existing plan, Lexicon will move onto the mezzanine of the new wing adjacent to East Asian Library, and CETH to the third floor within the Graduate Reading Room. However, if the necessary funds are raised to furnish the shell, the two projects will move to the fourth floor to become a part of the Electronic Resources Instruction and Research Center, and the subsequently vacated space will be reallocated for additional graduate reading areas.

The past couple of years have seen a definite increase of electronic resources available in the humanities and social sciences. Assisting patrons in finding needed items and use of electronic resources effectively is a major responsibility of librarians. Faculty members also need instruction specifically geared to the use of electronic resources for testing special databases or conducting research. To carry out these instructional activities effectively, librarians need a room equipped with at least 25 computer terminals where hands-on instruction can be conducted. In addition to Lexicon and CETH, the proposed Center will incorporate the Alexander Library's electronic resources instructional and research facilities.

*Future Agenda*

As a major research library in the state of New Jersey, it is a top priority of Alexander Library to make its environment supportive and comfortable for disabled patrons.<sup>6</sup> This requires further remodeling work, rearrangement of stacks, workstations, and furniture, and acquisition of equipment specifically developed for disabled library patrons. A more sophisticated Braille printer and digitized reading machine are examples.

The size of the collections and the diversity of their formats will also continue to grow. Bibliographic access points to information may change drastically from existing AACR-based descriptors to something totally new. As library resources in non-book formats increase, the value of browsing in the stacks could gradually diminish. If a certain piece of information in the stacks is well described, it is conceivable that patrons could browse the collection online, and rely on robot technology for retrieval. For example, needed items could be ordered by a student or faculty member from dormitory, home, or office and could be delivered to a designated location or directly to the requestor's PC. If this becomes reality, the stacks must be reconfigured in such a way to provide the most efficient resource delivery service possible.

Another future option to be explored is the installation of self-service charge/discharge stations. With the on-going budgetary constraints, the Library does not have sufficient human resources to manage existing collections while attending to preservation aspects. Installation of automated charge/discharge stations affords the opportunity for speedy access services while shifting human resources to other high priority areas such as reference and preservation activities.

An increase of information in diverse formats, including networked resources, is a trend that will continue to be part of the library's way of life. Application of artificial intelligence to the process of information seeking and analysis will also become another routine. The major reconfiguration of the reference collection, networked or stand-alone computer workstations, or even the Reference Desk, will be inevitable.

While the Alexander Library extends its services beyond the traditional walls, we also envision the increasing value of the library within as an intellectual, learning-conducive environment which promotes interactions between students and librarians as well as collegial relations between librarians and teaching faculty. The Alexander Library within and beyond the walls will continue to develop with vigor.

*Notes*

<sup>1</sup> From "Rutgers The State University. Alexander Library Expansion and Renovation Phase I. Program Report," February 9, 1990. The Hillier Group.

<sup>2</sup> From "The Rutgers Advantage: A Long-Range Plan for the Libraries." November, 1988.

<sup>3</sup> Francis L. Lawrence, "Research and Graduate Education at Rutgers: A Distinguished Past, A Challenging Future." September 30, 1992.

<sup>4</sup> Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologicae Classicae (LIMC) U. S. Center. Principal investigator: Dr. Jocelyn Penny Small. Since 1973, LIMC project has received grant support from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

<sup>5</sup> The Center for Electronic Texts in the Humanities (CETH) was established by Princeton and Rutgers Universities in 1991 to provide a national focus for those who are involved in the creation, dissemination and use of electronic texts in the humanities. Director: Ms. Susan Hockey.

<sup>6</sup> Memorandum from Vianne Conner, Assistant Coordinator of Library Programs, to directors, public libraries, dated June 9, 1992, in regard to Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), 1990.