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Downsizing Three Special Collections

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Abstract

Objective: When the University of North Dakota's Health Sciences Library moved to its new location in 2016 it transformed itself into an entirely digital library with a few exceptions. Due to shelving limitations, the library could retain only about one third of the volumes and historical medical artifacts in its special collections. Staff members were tasked with selecting the most appropriate items and moving them to their new location while complying with UND's disposal policies for discarded and gifted materials.

Methods: Staff members reviewed titles for relevance, prominence in their field, authorship, associations with the university, region, and state of North Dakota, date of publication, condition, duplication or holdings of a similar nature, and general availability. *Morton's Medical Bibliography*, a standard biographical reference on the most important contributions to the world of literature on medicine and related sciences, was consulted. Artifacts were considered for their relevance, historical interest, display potential, interest to faculty, staff, and students, and condition. Some objects required study to determine their exact nature and purpose. Calculations of available shelf space were made and measurements of selected material were taken. Items not selected for retention were made available to university faculty and staff through the UND surplus website. The donor of a significant collection was notified that the collection could not be retained in its entirety and options for disposal of non-retained items were investigated. Records in the library's online catalog (i.e., ODIN) and OCLC were altered as necessary to reflect current holdings.

Results: The library moved into its new home in July 2016. Books and artifacts selected for retention were boxed and moved to the new location over a period of weeks. Shelving the collection and arranging artifacts was delayed due to improper shelving supports. Once these were special ordered, received, and installed, materials were removed from their boxes and arranged on shelving. Happily, the collection fit in its new location as planned.

Conclusions: The library's downsized special collection is located in a student study area. Its presence adds charm and an historical perspective for the School of Medicine and Health Sciences as a whole and the collection contributes to academic scholarship. Access to a number of titles contained in this collection, though rarely used, would have otherwise been lost or limited.

Nature of the Collections

History of Medicine Collection

- Downsized from 979 titles to 668 titles and from 1,267 volumes to 807 volumes
- Collected over time
- Topics included:
 - Medicine
 - Allied Health Sciences
 - Local, state-wide, or institutional interest or authorship

Barger Collection

- Downsized from 1,068 titles to 116 titles and from 1,573 volumes to 122 volumes
- Donated Collection
- Topics included:
 - Focus on pathology
 - Medicine and allied health sciences
 - Business, statistics, humor, miscellaneous

Artifacts

- Downsized by 50%
- Donated items
- Collected over time
- Types of artifacts:
 - Amputation kit
 - Blood pressure unit (old)
 - Doctor's medical bag (1800s)
 - Drill brace for skull traction
 - Pen used to sign bill activating four year medical school (1953)
 - Schiötz Tonometer (measures intraocular pressure)
 - Stethoscope (old)

Selection – History of Medicine

Titles were reviewed with the following criteria:

- **Relevance**
 - Did the title fit into the scope of the collection?
 - Was it about medicine or an allied health science?
 - Were there connections with the university, the region, or the state?
- **Prominence**
 - Was it an important contribution to its field?
- **Authorship**
 - Was the author prominent in her/his field?
- **Date of publication**
 - Older works and first editions were given priority to reflect the historical nature of the collection.
- **Condition**
 - What was the condition of the item? Titles in poor condition represented a very small number of titles in the collection.
- **Duplication or similar holdings**
 - Did the library have a second copy or other works by the same author?
 - Was the subject of the book already well represented in the collection?
- **Availability**
 - Was the title widely held by other libraries in the state or country?

Selection – Barger Collection

The Barger Collection was donated to the library in 1997. It was the wish of the donor to keep the collection intact and therefore was not initially evaluated title by title. In the end, it became clear that keeping the collection in its entirety would not be possible. At that point, librarians selected just over 100 titles using similar criteria as was used for the History of Medicine Collection. Shelving space was, however, a limiting factor.

Selection – Artifacts

Artifacts were evaluated on the following basis:

- **Scope**
 - Did the artifact complement the collection?
 - Was there balanced representation among the various medical specialties?
- **Historical interest**
 - Would a visitor to the collection find the object historically interesting?
 - Did it depict medical practice during an earlier period?
- **Condition**
 - Was the object in its original form?
 - Was it free of debris, mold, or other forms of deterioration?
- **Display potential**
 - Could the item be displayed?
 - Would it fit on available shelving?

UND Surplus Requirements

Title lists of items not retained were sent to UND's Surplus website. The site is available to faculty and staff. Links to the list and to a request form were provided. Requestors agreed that materials would remain the property of UND and be used for academic purposes. Although nearly 1,200 titles and over 1,600 volumes in the library's collections were transferred to faculty and staff in the School of Medicine and Health Sciences and to departments campus-wide, only a handful of volumes in the special collections were transferred.

The BetterWorld Books Option

BetterWorld Books (BWB) is a company that sells, donates, and recycles used books. Utilizing BWB's services was explored as a positive method of disposal. The library entered into discussions with BWB and a contract was developed. BWB would provide boxes, pay for shipping, and attempt to sell the books. The library would receive approximately 10% of sales. Library staff would be responsible for boxing the books and arranging shipping. After careful consideration, the library declined to sign the contract due to a lack of staffing and resources since it was not clear that the terms of the contract could be met.

Disposal

In addition to offering materials to campus faculty and staff, a local museum was contacted to assess their interest in obtaining artifacts, but they declined. UND's Department of Anthropology expressed interest in obtaining a Native American object and it became part of their teaching collection. Several medical artifacts were transferred to the Department of Theater Arts for use as props. The bulk of books and artifacts not moved to the library's new location were disposed of by UND's Facilities Management Department.

