

# Renovated, repurposed, and still “one sweet library”: a case study on loss of space from the Health Sciences and Human Services Library, University of Maryland, Baltimore

Mary Joan (M.J.) Tooley, MLS, AHIP, FMLA

See end of article for author's affiliation.

DOI: 10.3163/1536-5050.98.1.014

**Setting:** The Health Sciences and Human Services Library (HS/HSL), University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB), is located in an urban environment on the west side of downtown Baltimore. Founded in 1813, the library opened its current building in 1998 and is one of the largest health sciences libraries in the United States, with 6 floors and over 180,000 gross square and 118,000 net assignable square feet (NASF).

**Project:** The initial discussions in late 2005 involved moving campus offices into the library. Almost immediately, it was recognized that a much larger renovation was needed due to the scope of the work. The vice president for academic affairs, the library executive director, and campus planners agreed that if the renovation was done thoughtfully, multiple needs could be met, including new office spaces, better user spaces, and synergy with the new campus center being built next door.

**Planning:** The planning, design, and construction process was multifaceted and on a fast track. Although the final piece of the renovation was completed in June 2009, the majority of the planning, design, and construction took place between March 2006 and June 2008. All tenants were involved with office design. Library staff were involved in designing the public spaces and planning the strategy for weeding and shifting.

**Outcomes:** Approximately 8,000 NASF was reallocated to new office space from shelving space, amounting to approximately 6.7% of the building NASF and approximately 10.6% of the public space in the building. The majority of new offices in the building report to the same vice president and are student focused and service oriented, with similar missions to that of the library resulting in a very harmonious cohabitation. Additional units with these missions and reporting structure are located in the new campus center, creating a synergy between the two buildings.

## BACKGROUND

The Health Sciences and Human Services Library (HS/HSL), University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB), opened in April 1998 after approximately 6 years of planning and construction. With 120,000 net assignable square feet (NASF) spread over 6 floors, the library is one of the largest health sciences libraries in the United States. Located on the west side of downtown Baltimore, the building is prominently sited on one of the busiest corners in the city. As such, it was conceived as a signature building for the campus. Due to this status, the design and construction of the building engendered a lot of attention both on and off campus [1]. This attention and ongoing interest has continued to this day. The campus community has great affection for the building, which has become an iconic structure for the west side of the city. The building was featured on the cover and in a paper in the *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association* in April 1999 [2].

With its dramatic central staircase, the longest continuous staircase in Baltimore; the use of over a dozen colors; large floor-to-ceiling windows; and open floor plan, the building was designed to be a welcoming space for users and staff. Programmatically, the building was designed for flexibility of space, a feature that has stood the library in good stead over the last three years of renovation. Initial planning for the building in the 1990s was done

during a time when the library community was just on the cusp of realizing the impact of digital and electronic collections. The impact could be imagined, but there was not yet a critical mass of resources shifting to this new environment. Consequently, 15 years of growth space in the stacks was planned before 85% capacity would be reached. Additionally, approximately 3 miles of compact shelving was installed in the lower level.

Input from users influenced much of the design. Space for copiers was located on every floor. Over 900 data connections were installed. A mixture of lounge, study table, and carrel seating was available. Probably the smartest design feature of the building was the 45 small group study rooms. Many of the schools were moving into problem-based learning environments that require collaborative space. This was designed into the library building via the study rooms.

The building is long and narrow, a city block long. To ameliorate the perception of distance, staff office suites were placed at the ends of floors, thus shortening the public-space footprint. People-oriented spaces such as staff offices and study rooms were located on the perimeter of the building. Collections and computing were located in the interior of the floor.

When the building was originally designed, campus computing and the library reported to the same vice president. By the time the building opened, this reporting structure was no longer in place. However, campus computing and the main computer room for

campus operations remained located in the library building. Therefore, the library building was already partially occupied by a unit that was not organizationally aligned with the library. Library administration managed building operations.

## SETTING

The library is located in an urban, land-locked campus environment where space is a highly valued commodity. At various times over the years since it opened in 1998, various entities have looked longingly at the space. Prior to the 2006–2009 renovation, campus computing expanded offices into a stack area, forcing an initial collection shift that was easily absorbed into the remaining stack space.

