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Where You and I Are Going to Spend the Rest of Our Lives: What a Future Library Looks like When There Is No There... There.

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Where you and I are going to spend the rest of our lives:
What a future library looks like when there is no there...there.

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Abstract:
Academic libraries have long envisioned a future where new services and functions are added to our existing structure of student and collection space. However, our future might be more driven not by what we gain, but by what we lose. In this presentation, a library that went through a massive change learned more quickly about the “library of the future” when they lost both student and collection space during a massive construction project. This presentation will share how the staff at this library adapted from a full service library to an information service unit; the service model of an “ethereal library;” and how they grew within this much smaller footprint. We will showcase how this library was able to retain its library services, its staff and its connection with the academic community at the school.

Libraries Need a New Plan
“Greetings, my friend. We are all interested in the future, for that is where you and I are going to spend the rest of our lives. And remember my friend, future events such as these will affect you in the future. You are interested in the unknown, the mysterious, the unexplainable. That is why you are here. And now, for the first time, we are bringing to you the full story of what happened on that fateful day. We are giving you all the evidence, based only on the secret testimonies of the miserable souls who survived this terrifying ordeal. The incidents, the places, my friend we cannot keep this a secret any longer. Let us punish the guilty, let us reward the innocent. My friend, can your heart stand the shocking facts about grave robbers from outer space?” (Plan 9 from Outer Space, 1959)
I suppose it's not a good idea to start a presentation about the future of libraries by quoting the notably bad 1959 film, *Plan 9 from Outer Space*. In this work, which is often cited as one of the worst movies of all time, filmmaker Ed Wood, Jr. opened with Criswell making the above prophetic statement about the future state of affairs. As we are now well into the 21st Century, libraries are seemingly in this exact same spot. We are very interested in the future, especially in the context of what is the shifting roles and responsibilities that we are now seeing now and have yet to discover. While hardly Shakespeare, Criswell's rambling opening quote from *Plan 9* did resonate with me as I pondered the future of the library for the *Re-think it: Libraries for a New Age* conference at Grand Valley State University in 2015. Our profession is certainly changing as space constraints and different means of information delivery are being used by publishers and scholars alike. The future we thought was going to be happening seems to be changing for all types and sizes of libraries. So in this regard, Criswell's opening line does ring true: we are all interested in the future of libraries for that is where we will be working for the rest of our careers. And while we are fortunate in libraries not having to work with "grave robbers from outer space," we do have serious issues and pressures that we are facing on our campuses, in our communities, at our corporations, etc.

As we find ourselves in 2015, libraries are at the crossroads. Though it is true that we might have been at the crossroads for some time, but did not realize it. This challenge is especially true in the academic library space where space constraints across campus are forcing librarians to reinterpret what the ideal role for the library should be. As the way libraries receive and share scholarship becomes increasingly electronic, using space in the center of campus for book storage (as many administrators see us) is being questioned more and more. Certainly, we in the
library field know that the print book is not dead by any stretch of the imagination. Even putting aside numerous studies that explore student and faculty preference for print vs. electronic content, there are many other factors to consider the need for a balanced collection in libraries (Zhang and Kudva 2014). There are many works, especially monographs, that are not available to libraries electronically. Additionally, there are many resources that have not been digitized in a manner that libraries may use. One example in this space is textbooks, which many academic libraries purchase to allow students to borrow them through reserve collections. So librarians are in the awkward position to remind people that not everything is available electronically. But in many regards, we have already shifted our collecting away from the traditional method of "just in case" acquisitions of print collection in favor of the "just in time" collection driven by the hope that we can fill the needs with an inter-library loan or short-term loan request. But as more and more libraries are forced to thin out their collection, is this a sustainable approach? With generally recognized decrease in the use of print materials in libraries, this question will likely continue to dominate the literature of collection development for years to come. (Martell 2008)

In pondering the library of the future, I looked as some samples of how the future is being presented by others. The ACRL “Top Trends in Academic Libraries” from June 2014 focused on a number of hot-button issues including: data, device neutral digital services, evolving openness in higher education, student success, competency-based learning, altmetrics, and digital humanities (ACRL Research Planning and Review Committee 2014). Four years earlier, the ACRL came out with a large study headed by Megan Oakleaf outlining the value of the academic library (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2010). And while this is a very thorough study that articulates many values that the library provides, the very need for this type
of discussion or study could be an indication that we’ve reached a 'tipping point' when our value is not self-evident. Steven Bell in his column on top ten academic library issues for 2015 also circled back to space:

