

Open Stacks for Library Videos

A Case Study

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Many academic libraries wrestle with how to provide access to video material. Documentary DVD purchases can cost much more than their book counterparts. Additionally, DVDs are much more sensitive to frequent use, and are easily scratched or damaged. Security and preservation issues have led some libraries to keep video material, especially DVDs, in closed stacks; however, moving a video collection to open stacks better serves patrons' needs and increases visibility and use of the collection. This case study provides an overview and positive outcomes of one library's experience in expanding access to its DVD collection and increasing the scope of its collection development policy.

In a 2007 ALA survey of both public and academic libraries with media collections, 31 percent of library media collections were in closed stacks.¹ Like many in this report, Penrose Library at the University of Denver historically housed its modest film and media collection in closed stacks behind a merged Access Services Desk. This collection was highly specialized and course-specific as new selections were made only upon faculty request. Nonprint media can be fragile, difficult to replace, expensive, and primarily selected for classroom use. As a result, restricting access through closed stacks

was favored over placing the video collection in open stacks.

In 2007 Penrose Library maintained and circulated a modest video collection of 6,948 titles (1,486 DVDs and 5,498 VHS cassettes). These were housed in accession order behind the circulation desk and were retrieved upon patron request, requiring staff mediation. The rate of circulation of both DVDs and VHS cassettes remained flat for several years at an average of fewer than 500 titles circulating each month.

Circulation increased dramatically when Penrose made several strategic decisions about collection development policies and the location of videos. The library purchased a large selection of new videos to fill collection gaps and created a new development policy to proactively and comprehensively acquire videos. This increase resulted in a space crisis as the collection grew too large for the closed stacks space.

This case study provides an overview of the decision drivers and the multi-faceted changes in policy and practice of one library's experience with expanding access to its videos. The effort was well worth making, as moving the newly enhanced collection to open stacks better serves patrons' needs and increases visibility and circulation.

The University of Denver (DU) is a private university in Denver, Colorado and is the oldest independent university in the Rocky Mountain region.² DU boasts low faculty-to-student ratios and caps enrollment at fewer than 11,000 students a year. The 4,890 undergraduate students and 5,768 graduate and professional students enjoy personal contact with and access to 1,256 faculty and 608 adjunct faculty.³ DU strives “for excellence, innovation, engagement, integrity, and inclusiveness” and its vision is to be “a great private university dedicated to the public good.”⁴

DU's Libraries include Penrose and its branch library, the Bonfils-Stanton Music Library. It is a medium-sized academic library staffed by 18 faculty librarians, 55 staff members and over 90 student assistants. The library's holdings include: 2.5 million print volumes, 90,193 e-journals, and 1,299 print journals.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature surrounding the question concerning the use of open versus closed stacks and restricted access to videos and other library materials can be categorized into two main areas. The first is public access to library materials in general collections. Most of these studies focus on balancing issues of security and inventory control, consolidating service points and staff downsizing, and enhancing user experiences. Second, literature discusses separate locations for unique collections. Separate locations are often required for ease of display for periodicals and new books, value and replaceability for archives and special collections, frequency of use for reserves and reference materials, or finally, format for audio visual materials and microforms.

General Collections

The discussion regarding the value of open or closed stacks in general has been around for decades. An early prime example of this discussion was Warren B. Hicks's 1954 article, “Open or closed stacks?” published in *Collection and Research Libraries*.⁵ At the time, he surveyed 69 colleges with fewer than 1,000 students. This survey showed that the majority of those libraries had open stacks for their general and core collections, but this study offered no clear advantages to either system. Hicks does note a trend at that time of opening up traditionally closed collections such as periodicals and reserves.

Periodicals

Discussions of housing periodical collections in open stacks have continued. Gretchen Roberts' s 1992 article, “Open vs. closed stacks for academic library periodical collections” published in *The Reference Librarian*, exemplifies the challenges and opportunities in opening the closed periodical stacks at Onodaga Community College.⁶ The challenges such as security and loss rate in Roberts's analysis are similar for any

library considering moving any collection from a closed to open stacks environment.

