

Do's and don'ts for moving a small academic library

Fourteen helpful tips

by Joanna M. Burkhardt

Library literature offers wide-spectrum coverage on planning and moving libraries. Authors offer visions of what might be, practical implementation suggestions, and/or explicit instructions for specific situations. Every move is different and offers its own set of challenges. Planning and moving into a new library can be a nightmare with long-range ramifications, or a sweet dream of perfect coordination and timing.

The University of Rhode Island (URI) College of Continuing Education, including the library for that campus, moved into a new building in January 1996. The small academic library has four full-time staff members and about 50,000 volumes supporting the widely varied curriculum

of the college and the research needs of several other university or state departments, an alternative high school, and a day care center.

We eventually ended up with a beautiful and functional space. However, retaining our long-range goals and moving the library from

the old building to the new building was not an easy task. It required an enormous amount of planning, measuring, researching, discussing, and muscle. There were a number of things that could have gone better if I "had only known." Many things went right simply because I did some reading, talked to library professionals with moving experience, followed my intuition and training, and insisted on having my own way. For the sanity and

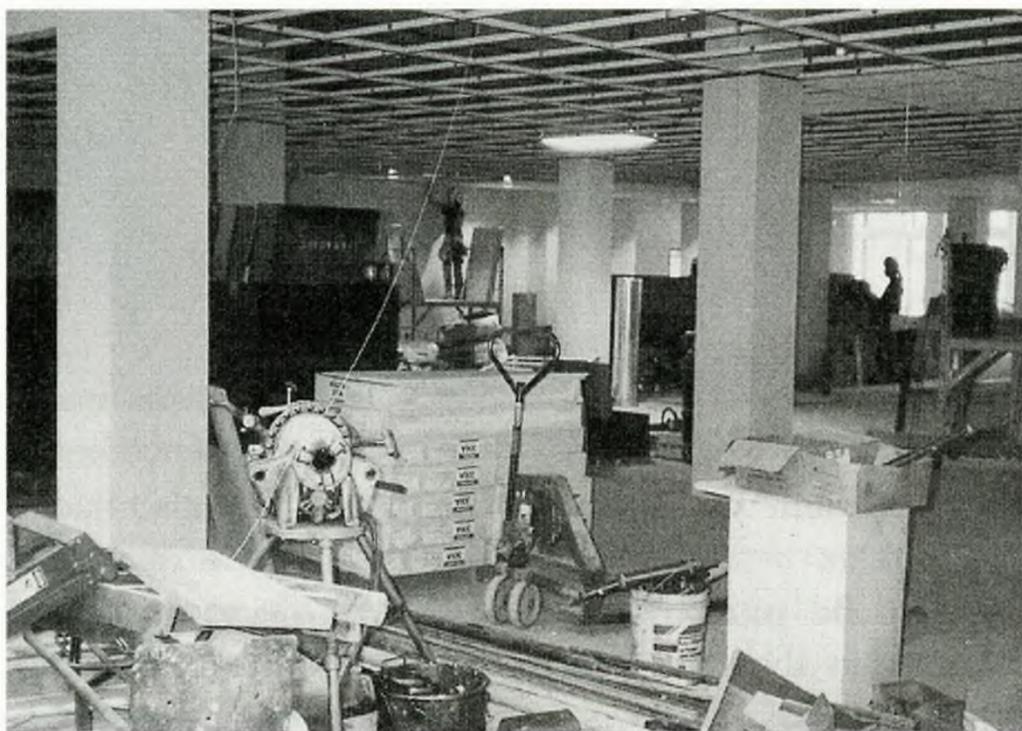
well-being of others who may be facing a move, I have compiled a list of suggested do's and don'ts to add to the literature already available.

1. Make your own plan for the new facility.

Think about the services you want to offer both now and in the future. Submit your plan

to the architect, space planner, or project manager.

Often space is designed for visual impact rather than practical use. Without the guidance of a library professional, an architect cannot be expected to understand why sight lines



It's important to visit the new site frequently during the very early construction phase.

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Author, Joanna Burkhardt, at the circulation desk, which is draped with fabric to keep it from getting scratched.

from the circulation desk to the microfilm machines might be important, or why leaving an open doorway into work areas might be a problem. The specific needs of your library should be discussed with those in charge of the layout so that practical concerns can be considered. Submit your own plan, even if you are not invited to do so. Any reputable architect will at least ponder the differences between your plans and their own. A 30-minute discussion in the planning stages can save everyone time and money.

