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CONTINUING AND CHANGING

ROLES OF LIBRARIES

Throughout history, the library has been the place where people sought knowledge, where they escaped into the imaginations of fiction writers, and where they investigated the ideas and activities of past generations. The library has served as the institution that acquired and organized books, journals, newspapers, manuscripts, and other materials, items which promoted an educated and informed society. A truly great library was one that held within its walls publications needed by anyone who entered. The world is changing and libraries are adjusting to new methods of information storage and delivery. No longer are bound publications the only method of organizing and delivering ideas and stories. Digital formats and the electronic delivery of information across high speed networks have changed library operations and library user expectations. Indeed, new formats have created a variety of challenges for librarians as they continue to serve educational institutions as the gatekeepers to scholarly information.

With the advent of technology, the expectations and processes of research and learning have changed significantly, and with them so have libraries. In recent years, the Chester Fritz Library has evaluated and acquired access to electronic journals and databases, which are rapidly growing both in content and popularity. These electronic resources offer the researcher and scholar an opportunity to explore large volumes of information with the assistance of sophisticated computerized searching tools that can isolate relevant information in a matter of seconds. Digital formats also allow access that is convenient to the researcher. The term 24/7 has appeared in our lexicon in recent years and it represents the shift to information access anywhere and at anytime. No longer is it necessary to come to the library. Seekers of information may have it delivered to their desktop in their office, lab or at home.

The Chester Fritz Library provides information to University of North Dakota students, faculty and staff using both traditional paper formats and new digital formats. While some believe that all information may be found through the Internet, a great deal of scholarly information is still available only in paper format and thus the Library continues to purchase books and journals. Library bibliographers offer an important service to the University through their specialized knowledge of the publishing industry. Through these individuals, books are ordered and journal subscriptions are managed as they have been since the establishment of the University.

Librarians utilize technology in all facets of acquisitions and the storage and delivery of materials. Even though new relationships have developed with publishers and information providers to enhance the delivery of information, the role of the librarian remains constant. Whether information is printed on paper, transferred to microfilm, or converted to computer bytes, the librarian fulfills the role of the specialist who facilitates the exchange of scholarly information within and among universities and research organizations.

One of the unexpected benefits of working with electronic resources is the opportunity for libraries to join together to evaluate content and negotiate access to digitized scholarly information. At the University of North Dakota, the Chester Fritz Library has worked closely with the Thormodsgard Law Library and the Harley E. French Library of the Health Sciences to provide digitized resources across campus whenever possible. This cooperative activity has produced a better understanding of the role and mission of these libraries within the University.

The Chester Fritz Library has also joined with libraries from other states to form evaluation and purchasing groups. The Library is a member of the MINITEX Library Information Network, which is a publicly supported network of academic, public, state government, and special libraries working cooperatively to improve library service for their users. MINITEX is a Minnesota-based organization, but libraries in North Dakota and South Dakota participate in MINITEX programs through contracts between the Minnesota Higher Education Services Office and North and South Dakota State Libraries. MINITEX has played a very important role in the acquisition of electronic resources. Recently a librarian from the Chester Fritz Library participated in an extensive MINITEX-sponsored evaluation project, which will help bring electronic resources to libraries throughout North Dakota. This cooperative work has saved and is expected to continue to save thousands of dollars through volume discounts negotiated by MINITEX on behalf of libraries in the three state region.

EPSCoR Science Initiative Group (ESIG) is another important library consortium that has facilitated the acquisition of significant electronic resources for the University. This group was formed by libraries in EPSCoR states to increase access to journals in science and technology, access critical to faculty for advancing research and teaching programs. EPSCoR, the Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research, is a joint program sponsored by the National Science Foundation (NSF) and several states and territories. Through EPSCoR, participating states have enhanced science and technology resources through partnerships between universities, government and the private sector.

In the same way, ESIG libraries have joined together to enhance their purchasing power. By negotiating with information providers as a group, ESIG libraries have benefited from more attractive purchasing packages. The Chester Fritz Library, as an ESIG participant, has expanded the number of science and technology journals by more than one thousand titles and at a fraction of the cost of individual subscription prices.

The University has greatly benefited from the Library's participation in these consortia. The results of these cooperative efforts have improved the Chester Fritz Library's ability to provide those scholarly information resources necessary to fuel dynamic research and diverse teaching programs at UND. As educational and scholarly communications continue to expand and formats continue to change, the Chester Fritz Library looks forward to supporting and enhancing the research, learning and scholarship that make UND an extraordinary institution of higher learning.

Wilbur Stoll, Director of Libraries
The MERRIFIELD COMPETITION'S FIRST DECADE

The Merrifield Competition, named in honor of UND's third President and first University Librarian, has passed a noteworthy milestone: its first decade of encouraging, recognizing, and rewarding student research.

The Merrifield Competition was established by the Thomas B. Merrifield Foundation in 1982. Its purpose was to create a competition for the best undergraduate research paper on any subject related to the University of North Dakota and its history.

