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# Shrinking into our Space

Reducing the Physical and Budgetary Footprint of the Library While Increasing Access

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**ABSTRACT:** The Graduate Theological Union (GTU) Library in Berkeley, California, has implemented significant changes to reduce its physical and budgetary footprint while enhancing access to resources. Serving a diverse consortium of theological schools, the library has consolidated its collections, digitized materials, and expanded digital services. By reducing its physical space and increasing reliance on electronic resources and shared print programs, the library has supported the GTU's financial goals and improved service to distant students and faculty. The collaboration with the Internet Archive has been pivotal in preserving rare materials. Despite budget cuts and staff reductions, the library remains a critical resource hub, leveraging technology and partnerships to maintain comprehensive access to theological content and exploring new affiliations to extend its reach.

## INTRODUCTION

The Graduate Theological Union (GTU) Library is a consortial library located in Berkeley, California, serving the students of the Graduate Theological Union. Formed in 1962, the GTU currently consists of nine separately accredited theological schools from Catholic, Protestant, and Buddhist traditions, five academic centers, seven affiliates, and non-degree certificate programs, such as the Interfaith Chaplaincy Program. The degree programs are at the graduate level and include DMin, MDiv, MA, MTS, ecclesiastical degrees, and the PhD program, with the library serving as the connecting hub of all students.

The GTU Library has changed its patron services, physical spaces, and collections as part of the campus five-year plan to close the budget gap and realign services to better serve students and faculty at a distance. Specifically, GTU's idea was to bring employees and

classrooms together by reducing library space by half (a reduction of 15,742 sq ft), which allowed all campus departments to move into the building. This change allowed for the other campus buildings to earn significant rental income.

## **COLLECTION CHANGES**

This plan called for the physical space of the library's collections to be reduced, while significantly expanding online services and collections. The first floor of the building became the sole space for library research collections and patron services, including the staffed service desks and the rare book and archives reading room.

The transition involved:

- 1) Collection consolidation
- 2) Expanded cooperation with other research libraries
- 3) Growth of electronic resources

The initial goals for collection consolidation included:

- Moving all library staff and collections off the second floor
- Reducing the circulating collection footprint by 30% (approximately 7,000-10,000 linear feet)
- Avoiding new off-site storage costs for the long-term
- Providing access to digital and print research content held elsewhere

Librarians investigated and implemented various tactics commonly used by research libraries to address the decrease in the print collections:

### *Digitization and Controlled Digital Lending*

Partnering with Internet Archive, print collections, mostly duplicates, were donated for non-destructive scanning. People can discover the link to the scanned item through the library website and view it on [archive.org](https://archive.org). As of summer 2024, over 20,000 GTU items have been digitized and are available on [archive.org](https://archive.org), with scanning ongoing.

### *Participation in Shared Print Programs:*

By participating in the Statewide California Electronic Library Consortium (SCELC) shared print program, the library agrees to keep specific book titles for 15 to 25 years. These titles are scarce in California, with some being unique to the United States. Student employees have labeled the spines of these books for visibility and promotion, and the catalog records reflect GTU's long-term commitment to keeping these items on the shelves.

For journal collections, the Western Regional Storage Trust (WEST) program verifies and consolidates volumes in compact storage systems, providing complete access for partner libraries. GTU participated in a gap-fill program with other WEST libraries to donate volumes to complete runs of titles. Interlibrary Loan (ILL) allows for the access and exchange of materials among partner libraries.

### *Purchasing eBooks and eJournal bundles*

The collection development policy was revised to favor purchase of ebooks over print books. Print books would only be bought if electronic copies were unavailable. Print journals were switched to electronic journal bundles to eliminate print journal subscriptions wherever possible. For example, we subscribed to five print journals with the publisher Equinox. By canceling the print and subscribing to the online-only bundle, we now have access to seventeen journals in religion at a lower price. Similar decisions were made with larger bundles as well, such as a 750-title Project Muse package. In addition to the benefit of all distance students having instant access to these titles, the library saves on the costs of binding, postage, and staff time spent on bindery shipments.

## **PHYSICAL SHIFTS**

The plan involved several overlapping phases, and the presentation consisted of photos of these physical changes in the library building from 2022 to 2024.

### *1. Donation and removal for digitization.*

Items were quickly processed and boxed by a team of six student employees. Rare books were taken off-site temporarily for safekeeping and returned at the end of the project. Microforms, monographs, reference materials, and some periodicals were donated to the Internet Archive for digitization and controlled digital lending. In all, roughly 60,000 of the 700,000+ items were donated in the first round, the majority being duplicate copies. Hundreds of thousands of items remained in four off-site storage locations during this phase, as the primary focus was on the main library building, although one off-site storage location of duplicate circulating material did have collections donated.

### *2. Large-scale shift and signage.*

A professional moving company shifted the 400,000-plus items in the main library circulating collections into the reconfigured first-floor shelves while the library remained open for patrons. New signs helped people locate the reorganized collections and library services. After the books were relocated, the first floor closed for the construction of library staff offices, while the second floor remained open for patrons and staff.

### *3. Analysis of collections for shared print programs, digitization, and online acquisitions.*

GTU Librarians continued to use Greenglass to compare collections against other peer libraries, digital holdings, and commercially available ebook and ejournal collections. They made decisions about where to deselect and relocate print holdings permanently, when to purchase e-resources to replace print, and when to rely on holdings of other libraries. After four months, the first floor reopened in January 2023, and the library staff moved downstairs. Ten thousand rare materials, held off-site temporarily for their protection, returned to the building. The second floor closed for the construction of classrooms and non-library staff offices, followed by the relocation of employees including faculty, which was completed by Fall Semester 2023.

