

Session 1, Wednesday

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The Renaissance of the Library

Abstract

In the enthusiastic embrace of the digital library, with its anytime, anywhere characteristics, some people have assumed that physical libraries will become obsolete. Yet an examination of the behavior of students and faculty and of recent renovation and construction of academic and research libraries shows that brick and mortar buildings are enjoying a renaissance. Libraries have traditionally supported the housing of collections, reader services, and the staff who manage collections and provide services. These three components continue in the 21st century, but librarians, architects, and users are collaborating to produce elegant and functional designs that reflect new spatial allocations and new purposes. Modern libraries incorporate flexibility and comfort to create an environment that is welcoming and that supports a range of research and learning activities. This paper draws on examples from recent construction and reconfiguration of academic libraries in the United States to illustrate the changing scope of the physical library and the important role it plays in serving as a community hub within a university.

Among the examples selected are several relating to the challenges of collection management, including the use of compact shelving and high-density storage facilities. The paper also traces the evolution of spaces from the catalog card era to the present state in which wireless access is a standard feature. Lastly, the author touches on new and expanded roles for librarians and the ways in which design advances the effectiveness of information professionals in fulfilling these new roles.

CV

Sarah Thomas came to Cornell University in August 1996 as the Carl A. Kroch University Librarian. In a career spanning thirty years, Thomas has cataloged books in Harvard University's Widener Library, taught German at the Johns Hopkins University, managed library coordination at the Research Libraries Group in California, held a Council on Library Resources Management Internship at the University of Georgia, served as the Associate Director for Technical Services at the National Agricultural Library, and directed both the Cataloging Directorate and the Public Service Collections Directorate at the Library of Congress. At Cornell she provides leadership for the nineteen libraries that make up the University's library system. The Cornell University Library holds over 7 million volumes and has an active digital library program. The Library received the 2002 ACRL for Excellence in Academic Libraries Award.

Thomas has had a long-standing interest in information technology. She has served as chair of the Steering Committee of the Digital Library Federation, and she is president of the Association of Research Libraries.

Thomas earned a Ph.D. in German literature from The Johns Hopkins University in 1983, writing her dissertation on the topic: "Hugo von Hofmannsthal and the Insel-Verlag: a Case Study of Author-Publisher Relations". She received her bachelor's degree from Smith College in 1970 and a Master of Science in Library Science from Simmons College in 1973.