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From the Dean & Director of Libraries

Following the tragic events of mid-September, library staff looked for ways to offer comfort and reassurance to our students. Just the act of opening Albany’s University Libraries on the day after the World Trade Center destruction seemed the most reassuring thing we could do — an honorable act against the forces of ignorance and repression. Libraries do embody the very essence of freedom. For as J. Lewis von Hoelle said: “Our research libraries have become monuments to our human condition. They remember our past, serve the present, and are vibrant, living caldrons of the new ideas which will shape our future.” We will count on Albany’s students to shape the future as well. Our job is to provide them with a repository of wisdom to assist them in their intellectual achievements and offer them a chance to explore new ways of looking at the world and understanding its complexity. Perhaps these citizens can create a world in which acts of terrorism are simply unthinkable.

Albany’s University Libraries spent the past year celebrating our 156 years of history and the milestone of reaching our two millionth volume. But we didn’t simply focus on our past, or on books and the print culture. In this issue, Mary Casserly identifies trends in scholarly communication and discusses the development of our digital collections. Our wonderful “Threads of Scholarship” program, developed by Deborah LaFond and Brenda Hazard, brought together scholars who use non-traditional sources in the scholarly process to preserve, document, and communicate the histories and cultures of peoples often excluded from traditional canons of scholarship. Our exhibit highlighting the African-American traditions of storytelling and the art of quilt making drew a standing-room-only crowd.

We look forward to a bright future. We have enjoyed unprecedented support from alumni and friends, and we are using this newsletter as a way of calling attention to the generosity of our donors and thanking them once again for their extraordinary support. We are especially gratified to add twenty-nine new members to the President’s Club University Libraries chapter. We are also pleased to welcome six new members to the University Libraries Development Committee, who will help us plan and prepare for a future campaign. Private support from generous, far-sighted donors in the recent past allowed us to complete the New Library and renovate the University Library.

Our goals for the future development of the Libraries include: providing quality services both responsive to the needs of our users and efficient to use; enriching academic programs by building excellent research collections and expanding digital collections; providing the very best functional and attractive facilities for our students and faculty; facilitating rapid access to a rich array of technology, print, and digital information resources; and building a solid financial foundation for our University Libraries. I know we can count on your support.

— Meredith A. Butler
University Libraries Collections – Going Digital

Today's students and faculty rely extensively on digital information resources. They expect access to increasingly comprehensive and sophisticated digital collections, reflecting both their preferences for unlimited and remote access as well as their need to conduct more thorough and efficient research. In response to this, the University Libraries are continuing to expand our collection of electronic indexes, full text databases, electronic journals and other digital resources. This article provides some background on what the digital revolution has meant to the collection development process and how this translates into practice.

The digital revolution has caused librarians to reconsider how they think about collections. For centuries, the library’s collection was commonly understood to mean the items or volumes owned by, or under the stewardship of, that library. Over the last decade, however, the general acceptance of leasing agreements between libraries as subscribers and publishers who continue to own and control their products’ contents has challenged this definition. Today, the notion of collection is no longer singularly wed to possession: it now includes the concept of access without ownership.

The digital revolution has also brought about important changes in library acquisition practice. U.S. research libraries have long aspired, albeit unsuccessfully, to develop collections cooperatively. The confounding problem was that the materials to be acquired cooperatively could only reside in one library which was often located a significant distance from the other potential partners. In the digital world, however, geography is not an obstacle to access. Most research libraries today belong to consortia for the purposes of subscribing to databases and electronic journals. Working cooperatively, they can leverage purchasing power and influence product development.

The digital revolution requires a new vision of the research collection, one that recognizes the power and advantages that digital resources offer and at the same time respects and enhances the value of the more traditional information formats. At University Libraries we have begun to pursue our vision by acquiring a core collection of more than 2,000 digital indexes, full text collections, and electronic journals. In the coming year we plan to expand this collection and develop a breadth and depth that reflects the University's curriculum and research interests. Although we are excited about this process, we face a number of constraints:

⇒ Funding. Building and supporting digital collections is expensive. Although the economics of digital publishing are still murky, publishers consistently sell their digital products as subscriptions and price them at, or above, the cost of their paper counterparts.