#### *4. Enable online access and adjust collection development policies.*

Librarians began to reconnect digitized copies or purchased copies into the catalog as they became available. Shared print and shared digital program agreements were negotiated and begun in discovery, access, and collection management workflows. Librarians and the faculty library committee revised the collection development policy to steer the development of the collections in the future in terms of subjects, formats, numbers of copies, and reliance on library partners. Librarians continued to analyze collections to reduce the physical collection and make space for new books.

### **BUDGET REDUCTION**

As part of the five-year strategic plan, the GTU was required to reduce the annual budget by 20% to create financial equilibrium. However, as the GTU library is a consortial library, the library budget is separated from the general campus budget. The library budget is divided among nine schools offering a variety of accredited graduate-level theology degrees, each paying based on a formula consisting of their programs' rolling four-year average of credits. As such, the GTU's contribution is the highest, and is roughly 25% of the \$2.3 million budget. The eight member schools pay proportionally for equal services.

On the expense side, about half of the budget is spent on staffing and benefits. Another large percentage covers building expenses, maintenance services, IT support, HR, and business office functions. Roughly \$400,000 is spent on library collections and software, and less than \$10,000 remains for library hardware, office supplies, professional development, and events.

The library has been tasked with keeping a flat budget for the past four years, with expected reductions in the future. As electronic resources expenditure increases by 5–10% annually, the staff and collections have felt the impact of reductions. This equilibrium has been accomplished in collections with bundling as described above, cuts in the standing order collections, and journal-title cancellations. These were achieved by working directly with faculty and targeting areas that are no longer part of the curriculum and do not have active faculty doing research. Staffing cuts were more challenging, as the

staff is already smaller than in libraries of similar collection size. The presentation discussed how the regular staff once numbered more than forty; today, there are only ten. Over the last four years, positions have been eliminated, some through vacancies and retirements, but not all. The eliminated positions are Serials Assistant, Conservator, Circulation Assistant, Head of Circulation, Branch Librarian, and Assistant to the Library Director. Of the remaining positions, some have been combined, some have reduced hours, and others have eliminated functions. In addition to the ten regular staff members, there are roughly ten to twelve part-time student employees at any time. Although not on the library's payroll, the evening and weekend security guard position has been eliminated, and the library reduced its hours to daytime, weekdays only.

## **FUTURE PLANS**

Going forward, with a smaller staff, a smaller space, and a reduced budget, we will be in continual evaluation mode to ensure that students and faculty continue to have comprehensive access to theological resources. We have worked to expand offerings through partnerships and purchases and linking and highlighting open-access resources. We have been looking at technology to help us be more efficient and have trusted our long-term student employees with tasks previously managed by regular staff. One benefit of being a graduate-only institution is that student employees often stay for five years or more, and we can train and grow their library skills to manage more complex tasks, such as copy cataloging, serials, signage and map creation, and supervising the branch library.

We do have one large bright spot in expanding our access: our strong relationship with the Internet Archive. In addition to continuing to donate materials to them, we have some collections of interest to researchers that are held in our rare book collection. Previously, someone would need to travel to Berkeley to view these in our library. We experimented with bringing items to Internet Archive's offices, but many items were too fragile for the short car ride to their headquarters. Instead, the Internet Archive has set up a digitization center in the GTU library, which can be used to scan materials we own, such as rare books and unique shared print items. The Internet Archive staff operate the machines, while GTU

librarians identify the priority of materials. The equipment has been set up as of July 2024, and the operators are being trained. The first two collections we want to digitize include an Islamic Manuscript Collection comprising 110 texts from the early sixteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century. These have finding aids, but the full text is not available online. The other collection high on our priority list is 240 separate editions of the Book of Common Prayer. This collection includes editions not adopted by the church and is of great interest to researchers. GTU librarians have been fundraising to support the staffing of the digitization center and are optimistic that the first scans will be available in Fall 2024.

The GTU Library is also investigating expanding the patron base, as our own enrollment shrinks. As some libraries have patron categories for independent researchers to associate or for other seminaries to affiliate with the library, we haven't offered an easy path for access in the past other than a visiting scholar program, which required individuals to be physically present in Berkeley for a time. Unaffiliated scholars have long inquired about using library resources remotely, but we did not offer options for remote associations. We have succeeded with our first out-of-state affiliate, the Wilmette Institute, a Bahá'í institution located near Chicago. GTU librarians load Wilmette patrons into our library system, offer online orientation and instruction sessions, and support students and faculty using chat, Zoom, and phone services. We provide interlibrary loan services and on-demand scanning, as we do for all students at a distance. We believe we could support other small schools in this way. Still, we are investigating the workload on our librarians and finding schools and partners who would mutually benefit from the collections we have.

## **CONCLUSION**

The transformation of the Graduate Theological Library is an example of how strategic changes can enhance access while addressing financial constraints. By reducing its physical footprint and expanding digital services, the library has successfully aligned with the campus's five-year plan to close budget gaps and realign services. The innovative use of digitization and shared print programs has allowed the library to maintain its status as a research hub while

optimizing space and resources. Despite budget cuts and staff reductions, the library has continued to provide comprehensive access to theological resources through partnerships and technology. The goal of ensuring sustained support for the diverse GTU community remains in our minds as we explore the next chapter in our library.