

# Plan Early and Often



The arched windows span the third and fourth floors, providing a picturesque view of Oregon's natural vistas.

The University of Oregon School of Law moved nine blocks across campus in 1999. The law librarians were charged with moving the collection — about 180,000 volumes and an equal number of volume equivalents. Despite the complications of estimated construction dates and the academic calendar, the move went smoothly, consuming about 30 working days.

Because every staff member would be involved, we wanted an atmosphere of inclusiveness. So early detailed planning included psychological preparation. All library staff participated in a "Coping with Change Workshop" and took the Myers-Briggs Type-Indicator test. The staff discussed the results of the test, which indicated that the move would disrupt their personal and professional lives. But both the workshop and the test helped the staff recognize their varying coping mechanisms.

The law library decided not to use professional movers, who had figured the entire move would take just five days — far short of the library's own calculations.

The moving crew consisted of two professional laborers from campus

Facilities Services, 24 temporary workers from Goodwill Industries, eight students, and the law school's technology experts (for computer infrastructure support). Six librarians supervised the work crews and monitored daily progress. The five law library classified staff maintained day-to-day operations.

A motley crew arrived for orientation the first day. The laborers had no experience working with call numbers and ranges and keeping books in order. Orientation

included training on safety, how to read call numbers and an overall explanation of the project.

Several other complications influenced the sequencing of the project: a need to remain open during the move; consolidation and weeding of the collection; a desire to reset the collection in the new building; and staggered availability of space. Success depended on considering these complications as a whole.

The law library remained open all but five days during the move. The crew carried out noisier work, such as dismantling shelves, during spring break for minimal disruption to students.

The crew moved the collection from four physical locations as new areas became available. This required forethought and coordination because the library staff was weeding and reconfiguring the collection at the same time. They reset the collection into four floors of the new building in three different call-number sequences: the compact storage area, a reading room of frequently used materials and the open stacks. They had to move into the new

building while construction crews were everywhere: Not only was their "lease" expiring on the two off-site facilities, but asbestos abatement and renovation for the old building needed to begin.

Facilities Services thought it could move 31 10-drawer microform cabinets with the contents *in situ* — an unwise decision. They dropped a cabinet and the fiche wedged in the tops of some drawers, making it almost impossible to pry the drawers open. I definitely recommend emptying or removing the drawers before moving them.

The library rented 40 oversized wooden book carts, each holding 255 linear inches of books. Carts were more efficient than boxes; shrink-wrapping secured the books in transit. The library staff's initial goal was to move 45 to 50 book carts a day for 30 days; they calculated daily success against this figure. The staff measured the collection and grouped it into call number and title spreads. To project growth space, the staff used a spreadsheet to visualize space for different portions of the collection. Based on the linear feet of shelves in the reading room, the staff categorized similar materials according to frequency and difficulty of use.



The Reading Room is a popular place to conduct research and study; note the number of laptops.

# Stay Flexible!

The library staff coordinated multiple start points so several people could simultaneously load and unload carts at either end. The librarians closely monitored the crews and instructed them on how much space to leave on shelves for growth and filling in. Book carts were color-coded with green and red tape for the beginning and end of a call-number sequence and numbered to keep things running smoothly. The librarians monitored progress based on the number of carts for moving the entire collection. The project initially fell behind while the librarians and moving crew learned about efficient loading and unloading of books and experienced sporadic malfunctions of the moving trucks and the occasional AWOL laborer. But the staff and crew managed to catch up with the original moving schedule as the crew's efficiency increased faster than the temporary labor pool's attrition rate.

By project's end, the librarians and crew had moved 1,400 carts of books. The librarians concluded nine-hour days of supervising the work crews with two hours of debriefing and planning the next day's schedule — sharing carrots, rice cakes, cheese crackers, sodas and laughs.