**Library Space:** You might say that library space (and what we’re doing to improve it to meet user expectations better while positioning the library as a place of intentional learning and community engagement) is always a big factor, in any year. In 2015, I think academic librarians will be doing even more experimentation with their spaces in an effort both to attract even more students and demonstrate the beneficial impact of students connecting with the library and librarians. We’re only beginning to explore how new spaces for digital scholarship and creativity fit into the academic library. We’ll be learning more from one another this year about how to get these spaces right. (Bell 2015)

The frequent appearance of articles that are centrally focused on the future of the profession makes it very clear that we are at a crossroads. The challenge becomes how do we, especially those of us working as academic librarians, meet the needs of the students and faculty on our campuses with resources, spaces, and services that they need or desire when those spaces are continually in flux. It is not simply that libraries should follow and embrace what is technologically trendy. I believe that the future of libraries is not simply built on what we can purchase and make available to a broader audience. This has been the logic behind shifting from information to technological purchase, such as the 3D printers and Makerspaces which have been a popular addition to many libraries. In many regards, these might be a harbinger of the repurposing of library space that we have experienced for many years and will only accelerate as print is less and less common.

The future of libraries will also, and maybe most importantly, not be within our control. As libraries reinvent ourselves for the modern age, we have been able to provide a balance between the traditional library and a potential future self. New building designs, such as the Pew Library...
at Grand Valley State University or the Mansueto Library at the University of Chicago, feature automated storage and retrieval systems for a large number of print volumes in their collection. The addition of these systems enable the library to convert book stacks to student space while maintaining on-campus access to the legacy print collection. However, for many libraries, having the luxury of such a system will not be in the cards. These systems are expensive and without investment from the governing body, it is likely that many alternative arrangements will need to be made for legacy print collections. These arrangements might be off-site storage, dramatic weeding, or deaccession to other libraries. In a world where more and more libraries are making decisions based on the need for space, the reduction of print holdings is going to happen more and more frequently. So while we in academic libraries would love to take a path forward of our choosing, many libraries, especially academic ones, will be forced to react to the pressures (space and financial) on their campuses. To that end, each of the paths we take will be based on our resources, which we may have little control over.

Two Spaces of the Library

In envisioning the library of the future, I am drawn back to a presentation that I gave at the Michigan Library Association's Library As Place meeting in Novi, Michigan in May 2013. The premise around the day-long meeting was to bring together public libraries to talk about new and creative uses of spaces in their libraries. Included among the presentations were sessions on therapy dogs, makerspaces, among others. My presentation was titled "The Two Spaces of a Modern Library: Using Business Library Collection as Outreach and Community Engagement" and it focused on how we have structured our library around two very distinct spaces that we controlled (Seeman 2013). This presentation took place months before we found out that we
were dramatically changing the space that we have in our library, so the timing was fortuitous (all things considered).

The elephant in the room for academic libraries amid these discussions on what is the best use of library space is the decreasing value (perceived or real) of print collections in modern libraries. Libraries are certainly not alone in this regard. According to IBISWorld reports viewed in August 2015, the following sectors were all in decline in the United States:

- Newspaper Publishing
- Periodical Publishing
- Book Stores
- DVD, Game and Video Rental

And yet, there are locations in Michigan, for example, where some of these entities are not fully in decline. In more rural parts of the state of Michigan, there are video stores that are still open and functioning in 2015. This is driven possibly by the irregularity of bandwidth connection to the Internet which could prevent people from embracing Netflix, Hulu, Amazon Prime and other video delivery services. Until that problem is solved, it is likely that video stores will continue to operate in some fashion as they have for years. So while you can make broad statements about the overall health of an industry, there are many situations where that does not apply to particular locations. Such is certainly the case with the adoption and use of print materials in libraries.

Also, there are many academic disciplines that utilize older items, often in print, and find that access to a physical library is more critical to their research. Thinking about the humanities and
many social sciences, this work is not easily done with only electronic resources. Additionally, given the lack of an online equivalent for many resources published in the 50s, 60s, and 70s (and later), the move to an electronic only collection would be less than ideal.

