Ivy Leaves

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This installment of Ivy Leaves follows the opening of the new Penn Libraries Research Annex (LIBRA). For some thirty years, the Libraries have been placing less-used materials in off-site annexes in order to optimize limited on-campus space, leverage the growing benefits of digital access, and better align our facilities to the changing demands of teaching and learning. This Ivy Leaves includes a long-range view of collection management—both physical and digital—within an evolving scholarly ecosystem, from Martha Bogan, Director for Collection Development and Management.

RESEARCH LIBRARIES and the NEW STACKS EQUATION

“The library is a growing organism.” S.R. Ranganathan

The Penn Libraries represent an amazing repository of scholarship amassed over the past 260 years—recently surpassing six million items, doubling in size in the last 30 years. Acquiring new materials at an estimated rate of 100,000 volumes annually, Penn began to face a serious shortage of space on campus to house its burgeoning print collections by the 1980s. Starting in the 1990s, having exhausted possibilities for further expansion on campus, Penn—like other research libraries around the country—found a cost-effective solution in customized off-site stacks facilities, such as our former HDS (High Density Storage) and the new LIBRA, where materials less frequently used, but of enduring value, are stored by size and easily retrieved upon request for use by library patrons.

Academic libraries in North America collectively hold nearly one billion volumes and add an estimated 25 million volumes annually. According to a study prepared by the Center for Research Libraries, off-campus facilities house an estimated 70 million volumes nationwide and, at many universities, are becoming their institution’s single largest “library.” This trend is no surprise given the cost of maintaining materials on open shelves in campus libraries. In a recent essay published by the Council on Library and Information Resources and entitled, “On the Cost of Keeping a Book,” economist and former provost, Paul Courant, (currently Dean of Libraries at the University of Michigan), calculates the annual life cycle cost of retaining books in campus stacks at $4.26 compared to an estimated $0.86 to store them in an off-site facility. Among the Ivies, at least 20% of print collections are housed in high-density off-site facilities, with Columbia and Cornell approaching 40% and Harvard with 50% of its collections off-site, including most newly received acquisitions.

Collections remaining on campus in open, browsable shelving, while still extensive, represent at best a lens into a field of study which virtually always requires amplification through multi-faceted search strategies. Of course, this has been the case for a decade or longer in most scientific disciplines where databases and electronic journals have largely replaced their print manifestations.

Strength through Collaboration

Research libraries, which traditionally relied on the count of physical volumes to measure their stature, have begun to employ a new metric, one we might call the “collaborative strength index.” We have replaced our 1980s t-shirts, “He who dies with the most toys wins,” with the more eco-friendly, “Plays well with others.” In the collaborative index, research strength would rest on dollars spent in support of shared solutions benefiting the Penn community in concert with other partners. Penn Libraries would rank high in a number of important ways. We are fortunate to have a solid foundation in Borrow Direct—recently strengthened by the addition of Harvard and MIT—and EZ-Borrow which gives the Penn community rapid access to the world’s recorded knowledge. In 2010, nearly 15% of all items circulating to Penn library users came from our partners’ collections. At the same time, we lent out 53,000 volumes from our collections to non-Penn users. This symbiosis is only the beginning of what we can expect to be more extensive and deeper interdependencies among academic libraries.

LIBRA's logo is based on the frontispiece engraving from Jean-Pierre Blanchard’s Journal of My Forty-Fifth Aerostat Voyage from Philadelphia to his landing in Deptford, Ascension, Being the First Performed in America, on March 8, 1796. The engraving, produced by Georg Braun, artist, and Peter Hogenberg, engraver, between 1572 and 1617 are exhibited.

Renaissance City Views from Above and After
On exhibit March 14-August 13 in the Kamin Gallery.
Collector Jack Sotiropoulos’ large group of city views from Civitates Orbis Terrarum, produced by Georg Braun, artist, and Peter Hogenberg, engraver, between 1572 and 1617 are exhibited.

News and Notes from the Penn Libraries | Spring 2011

Continued on the center spread inside.
RESEARCH LIBRARIES and the NEW STACKS EQUATION

[continued]

OCLC’s Lorcan Dempsey envisions a time in the not too distant future when “with the exception of a small number of large research libraries, many stacks would be managed as a pooled resource and physically consolidated in large regional stores.” Penn Libraries may play a pivotal role in the emerging national and international conversation. LIBRA might serve as a vital node—accepting materials from selected institutions in some cases while relying on the collections of our trusted partners in others.