Our architects, Presbrey and Torrado in Providence, Rhode Island, assigned the design of the library to an architect who was willing to work with me, and who respected my role as the professional who knew the most about how work flows through the library. They followed my plan closely and listened to what I had to say. The cooperation between us resulted in an efficient workspace that is also a delight to look at.

2. Allow your staff to be part of the planning process. Ask what they need or want to see as top priorities.

People are interested in their workspaces. Those on the front lines know how the current arrangement could be made better. I drew up the initial plans for the library and amended them several times, asking my staff for input at each revision. Their responses gave me valuable information about what they wanted and needed in a new work environment.

The top priorities they listed gave me guidelines about what to emphasize to the architect. For example, a top priority for my staff was a space where they could work on assignments undisturbed. When the architect

tried to talk me out of the private offices, I knew what my staff wanted. Cooperation can be expected from staff members whose wishes have been considered.

3. Make your own plan for computers and what they will access. Find out how much connectivity you need and where to put it. Meet with the computer experts, electricians, and/or architects to discuss the present and future needs for your library. Don't assume they know what your specialized needs are.

Talk to the people who can translate library services into electricity, outlets, modular plugs, data lines, surge protectors, and other related paraphernalia. Combining professional knowledge in libraries and computers, will optimize the eventual outcome and possibly avoid expensive changes later on.

4. Visit the new site frequently while it is under construction. In construction projects, things happen very quickly. One day it's all I-beams and concrete, the next day the walls are in place. Adjustments frequently have to be made to accommodate changes and unforeseen circumstances. Economies may be needed, which will affect your space. It may be that you will have fewer electrical outlets or that a quiet study room has to be eliminated. If too much time goes by between visits to the new site, economies may be achieved without your knowledge or approval.

In our case, the building was 70 percent complete before we knew we would be moving into it. We also had limited access to the building. It was difficult to find time to make regular visits to the new site, and it was easy to assume that everything was going along as planned. We made irregular and infrequent attempts to spend time at the new site. This benign neglect did not result in disaster, but some difficulties could have been avoided with more regular attention.

5. Plan the move for the season most likely to provide good weather and avoid weather-related illness. Many factors have to be considered when scheduling a move. Higher powers may prevail when setting the moving schedule. Your timetable may or may not be given priority. However, if given the opportunity, opt for a dry season with moderate temperatures. Plan for a time when you

have a maximum work crew available, and when the traffic between the old site and the new site is the lightest.

Our move was scheduled for the week of January 2, 1996. Snow crippled the city with three major storms during the first two weeks of the new year. Inclement weather made the difficult downtown traffic even worse. The weather was also hard on our materials, which had only minimal protective covering during the trip from the street to the library. Student workers had gone home for the holidays and the remaining library staff were stricken with the flu during the post-holiday week. The move crept along at a snail's pace.

6. Start packing early. Think about packing earlier than that. Do as much sorting, weeding, and discarding as possible before you move. Don't move anything you plan to throw away when you get there.

Close your eyes and try to imagine packing up all your belongings, transporting them across the city, and putting them down in a new place over a ten-day period. What would you move first? What will you need on hand until the very last minute? What will be the first thing

you need at the new site? What will you need in the middle? What is the best way to pack things so that you only have to handle them once at the other end? It's good to have thought about this. It's better to have written it down.

I began thinking about packing long before December. I went over my basic plan with my staff to get their input and to look for flaws. I tried loading a few book trucks. I measured the collection.

Office files and supplies were packed early in the process. We weeded files and packed as much as possible during the fall semester. Slowly the pile of boxes grew with the pile of paper to be discarded. Old forms, stationery, and invoices disappeared into the dumpster. Every piece of equipment was examined. If it

