

Scholarly Information in a Digital Age: Choices for the University of Melbourne

A response focussing on access to non-digital objects

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Within the existing University Library collections are held over 3 million print items such as books, maps and documents, and University Archives contains some 15 kilometres of physical objects. Despite earlier cries that electronic would replace print, new book sales continue to grow. It appears that the University of Melbourne must plan on how it will continue to physically house it's growing non-digital collection, in times of decreasing building space on campus. As well as enhancing teaching, learning and research opportunities, access to our diverse collection of non-digital objects should be developed, as it is a marketable point of differentiation for students.

Increased awareness of physical holdings

The number of people looking for access to University of Melbourne collection items has increased due to

- addition of previously uncatalogued material to online catalogues
- online access to library catalogues
- development of metadata to facilitate searching
- introduction of federated searching tools, which provide faster searching across multiple databases
- increased expectation of access to information within contemporary society

Future plans for the University of Melbourne should

- fund addition of all uncatalogued material to the online catalogue
- implement metadata standards to ensure catalogues can interlink
- fund strong infrastructure and development support for library systems
- implement regular stocktakes of the collections listed in University catalogues, to ensure our holdings match what is on the open shelves
- explore innovative ways to ensure access processes are automated, aiming to decrease time delays in access due to increased numbers of requests

Access to physical resources

On site

Physical space available for open access to institutional collections is fast being outstripped by the growing amount of material available. Staff managing open access collections face issues of

- rising demand on items requires setting priorities for who can access, as unlike online collections multiple users cannot draw on the same resource simultaneously.
- open access collections require high levels of materials handling by staff, ensuring items are issued, returned and shelved quickly and correctly for easy self service retrieval, and to maximise access opportunities.

- Competing styles of learning influence the use of items and the space in which they are used eg staff struggle to resolve use of limited study space by talkative groups versus the lone researcher.
- Security issues arise as the access to collections are opened up outside the institutional community eg Some libraries have had to introduce security passes for entry to counter thefts or personal confrontations.

Collaborative sharing of resources between institutions through reciprocal borrowing programs are one way to increase access and decrease the demands on individual institutions to be all things to all information seekers. Such programs leave the onus for locating and returning items on the individual, offering the incentive of self service, ability to set own timelines for collection, and a wider pool of resources to access, some of which may be closer to an individual geographically. The CAVAL reciprocal borrowing program offers tertiary and TAFE students access to borrowing items (excluding designated high use items) from all Victorian academic and TAFE institutions. United Libraries Australia offers students a reciprocal borrowing program for academic collections across the nation.

Future plans for the University of Melbourne should

- Identify and plan for required collection space on and off site, and plan relocations to minimise access disruptions
- Review materials handling processes, introduce self service automation where beneficial and fund staffing needs to meet collection access demands
- Experiment with new materials tracking options to improve delivery speed and available online information on progress of an access request. eg RFID tags instead of barcodes, automated retrieval systems
- Develop University standards for access demands on physical collection spaces which best fits identified demands and allocate space in future plans
- Continue to contribute to development of local and national reciprocal borrowing programs in line with assessed needs.

Off site

On site improvements can however not be the only access solutions, as due to online catalogues there are now increased numbers of people who can search institutional holdings but cannot gain access to institutional objects due to restricted opening hours or geographical distance.

Inter library loans are a long standing mechanism to meet broad ranging research needs for individuals outside of core collection plans. Here the onus on location and delivery moves to the institutions who join such programs. Union catalogues now draw on self service technology to expand these services. The recently introduced BONUS service draws on a combined catalogue where staff and students can self order items from member Universities, which are then delivered to University of Melbourne library servicepoints and borrowed. Institutions bear the costs of such schemes both to contribute to open access, and also as an alternative to purchasing, storing and handling items outside their core collection plans.

Another way to handle access to lower used materials, which meets decreasing on site collection space, has been a growth in storage options. These now range from standard warehouses to the British Library's robotised retrieval from underground

closed collections. A local example used by the University of Melbourne is a purpose built warehouse in Melbourne for the CAVAL Archive and Research Materials (CARM) Centre; a standards compliant, high-density, climate controlled print repository, housing a shared collection of close to one million volumes for partnered University Libraries. This shared collection is managed by CAVAL for long-term ownership, and access draws on existing interlibrary loans processes. In addition CAVAL provides storage space on a fee for service basis for member libraries.

Combined storage can lead to a reduction of duplication in collections, and thought is now being given to repositories for final copies at national level. Disaster recovery for print and non digital objects would mean that the last copy of an item is not stored only in a single location, subject to loss with one accident – multiple locations are required and this needs cooperation between library professionals and government agencies.

Future plans for the University of Melbourne should

- Investigate more automated options for interlibrary loans processes
- Review off site retrievals processes and fund to meet identified needs

Summary

Access to an increasing body of print materials or non-digital objects will continue for some time. Due to costs involved in storage and materials handling more cooperative sharing schemes will need to evolve. To decrease costs for access services, fuelled by the increasing demands due to improved searching tools, automated techniques for self service searching, ordering and pickup will need to be explored. In addition more material will need to be stored off site, and sophisticated materials tracking resources will need to be drawn on for managing delivery and access to physical objects in library collections.

Collection Access projects that could meet these needs at the University of Melbourne are

- Develop in consultation with the University community, a collection plan detailing on site and off site space allocations over the next 5 years, alongside funded service agreements on retrieval procedures that can meet identified timelines
- Creation of a browsable virtual library that allows people to view cover images and contents pages (already available with catalogue records), place direct orders for selected items and track online the delivery of these items to a physical collection point
- Automation for access procedures to national and overseas institutions could be investigated so that students who are travelling can access relevant institutional resources as they discover them
- A shuttlebus twice a week to off site storage to offer browsability of some collections currently only closed access or difficult to reach
- Radio Frequency IDentification (RFID) equipment should be funded in a trial library to allow data gathering on the improved materials handling for staff and service improvements for library members
- Allocated increased funding for interlibrary loans and extend access to this scheme to undergraduate students, to encourage developing research interest