In fact, this consolidation is already underway in WEST (Western Regional Storage Trust), a distributed shared print repository program for retrospective journal archives, established by more than twenty research libraries located in the western United States. WEST will consolidate books and journals at facilities at major university library storage facilities and at selected campus locations with a governance model and sustainable financial plan to share costs.

The Evolving Scholarly Ecosystem

The Penn Libraries must adapt and evolve as we confront new environmental forces—economic, technological, and cultural. And we will do this in the context of reinforcing partnerships with our trusted peer institutions. Penn Libraries will continue to build distinctive collections—physical and virtual—but they will be constructed with a greater awareness of the wider national— even international—ecosystem of scholarship. As a network of libraries, Penn is well positioned to take advantage of advances in technology and to be an agile partner in this ecosystem. Ultimately, Penn Libraries will actively engage our own scholars in shaping new systems of knowledge management.

LIBRA and the New Stacks Equation

LIBRA, a symbol of scales, provides the Penn community with the opportunity to reanimate the allocation space for collection—on campus and off—from which we might design a more flexible framework for the optimal deployment of our highly valued, centralized campus locations. In the Van Pelt-Dietrich Library Center, a major renovation is already underway on the 5th floor: the transformation of the Rare Book and Manuscript Library into the Special Collections Center, which will support more fully teaching and research based on direct user engagement with primary source materials.

Similarly, scholars may come to rely on large-scale digital repositories that are managed as a collective asset. As a case in point: HabitText (www.habittext.org), an international community of research libraries that Penn joined in 2010 aims to “build a reliable and increasingly comprehensive digital archive of library materials converted from print.” With holdings exceeding eighty million digitized volumes and rapidly growing, HabitText’s enhanced digital surrogates will serve as a starting point for scholars investigating the history or intellectual context of a particular title as a way to offer tools for text-mining to advance discovery and access.

Making Room for New Collections

In the last several years, the Penn Libraries have had the great privilege of gifts of major rare book collections. Creation of these items demands not only space for their housing, but also proper conservation and preservation. Below is a sampling of some of the collections during major rehousing campaigns.

2003 | Sethem Book Mart. New York’s renowned book emporium comprised some 200,200 items focused primarily on modern and contemporary poetry and literature, as well as art, architecture, material culture, music, dance, theater, and film. The collection boasts first editions, books from small presses, experimental literary magazines, books from the personal libraries of Truman Capote and Anais Nin, and items signed by nearly 200 authors.

2003 | Larkin Family Collection of Photography. A major gift from Edward Larkin (CLC, F’74) enabled the Libraries to acquire the outstanding, collection of historical photographs of the Holy Land. Comprising nearly 15,000 images spanning from the 13th century to the 19th century, this collection serves as primary material for teaching and research across a broad spectrum of disciplines, including the history of photography, architecture, regional planning, religious studies, history, and political science.

2010 | Chaim Potok Papers. Spanning the second half of the 20th century, this collection documents the literary career of this noted, rabbinical life of the noted novelist, professor, and Penn alumnus. The collection consists of correspondence, lectures, sermons, promotional material, the author’s fan mail, and a trove of writings—from note books to drafts and annotated typescripts and galleys.

2010 | Running Press Book Publishing Company. Presented to the Libraries by the late, Philadelphian and book dealer John Noonan, this gift consists of the approximately 15,000 titles that comprise Noonan’s collection of book contracts, business records, and other materials such as advertising and promotional brochures. This gift documents the history of an important, independent publishing company that has shaped the field of literature for the last 50 years.

2011 | Lawrence J. Schoenberg Medieval Manuscript Collection. One of the Penn Libraries’ most generous and imaginative benefactors, Mr. Schoenberg has amassed more than 280 manuscript books and documents from the 8th through 18th centuries C.E. as well as archetypal texts from as early as the 21st century B.C.E. The Schoenberg Collection combines the transformation of knowledge in the Western and Islamic worlds from early medieval times through the Renaissance. Subject matters include philology, music, medicine, astronomy and astrology, medicine, alchemy and chemistry, and technology.