The challenge is seeing the need for balance as we make collection decisions based on space constraints. For many, many years, the value of a print book on the shelf was not one of instant gratification. Instead, many in collection development would take joy if a book circulated once during the first ten years of its time at the library. The reason a book might have sat on the shelf could be the delay in publishing book reviews in the scholarly journals, or possibly it might be on a subject that is not yet studied by the students. But since libraries were collecting for both today's researcher and tomorrow's scholar, it was safe that most items would find a reader and prove value to the collection. As libraries have moved from a physical collection to an electronic one, the patience of collection development librarians has also likely contracted. One use in ten years is not going to be useful as we move forward.

Besides the space needed for print materials, a great deal has been made about the use of study space in the library. The focus of many library renovations in recent memory have been focused on the needs of the students and their ability to work. In many smaller renovations, library space once used for journal runs have been transformed into student spaces. These may show up as larger labs or information commons, but realistically they need to have one basic element. They need to be a place where students can work. Libraries have focused on ensuring electricity in sitting areas for students to charge and use portable electronics as they work (and sometimes play) between classes. As new libraries are being designed (especially the Pew Library at
great care is taken to make student space the priority. The function of these modern libraries is that of a learning center, not a storehouse for print items. However, the best libraries have room for both.

Getting back to the presentation on the Library as Place in 2013, I focused on the concept that there are two distinct places where libraries operate. First, there is a Physical Space. The physical space of a library allows us to provide places for students to study and interact with materials (both physical and electronic). The physical space enables us to provide interaction spaces such as group study rooms or collaboration spaces. It also provides the ability to invite community members to come in and utilize our resources. On college campuses, there are few more inviting spaces to people outside the immediate community than a library. In many cases, the real identity of the library stems from its physical space. So the library is viewed as a place to go to, first and foremost. And as we clear out books from our libraries, we find that we are meeting the majority of needs of our communities by having good work surfaces, strong internet and places to plug electronics in. For many of these functions, the reality is that the management of the space can just as easily be done by other units and in other buildings.

But thinking about the service that we provide to our communities, I came to a different space of the library. This has become a central theme as we have undergone our transition at Kresge Library from a traditional library to a modern, bookless one. So second, there is an Ethereal Space. The ethereal space of the library allows us to provide services for students, faculty and community members. This is fundamentally where we connect with our community members. Most importantly, the ethereal space is where we provide clarity to our users and help them find
what they are looking for in an increasingly complicated information universe. And while the proliferation of electronic resources enables any authorized patron to use the collections from just about anywhere, the value add of the librarian interaction is to help the patrons understand the value of the particular resources. While librarians have taken note that reference numbers are decreasing over recent years, what might be more accurate is that the type of question has changed with the electronic era. No longer are patrons asking the simple questions (when did a movie come out, how much money did a company make last year, etc.), but now they are coming to the library with higher level questions. This is what we have noticed at Kresge Library and it seems to be replicated by others across academic libraries.

The benefit of the ethereal library is that this is our true value add to the community. And unlike the ability to provide good workspaces for students (in the academic sphere), the work of helping connect patrons to higher level information is not work that can be easily done by other units on campus. So as we are envisioning the library of the future, we need to be mindful of how we operate in both spaces, the physical and ethereal. And if forced to choose which path to take, would we elect to preserve our physical or ethereal spaces? Of course, this assumes that you have to choose (many libraries do not have that problem) or that the choice is one that the library controls.

As I will share shortly, the space discussion at Kresge Library was not one where self-determination was central in the planning of the future of the library. While the library had hoped to maintain a traditional library in a major construction project, that did not happen. Kresge Library was caught between internal (library) vs external (organization) demands that had a
dramatic impact on our space allocation and abilities to move forward. In many regards, this is a dual-edged sword for academic libraries. The more ambitious and active the school, the greater the demand for space on campus. And when buildings cannot be erected to meet the demands of the schools and the wishes of the administration, reallocation and repurposing of library space will be on the agenda. So to that end, when thinking about the future of the library, I see few certainties except that it will be smaller. Space is a luxury on academic campuses and the value of having central space for 'book storage' diminishes yearly among administrators. As we move from 'just in case' ownership to 'just in time' access of information resources, I believe the need for space on campus for large library collections will not be the norm. How libraries respond to that challenge will set the path forward as they embark on a new stage of existence.

