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## NAVIGATING CHANGE AT U OF CHICAGO

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Director, University of  
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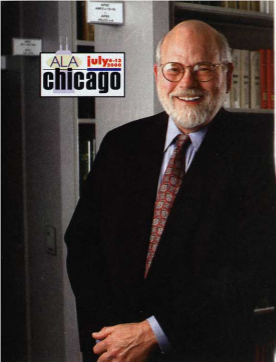
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**BACKTALK: WHAT I LEARNED IN A COLLEGE LIBRARY**

*A premier research library retools its main facility and faces the uncertain future of print and digital*

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# Navigating Change at the University of Chicago

By Norman Oder

LOCATED IN THE Hyde Park lakeside neighborhood some nine miles south of the Loop, the University of Chicago is one of the world's premier research universities, with several Nobel prize winners in economics and a history of scientific discoveries like the first controlled, self-sustaining, nuclear chain reaction (thanks to Enrico Fermi).

With some 2000 faculty and 8600 graduate/professional students but only 3850 undergraduates, it is smaller than most peer institutions, and its endowment is consequently smaller. But its library—the entire eight-site system, including legal and medical collections—is a heavyweight. Provost Geoffrey Stone calls it “the heart and soul of the institution.” Indeed, the Joseph Regenstein Library (which houses social sciences and humanities collections) is one of the five largest library buildings in North America, and the system, with more than 6.4 million volumes, is the nation's 12th largest, according to the Association of Research Libraries (ARL).

Studies at Chicago are interdisciplinary—a philosophy that everyone at the library emphasizes, from Director Martin Runkle on down. That—along with a compact campus—fosters significant

centralization. Indeed, there isn't even a separate medical library; medical collections are housed in the central science library, Crerar, just as the medical school is part of the Division of Biological Sciences. Regenstein (known as “the Reg,” pronounced with a hard “g,”) also houses library offices and support services.

Those trends toward interdisciplinary study and centralization strongly influenced how the library managed its space crunch. The Reg was built in 1970 and projected to last 25 years. That's pretty much how long it took to fill up. Fortunately, the library had begun to plan for the crunch way back in 1987, and a reconfiguration study was completed in 1996. In 1998, Runkle and staff launched the Regenstein Reconfiguration project, of which the first phase is virtually complete. The \$15 million project expanded capacity by 30 percent (from 3.5 to 4.8 million volumes) via compact shelving and re-

vamped the first floor services area. Now the Reg has a decade-long lease on life, with a continued commitment to onsite storage with open stacks—unlike more dispersed libraries that have chosen offsite storage.

The path to this configuration—two large libraries, onsite storage, a not-quite-undergraduate library—has hardly been assured. “The sociology of research libraries is very interesting,” muses Runkle, a Chicago library veteran of 30 years and head for 20, citing the confluence of faculty wishes, availability of donors, and historical accident. “As a director, you try to lead, but you can't do that in a vacuum. If you get too far ahead of the pack, you'll get in trouble.”

“I am a digitization enthusiast, but one can't ignore the many practical considerations, such as cost and intellectual property rights, and one must consider the cost/benefit ratio for specific categories of materials,” Runkle says. “It will be a few years before we have developed and demonstrated the trustworthiness of shared digital repositories for the journal literature. Until we do, we cannot give up the print.”

## Entering the Reg

Despite the library's emphasis on centralization, it remains a fairly recent phenomenon. In 1932, just 40 years af-

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ter the university's founding, a study recommended two central library buildings, one for the natural sciences, the other for social sciences and the humanities. But financial pressures as well as lack of faculty consensus delayed such changes. The intertwined factors of tightening shelves and the availability of funds—a \$10 million gift from the Joseph and Helen Regenstein Foundation, plus \$3.4 million in federal funds—led to the establishment of Regenstein.

Just north of the central quad, the five-story Reg presents a massive structure of striated limestone, somewhat brutish compared to the Gothic older campus. The library's ground floor seems pleasantly functional, but as staffers describe it, the changes are huge.

First off, the black-clad card catalog that dominated the horizon has been shunted to the sides, thanks to a somewhat belated retrospective conversion. In the center of the floor sits a welcoming reference desk, which was previously hidden to the side. A new station at right centralizes formerly scattered circulation, reserve, and interlibrary loan services.

