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Trends

IN LAW LIBRARY MANAGEMENT AND TECHNOLOGY

Edited by Philip C. Bernick ♦ For academic, firm, corporate, and government law librarians

A Law Library Move: Going Vertical

By JOSEPH A. CUSTER, Assistant Professor of Law and Director,
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On a January day in 2012, then President Lawrence Biondi, SJD of Saint Louis University, had his driver pull over and pick up the then Law School Dean, Annette Clark, who was walking across campus, to tell her that the Saint Louis Law School had a new home in downtown St. Louis. It happened that quickly. Up to that point the law school building plan was to build an addition to the current law school building on the main campus.

Two local real estate moguls, Joe and Loretta Scott, had just gifted the old AT&T building located downtown at 100 North Tucker Boulevard to Father Biondi. The Scotts weren't alumni of Saint Louis University but were appreciative of the University and wanted to contribute to its success. The building constituted eleven floors amounting to 260,000 square feet. The location of the new law school posed many possibilities. The St. Louis Civil Courts are located just across the street and the magnificent Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals is just over a block away. The new building location also moved the law students much closer to the busy legal community located downtown.

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In addition to an extremely ambitious building plan schedule in which the President had the law school moving into the new location by August 2012 for the incoming fall class, Father Biondi had his own ideas as to how the eleven floors were to be used and distributed. He thought the law library could be located on one floor. This would account for just over 19,000 square feet, including both the collection and the law school staff. Most of the eleven vertical floors had just over 19,000 of usable square feet. The current law library was over 48,000 square feet (but truthfully had a lot of dead space). The Dean demurred, believing that one floor just wouldn't do for the law library and told Biondi this. Fortunately her advocacy won, and the law library encompasses both the 5th and 6th floors, totaling a little more than 38,000 square feet.

Planning

The law library staff was very fortunate in having a very collaborative Dean during the beginning of the planning process. Dean Clark told me up front that she wanted library input on everything regarding the two law library floors. I started to meet with the library staff to discuss building plans in February. It was decided that Richard Amelung, the Associate Director, would supervise Tom Patterson in shifting books to Searls Hall, the on-campus storage facility. Tom, with the help of two students, started to move previously designated items to Searls for storage.

I had the library staff volunteer for various building task subcommittees that were being created, such as parking, security, technology, amenities and food services. It ended up that few staff members were chosen by the leaders of the various task forces, but we didn't let that get us down. We also had the staff work on identifying those items that would be important to have in the new building, such as a reading room, a designated library conference room, comfortable student seating, library lounge, compact shelving (if the floors would support it), and a rare book/archives area, to name a few.

I was placed on the building committee. Dean Clark did not place herself on the committee but I met with her twice a month. We ended up with two committee chairs. The first, a woman law professor, was dismissed by President Biondi after a certain period to be replaced by Law Professor Michael Wolff, who would eventually become the Dean of the Law School in March 2013.

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Dean Clark greatly enhanced the planning process by sending me to visit other vertical law libraries. First of all, she sent me out with the first committee chair to the ABA 2012 Bricks and Bytes Continuous Renovation Law School Facilities Conference held in San Diego, hosted by Thomas Jefferson Law School. I also flew to Chicago in the spring of 2012 with other members of the Building Committee and a couple other interested law professors to look at a few law schools in Chicago. My assignment naturally was to take account of what I saw in the law libraries.

The Thomas Jefferson Law School building had a very open law library. Upon entering it on either the 4th or 5th floor, there was inviting open space. Beyond the open space there were conspicuous circulation desks on both floors. They did not have a separate reference desk. Our old law library was rather congested at the main entrance and something we did not want to replicate, so I found this space very inviting. I also liked the layout throughout the library that de-emphasized rows and rows of stacks and emphasized comfort and good study space. Tables and carrels were interspersed within the stacks, providing some built-in quiet which also gave students some nook and cranny areas in which to study. They also had a soft seating popular reading area for students on the 4th floor and another comfortable seating area on the 5th floor.

As was the case at Thomas Jefferson, a couple of law libraries in Chicago were making more use of tables as opposed to carrels for student study purposes. There were also instances of attractive comfortable seating arrangements. The office layout at a couple of the libraries seemed appropriate for our staff size and breakdown. Offices were a point of contention because the President, while eventually acceding to two floors, did not think that the librarians should actually have offices. This wasn't going to directly affect me in that I was going to office on the 8th floor with other law faculty, but I had it at the top of my list of priorities because if my staff isn't happy, I'm not happy, and I did believe that the teaching mission of the law librarians justified offices.

After the visits to San Diego and Chicago, upon request, both the Interim Law Library Director at Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Meyer, and the Law Library Director at Loyola Chicago Law School, Julia Wentz, shared their library's floor plans. Both of these law libraries were in vertical buildings and, in my opinion, provided the most help. I thought the librarian offices at Loyola Chicago offered some additional perspective. I shared these plans with our Dean. She liked the layout of the tables and seating interspersed within the stacks and agreed that it

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would be appropriate to have librarians in offices and that she would continue to advocate for these things.