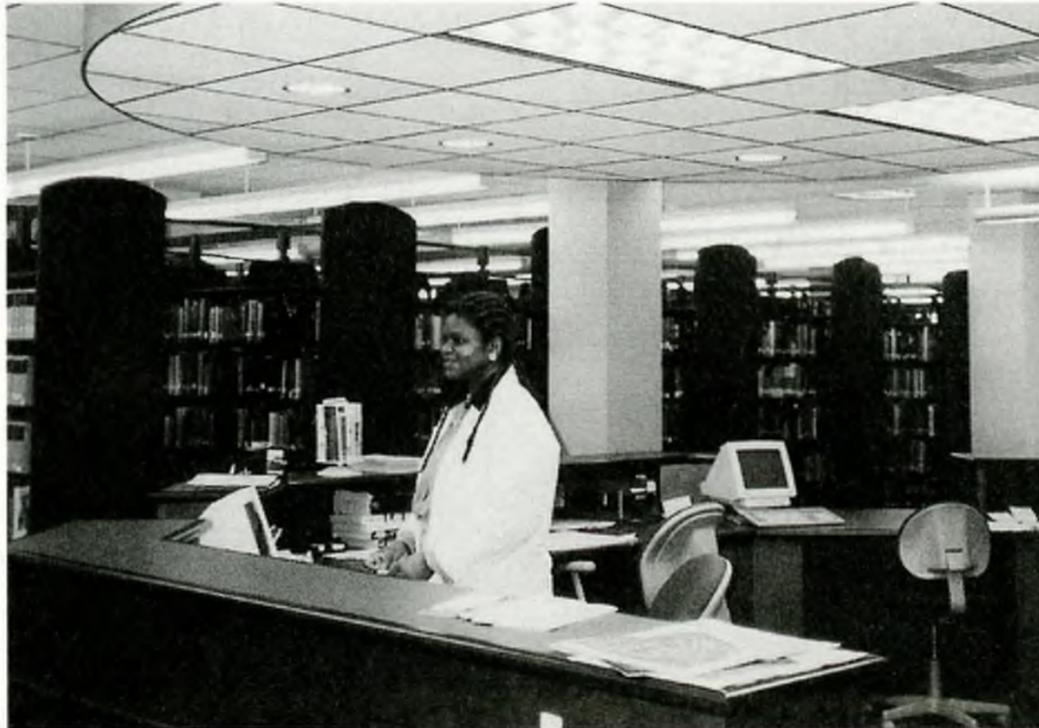
was not in working order and had not been used during the last year, it was left behind.

In some cases it was a good thing that old things came to the new site. We discovered that clocks and wastebaskets for the entire building were on a pending purchase order. If we had not brought our old clock and our wastebaskets, we would have had to do without either for months. On the other hand, all kinds of crazy things were sent to the basement storage area where they will molder forevermore.

7. Allow a flexible time frame and provide sufficient funds for the materials needed for moving. Schedule the move, including plenty of room for delays. Pack the collection in boxes and transport it all at the same time or in as few trips as possible. Do your packing with efficient unpacking in mind.

The library was the last unit of the college

to move. We had to be operational at the old site until December 22. With only two weeks between semester's end and the move, packing was hurried. Most of our moving supplies were acquired through innovative scavenging, borrowing, and retrieving boxes from the new site



Lucinda Ugorji staffs the new circulation desk.

as they were emptied by other units. The move took more than twice as long as the time allotted.

We moved the monographic collections on fully loaded book trucks, which were wheeled onto a large moving van, driven to the new location, wheeled off the moving van, and rolled into the library. The book trucks were unloaded directly onto the shelves, then sent back to the old location for reloading. In theory this scheme should have worked.

However, in reality, fully loaded book trucks do not move well in snow and ice, nor do they easily roll up and down the loading tailgates of the moving trucks. The wheels of fully loaded three-shelf book trucks buckle under the weight of the books. The book

trucks were dented and otherwise damaged in the rigors of moving through the snow and ice on the uneven city streets.

The book trucks on the vans were not loaded or unloaded in any order. Unloading the moving van took from 20 minutes to one hour. Time was wasted waiting for Book Truck #1 to get to the library so that shelving could begin. The book trucks could not be sent back to the old library for another load until their contents were off loaded onto the shelves.

We were able to pack and move the last half of the journal collection in boxes, which proved to be our salvation. This part of the collection was moved in one trip and did not have to be unpacked until it fit into our timetable. Had we been able to box the entire collection, we could have moved everything in the time available and could then have concentrated the attention of the entire staff on unpacking. This would have resulted in greater efficiency in the move and vastly improved results in the shelving process in the new library.

8. Hire movers with library experience.

Hire literate movers who speak the same language you do. Train your movers in the basics of library organization. Have a “moving drill.”

This is not a job at multiculturalism. Communication is closely linked to efficiency and accuracy in moving. If you hire movers who cannot understand your instructions or cannot read the labels on the boxes, the move becomes much more complicated.

Our movers were Prison Industries of Rhode Island. Prisoners from Rhode Island’s Adult Correctional Institution who were slated for release in the near future worked in teams with supervision by prison guards. Many of these folks had never been in a library. Some did not speak English as a first language. Several did not speak English at all. They are to be commended for being flexible, courteous, pleasant, and for getting the job accomplished.

