CASE STUDY:
MAKING ROOM FOR INSTRUCTIONAL INNOVATION

University of Wisconsin-Madison

WISCONSIN
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–MADISON

The University of Wisconsin-Madison is a public research university founded in 1848. It has 20 schools and colleges and a student body that totals over 40,000. The university's library system comprises more than 40 on-campus libraries that accommodate more than 4 million visits each year.

Innovative Learning Spaces

Libraries are transforming to meet modern requirements, and the libraries at major research institutions are no exception. Library professionals have recognized the need to shift service offerings as students need less help finding printed research materials and more help evaluating the vast amounts of information available online—and they've also seen print materials declining in circulation as the most current books, journals, and research collections become available electronically. At the same time, the traditional instructor-centered classroom model, which consists of lecture halls or classrooms that feature a podium for the instructor and chairs for students to sit and take notes, is falling from favor as technology offers new ways to teach and learn.

In an effort to encourage instructional innovation and make the best use of space and staff time, the University of Wisconsin-Madison is repurposing underutilized areas in on-campus libraries to create new learning spaces.

The new spaces support active learning by "flipping" the traditional instructional model: instead of lecturing in class and assigning homework, instructors often ask students to watch online lectures before each class session in order to use class time to work on projects and call on the instructor's expertise when they need assistance.

The university has ambitious plans to construct these new spaces in libraries across campus, and two centers have already been completed. These new learning spaces are a part of the Wisconsin Collaboratory for Enhanced Learning (WisCEL). The goal of the WisCEL program is to create student-centered environments, as opposed to instructor-centered lecture halls, to encourage active learning and innovative instruction. Featuring interactive digital whiteboards, shared large-screen monitors, individual laptops, and decentralized seating arrangements, the rooms challenge students to collaborate and participate more actively during class time.

The first WisCEL centers opened in 2012, and they are revolutionizing instructional processes. The centers encourage active learning and are currently used by more than 5000 students in 40 different courses annually.

A Model for Teaching and Learning

Given that engineering is a rapidly evolving field and that new materials appear online every day, the UW-Madison College of Engineering's older books have not been in high demand in recent years. With that in mind, the engineering library began the process of decreasing its on-campus holdings by placing materials in an off-site shelving facility and withdrawing duplicate titles.

The College of Engineering gained space for the new learning areas by relocating an entire floor of books and other paper-based materials to off-site shelving.

The resulting space is being used to revolutionize instruction at the College. The first major project cleared out and consolidated an entire floor of printed material to make room for the new WisCEL Center at Wendt Commons. The new center comprises three classrooms of various sizes, a multi-use room, and an instructor workroom. The largest classroom features a highly decentralized seating system consisting of "pods" with six seats each. Each pod is equipped with laptops and a shared large-screen monitor. Instructors can use smartboards, projectors, and fixed and mobile whiteboards.

The planning committee emphasized flexibility during the design process. They wanted spaces that not only offered a variety of options to instructors during the day, but that could also serve as study areas and collaborative work spaces around the clock.

"It's fluid," said Deb Helman, director of science and engineering libraries, in reference to the WisCEL space. "It's booked solid with courses during the day. But it's just as busy at night, with tutors and study groups and people studying on their own. These spaces are being used all the time."

"The students feel like this is their space. We're seeing better attendance at office hours when instructors hold their office hours in the WisCEL, because the students feel like they belong here."