Ross Construction Project

This paper is focused on how the Kresge Library responded to dramatic changes in both collection and student space during a major construction project at The University of Michigan (2013-2016). Here is an outline of the history of the Kresge Business Administration Library at the Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. The Kresge Business Administration Library was built in the mid-1980s to serve the research and curricular needs of the Ross School of Business (then named the University of Michigan Business School). The school had a library for many years prior to the construction of the building which opened in 1984. And like some academic business libraries, the Kresge Library was independent from the main University Library at Michigan. This is common among the larger business libraries in academic units across North America. For these cases, funding and operational support comes from the business school, not the central library.
This building, funded by a lead gift from the Kresge Foundation of Troy, Michigan, featured a 1980s state of the art building designed to manage a growing print collection of business resources. It was part of a large expansion of the school during that time which saw new classrooms and an executive residence constructed. The executive residence was built to provide hotel-like housing for executives on campus for Executive Education and Executive MBA programs. The library was housed on floors 2 through 4 of the four story building (classrooms were on the first floor). Each floor of the library building was around 14,000 square feet and when opened, was dedicated to library needs and uses.

The Kresge Library was very conveniently located among the interconnected buildings of the Ross School of Business. This has made it a long-valued destination for students. After only 15 years in the building (around 1990), plans were designed to create a large quiet study space on the 4th floor. Half of the book shelving was removed and a large quiet student space opened for students. The books that were displaced were moved to the Buhr Storage facility of the central library (an example of the collaboration that had taken place over the years between this independent branch library and the main library system). With the addition of the quiet study space, the Kresge Library had room for around 700 students. The library would be open around 108 hours a week during the Fall and Winter Terms. The library space was very well used by students and we were constantly receiving requests for more open hours from the community. Our hours were fundamentally set by the Ross Campus hours and we closed when the building did.
The print collection totaled nearly 140,000 volumes with half located in the library itself. The 70,000 volumes that were sent to the Buhr building when the quiet study was created were moved to the University of Michigan at Flint, where they were stored from 2006 through 2013. They had a building project in the library which required them to clear out space that was used for our books. The books at Flint were reviewed, with some returning to Ann Arbor, some going to the main library in Ann Arbor and the majority were discarded since no new space was secured for their retention. Not having optimal space was a long-standing issue for Kresge as we found ourselves in a constant state of 'library erosion' with other units moving into the library over the years. But as Shakespeare beautifully put in *The Tempest*, "what's past is prologue" and a precursor to the changes that would take place in 2014.

During the summer of 2013, the scope of the building plans that would be finalized over the next year were shared with Ross School managers. With a space issue at the school, and a capital campaign about to commence at the University of Michigan, discussions were held with architects about what would be needed to best meet the needs of the growing business school. And while the plans were developing, the ability for the Ross School to implement a new building project hinged on a major gift to the University. Simultaneously, the library was warned that if this building project moves forward, there would be a dramatic change in the amount of space that the library controlled, especially for collections. Though we did not have a definitive charge in the elimination of collection space, discussions were started with the central library to see if they could consider taking ownership of the library’s print collection, then counting around 70,000 volumes plus other formats such as microfilm, microfiche, DVDs and VHS tapes, etc. In early September 2013, the lead gift was announced that would set this project on its path (Davis-
Blake, 2013). The large gift from Stephen Ross would be split between Athletics and the Ross School. This was the second major gift Stephen Ross gave to the school, the first one (in 2004) changed the name of the school and provided the money to start construction of the Ross Building (which opened in 2009). For the Ross School, it was the gift needed to start the building project planning in earnest.

