

## FINAL REPORT

### PROVOST'S TASK FORCE ON THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

July 2006

When it became clear that shelving in the University Library would soon be full, Provost Richard Saller appointed a faculty committee to consider options for housing future print collections. From this process came the recommendation for and ultimate Trustees' decision to build an addition to Regenstein for an automated storage and retrieval facility (ASRS). This decision in turn made it logical to rethink the University libraries. The Provost therefore appointed the present Task Force in April 2005 to "have a larger discussion about the changing use of our library."

The Task Force gathered various kinds of data. It surveyed students in the Spring Quarter of 2005. It met with various stakeholders in the following Autumn Quarter. It sponsored a one-day conference on "Space and Knowledge" on 17 November 2005. The Task Force has benefited throughout from excellent support by John Kimbrough and others of the library staff. It has also benefited from the extensive report of Professor Abbott on the library (appended), which contains detailed analyses of much of the formal data gathered by the Task Force.

One context for our discussion is provided by the library policies of the other major universities. Most of these have moved substantial portions of their collections offsite, usually into some kind of high-density storage. The Trustees' decision to build the ASRS facility on campus thus emphasizes Chicago's uniqueness among academic libraries.

In recent decades, Chicago's library system has been highly centralized, resting on two major facilities - Regenstein and Crerar. (The other major library - Law - is already undergoing a faculty-mandated move towards a purely departmental model, shifting much of its research collection to the central system.) Much evidence shows that Crerar is little used as a physical library, so the major decisions all concern Regenstein, which remains an active research library. The original design of Regenstein around subject-oriented floors, however, has of necessity changed because of collection growth and rearrangement. Luckily, however, the building has no internal bearing walls and hence is almost infinitely reconfigurable.

#### *Current Use of Regenstein Library*

Evidence shows that Regenstein was very heavily used in the 1970s. Personal computers and coursepacks seriously reduced that use in the 1980s and early 1990s. A combination of factors - the Palevsky dormitory, wireless computing, increase in the College, and other things - have increased physical usage in the last decade, bringing it close to the levels of the 1970s. (Since a substantial amount of usage is electronic, and hence possibly offsite, it is not clear that physical usage will continue to increase.) Physical usage is of two kinds: research and study. Most stakeholders underscore the dual function of Regenstein as study hall and research facility.

Our studies of recent trends in Regenstein usage revealed many things. The most important are the following:

1. Undergraduates are both more numerous and are going in the library more often, although they are taking out fewer books.
2. Faculty are going in the building less but taking out many more books.
3. Most circulation is accounted for by a small group of heavy users, from 500 to 1000 depending on how one counts. This group contains from 70 to 130 faculty and from 300 to 600 graduate students, plus a hundred or so undergraduates. The majority of library "users" are actually study hall users. The library is thus a laboratory facility for a core group, and a study hall for most others.
4. Among faculty, usage of the libraries is in effect an HD, SSD, and Div affair. Individual faculty vary their usage considerably from year to year, quarter to quarter, and day to day, making measurement difficult. There is not much evidence that faculty are turning over most of their library work to RAs. There is mixed evidence about the usage of faculty studies. In summary, faculty use of JRL is high but changing in kind. There are about 100-130 faculty who are absolutely dependent on the library and very heavy users of it.
5. Among students, we can make more fine distinctions because of the on-line survey of 2005. In general, undergraduates use the library primarily as a study hall, with some secondary usage as a social center. Graduate students (mostly from HD, SSD, and Div) use it more as a research center. All students use the various technologies of everyday life (cell phones, web purchase, etc.) in the library, but the degree to which they use these is unrelated to their level of research use of the library.

A variety of questions were asked about special usages and study habits. In general graduate students are more serious users of the library in all ways: less likely to listen to music or to eat food while working and more likely to use the various special services (Special Collections, Maps, CDRoms, On-line databases, Archives, microforms and so on).