- Deborah Helman,
Director of Science & Engineering Libraries

A Deliberate Move

The UW-Madison devised a novel way to determine which on-campus libraries were most ready to consolidate printed materials and repurpose space.
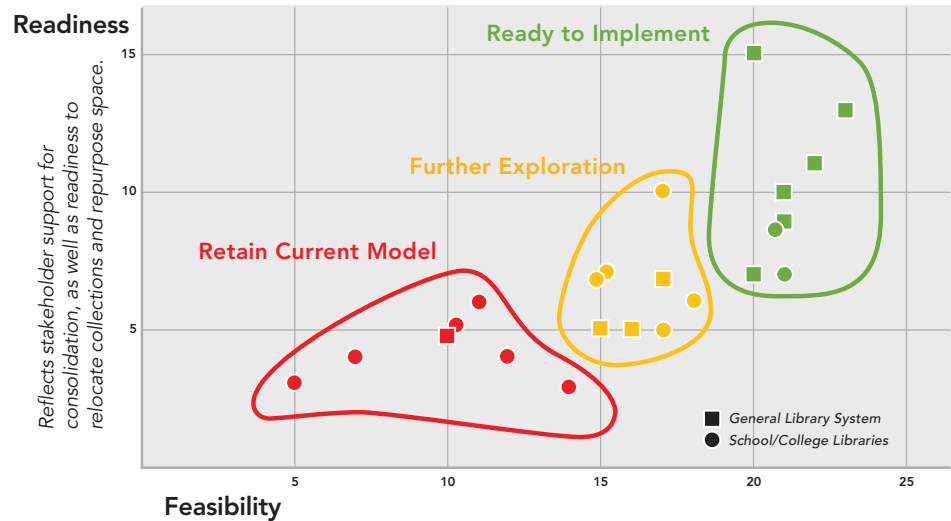
Even at a time when the UW-Madison is emphasizing digital strategies, the institution's libraries continue to acquire more than a linear mile's worth of print-based books and journals every year. The construction of a new high-density shelving facility in Verona, Wisconsin, about 10 miles south of campus, is enabling the university to honor its obligation to store print-based materials while still gaining space for renovations.

Gathering data

Consolidating the contents of a complex, campus-wide library network into offsite shelving requires a deliberate plan of action. To that end, the UW-Madison established committees to recommend strategies that would strengthen core library functions, redesign campus spaces to create new learning environments, locate related collections closer together, and streamline processes. The Consolidation Working Group interviewed library staff regarding services offered, staffing levels, and budgets in the various libraries around campus. The group also gathered data regarding circulation statistics, gate counts, shelf space, and the square footage of various libraries.

What moves when?

UW-Madison's method for determining which libraries to designate for consolidation

Source: UW-Madison Libraries Consolidation Report, 10 December 2015, page 9

Assigning scores

Using these data, the group assigned two scores to most campus libraries. The Feasibility Assessment Score reflected the feasibility of moving a library's collection and repurposing space, as well as potential cost savings and the feasibility of supporting teaching and research if a major relocation were to take place. The Readiness Assessment Score reflected whether stakeholders supported consolidation and were ready to relocate collections and repurpose space, as well as whether consolidation might affect a library's reputation and overarching strategy.

Making Recommendations

After the assessment scores were assigned, the group plotted the results on a graph and three distinct groups emerged: locations that were ready to implement a new service model, locations that required further exploration, and locations that should retain their current model. Libraries identified as ready to implement a new service model were the first libraries designated to move into the next phase of consolidation, and those libraries are currently working with their respective stakeholders to develop consolidation plans.

> *"We want to make sure that the items we're putting into the high-bay facility are really well thought out. It's costly and extremely time consuming to move things out after you move them in."*
>
> *- Heather Weltin, Director of Collection Management & Resource Sharing*

Changing Roles

As library materials shift, so do the roles of library professionals. While their work still revolves around knowledge and information, library professionals at the UW-Madison are spending less time helping patrons find printed materials and more time helping students and researchers discover, evaluate, understand, and share information from a variety of sources.

Among many other efforts, this involves:

- Assisting students with electronic research tools, including bibliographic management tools
- Helping students, faculty, and other researchers develop data management plans and research portfolios
- Supporting digital scholarship and sharing new ways of disseminating scholarship
- Teaching students about informational literacy concepts, copyright laws, and intellectual property

Evolving to meet modern needs

University officials stress that these libraries are not closing; they are evolving to meet modern needs. "When we talk about consolidation, we talk about three things," said Ed Van Gemert, the UW-Madison Vice Provost for Libraries. "We talk about concentrating print resources in fewer locations, and within that we make decisions based on usage about what needs to remain on active shelves and what needs to move off site. The second piece is repurposing library spaces, such as the WisCEL spaces. The third piece is the reassignment of library staff into priority areas."

While the changes associated with such a dramatic shift in the on-campus libraries' function and appearance can be difficult, the libraries' core mission remains the same: to provide exemplary information services. With a dedicated high-density shelving facility and a solid strategy to fill it, the university is well-positioned to honor its commitments to retaining print-based materials while making room for modern ways to create, use, and share information.

"Shelving is the linchpin," Van Gemert said. "It enables us to do other things with the space that printed materials once occupied."

We Help Libraries Transform.

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"Spacesaver was really a key player in our planning."

- Heather Weltin,
Director of Collection Management & Resource Sharing
University of Wisconsin-Madison

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