Over the course of the next few months, the architects and university administrators met to look at plans and scope of the building projects. While the library director participated in these meetings with architects, the driving force was one of “physics.” The Ross School had greater space needs than they had available space to assign. Additionally, a memo was prepared and shared with the leadership team about what the loss of the print collection might mean for the school. During these months, the space provided to the library ebbed and flowed. But by early 2014, it was clear that there would not be any space for print collections at Kresge Library. Additionally, requests to create an off campus facility for the library to store and manage the print collections were not approved. Since Kresge was an independent library, there was not a clear and easy path forward to managing the print collection. The earlier discussions with the central library were beneficial as solutions were already started. So after a few months of negotiations and planning with architects, the library had only a few months to secure a home for the print collections and rebuild the Kresge Library as a bookless library. In many ways, this might have been a 'perfect storm' whereby we had to radically alter the value proposition of the library in a very short amount of time. And while this task was difficult and caused a great deal of anger among the library staff (as one might imagine), we were able to meet the tight timetable and 'flip' the library.
The print collections management was very challenging as one might imagine. When working with the main library, the decision was made early on that they would not accept any duplicate copies of works. All told, nearly 35% of the collections were duplicates for two good reasons. First, much of the collection was historical and built up when having separate copies of journals at the business library made good sense. The same was true of reference works and directories. And while many of these were weeded over the years, we kept print copies of core journals. Second, we purchased duplicate copies of popular and faculty titles. In some regards, we would have as many as five to ten copies of a book (such as C. K. Prahalad's *The Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid*). Working with Michigan Library staff, we identified books that were not to be transferred and they were separated out prior to the move. This work involved much of the library staff and it was done between May and early July 2014. We closed the 4th Floor for this purpose right after the end of Winter Term². By early July, we had vacated the building and moved into a modular office setup across from the front of Ross. This space, which would serve as our home from the summer of 2014 through the summer of 2016 basically had only cubes for staff. At that point, we lost our public space and had to very quickly reinvent ourselves to reflect the new reality.

In assessing this change to Kresge Library, we had to step back and see that this is not simply a 21st century problem. Changes in the library profession have been constant over the last 50 years. During that time period, we saw many changes to library work that can be viewed as each being a dramatic and unsettling as losing one's collection space. These include:

² For pictures of this project, see: https://www.flickr.com/photos/cseeman/sets/72157664353030516
The advent of copy cataloging and the changes related in technical services

Development of local online catalogs and expanded access that comes from tables of content information, keyword searching and more subject headings.

Shared catalog systems and patron-initiated borrowing.

Discovery layers for public searching.

Institutional repositories and the libraries as publisher.

Coffee and food in the library.

I always thought I would write about change management in the library, but the goal was to view this from the vantage point of small or calculated changes that can shift the priorities of a library while maintaining its traditional roles. It was very clear that change management can either be something that starts from the library or imposed onto the library. In the case of Kresge Library, it was the latter. Coming to grips with what it means to lose your physical space is not something that most librarians will embrace quickly. From the library standpoint, it means that the new library will have limitations which dramatically alter the value proposition on campus. For Kresge, it meant that we would no longer be a student destination for study and collaborative work space. It meant that we could no longer be format agnostic in collecting information resources. In order to build the library of the future, we had to quickly manage change that was anything but small. We needed to focus on the future, not dwell on the past. This building project was the 're-think it' opportunity for the Kresge Library to quickly reinvent itself for the future.
Going through this type of transformation - from a traditional library with student space and large physical collections to one with virtually no student or collection space - is challenging to say the least. Early on, through discussions with staff, we set up a priority system for planning the library of the future. As we moved from a traditional library to an ethereal one, I told the staff that these would be the priorities of Kresge (in importance order): staff, services, stuff (or collections) and space. While we have always been a strong service organization at Kresge Library, much of our identity came from the space that we occupied. Kresge was not only a place to get help, but it was a place to meet and a place to study. With the changes on the horizon, Kresge would only be a place to get help. We needed to completely reinvent ourselves as a service unit. To that end, you cannot be an effective service unit if you do not have dedicated staff to support the needs of the academic community. The process that took place on the staffing side has been documented in my article from *Advances in Library Administration and Organization* (Seeman 2015, 101-125).

In rebuilding the Kresge Library as an ethereal library, we followed the following 6 principles (or the 6P approach). The ethereal library concept was first presented at the 2014 Conference for Entrepreneurial Librarians at Wake Forest University. (Seeman 2015) The six elements are: Philosophical, Patient, Positive, Proactive, Perform & Ms. Pirkola’s Rules.³

³ For descriptions of these terms, see: [https://libjournal.uncg.edu/index.php/pcel/article/view/1186/802](https://libjournal.uncg.edu/index.php/pcel/article/view/1186/802)
In becoming an ethereal library, I also preached four basic tenets that were critical to the overall change process. First, we needed to assess what we could do with our temporary and new space (fortunately or not, they were similar and limited to staff work areas). There is a great tendency in libraries to seek out the 'north star' position and try to build it for your community or campus. This is a very noble cause, but one that will be difficult to attain. So while the tendency was to try to recapture what was possible previously in our new space allocation, we shifted focus and became realistic about what we could do, rather than dwell on what we can no longer provide.