In 2006, severe space issues on campus were created by the hospital's acquisition of campus property as part of a plan to build an ambulatory care center. At that time, the HS/HSL director knew that campus planning eyes would turn to the library. Library staff undertook a study to determine growth space. As mentioned earlier, when the library opened, 15 years of growth space were estimated to achieve 85% capacity. The 2006 calculations indicated that primarily due to the conversion to electronic journals, it would take approximately 40 years to achieve 85% capacity. Additionally, we had almost 3 miles of compact shelving in the lower level. We determined we could give up approximately 1 floor of shelving or 6,500 NASF to help with campus needs.

At that point, it was important to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of offering space to the campus. By offering up the space and becoming involved early in the process, the library had a better chance of influencing who might come into the building. There was an opportunity to articulate needs and, as part of a renovation, envision certain areas of the library. Needs included modification to the library's gallery space, remodeling of the main floor, and a major redesign of the resources division's office space. These projects could not have been done for years, if ever, using library or campus facilities budgets. The only disadvantage was the primal urge to hold onto space. Making a modification of this magnitude and giving up this amount of space was a huge leap of faith.

The offer was made to give up the stack space on the 2nd floor, which amounted to 6,500 NASF. An additional 1,500 NASF of stack space was eliminated on the 3rd floor to expand library staff offices. The total NASF lost was about 6.7% of the total building NASF and about 10.6% of the public space. This offer was accepted, and the units assigned to move into the library included the student counseling center, international student offices, the registrar, and student accounting—all very compatible with the library mission. These units were very student and service centric, were good partners in the planning process, and have proved to be good cohabitants.

Simultaneously, the campus was also beginning construction on a new campus center that would

adjoin and be connected to the HS/HSL on the main level. The campus center would contain the food court, student association offices, student services offices, an athletic center, and other amenities. Synergistically, the union of the campus center and the library would create a hub of student-centered activities for the campus.

## METHOD

Once the determination was made that library space would be used, planning could begin. It was a domino-like process. To clear the stack space of the second floor, extensive weeding and shifting needed to occur. Led by the collections and cataloging staff, a methodology was developed to weed the monograph collection. Simply, any pre-1982 monographs that had not circulated during the last 10 years were removed from the shelves and placed in compact shelving. Duplicates and out-of-scope materials were also removed. Parameters for our historical collection were also readjusted. Previously, pre-1900 was the cutoff for the historical collection. This cutoff was shifted to 1945. Every professional staff member spent time in the monograph stacks evaluating the collection. Over 56,000 volumes were moved into compact shelving. Some of those were thrown out, and others were shipped to a broker who acquired materials for developing countries. It was agreed that any volumes requested from the compact shelving would be added back to the upstairs collection. Since 2007, approximately 250 monographic volumes have been reinstated. Historical materials that were out of scope were sold in lots to bidders. Changing location codes and removing materials in the library system was the most difficult and labor-intensive phase of the collection part of the project.

The successful weeding and shifting project enabled the relocation of all monographs to one floor. The next step was the shifting of two floors of bound journals up one floor each. Prior to this shift, an evaluation was done of journal collection growth. Cancelled journals or ones that had transitioned to a digital format were identified, and space calculations were done. As part of the project and under the supervision of library staff, professional library movers shifted the collection.

While the collection evaluation and shift were occurring, architectural plans were being developed for the office space on the vacated second floor, with input not only from the occupants, but also from library staff. The library director was concerned about preserving the architectural integrity of the space and wanted the new offices designed to look as if they had always been there. Although this was a challenging project for the architects, they listened thoughtfully to the library staff input. Eventually, issues were resolved to the satisfaction of all.

To create more user space near the second floor offices, current periodicals were relocated to the main floor of the library as part of the renovation of that floor. On the main floor of the library, a number of things were going on at the same time. The redesign

of the main floor involved installing a demi-wall separating the gallery from study space. This provided additional wall space for art and provided a sound barrier between the gallery and user space.

Library services staff were intimately involved in the planning of the main floor renovation, providing input at every juncture. The footprint of the floor was completely changed. Much of the reference collection, particularly indexes and abstracts, was removed along with the shelving. The reference desk was reconfigured and moved. The number of public computers was reduced and moved closer to the new reference desk. For a number of months during construction, reference services were moved to a study room on the second floor of the library along with the computers. The computers on the second floor proved so popular that when the reference desk moved back to the main floor, the computers stayed. Necessity being the mother of invention, a software program was developed so that staff could be summoned with a click of a button to offer user support. This has remained in use.