While Runkle says staff and users had trouble envisioning how this "highly admired" building would function, it is better than ever. The shelves around the reference desk have been lowered, and new carpet and light fixtures installed. The heightened visibility has nearly dou-



*Open shelving for special collections, too, under the eye of curator Alice Schreyer*

bled the number of patrons seeking reference help. Previously, says head of reference and information services Katherine Haskins, "It was extremely frustrating. People would go to the circulation desk, thinking it was reference." Now, "It's a huge morale booster for the staff." Haskins's department is working on a new strategic plan concerning its mix of print and digital resources and onsite and

remote service. Runkle observes that, while circulation and entrance counts at the library have not diminished, the rise of digital resources has prompted the library to shift resources to reference staff and information technology staff.

The retrospective conversion, begun by OCLC in November 1997, involved 1.3 million records. Chicago was not significantly later than most peer libraries, but it did wait until the price went down to \$2.3 million, 60 percent less than an earlier OCLC quote. It was needed. Users were bypassing the catalog. Says Associate Director Judith Nadler, "Fortunately, we do have open stacks, and some materials were found by browsing. But the advantages of conversion were really tremendous."

### Open stacks vs. storage

Some two-thirds of ARL libraries use secondary storage, from underground facilities to converted warehouses. At Chicago, however, a survey showed that sentiment on offsite storage was mixed, and no one in the Reg's constituencies wanted to sacrifice public space for stack space. A new wing would have cost \$25 million, but there was space for compact shelving, on the two subterranean floors.

The big question became what to move downstairs. "We looked at the option of pulling out journals, on the theory that it would gore everyone's ox equally, and rather quickly rejected that," reports the acting assistant director for humanities and social sciences, Sem Sutter. Instead, the library has chosen specific call number ranges, including the As (general works and general periodicals) and Zs (bibliographies and library science).

In some cases, it has responded to pressure. A proposal to move sociology materials was resisted by sociology faculty, who apparently perceived a slight. Then again, political science faculty were less concerned about a transfer downstairs. Also moving are materials in economics and business, education, government documents, plus the portion of the East Asian collections that use the Harvard-Yenching classification system rather than Library of Congress (LC).

"We decided, both from a political standpoint and a practical one, that we wanted to make the space as attractive to users as possible: make sure it was well lighted and had sufficient copy machines and appropriate seating for consultation and study," says Sutter. Also, staffers stress that it is "compact shelv-

ing," not "compact storage." For a month beginning in late April, a massive program at Regenstein moved books from its five levels to the new basement compact shelving. Now the library is shifting collections around the building, until the end of the summer.

### Crerar comes to campus

It took longer to build a science library than to build the Reg. As at many universities, the science collections



*Why is Asst. Dir. Jim Vaughan smiling? Queries are up at the new reference desk*

were spread out among departments, and the Regenstein project further distracted from centralization forces. Still, notes science librarian Kathleen Zar, "The scattered libraries were overcrowded, difficult to staff, and duplicative of materials."

Because of the university's emphasis on theoretical research, the library was weak on engineering and other applied science materials. That deficit was endurable, thanks to the presence of an independent science library, the Crerar Library, founded in 1894 and located since 1962 at the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT). "The university had always built its collections with knowledge of what was three and a half miles away," observes Jim Vaughan, assistant director for access and facilities.

By the late 1970s, the interests of Crerar and IIT had begun to diverge, and Crerar's trustees sought a new home. Chicago saw an opportunity to advance its library and consolidate science facilities. Gaining a million-volume collection—about half of which was sold as duplicates—the university sold bonds to build the \$24 million Crerar Library. It opened in 1984, in a science block near Regenstein. The merger, reflects Vaughan (a former Crerar staffer), was easy conceptually but "a nightmare" bibliographically, as

all Crerar materials were in Dewey.

Sprightlier than Regenstein, Crerar welcomes visitors with a soaring sculpture, Chrystara, a 30' x 12' piece in aluminum and crystal by local artist John David Mooney. Open round the clock, a concession to the demands of its users, its first floor remains accessible to the general public during major service hours, in accordance with founder Crerar's will. The library houses about 1.1 million volumes, nearly 40 percent in compact shelving (installed three years ago), with capacity for 1.4 million. Unlike at Regenstein, serials and journals—some 60 percent of the collection—don't circulate.

### Library new and old

The basement of Crerar houses a conspicuous example of the new library, a 5500 square foot, 106-seat computing lab, a joint project with the campus networking office, which manages it. The spiffy new lab includes reconfigurable spaces and a variety of platforms and hardware (all with flat screens). "We see it as a great attraction to students," says Zar, who hopes that the bank of terminals in the café area—which offer only e-mail and Internet access—will relieve congestion at workstations upstairs.