Second, we quickly gave up traditional services when it became clear that we would not manage them effectively. Despite the desire for students to have popular titles and reserve books close at hand, we had to shed them from our list of services because we did not have the space or the capacity to manage them properly. Third, take risks & be entrepreneurial. In this type of situation, the Kresge Library was essentially playing with 'house money' and could not really be blamed if things ended poorly. The removal of the print collection and the student space gave us sufficient “cover” should we encounter any missteps. The phrase “playing with house money” refers to that moment when you have all your cash, and you are simply gambling on money that was not yours before you started. This has made many gamblers bolder with their strategy. Likewise, librarians with these conditions can make bold moves that they might not have dreamed about only years earlier. The means of overcoming dramatic changes in space and collections are ones that are managed best by going big. That is the path that we took.

While this did not give us the ability to sit and do nothing, it did give us the incentive to be creative and thoughtful on how we can meet the needs of the school with these new conditions. This construction project was a disruption that could be seen as a justification for trying new
projects (regardless of their success). And finally, do not let 'loss' be your brand. In business, people write volumes and volumes on brand management and the importance of maintaining brand quality. The same could be said about libraries. In 2015, there are so many different aspects that libraries are known for, that it is hard to come up with what the brand is, especially in academic libraries. Is it information, or information literacy, or scholarship, or collaboration, or student space? It is likely all of those things. But it cannot be loss because that is backwards thinking and reflects the past, not the future. So the path forward was very important for the success of Kresge Library.

Providing Value With New Constraints

While a great deal can be made of what a library does when it no longer manages a print collection or a student space, the reality is that a library services unit can still make a tremendous contribution to an overall academic enterprise in an ethereal form. The largest challenge was ensuring that the work that is unrelated to space needs could operate fundamentally as before. Then, it is imperative to expand the services and use any excess capacity created when you no longer had to manage a library space. Possibly by virtue of being an independent library, we were able to do this very effectively.

One of the major service additions made possible by the closing of the library space was our ability to manage the Ross School of Business' Exam & Assignment Program. The program started as a pilot under the Faculty Support group the year before our move out of the library. The premise behind the program is that many faculty at Ross do not want to hand back assignments in class and would rather have a centralized means of doing so. Additionally, some
faculty do not let students keep completed exams, though they have the opportunity to review them. Previously, much of this would be done in the faculty member’s office or in the office space by one of their administrators. We were able to take this project on at Kresge Library because we had staff capacity in the former Access Services (or circulation) group that would no longer manage a print collection (that did not exist). So in this regard, we were able to fill a big desired service for the school by virtue of no longer needed to service a print collection. This addition to the Kresge Library portfolio of services fell under the curriculum support work that we do. Though in many regards, our desire to retain staff positions as well as support the school gave us the freedom and flexibility to branch out in any direction that would meet the school’s needs. This service has been popular for both faculty and students and will continue with Kresge Library into the new building. Even though this project did not match up exactly with the work that we have been doing historically, the benefit to the school in the service and the staff in having a more secure position (in light of the collection changes) were two big wins for the library.

We also had numerous meetings with a diverse group of Ross Community members to gauge how we were doing and what types of opportunities there might be to meet their information needs. A series of meetings called “Kresge Value Proposition” started in the winter of 2015. In these meetings, we talked with faculty, students and staff about the services that we were supplying vs. the services that were needed by the school. It gave us an opportunity to find out which services should be central to the Kresge Library when the new building opened. Among the new ideas that came from these meetings were a better means of centralized subject and journal alerting services, the desire to bring course reserves back to Kresge, and managing
communications with the different members of the campus community (faculty, staff, students, alumni). While it might have been nice to have these meetings before the Ross construction project got underway, having the meetings enabled us to use the change in services as an opportunity to ensure that we are meeting the needs of the school. These meetings were positive and provide a strong means of moving forward as the library reinvents itself as an ethereal library.

We continue to assess and tweak our offerings to reflect the needs of the school moving forward. During the 2015-2016 academic year, we saw an increase in reference statistics (up 6-10% YTD) which reflects that we are able to make connections once again with the school community. We also started working with new classes that were assignment and project focused rather than one fixated on exams and cases. Success leads to new and bigger opportunities from the community, which is very welcome at the library.