The final major component of the renovation was the consolidation of the resources division into one office suite. When the HS/HSL opened in 1998, cataloging, acquisitions, and interlibrary loan were all on different floors. It seemed like a good idea at the time to have a staff presence on every floor with "vertical adjacencies." In reality, over the years the need for staff to interact grew. These separate offices became more of a barrier. As part of the renovation, these three groups were unified in one office suite. Staffs were consulted from the very start regarding their needs and suggestions they would make for better integration of their functions. They had ample opportunities for input. Consequently, their renovated, unified office space is a huge success.

Library personnel were intimately involved in all aspects of the renovations. Opinions were respected and sought out. The three-year project consumed a tremendous amount of staff time and energy. To this day, library administration has no knowledge of the project cost, as we were not involved in any of the budgetary discussions. The only expenditure from library funds involved reupholstering some lounge seating and purchasing new computer seating. The entire project, from the collection evaluation and weeding through the last office move of the student counseling center in June 2009, took approximately three and one half years.

## RESULTS

A project of the scope of this one does not come without challenges. In addition to the massive amounts of staff time and attention, we are now managing a building that at times is more like an office building than a library. We have been challenged to meet the needs of our new occupants, whose hours are different. The new spaces created security concerns, because although no new entrances were created, there was an impact on lighting, sight

lines, and traffic flow. Our nonlibrary cohabitants sometimes talk loudly, forgetting they are in a library. And we have to learn who they are.

We have made concerted efforts through various communication channels to remind them that their offices are in the library and not an office building that just happens to house a library. We have included them in some library events, such as the holiday door-decorating contest. We asked them to review library schedules to see if there were conflicts with their schedules. We requested a safety audit of the building to identify areas that might be troublesome or cause anxiety as they move through the building.

On the positive side, our new cohabitants attract users we would not normally see. Once these users are in the library, they stay and use library resources and services. Once the new campus center is complete, we expect to see even more activity and energy as users pass from building to building. From a strictly library viewpoint, all of our renovations have been extremely successful.

## CONCLUSION

By far the most positive result of this renovation was the good will the library engendered at all levels of the campus and the "points" we accrued for being involved, positive, proactive participants in the renovation process. The building modifications, although very successful, were almost secondary. We also gained an entirely new computing and communications infrastructure for the building, improving wireless connectivity, network switches, and telephony.

On the less-than-positive side, we lived with construction and noise for about three years. If it wasn't our renovation, it was the noise from the campus center construction next door. We, and our users, grew weary of the noise and tired of making and hearing excuses, but by the beginning of the academic year in fall 2009, that was over. We also lost our café as it moved over to the new campus center. As one of the first libraries to have an in-house café, we were sad to see it go.

It is hard to know if there will be any other demands on our space. There is an awareness that the campus computing staff are supposed to move out of the building within a year. At this time, there is no indication of who might move in. The library has some space needs based on new projects, such as a campus writing center, and more collaborative spaces that campus administration has indicated may be moved under the library's jurisdiction. Perhaps some library space will be returned to accommodate these new responsibilities and programs.

Library directors should always be planning for when they may be asked to give up space and should at least have some ideas about how to respond. Additional space could be given up in the HS/HSL, predicated on the campus funding and purchasing digital backfiles or agreeing to the elimination of print copies of journals available in PubMed Central. User space is always a nonnegotiable point. Throughout the HS/HSL renova-

tions, not a single user seat was lost. Library directors should approach any discussions with an open mind and a heavy dose of "what's in it for me?"

## REFERENCES

1. Forgey B. For U-Md; a library that stacks up. *Washington Post*. 1998 Oct;24(G):1, 5.
2. Weise FO, Tooley MJ. The Health Sciences and Human Services Library: "this is one sweet library." *Bull Med Libr Assoc*. 1999 Apr;87(2):170-7.

## AUTHOR'S AFFILIATION

**Mary Joan (M.J.) Tooley, MLS, AHIP, FMLA**, mjtooley@hshsl.umaryland.edu, Associate Vice President, Academic Affairs; Executive Director, Health Sciences and Human Services Library; and Director, National Network of Libraries of Medicine, Southeastern/Atlantic Region; University of Maryland, Baltimore, 601 West Lombard Street, Baltimore, MD 21201

*Received July 2009; accepted August 2009*