Criteria for consolidation of branch libraries

By Elizabeth D. Byrne, Ralph H. Moon, and Gary R. Peete

California's practical guidelines for closing branches

Over the last few years the University of California has been rocked by a number of economic shocks. Budgetary cutbacks and a series of early retirement incentive programs have forced campuses such as Berkeley (UCB) to seriously evaluate the array of services offered—particularly the large number of specialized decentralized service points and branches that exploded during the more prosperous periods of the 1950s and 1960s. With 22 branch libraries, an undergraduate library, and a main library, Berkeley has developed an abundance of these expensive service points to support. During the last few belt-tightening years, the library sustained large reductions in staffing so that the number of librarians and other nonstudent employees was reduced from around 575 at the end of 1988 to 460 in the beginning of 1993.

By the spring of 1993 it had become apparent that a piecemeal approach, which was taking across-the-board cuts from all operations, was only leading to the eventual weakening of all the services at UCB. Recognizing the enormous cost of duplication of material, space, and staffing, the library administration decided that it would be preferable to eliminate and consolidate some services rather than weaken all operations. Despite the initial cost of consolidations, it was also determined that funding fewer service points and branches could result eventually in improved services in those that remained. Dorothy Gregor, the university librarian, asked that LAUC-B (the Librarians Association of the University of California, Berkeley) appoint a committee to develop guidelines that could be used when considering which branches would be closed.

This committee found little guidance in library literature; rather it used advice from other librarians involved in closing decentralized service points and other unpublished sources for drawing up these guidelines. The articles that had been published on the subject primarily dealt with the debate over centralization versus decentralization or the closing of undergraduate libraries in conjunction with the elimination of their colleges, but not on how to decide which established branch libraries to close. The committee relied primarily on information provided by the library staff involved with the closure of branches at UC-Los Angeles, a planning document written by the Science Libraries Department at UCB, and discussions with campus branch librarians for ideas.

These "Guidelines for Consolidation" will hopefully provide other large research libraries with some constructive ideas on how to approach this process. While they are written primarily for the situation at Berkeley, they deal with concepts that will be applicable at a number of large research institutions.

Criteria for consolidation of branches

These were developed by the LAUC-B Executive Committee, Subcommittee on Consolidation, April 1993.

Assumptions

1. Budget shortfalls will continue for several years.

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2. There will be a continued reduction in staff.

3. Additional library space will be available through the completion of the Doe/Moffitt Expansion in fall 1994, and expansion in the Northern Regional Library Facility.

4. Library Guidelines for Consolidations and Reassignments (2/93) will be followed.

5. All branches will be judged according to these principles and criteria.

6. All affected groups will be informed and/or involved in a timely manner, including library and academic units affected, branch and Senate library committees, Academic Senate, etc.

7. There will be considerable short-term costs associated with the planning and actual move and merger of any consolidated branches, e.g., review of collections for weeding and storage, relabeling, changing, merging, and/or cleaning bibliographic records, etc.

Principles and criteria

Consolidation should:

1) Reduce expenditures or enhance services, and avoid further erosion of service quality which results from stretching reduced staff across a greater number of libraries.

Examples of enhanced services include: longer hours of access to collections and services; access to a larger, broader, and related collections; access to more or better library equipment; etc.

Criteria:

a. Will hours of access and services be increased or decreased as a result of the consolidation?

b. Will loan policies be appropriate for the needs of the users whose collection is being consolidated?

c. Will reference expertise in the affected subject be available in the new location?

d. Will access to library equipment (photocopiers, microform equipment, CD-ROMs, etc.) be increased or decreased?

e. Will short-term costs of implementing consolidation be outweighed by long-term gains in savings or enhanced services?

f. If necessary, will new services, such as document delivery, be created to enhance services or improve parity of services?

2) Create a rational combined collection with intellectual affinity.

Criteria:

a. What percentage of the branch collection is unique or not duplicated elsewhere on campus? How much is duplicated in other library units? If there are major subject overlaps with other collections, which location is the primary source for the affected academic units?

b. Do the collections proposed for merger complement each other and contribute to interdisciplinary research?

c. What are future trends (e.g., electronic formats, a significant increase/decrease in amount of publishing, etc.) that will affect this collection, and what impact will they have on consolidation?

3) Continue to meet the unique collection needs of the academic programs affected, and provide full access to the entire campus community.

Criteria:

a. Is there provision for qualified personnel to develop and manage the collection?

b. Have the ramifications of ongoing collection development agreements with other libraries been considered? Could collections be shared or transferred with assurance of open access to the entire campus community?

4) Provide appropriate quality and quantity of space to accommodate the combined collections.

Criteria:

a. Are there special technological, environmental, spatial, or security needs (e.g., rare books, music listening room, CD-ROM network tower, etc.) for the collections and services, and have provisions been made to meet them?

b. What and how much material will need to be weeded and/or stored from both collections in order to accommodate the merger?

c. What are the present and projected size and growth rates of both collections (e.g., an anticipated rapid increase in the literature)?

d. What is the impact on study hall space?

e. What is the impact on the receiving library?

5) Minimize inconvenience to primary users of the branch being consolidated and the receiving location.

Criteria:

a. What are the size and growth rate of the user groups in the branch considered for con-

(Criteria cont. on page 378)

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