Electronic use of library resources is also higher among graduate students than among undergraduates. There is no evidence of a simple succession of older "non-electronic" people by younger "electronic" ones. More important, there is a very powerful and positive correlation at the individual level between electronic use and traditional use. High users of electronic research tools are high users of physical research tools and vice versa. Other than the shift to use of electronic rather than physical versions of journals, there is almost no evidence whatever of substitution by our students of electronic for print resources.

Like faculty, students also have a group of heavy users. Although the percentage of heavy users on all scales is far higher for HD, SSD, and Div graduate students than among undergraduates, when we look at the heavy user community by itself and ask what portion of it is undergraduate, we find that undergraduates are about a quarter of the heavy user community simply because there are so many of them. As with circulation data, our scales indicate a group of from 300 to 600 students total who are heavy research users of the library. We might note that heavy use figures show the effect of the undergraduate curriculum, since heavy use rises from first year to second, as students leave the core behind, and again from third year to fourth as (some) students undertake BA papers.

6. General usage data indicate that overall replacement of former physical usage is happening in only one area - journals. Indeed, one can say that nearly all access to journals is now electronic rather than physical. Beyond journal use, however, it is not clear what the use of electronic data-bases means. It seems probable that there has been less of a shift to electronic reference works than there has been to electronic access to journals. The only heavily-used non-journal database is Lexis-Nexis - the one electronic database that most of our College students come to Chicago having already used.
7. Data indicates that the building is to some extent "zoned" both spatially and temporally. To a large extent, the research users and the study hall users not only segregate themselves physically in the library (e.g., the faculty goes to its studies and wanders in the stacks, the undergraduates use public spaces), they also segregate themselves to some extent temporally, over the course of the year, over the course of the quarter, over the course of the week, and over the course of the day.

The basic picture of JRL today is of a dual-purpose building with a good deal of physical and temporal zoning. The research function and the study function are to a considerable extent going on side by side. The temporal zoning is provided by the patrons themselves, and they provide some at least of the spatial zoning as well. Finally, and most important, there is a core user community of around 100 to 130 faculty and about 500 or so graduates and undergraduates who are the core research constituency of the building. They are the central users of Regenstein.

In its discussion, the Task Force has established some general principles and some more particular principles. These guide our particular recommendations, which follow.

#### *General Principles*

1. The current building seems to be quite successful and we should seek only to improve it. The building and its contents are an essential resource for a significant fraction of our scholarly community. In our view, the library's role in facilitating these colleagues' work will not be supplanted by the electronification of scholarship for at least two decades.
2. Any plans for the future of Regenstein should be flexible. We are unable to predict the future demands with clarity.
3. While a visionary redesign for Regenstein seems attractive to some, it is more practical to modularize and prioritize recommendations. Given the funds to be expended on the Library Addition housing the ASRS, more ambitious modifications of Regenstein will have to be undertaken incrementally.

#### *Particular Principles*

1. The main purpose of Regenstein is research and should remain research. There are a variety of aspects to this principle. It means we feel that heavy users should continue to be the highest priority in service, and it is their research success we should be aiming to facilitate. Also, it means that the library's public spaces should celebrate the research function and that the University should work harder to expose its undergraduates to library research as one of

the forms of knowledge generation. We also feel that the library should start to recognize that it will increasingly have a constituency beyond University of Chicago users. As other major libraries remove research materials to offsite storage, Regenstein will become more and more attractive to colleagues elsewhere. In some senses, the Trustees have already envisioned the library as a facility whose research constituency will reach well beyond the University of Chicago. We recognize that judgment and applaud it.