The competition was named in honor of William Blackbum, first UNO President, and the Merrifield Award was established to honor the best research paper presented by an undergraduate student. The award was given annually to the student whose research paper received the highest score from a panel of judges.

The Merrifield Competition has become one of the most prestigious undergraduate research competitions in the country. It is open to all undergraduate students of the University of North Dakota, and the winners are chosen by a panel of faculty members from the university's different departments.

Over the years, the Merrifield Competition has received many applications. The winners have been recognized for their scholarly work, and their research has been published in various academic journals.

The Merrifield Competition has been an important part of the University of North Dakota's commitment to academic excellence. It has helped to foster a culture of intellectual inquiry and has encouraged students to pursue their research interests.

The competition has also been a source of pride for the university. It has helped to attract and retain top students, and it has helped to build a reputation for the university as a center of academic excellence.

The Merrifield Competition has been a success story, and it has helped to make the University of North Dakota a leader in undergraduate research. It has been a hallmark of the university's commitment to excellence, and it has helped to make the university a beacon of academic light in the region.
ENHANCING ARCHIVAL ACCESS

An emerging trend in the archival profession is the creation of electronic databases to index and provide access to detailed and complex information in original primary source documents. These databases are often mounted on the World Wide Web where they can be searched by users across the globe. The overall effect of this phenomenon is that researchers are able to access information they would have thought impossible several years ago. The Elwyn B. Robinson Department of Special Collections has kept up with this trend, and has recently completed three important Oracle database projects.

The first project involved the conversion of an existing card catalog index to the Dakota Student. Special Collections maintained this catalog, with staff indexing the newspaper back to its very first issue in 1888. Each original article in the paper was indexed by subject, followed by a short description detailing each article. Citation information was included as well. Data entry alone for this massive project took approximately four years and was accomplished by dedicated student assistants.

This newly created database searches keywords within both subject and description fields, and searches may be limited by a single year or a range of years. Results are alphabetized first by subject, and then are arranged chronologically for multiple entries for one subject. By using citations from a successful search, the researcher may obtain copies of Dakota Student articles preserved on microfilm in Special Collections. The newspaper database may be searched at:
http://www.und.nodak.edu/dept/library/Collections/searchDakotaStu.jsp

The second project involved the records of E.J. Lander & Co., a real estate, land development, and farm management firm. Founded in Grand Forks by E.J. Lander in 1883, the company worked with farmers and ranchers primarily in northern North Dakota and Montana, a smaller number in Minnesota and South Dakota, and eastern investors.

The E.J. Lander & Co. Land Records database indexes the contents of over 160 archival boxes, consisting of the firm's loan files, Eastern Client files, and real estate files. All of the records are searchable by name, date, location, and acreage. Most of the material dates from 1902 to 1953, with the bulk dating from 1916 to 1942. For scholars, the files provide a picture of land settlement patterns on the northern Great Plains and detail fifty years of the region's agricultural economy. The land records also offer family historians yet another insight into the lives of their ancestors. The Lander land records are incredibly detailed and complex. Access to them would have been very difficult before the creation of this database, which is available at:
http://www.und.nodak.edu/dept/library/Collections/Lander/index.html

The third project involved Grand Forks County Coroner certificates. The Coroner is charged with the responsibility of investigating any death arising from suspicious and unusual circumstances, including criminal or violent means, suicide, accidents, and sudden death when in apparent good health. The Coroner is a licensed medical doctor appointed by County Commissioners.

The database indexes more than 3,200 certificates, dating from 1882-1989. Many of the files for pre-1956 certificates were quite voluminous, and often included testimony before inquests of both the Coroner and the State’s Attorney, an inventory of possessions found on the deceased, and statements of the coroner's expenses. Most of the files after 1956 consist of a single piece of paper, the coroner’s certificate itself. The database searches first and last names, and may be limited by year. Search results are arranged alphabetically by surname, then by given name. Please note that according to Chapter 23-02.1-27 of the North Dakota Century Code, only family members of the deceased may view the certificates. The database can be searched at:
http://www.und.nodak.edu/dept/library/Collections/searchGFCoroner.jsp

Special Collections has initiated another database project in its continuing effort to provide online accessibility to records. The same committed volunteer who completed the Lander and Coroner databases has recently begun data entry for an online index of hand-written Grand Forks County Marriage Licenses dating from 1875. This monumental project will enhance a separate database created by the County, which primarily indexed typed licenses.

The creation of all these databases was a team effort. Special Collections identified the nature and scope of the projects, and received technical assistance in administering each of the databases from Chester Fritz Library Systems and Services and UND’s Informational Technology Systems and Services. The Department also worked closely with Library Systems to create each Web search interface. Special Collections is especially indebted to its student and volunteer data entry workers and their attention to detail. The result is efficient access to records valuable to a wide variety of researchers.

Curt Hanson, Special Collections