⇒ Availability. While e-journals abound, books have not translated well into the digital environment. Building a quality collection in book dependent disciplines, such as those in the arts and humanities, means a continued commitment to print on paper.

⇒ Preservation. Publishers have been slow to commit to archiving their products’ digital content, and research libraries have only recently begun to discuss a strategy for taking up the slack. Most research libraries are proceeding cautiously, often continuing to acquire (and pay for) their digital resources’ paper counterparts.

⇒ Use and need. The patterns of scholarly communication that were well documented in the print environment may not prevail in the digital age. In order to make sound decisions about the content and delivery of digital collections, librarians need more information about how, and how frequently, these resources are used.

Digital technology has changed the way research is conducted, heightened user expectations and profoundly influenced the nature of library collections and collection building. Albany’s Libraries are committed to restructuring our vision of the research collection and to expanding our digital collections. We have begun the process of mapping a strategy and are prepared to work with our students and faculty, as well as with other libraries and publishers, to achieve this goal.

— Mary Casserly, Assistant Director for Collections

UL People in the News

Carol Anderson — a librarian in University Libraries since 1980, Ms. Anderson has been awarded a scholarship from Initiatives for Women to pursue a second master’s degree in Educational Psychology.

Mary Jane Brustman — was awarded the Librarian of the Year Award at the spring 2001 conference of the Eastern New York Chapter, Association of College and Research Libraries. Ms. Brustman’s work as a bibliographer at the Dewey Library, her involvement in professional organizations, and her noteworthy publication record were cited at the ceremony.

Dorothy Christiansen — Head of Grenander Special Collections and Archives, was honored in May 2001 with the Outstanding Service Award presented by the Capital District Library Council, which noted that Ms. Christiansen’s “…record of service is unmatched in council history. The libraries of the region have been immeasurably enriched by [her] sharing of time and talents.”

Laura Cohen — UL’s Network Services Librarian and Webmaster has recently been inducted into the Internet Librarian’s Hall of Fame. Ms. Cohen’s internet tutorials are used worldwide, and garner about 60,000 hits per month. These tutorials have been positively cited by USA Today, the Philadelphia Inquirer, and Byte Magazine.

Candace Merbler — has worked in UL for 21 years. She was awarded a scholarship to attend the Institute for Information Literacy ’01 sponsored by the Association of College and Research Libraries.
“Threads of Scholarship” Follows Art and Politics

The University Libraries presented an exhibit and symposium on May 3, Threads of Scholarship: History and Storytelling in African-American Quilts. For more than three hours, an audience of more than 100 listened to lectures, looked at scholarly evidence, and talked with scholars about the history and stories told in and through quilts designed and crafted by black men and women slaves.

For the immediate audience, there were stunning contemporary quilts, visual examples of storyteller’s and chronicler’s art of preserving the present to educate future generations about the realities of slaves’ lives and work.

The keynote speaker for this event was Dr. Gladys-Marie Fry, Professor Emerita of English, University of Maryland. Dr. Fry’s address, “From the African Loom to the American Quilt,” focused on the ways in which African-American quilts incorporate cultural themes from African tradition. Additionally, she spoke of methodologies and interpretations of these art forms that preserve the history of some of America’s disenfranchised people.

Fry pointed to the importance of print, microform, and archival resources for constructing social histories that, in turn, elucidate the tales told by the textile art.

Other speakers included La Nina Clayton, an archivist at George Washington University, who spoke on “Piece-work: Crafting the Fabric of our Lives,” and Dr. Raymond G. Dobard, Professor of Art, Howard University, whose talk was titled “From Griot to Grandmother: Stitching Stories and Viewing Heritage through the Eye of the Needle.”