The language/literacy barrier made giving directions difficult and the L.C. Classification System further complicated the situation. A basic training session and a “dry run” would have been extremely helpful. A basic understanding of how the collection is organized and why it is important to keep it in order would have been useful, as well.

9. Limit the number of different companies and contractors involved in vari-

ous installations. Schedule contractors for firm dates in the order they will be needed. Schedule delivery of equipment and furnishings—stagger their arrival. Be on hand when the contractors assemble and place shelving and furniture.

As opening day approached, we still had huge bundles of wires lying on the floor where the computers were supposed to be. Furniture could not be installed until the wiring was finished. The contractors could not agree on who had to do what with the wires. Where did Company A’s responsibility end and Company B’s responsibility start? Our security system took months to install because there was no one to cut a hole in the circulation desk.

The library stacks went up the week before we moved without supervision by the library staff. The shelves were fully loaded when the building inspectors arrived and suggested that there might be a problem with the width of the aisles for emergency exit routes. Supervision of all library installations by a library staff member would have been a good idea.

During a move it is very important to schedule deliveries and use of the loading dock so progress does not come to a standstill. Our library move was delayed because the trucks simply could not get to the loading dock. There was no prioritization of need, and there was no plan in place when several semis arrived at the same time. The bad weather added nothing helpful to the mix.

10. Measure and mark out the areas for collections ahead of time. A good deal of time was spent measuring the collection and marking out how and where it would fit on the new shelving. This time was well spent. Preplanning gave some concrete view of how much room I had to work with, how much I could leave for growth, where the various parts of the collection could be housed, and how to fit equipment and furniture around the collection.

11. Give communication a high priority. Make sure the people at the old site can communicate with the people at the new site. Maintain the phone, e-mail, and fax at the old site until the move has been completed. Hook up the same at the new location as soon as possible.

Dozens of questions need answers, messages need to be relayed, people need supplies, and so on. We needed to stay in touch to keep things running smoothly. Fortunately,

our phone connection continued until the move was completed.

However, it took a week to find out what our new fax number was. It was also several weeks before our e-mail connection was back in service. The computers joined the library network in March. It was April before the telephones all worked properly and were located in appropriate spots. Preplanning and on-site supervision at the time of installation could have decreased these delays.

12. Make a punch list of items that need the contractor's attention. Interact with the project manager. During the actual construction process, details, repairs, and corrections are deferred until another time. To remind the contractor of what still needs to be accomplished, you must compile and submit a punch list to the project manager. Walk around your library. Look up and down, over and under, being as detailed as possible in describing what needs to be accomplished.

I prioritized my list, putting the items that most drastically affected operations at the top. The top priorities all received attention, if not a permanent fix, before the end of our first semester in residence.

In a large construction project it is imperative that someone oversee the job to keep the contractors on schedule and to keep the work moving. It is important to have someone to manage and report problems and to negotiate changes in the job specs. Let this person know what problems you encounter, what changes are necessary, what priorities you have. This person can arrange for the problem to be fixed. The old adage about the squeaky wheel applies here. Be creative in how you squeak.

13. Document your move. Share your experiences with others. One of the things that I did, which was actually fun, was to videotape the old library as it looked while

we were working there, while we were packing, and while we were leaving. I also videotaped the new library as it emerged from the rubble, took shape, filled up, and got organized. I took still pictures as well, from hard hat days to the finished product in the new library. I have written the process of planning, revising, moving, and settling in for my own benefit, and I have tried to share some sense of how it all happened with interested parties. The pictures and the story are now part of the history of the URI Libraries.

14. Blow your own horn. Say thank you. Celebrate. Celebrate your victory. The chance to say "good job" and "we did it" is not something that should be passed up. Many people worked very hard to make our move happen. Saying thank you is a small thing, but it can mean a great deal to those on the receiving end.

Stress is a major factor in change of any kind. At the end of the move, it was important to lower the level of stress. Some of this was accomplished by shortening the work day to normal hours and getting

into the routine of the semester. The rest was accomplished through the mental exercise of reaching closure on this phase in our transition and in making the new library feel like home. Goals and everyday tasks have put us back into a normal work routine.

Many things can go wrong when planning and moving into a new library. The time spent in preparation for a move is closely related to its success or failure, but no amount of planning can guarantee a perfect move. It is possible to avoid some of the pitfalls by using the experience of others in combination with strategic planning, communication, and on-site presence. It is hoped this list of do's and don'ts may be of some assistance for those contemplating the planning/building/moving process. ■



The newly completed library.