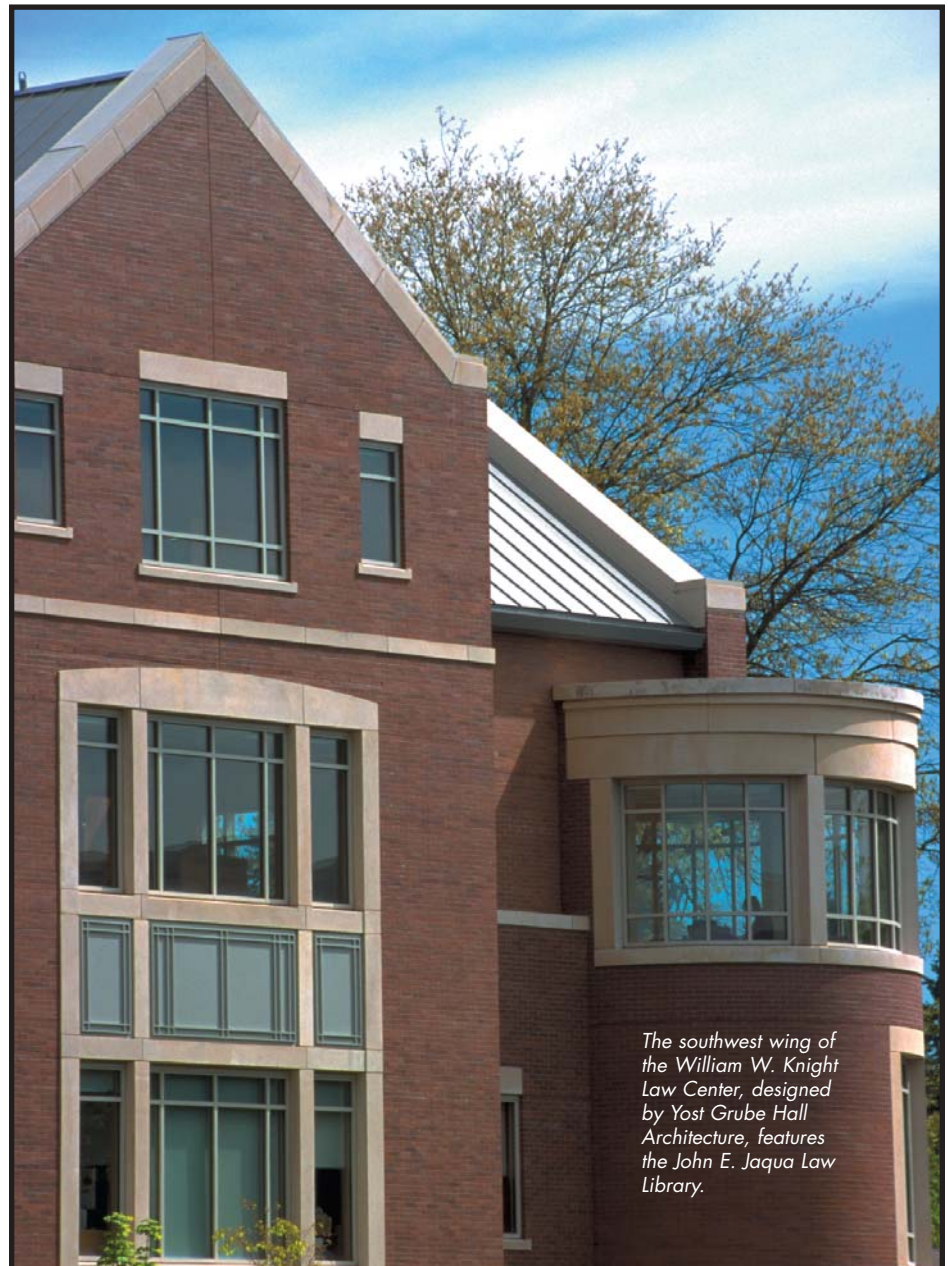
The new space is a great improvement. More users come because the library is a more pleasant place to study, with natural light, attractive furnishings, computer access at all tables, study carrels and group study rooms. The computer lab is no longer in the library. The librarians' offices are farther from public services, so there is less walk-in traffic. Communication between technical and public services staff is facilitated by office proximity; they were on different floors in the old library. However, the librarians and law faculty are on opposite ends of the building on different floors, so they must make greater efforts to maintain contact.

**Lessons:** Plan early and often; stay flexible. The more complicated the move, the more closely the librarians must collaborate, participate and oversee the day-to-day mechanics of the move. Planning must also include all staff and their psychological preparation to deal with change.

The stresses of the project could have proved divisive, yet it confirmed what the library staff already knew: The University of Oregon law librarians are an incredibly compatible and complementary group.

**Stephanie Midkiff** ([smidkiff@law.uoregon.edu](mailto:smidkiff@law.uoregon.edu)) is a reference librarian at the University of Oregon's John E. Jaqua Law Library in Eugene.

Photos courtesy of University of Oregon Publications and photographer Jack Liu.



The southwest wing of the William W. Knight Law Center, designed by Yost Grube Hall Architecture, features the John E. Jaqua Law Library.