But the old library continues, notably in the Special Collections wing on the first floor of Regenstein, where curator Alice Schreyer oversees university archives and an eclectic mix of materials. The largest library space before the Reg was the Harper Library, which anchored the south end of the Gothic quad. Now, while Harper gave up most of its floors to offices, two cathedralesque reading rooms remain, one in stone, another in wood. Along with some stack space, they house only 67,000 volumes.

While many at Chicago consider Harper the "undergraduate library," Harper librarian Eileen Libby calls it a "general library." It is used for undergrad course reserves, but on a campus known for a rigorous undergraduate core curriculum, no one can earn a B.A. without spending much time in Regenstein. Indeed, notes Tom Dorst—a former project manager for reconfiguration, now at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign—"Regenstein is used differently from any library I've been associated with. People just go there and spend lots of time."

The role of undergraduates at the Reg can only increase, as the university is building two new dormitories around the Reg's northern flank, part of a cam-

paign to raise the undergraduate population from 3700 to 4500. According to Provost Stone, "it's no accident" that the university's new \$200 million master plan—which includes an athletic center, dining halls, and arts center along with the dorms—defines Regenstein as the focal point.

That master plan, in fact, has nudged aside some of the library's ambitions for further improvements. Runkle says he's not worried about the delay, noting that all the construction around the Reg precludes any major changes inside. If the university won't allot construction funds to the library, Runkle's fundraising plans have expanded. Currently, the library has a \$63 million en-

**Just aesthetically, walking into the first floor [of Regenstein] is thrilling," says Runkle**

dowment and raises about \$3 million a year, including gifts in kind. Now, with a new development director, the library will aim for a broader campaign, seeking endowments for collection, preservation, and capital needs.

### Looking to the future

With expected additions of 100,000 volumes a year, the Reg will run out of space in about a decade—as will Crerar. "I want to try to encourage, as much as I can nationally, a conversion to digital formats," says Runkle, a former ARL president and currently a member of the board of the Research Libraries Group, "but that can't be the solution." One option is an addition to the library, which could accommodate another stack rectangle. Another is a remote storage facility shared with other area libraries.

While students and faculty would prefer materials at the Reg or at least on campus, the cost would be double that for remote storage. Many faculty, particularly in the humanities and social sciences, would support an addition, while others, especially in science, might support a cheaper option, so remaining monies could be used for digitization. "As a university, within five years, we have to have a firm decision," Runkle notes. The amount of print collected over the next decade should not shrink, though the number of electronic-only journals will increase.

In the past year, the library spent about \$1 million of its \$9.5 million ma-

terials budget on licensing or purchasing electronic information resources. In doing so, the library wants "to test how people will behave, how they'll use the information, how valuable it is...and then demand it because they prefer it to print." As the cost of journals increases, Runkle warns of being forced to make trade-offs the library has mostly avoided. Notes Sutter, "We need to look at our electronic expenditures by discipline, which is not easy to do. In many cases, we're spending money for aggregated electronic sources."

In providing electronic information, the library doesn't just write a check and provide a web link. About three-quarters of the online humanities databases it buys are loaded into the search program PhiloLogic, a collaboration between the library and the Humanities Department. Not only does this enable more sophisticated searching, notes Elisabeth Long, codirector of the Digital Library Development Center (DLDC), but it also "means a uniformity in searching, rather than having to learn a new interface for different databases."

Still, "there's no one place to go to search everything in the library," she says. "It would be nice if a search went through the online catalog and bibliographers' web pages." That's one of the challenges for the DLDC—"I think we'll see it in phases," says Long—along with standardized web design across the library's pages.

Chicago has moved into digital librarianship on several fronts. It has received two LC/Ameritech grants, one to digitize a collection of environmental photographs, one for a collaborative project with a Louisville, KY, historical society documenting the settlement of the Ohio River Valley. Adds Schreyer, "I'm very interested in identifying the parts of our collection that make the most sense of programmatic digitization. Everything we're doing is giving us very good information about the real costs of what's involved." Another collaboration, with the Chicago schools, will digitize the papers of muckraking journalist Ida B. Wells, a campaigner for civil rights and women's suffrage.

The challenges at Chicago are rooted in pride. "I've never wanted to go elsewhere," Runkle says of his tenure there. "I think Regenstein, Crerar, Law are considered fine and functional libraries. I love the anecdotal comments I get when talking to faculty at other universities who studied or taught here." ■