

Plan Early and Often – Stay Flexible!

The University of Oregon School of Law moved into its new building nine blocks across campus in spring 1999. The law librarians were charged with moving the collection – approximately 180,000 volumes and an equal number of volume equivalents. Despite a schedule complicated by estimated construction completion dates and the school’s academic calendar, the moving project went smoothly, consuming approximately 30 working days in two phases. Areas of the building were completed and released for occupancy incrementally over several weeks from March through May. Phase I began in the three weeks around spring break with our move into compact storage in the basement. We shared the elevator and loading dock with construction workers taking sheetrock, woodwork, fixtures and other materials into the building. Phase II began as soon as final examinations were over and the other three floors of the library became available.

The detailed planning began early and included psychological preparation. For example, the Law Library requested that the University’s Human Resources Department conduct a “Coping with Change Workshop” for all library staff. We each took the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator test. Discussion of the MBTI results enabled us to recognize that the move would disrupt our personal and professional lives, and it helped us appreciate the differences represented by our varying coping mechanisms. Because every staff member would be involved, we wanted an atmosphere of inclusiveness.

We decided not to use professional movers. The movers projected the contents of the building, including the library and its collection, could be moved in five days. Our calculations – based on the size of the collection, the number of book carts needed to move the collection, the number of book carts which would fit in the moving trucks, and the number of trips which could be made in each nine-hour day – established that it would take many more than five days.

Several complications affected the sequence of steps needed to complete the project: 1) need to remain open during the move; 2) consolidation and weeding of the collection; 3) need to reset the collection in the new building; and 4) availability of the building for occupancy. Success of the project depended on considering these complications as a whole rather than as discrete problems. Some decisions in response to the complications were: We managed to remain open all but five days during the move, doing the noisier work, such as dismantling shelves, during spring break for minimal disruption to the law students. We moved the collection from four physical locations – two offsite storage facilities - each of which had imposed deadlines for vacating, and two onsite locations - the library itself, as well as a 15,000-volume faculty library – as target areas in the new building were released. This required forethought and coordination because we were weeding and reconfiguring the collection at the same time. We reset the collection into four floors of the new building in three different call number sequences – the compact storage area, a Reading Room of frequently-used materials, and the open stacks. We had to get into the new building even while construction crews were evident everywhere, because not only was our “lease” expiring on the two offsite facilities, but asbestos abatement and renovation for the old building needed to begin.

Our labor pool consisted of 2 professional laborers from campus Facilities Services to drive the moving trucks and move the microform cabinets, 24 temporary laborers from Goodwill Industries, 8 students, the Law School's technology experts for computer infrastructure support, and the 6 librarians to supervise the work crews and monitor our daily progress. The 5 law library classified staff were responsible for maintaining day-to-day operations.

We rented 40 oversized wooden book carts (54" high x 45" long x 24" wide), each holding 255 linear inches of books. Using these carts was more efficient than boxing books; carts were shrink-wrapped to secure the books in transit. Our initial goal was to move 45-50 book carts per day for 30 days, and success each day was measured by whether we averaged this figure. We measured the collection and grouped it into call number and title spreads such as the National Reporter System, state and federal statutes, law reviews, and monographs. Then we projected growth space and transferred the numbers to a spreadsheet to visualize space necessary for different portions of the collection. Given the linear feet of shelves available in the Reading Room, we used the spreadsheets to determine what similar groups of materials best fit there, taking into account frequency and difficulty of use.

When Facilities Services moved 31 ten-drawer microform cabinets, they thought they could do so with the contents *in situ*. This proved unwise when one cabinet was dropped and the fiche wedged in the tops of some drawers, making it almost impossible to pry the drawers open. I definitely recommend emptying or removing the drawers.

A motley crew arrived for orientation the first day of work. The laborers had no experience working with call numbers and ranges and keeping books in order. Orientation included training on safety issues and how to read call numbers, as well as an overall explanation of the project. We had multiple start points so several people could simultaneously load and unload carts at either end without tripping over one another. The librarians closely monitored the crews and gave them specific instructions on how much space to leave on shelves for growth and for filling in between start points. Book carts were color-coded with green and red tape indicating beginning and end of a call number sequence, and they were numbered to keep things running smoothly. We determined how many carts of books were needed to move the entire collection and with the numbers were able to monitor our progress. We fell behind early on because of the learning curve for the most efficient way to load and offload books, the sporadic malfunction of the moving trucks, and the occasional laborer "gone AWOL." We caught up later as the efficiency of the crews increased faster than the temporary labor pool attrition rate.

By project's end, we had moved 1400 carts of books. The librarians concluded nine-hour days supervising the work crews with an additional two hours of debriefing and planning the next day's schedule – sharing carrots, rice cakes, cheese crackers, pop and laughs.

Our new work space is a great improvement. The old building had a utilitarian look, constructed of formed concrete and beige bricks with few windows. The new building has a craftsman feel to it with red brick, turrets, atria, arched windows, stained glass accents – more attention to exterior and interior detail. The library gets more use because it is a pleasanter place to study with natural light, attractive furnishings, and computer access at all tables, study carrels

and group study rooms. The computer lab is no longer situated within the library. The librarians' offices are located in a suite of rooms farther away from the public services area so there is not as much walk-in traffic. Communication between Technical and Public Services staff is facilitated by office proximity, whereas we were housed on different floors in the old library. However, the librarians and law faculty are on opposite ends of the building on different floors, so we must make greater efforts to maintain contact.

Lessons: The more complicated the move, the more closely the librarians must plan, participate and oversee the day-to-day mechanics of the move, and the earlier and more detailed the planning must be. Plan early and often – stay flexible. Planning should include all staff and psychological preparation of staff to deal with change.

The stresses of the project could have proved divisive, yet it confirmed what we already knew – that ours is an incredibly compatible and complementary group.

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