Design Process

With the plans from Thomas Jefferson and Loyola Chicago in hand, we were able to start filling in the two library floors that spring. Richard Amelung and I met regularly with the architect assigned to the library. I had previously assigned Richard the duty of laying out the shelving in the new building. He had already moved a large part of the collection in a prior construction update, so it was not a hard decision to have him supervise this. By this time Richard had a decent idea of what would be needed to fit into the new building and we started to lay out the design that Thomas Jefferson used of intermixing the stacks and tables and carrels. By the end of the project, Tom Paterson and his students had moved more than 100,000 volumes to Searls Hall. This was added to the more than 100,000 books that had been moved there in 2009 shortly after the facility had been built (and named after the long-standing Law Professor and Director of the Omer Poos Law Library, Eileen Searls).

The Dean told me early on that the President wanted “wow” factors in the building, and a balcony from the 6th floor of the law library overlooking the 5th floor looking out through two-story windows on the south side of the building onto the St. Louis Civil Courts was going to be one of the “wow” factors. This open area would result in us losing more square and linear feet, but the physical presence we were told would be pretty amazing. We were very concerned at the time about noise on the 6th floor spilling over onto the 5th floor where the new reading room would be located. Another even more spectacular “wow” factor was the decision made by the President to add a 12th floor to the building. The 12th floor offers a magnificent outlook upon downtown St. Louis, overlooking the outside downtown mall. In addition, there is a full windowed pavilion and beautiful courtroom also on the 12th floor.

The law library staff had significant input into where they would office and work. The Dean suggested we go ahead and lay out the offices even though it wasn’t a certainty that they would exist. The library staff decided to set up shop on the 6th floor after being in a law library where the staff was split up on two different floors. Having everyone on the same floor turned out to be ideal. I was told that if the librarians were to get offices they would be smaller than the law

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faculty offices. I was also told not to argue this for fear that we would upset the powers to be, primarily the President, and end up without any librarian offices. I considered that good counsel since all the librarians were okay with smaller offices, just as long as they had offices. The rest of the staff who were not librarians received tasteful and functional Herman Miller work settings.

During that spring and early summer of 2012 we were able to advocate through either the Building Committee or through the Dean for successful inclusion of several of the law library items mentioned above that would be important to have in the new building. The advocacy for the addition of a collaborative learning center on the 6th floor, however, proved unsuccessful. Thomas Jefferson had one of these on both their library floors. I thought it would be a big hit but the idea fell flat back at SLU Law. Those outside the library did not view a seamless move from knowledge acquisition to learning interaction as a library function.

After hearing that the President had finally given up the ghost about having the law school moved in by August, Tech Services, Access Services and the Reference Departments were tasked with developing the specifics regarding design needs for other items, such as a reference and circulation desk. The most affected departments naturally had the most input into these specifications, but everyone was invited to provide input if they had helpful ideas.

Tech Services had been designing work flow in their department with great input from Associate Director, Richard Amelung. Now they were also tasked, as was the Access Services department, with assessing a shared printer/copy area. The whole staff had input on the specifications and design of the new break lounge to be located on the 5th floor. Richard Amelung, Joanne Vogel and I were primarily involved in designing the interior for the rare books room and archives area.

In August 2012, our Dean unexpectedly resigned. Unfortunately, when the plans went before the President in September 2012, Father Biondi eliminated the compact shelving. A couple of months later a member of the Saint Louis University Board of Trustees was influential enough to convince Father Biondi to agree to provide floor support to part of the 5th floor for future compact shelving if needed.

With this sudden loss of linear space, we decided we would have to increase the parameters of our weeding process and go ahead and do a thorough weed of the entire library. Everyone on the collection development committee was

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involved. The liaisons split up the collection according to the specialties of their law faculty members. They contacted their law faculty when necessary on close calls. Many of the items were sent to storage in Searls Hall. We also identified some print sources that could be switched to electronic versions. Richard Amelung and Corie Dugas were busy mapping out what books we had remaining after the moving of books to Searls Hall. It was this loss of the compact shelving that pushed us to the point of moving more than 100,000 books to Searls Hall.

Final Layout

From October 2012 to opening day of August 5, 2013, there were several hiccups along the way, but on the whole it went relatively okay. We did, in large respect, get what we had envisioned. The librarians in the spring of 2013 were awarded offices. The law library shrunk from a little over 48,000 square feet to a little over 38,000 square feet, but due to the movement of books to storage and the increase of electronic resources, we are quite comfortable in our new space and there is good room for growth.

Conclusion

The better law libraries being built today are not readily recognizable as the law libraries we had just twenty years ago. Rather than being thought of as cold storage for occasional use, the better law libraries of today, in my opinion, are those that can add to the social capital of the law school. Early on, the library knew it was going to lose some of its social capital with the study rooms being placed on the upper-level classroom floors.

While we were cut short in some of our efforts, for example missing out on the creation of student learning centers, we were able to put in a popular, well-used reading area for the students on the 6th floor along with other comfortable, informal seating areas. At the bottom of the east staircase, for example, there is a comfortable student seating area that doubles as a charging station for students' cyber needs. We had hoped to provide areas for students to get serious about their studies but also offer other areas to help them develop personal connections within the legal climate of law school, helping them establish their professional identities. I think we were successful in establishing many different types of spaces, ranging from places for quiet contemplation to places for group interaction that encourage spontaneous meetings with faculty and other students.

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In today's law library, I think it's also important to maintain a significant physical presence, and now that we have the balcony we're happy with it. The students seem to like it. The noise flowing onto the reading room is not a problem because the walls and ceilings were constructed to muffle noise. As a matter of fact, we don't have nearly the noise complaints that we had at the old law library. The new law library plays an important part in the lives of its students and is being viewed as an effective and successful component of the overall law school experience.

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