Closing Thoughts

In many ways, the title quote for this paper reflects the change in thinking that we went through at Kresge Library as we shifted from a traditional library to one that is bookless. We are definitely interested in the future, although for us at Kresge Library, it came far earlier than we had anticipated. While change of this magnitude can incentivize older librarians into retiring early or others to leave the organization, the need to act quickly forced us instead to face this challenge head on. This is the future library that many of us did not anticipate that we would see in our career, yet here we are. Many of the notable bookless libraries, including BiblioTech in San Antonio, Texas, and the new Florida Polytechnic University in Lakeland, Florida were born.
digital, so their changes were not nearly as pronounced. The Cushing Academy in Massachusetts recently made headlines by converting their traditional library to an all-electronic collection. It is very clear to me that being born digital is far easier a task than becoming digital. As with any good morality tale, there are many lessons that can be pulled from the Kresge Library experience.

In looking back to the changes that took place at Kresge Library, I am most proud of the big win that we had on library staffing. The premise of the loss of library space has been the need to assign it to higher priority units at the school. Since the need was one of space, we were able to redeploy staff into new roles. While we have reduced our temporary staff dramatically, there were no full-time staff losses related to this move. As mentioned above, we took on new responsibilities in the library to take advantage of the work we would no longer be doing in managing a print collection. We have been able to redirect staff from library-centric tasks and have them work on school-centric needs. To make this work successful, you need a flexible staff, an administration that will entertain the switch, and the ability to put the school’s needs ahead of the library.

As we ponder the future of libraries, I see that our path is one that is more and more likely to be the path taken by others. That being said, I believe that we are 20 years ahead of the profession at Kresge and this will likely be more common in the 2030s. The problem about moving now in this direction is that many resources are not available electronically, or are not easily licensed for a campus. So to be an electronic-only library, you lose the capacity for many types of resources and works that are useful for the community. When we are in the year 2036, I expect that many
academic libraries will be in a very similar situation as Kresge Library finds itself in right now. Libraries will continue to lose space, often in small increments, until it is mostly gone. Libraries need to be nimble, flexible and resilient to meet the needs of the school while losing space. This activity will be central as we secure the future of the library in academic environments.

Another critical thought is the future of the library collection. Many libraries used Chris Anderson's work on 'The Long Tail' (first introduced in 2004) to justify the value of library resources that seemingly did not get used in the first few years in a library collection. To that end, most academic print collections are built on research needs for both now and years down the road. But in an electronic environment, there is a greater likelihood of commercial hosting and the possibility of material being dropped from aggregator packages. The long-term ROI (Return on Investment) is very difficult to manage in an electronic-only information environment.

As we considered the future of the Kresge Library, we decided to change the name to reflect our new status. When we moved out of the building into our temporary home, we changed our name to Kresge Library Services. Since we were no longer a “destination” or a library in the traditional sense, I felt it was important to distinguish this change. The space we had for print volumes was part of the reason. While the print holdings were only about 2% of our use, it represented about 50% of the perception of the library. Additionally, we did not want students to look for Kresge Library when they needed a place to study. In the temporary home and in our permanent location, we did not have places to study. Students still perceive the library as a place to be. Even though “Kresge” still belongs to the building – “Kresge Library” has great brand recognition at Ross and the University and we wanted to ensure that we could keep that.
My final thought is this: Are departmental or branch libraries the “canary in the coal mine?”

These libraries have been closing on academic campuses as resources (especially journals) have become electronic and the departmental space needs were greater than the value returned by a library. But is this a precursor to larger shifts in academic libraries? The Kresge Library space contraction appears to be the future of libraries everywhere – we just had it happen all at once.

But what saved the Kresge Library was our focus on service and the value that we could provide as an ethereal library. And while we cannot do everything that we had done before, we are doing things that are valued by the school and are not dependent on space. And that is a good thing.
Seeman – Where You and I Are Going to Spend the Rest of Our Lives

References


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Corey Seeman is the director of Kresge Library Services (Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor). Since 2013, he has been guiding the Kresge Library through a dramatic transformation from a full-service library with a 70,000 volume collection to one that practically only has electronic collections. Prior to that position, Corey served as Assistant Dean at the University of Toledo, a training consultant at Innovative Interfaces, and a librarian and archivist at historical libraries, including the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown. Corey has written and presented on customer service and change management within libraries, especially academic ones. Since 2004, he has maintained the Library Writer’s Blog (http://librarywriting.blogspot.com/) where he shares writing and presenting opportunities for librarians. He is also an avid photographer (especially of the campus squirrels at Michigan) and a cooking enthusiast.