

HUMBOLDT STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY
SPECIAL COLLECTIONS – SPACE REQUIREMENTS
Joan Berman, January 2004

OVERVIEW

Special Collections. The Humboldt Room, on the third floor of the Library, is the public service point for Special Collections. These are unique materials acquired and maintained in support of the University's curriculum with emphasis on the natural resources, native peoples and primary industries of Northwestern California, including the history, growth and development of Humboldt State University. Materials are available for use in the Humboldt Room by visiting scholars and the general public as well as HSU students, faculty and staff. Some materials reside in the Humboldt Room and others must be paged in advance. Access to information about the collections is available through the Library's catalog, the Humboldt Room web page (<http://library.humboldt.edu/infoservices/humco.html>), and the Online Archive of California (<http://oac.cdlib.org>).

Current space. Special Collections is currently occupying space on 3rd floor, 1st floor, and the basement, to the tune of approximately 10 modules. Modules are bounded by pillars, and measure about 22x22 or 22x23 feet. This translates to 4,840-5,060 square feet, for a ballpark figure of 5,000 square feet. We are woefully crowded in both our public and our storage spaces, to say nothing of our non-existent processing space, but we do recognize that the space is so broken up that it isn't being utilized to its fullest, nor is it equipped with the most space efficient storage furniture available. We propose to consolidate the existing spaces devoted to Special Collections into one efficient, state-of-the-art facility capable of accommodating natural growth for 15-20 years on the Basement level of the Library.

Types of space. Public space includes the reading room (Humboldt Room) and space for public access computers, microform readers, and displays/exhibits, all of which are currently outside the reading room. This is probably the area most direly in need of additional space, with shelving projected to exceed capacity by 2004/05.

Storage space presents different requirements for processed and unprocessed materials. Once materials are processed they are in standard sized containers and are assigned numbers that allow them to be expeditiously paged for patron use and then reshelved. Unprocessed materials, however, tend to be messier and in irregular types of storage containers; they do not fit so nicely and compactly in any space and they are largely inaccessible to users. Storage space for Special Collections has been occupied on a very happenstance and serendipitous basis over the years: this is the area that would benefit most from consolidation into a single large space, or a combination of compact storage (for processed materials) and open space. (Minor cap proposals have been made for several years for compact shelving.)

Office space for the Special Collections Librarian and the Special Collections Assistant, as well as for a corps of student assistants, interns and volunteers, needs to be adjacent to the reading room as well as to the materials storage area for efficient workflow and patron service; this need is not well served at present. Finally, space specifically designed for processing materials does not currently exist and must be carved out of office and storage space on a project-by-project basis.

Special requirements. The major storage space ideally needs to be climate controlled for both temperature and humidity to ensure the long-term preservation of these unique materials.

ACCOMMODATION, GROWTH, ASSESSMENT: 1997-2003

1997-1999. Erich Schimps, Special Collections Librarian, and Linc Kilian, Special Collections Assistant, both retired in summer 1997, after very lengthy tenures in those positions. They shared an office adjacent to the Humboldt Room, but in reality the Humboldt Room was Erich's office and the "office" was piled high and deep with unprocessed materials and barely enough room for Linc to move to and from his desk. Students and volunteers working for Special Collections worked in public areas or in the Documents processing office. At the same time, the Humboldt Room was also filled to overflowing with no room for growth. Space was the most pressing problem to be addressed when the new staff, Joan Berman and Edie Butler, assumed their positions.

The unprocessed materials were boxed and added to the basement storage area and the office was made useable for Edie and student assistants; fortunately, Joan already had existing office space on the first floor. A proposal to shift circulating copies of Humboldt Room materials to the main stacks was accepted in August 1997 and the first part was accomplished by relocating the second copies of all theses out of the Humboldt Room. This freed up about 30 shelves, which accommodated normal growth, as well as a long-standing cataloging backlog, for a few years. Additional space was acquired by retrofitting two vacant bathrooms on the third floor. This allowed one major unprocessed collection to be moved up from the basement to be accessible on a limited basis and the Archives Pamphlet Collection to be moved from the Humboldt Room, thus providing much needed expansion room for the Humboldt County Pamphlet Collection. Filing cabinets to accomplish these moves were acquired as a result of the closure of the Library's general pamphlet collection. The large desk and several other bulky pieces of furniture were moved out of the Humboldt Room. The map filing cases were relocated within the room to be more accessible to users. This all got us through the immediate space crisis.

2000-2003. The final phase of removing circulating copies of cataloged titles from the Humboldt Room to the main stacks was accomplished in summer 2000, with projected growth space for 4-5 years. This will take us to 2004/05 for the book collections. We have pretty much exhausted the possibilities for creatively rearranging shelving for maps and photographs and pamphlet collections, however, without decreasing further the

seating space for readers, which space is already at a very narrow minimum level of acceptability.

Although moving the large service point desk outside the Humboldt Room retrieved some space in the room it also intensified another problem. Supervision of the use of the room, both from the perspective of safety and preservation of the materials as well as attention to the research needs of the users, became more difficult. Further, a roof leak over the Humboldt Room in August 1999 served as a very good wakeup call regarding preservation of our collections. We were able to benefit from this by participating in an overall preservation analysis of the Library's collections performed by Amigos in October 2000. This site visit resulted in an extensive report replete with findings and recommendations. The strongest single recommendation with regard to Special Collections is to consolidate the multiple functions/spaces located on four separate floors of the building into one coherent space.

We have made a concerted effort to address many of these recommendations and have actually vacated one closet space on the 2nd floor, thanks to purchasing more efficient shelving for two areas of the basement storage, thanks in turn to completion of processing of a major collection (Clausen) which now is more compactly stored on the new shelving. Now we are only spread among three instead of four floors!

THE VISION, 2004

In fall 2003 the Library began a planning process to identify our highest priorities for use of the Basement after the new Behavioral and Social Sciences Building is completed. An existing plan, "BSS Phase II, Library Basement," was reviewed and a separate brainstorming and prioritizing exercise was conducted among Library staff. A new home for Special Collections emerged as a top priority based on the documented need to consolidate the function into contiguous space and to address growth and service issues. An area of potential growth beyond our present scope is suggested by the current Klamath Basin Institute initiative. While we currently collect materials related to the lower Klamath Basin, the upper Klamath area has heretofore been outside our geographic scope for Special Collections. Another area which could potentially see increased growth is University Archives, particularly as storage space issues elsewhere on campus become ever more acute and as we begin the preparation for the University's centennial in 1913. Strategic digitization of portions of our collections on the Humboldt Room web page is actually generating increased demand to see more of our unique, original materials within the physical Library.

While this planning process was underway, the President announced the new enrollment ceiling at 12, 000 students, paving the way for increased Library space in advance of actual enrollment growth. We propose that a new and improved Humboldt Room is an excellent way to increase the prestige of the University while providing our students and faculty with an archival laboratory of research level materials covering our geographic area of service. Such a facility could also be highly competitive for both grant and private donor fundraising to augment the renovation allocation.