“This project invites students to consider the place and relevance of their own cultural histories in their scholarly process. This exhibit links visual images with social and historical journeys,” says UA librarian Deborah M. LaFond. The research methodologies include the use of collected oral histories, interpretative scholarly materials, textual and photographic media, and other electronic media. UA librarians Gerald Burke, Brenda Hazard, LaFond, and Geoffrey Williams worked together on the exhibit and symposium. The exhibit will continue to be used in Library user education courses.

The symposium and the exhibit gave University students ways to connect the importance of primary source materials with the different ways library resources can be used to construct social histories. For all of us, the exhibit opens the walls of libraries to less traditional kinds of scholarship and provides a space for history that can be seen in a variety of forms.

The art exhibit and the program were supported by the University at Albany’s Affirmative Action Grants Program and the University Library Development Fund. The Frank and Dorothy Pogue Endowed Fund supported the purchase of books used in this exhibit.

“The permanent display of quilt prints continues to inform library users about the artistry and scholarship of African-American quilts,” says UA librarian Brenda Hazard. “The exhibit would never have been mounted without support from grants and endowment funds.”

Dr. Raymond G. Dobard (Photo by Sune Woods)

Quilt created and designed by Lynette S. Jackson, Marietta, Georgia.

La Nina Clayton

Dr. Gladys-Marie Fry
Albany’s University Libraries, like all research libraries everywhere, preserve the past in order to assure the future availability of knowledge. To build great collections requires the dedicated work of scholars and skilled librarians. Their success depends, in turn, on substantial financial support.

Generous support from alumni, faculty, staff, and friends has made many of our successes possible. You have helped build the new library, dedicated in 2000. You have provided essential funding to enrich our research capabilities and collections. You have assisted her correspondence, manuscripts, drawings, final art, books, and puppets.

Understanding the costs involved in processing and preserving her collection, Ms. Brown established a fund for this purpose in 1994, with a $10,000 donation. Since that time, Ms. Brown has continued to give generously to the University Libraries, in part for the fund in her name, and in part to the M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archives to support the work of the educational programs.

To honor Ms. Brown’s intellectual and financial support of the Grenander Department, the University Council voted unanimously to name the Special Collections and Archives Research Room in her honor. On November 2, 2001, The Marcia Brown Research Room will be officially designated.

Other donations have helped us where our need is greatest. Through a $10,000 bequest in her will, Mrs. Dorothy Rex West ’27 established a library book fund in memory of her sister, Mrs. Helen F. Rex Hart, also a 1927 Albany graduate. In addition, a remainder portion of Mrs. West’s estate in the amount of $35,000 was designated for the University Library without restriction. Such gifts are among the most useful we receive because they allow us to fund new projects and vital innovations.

In recognition of Mrs. West’s second bequest, the University Council has designated a newly renovated conference room in the University Library as The Dorothy Rex West Class of 1927 Conference Room.

We offer donors the opportunity to fulfill personal goals and help the Libraries through charitable giving. Great university libraries not only preserve the achievements of the past, but also draw together the scholars and students who will make the discoveries of our futures.

You can help us shape that future. Your gift of cash, securities, or real property is of vital importance to the growth and continuing development of the University Libraries. You can also, of course, enjoy tax and financial benefits through your giving. We offer a flexible range of giving and recognition opportunities. For example, a named endowment book fund may be established in a subject area of the donor’s choice with a minimum gift of $10,000. Larger gifts can be used to fund a project, help us achieve a goal, or provide funds for research materials or technology. There are other naming opportunities for collections, buildings, rooms, and special equipment.

Please join us as we build tomorrow’s University Libraries. You can contribute by using the form on the back of this newsletter. We would be delighted to discuss other ways of giving with you. Your inquiry will be treated in confidence. For more information, please contact Dean Meredith A. Butler, University Libraries (518-442-3568, e-mail: mb801@csc.albany.edu); or Roberta R. Armstrong, Libraries Development (518-442-3540, e-mail: armstrng@albany.edu).

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