



Shelf to Shelf: Moving a Small Academic Library

Our library at Columbia College in Vancouver was scheduled to move to a new building just after mid-April 2013, and we were expected to be fully operational for the start of the summer semester on May 9, 2013. We were only able to close the library, flag the collection, and pack items in public areas at the end of the semester. Apart from our electronic resources, we have approximately thirty thousand print volumes. Lessons from our experience may help other small libraries anticipating a move.

Specialist or general mover?

The decision was made by the College to use a general mover to relocate the whole college. We found it acceptable to use these movers: they had moved libraries before. Following a preliminary walk-through with the movers, a more detailed meeting was held. It allowed:

- library staff to ask questions (e.g., whether filing cabinets needed to be emptied; how best to label cartons, how loose magazines were to be packed; how hardware would be handled; how the shelves were to be dismantled and reinstalled to meet city by-laws, as Vancouver is in an earthquake zone), and
- the movers to better understand what they had to move and how this should be done, as well as giving them the opportunity to ask questions and address concerns.

What to do before a move

Assigning specific duties

All library staff should be clear about what they have to do before, during, and after the move. Keeping staff apprised of developments or changes from the planning stage allows them to better understand their role in the larger scheme of things.

Weeding and shelf reading

Weeding should start as early as possible; we began a year prior. We reduced our print acquisitions



Left: Flagging rows of books

Right: Leaving a shelf empty for future growth

Photo credit: Yvonne de Souza

and reallocated some funds and time that would otherwise have been spent on materials selection, cataloguing, and processing. We tried to do as thorough a shelf-reading job as we could.

Site visits

Our new library is almost the same size as the one we were leaving but has a different floor plan. It is important to note that dimensions marked on a floor plan diagram may not necessarily be the actual measurements of the space itself. A measurement just an inch and a half off could mean that one whole bay of books may not fit where it was intended. We armed

Photo credit: John Lee Images



A section of the new Columbia College Library

ourselves with measuring tapes, masking tape, a camera, and the floor plan whenever we visited the site. The movers were also present on a couple of occasions. We kept a first-aid kit handy at both locations.

Checking with City Hall

Most cities hold celebrations and other events that divert the flow of traffic. There could be scheduled road work and other kinds of construction. Knowing the city's plans will help in choosing a move date free of events that will hamper your move. The city does not know that a library is moving, unless it is told or there has been a request to block off traffic or to obtain permission for moving trucks to be parked for loading other than at designated loading bays.

Floor plans

Changes are inevitable between the planning stages and the final layout. Clearly dating versions of floor plans as they are revised provides a record of changes. We enlarged library floor plans and posted them in strategic locations useful for the movers. When an area housed more than one functional use, we sectioned them off on the plans, using letters of the alphabet for each area.

Shelf-to-shelf or boxed?

We did a shelf-to-shelf move rather than boxing our books, as we had a very limited amount of time between the last day of the semester and the date of the move to get from the old location to the new. This method was more convenient. Books could be placed on the mover's carts in shelf order, making it easier to reshelve them and maintain shelf order at the destination location. Having to unpack boxes and reshelve our books would

have taken considerable time. We had to be ready for the first day of the summer semester. In addition, using the mover's carts meant that there were no used cartons to deal with after the move. However, the shelf-to-shelf move, while more convenient, required much detailed planning to ensure a smooth transfer. A considerable amount of planning was done in advance of the move. We did use rental cartons for special items such as office contents, folio-size items, bookends, supplies, unprocessed books, and odds and ends.

Our books were taken off the shelves and placed on double-sided wooden moving carts, which were then shrink-wrapped (to prevent books falling off), loaded, and shipped to the destination library. As the shelves were emptied, they were dismantled at the old location. This involved removing bolts that had held them securely in place. Some shelves were moved in bays, without end panels; others had to be completely dismantled, as shelving configuration in the new location is different.

Coding and flagging

While librarians think in terms of call numbers, reference sections, atlases, and so on, to most movers books are just items they have to move. We used running numbers (instead of cumbersome call numbers) to flag the rows of books, starting with number 1 for the first row of books on the top shelf of the first bay. Each flag at the old location was the start of a new row at the new location. This allowed us to accommodate anticipated growth (Figure 1). For shelves that we had planned to leave empty, we placed tape across them (Figure 2). We explained to the movers that shelf order is left to right and top to bottom for each bay. At the old campus, we supervised as best we could the removal of books from shelves in call number order, and at the new, staff supervised their proper re-shelving. This was important because an undetected error becomes cumulative. Leaving the numbered tags after re-shelving enabled a quick check of shelf order and indicated whether a batch of books was out of sequence. We used coloured flags to delineate the various collections (fiction, reference, ESL, main, etc.). For our own reference, we marked the numbers representing the rows of books on our copy of the floor plan to correspond with the numbers that were used to flag the books in running order. We placed labels in a consistent location on the sides of all cartons used. Labels on the top of boxes are

invisible when stacked, which hinders efficient delivery of the boxes to the designated locations.

Keeping lines of communication open

Apart from having staff in both locations on moving day, we kept the lines of communication open among staff, the movers, administration, and the building engineer. Elevators were locked on moving days to make it easier for the movers.

What about furniture?

It is useful to do an inventory of furniture. We stacked our chairs and labeled them with the room numbers that they were to go to, as chairs of the same make and colour belonged to another department being moved at the same time. Items of furniture that we no longer wanted were clearly marked; staff at the departure location ensured they remained behind.

Items other than books


Unbound journals were left in their pamphlet boxes; their order was also marked with numbered flags. Current issues were bundled and left in the magazine shelves, which were taped. Keeping a few spare boxes at the departure location for materials that get returned during and after the move and for miscellaneous overlooked items is a must.

If changes at the new library are anticipated prior to a move, they should be accommodated at an early stage. For example, we now have glass panels on either side of the security gate. Anticipating the installation of a new security system in the future, we left sufficient space on either side of the glass panels, as we expected the new system to require a wider corridor width.

We carefully bubble-wrapped fragile items such as our barcode scanner, and protected the Corian countertop of the new circulation desk with cardboard sheets. Our security gate was bubble-wrapped by the movers, who also took care of the computer hardware, which we had labeled, and our IT department took charge of the server that stores our data.

Conclusion

Our detailed planning paid off, causing only a few minor snags. Our new library has a copious amount of natural light. A better layout offers a much improved study and research environment for our students and

an improved work space for staff. A library move should end with a small get-together for staff to celebrate the results of their efforts, and stories can be retold and shared before they are moved to the recesses of memory. 

For libraries anticipating a move, these two publications could be helpful.

Fortriede, Steven Carl. *Moving Your Library: Getting the Collection from Here to There*. Chicago: ALA, 2010.

Chamberlain, Elizabeth Habich. *Moving Library Collections: A Management Handbook*. Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1998.

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