2. Research use of Regenstein ought to include the presentation and discussion of research, as well as its generation. In part this is a matter of reaching to groups beyond the University, but it is also a matter of seeing Regenstein as in some sense the center of one broad type of intellectual life on campus.
3. Although primarily a research building, Regenstein has successfully served the two functions of research facility and study hall, and it should continue to do so. Although there are inevitably complaints in a dual usage building, the two usages seem to go on side by side without as much friction as we might expect. But there are clearly things we can do to lessen their conflict, particularly by increasing the physical zoning of the building.
4. Graduate students seem to be a - perhaps the - most important constituency of the research library and should be more integrated into it. While we have diverse proposals for how to achieve this integration, we are agreed in the necessity for it.
5. The rapidly changing technical environment means that we need to develop serious instruction in library research. And despite technical change, many materials other than journals and databases will continue to be either unavailable electronically or more easily used in physical form. Yet most of our entering students of all levels have relatively minimal experience with library work. The Task Force is persuaded that there remain crucial skills of knowledge assembly that students do not learn on their own, and that a serious effort must be made to teach them.
6. Integration between library staff and faculty is important. For example, we should take steps to increase integration of bibliographers into departmental and workshop life. Co-teaching of research courses is another possibility.

### *Recommendations*

Our recommendations are of two types: spatial and institutional/pedagogical.

#### *Spatial:*

1. In the light of the Addition and the changing use patterns in JRL itself, we have to rethink both A level and the first floor. A-Level would do well as a dual purpose space, serving both as a student study area and as a venue for small conferences. Both uses require open reconfigurable space combined with smaller spaces for group discussion. Actual planning for the space is, however, hostage to the location decision on a coffee shop, since A-Level is an obvious possible location for it.

At present, the first floor has a mix of uses that are not harmonious: access, reference, web-surfing, social area, circulation, and privileges. Redesign of the first floor is hostage to the access plans for the Addition, however. An ad hoc group will need to work on this with the

library staff and architects, both to resolve the disharmony of functions and to establish the library's identity as a research center.

2. We need to build at least four more technologically-equipped classrooms for instruction in library research and for use in courses heavily dependent on library materials. Demand for the one current classroom (in the SCRC) is very high. An example of the need for more such rooms is the Mellon-funded Center for Disciplinary Innovation.
3. The reading room of the Library Addition must be conceived in the first instance as a research facility for consultation of material located in the ASRS.
4. We need to build a good coffee shop. The Task Force is unable to agree on where to do this, but there is universal sentiment for a coffee shop of better quality and aesthetic appeal than Ex Libris.
5. While it is clear that faculty studies are underused, it is not clear how underused nor what alternative uses might be better. This is a vexed enough question to require an ad hoc group to investigate it in detail.
6. The Special Collections Research Center should be made more visible and accessible. Integration of the SCRC exhibition space into the library's broader pedagogical function is important.
7. There is some sentiment for creating spaces for graduate students in subject related groupings. The Classics Reading Room has served its constituents very well, but we feel that not enough is known about the desirability of similar spaces for other disciplines (e.g., history, English). We should therefore appoint a group to undertake research among graduate students about the desirability of set-aside space by departmental or subject grouping.

### *Institutional*

1. It is clear from the Task Force experience that most decisions about the library require continuous planning and oversight, rather than one-time investigation. The responsibility for oversight and planning should be assigned to the Library Board.
2. Harper Library presents complex issues that reach beyond our charge. Although the below-ground stacks remain necessary to the Library, the reading rooms do not. An ad hoc group, drawing broadly on the University community, should consider future models for Harper Library.
3. Crerar Library presents even more complex issues. In the short term, Crerar will need to undertake a variety of temporary functions until the Addition is finished. During that time, an ad hoc group should be appointed to develop models for Crerar usage once the Addition is complete.
4. We believe that there should be fellowship programs that encourage outside scholars to use Library collections. A beginning has already been made in Special Collections, but these programs should expand considerably and involve the collection as a whole.

5. We should encourage attempts to develop instruction in library research methods. Impetus for these will need to come from the faculty, but such initiatives should also avail themselves of library staff.

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Appendix - Abbott Report