Special Collections

Special collections, by their nature, have had a long tradition of closed stacks. In the article, “Accessing closed collections,” which appeared in a 1999 issue of *Technical Services Quarterly*, authors Nelson and Frantz note that more human intervention is needed to allow for discovery of materials housed in closed stacks such as in a special collection or archives.⁷ Detailed notes and enhanced descriptions are required in catalog records for un-browsable material. In addition, customized finding aids, displays, and bibliographies are also all essential in connecting users to material in closed stacks.

Format

More recently, Sullenger discussed moving low-use print periodicals to closed stacks as patrons' online use increases. Her 2010 article, “Closed stacks for current periodicals” in *Serials Review* analyzes the costs and benefits of separate periodical stacks.⁸ Closed stacks provide cost and time-saving benefits as the material now only needs minimal processing. The collection, however, has to be monitored as specific titles must be moved back to open stacks if the title is no longer available online. Sullenger often notes that most patrons who prefer browsing open stacks do not request material from the closed stacks. This suggests that closed stacks may be a significant barrier for patrons.

Videos

Research and analysis about the benefits of circulating video material in open stacks tend to be from a video librarian's or media center's perspective of video management or a separate video service view-point. The emphasis of this research is on circulation and integration of the material into the main library's overall workflow as in Merry's 2004 article, “The devil is in the details: An academic library acquires a video collection.”⁹ In this article, Merry discusses relocating video material to a main campus library after a renovation project.

The balance of security and replacement issues versus customer service to the library community was emphasized in Albitz's 2001 article, “Establishing access policies for emerging media in academic libraries.”¹⁰ Security concerns may trump patrons' ability to browse the materials but not all security concerns can be completely addressed. Pat Lora, who discusses video collections in public libraries, notes in her 1990 article, “Open shelves for video and security for all,” if “a patron is determined to steal from the library, he or she will find a way . . .”¹¹

Laskowski and Bergman have done the most research on library video collections and have conducted a series of surveys focusing on academic libraries with specialized media centers. They note that even today academic libraries still

FEATURE

focus on the classroom use of video material over open circulation.¹² These surveys analyze the trend of moving media to open shelving among academic libraries. In a 2004 survey 37 percent of academic libraries had open stacks arrangement for videos and in the 2009 follow-up survey, 44 percent of respondents had some form of open access.¹³

In addition to closed stacks, academic libraries may limit access to material by patron type (students, faculty, etc.). In Bergman's 2009 survey, 80 percent of academic libraries allowed videos to circulate to students. She notes that this is a significant change from a survey conducted by Brancolini and Provine in 1993 which showed that at that time 20 percent of academic libraries did not allow student checkout of video material.¹⁴

THE PENROSE VIDEO COLLECTION

Discussions of open stacks and increasing the video collection at Penrose began in 2004 with the addition of a large gift collection of almost 1,000 popular feature film VHS cassettes. Aside from the gift collection, the media collection was small and acquisitions were sporadic. Although the gift was originally slated for the library's Friends sale, the Collection Development Team recognized these tapes as a valuable addition to the media collection. Penrose made these gifts available for lending within its regional consortium, Prospector, to balance the borrowing of video materials by DU patrons from the Prospector system.

In addition to the acquisition of this large gift, Penrose Library augmented the size of its video collection by broadening its policy for purchasing videos. The previously established policy was to acquire media only upon faculty request for classroom instruction and course reserves. Most of these titles were purchased from monographic subject funds. As a result, selections were patchy as film was not considered a core collection area. Much like many universities, the use of video in the classroom is increasing at DU. Teach and Brancolini conducted a study in 1994 of media use in classrooms at Indiana University and concluded that, "media was a central part of the teaching mission."¹⁵

Not only do the faculty use traditional educational video material produced for classroom use, the use of feature films for teaching has also become very popular. Faculty members at DU continually find creative ways to use film to connect students to course material and the use of film in teaching across the disciplines is encouraged and supported by the University's Center for Teaching and Learning. In 2006/2007, DU faculty were requesting as few as 100 videos a quarter, yet by 2009/2010 faculty requested over twice that with 728 unique video titles placed on reserves that year.

Since the video collection was small and incomplete, the Reserves Department struggled to fulfill the increased requests. As with print materials, older videos are difficult to acquire retrospectively. Feature films are not easy to find after they have been dropped by their distributors, and

educational, non-commercial titles are even more difficult to find when they go out of print.

After reviewing concerns from reserves, the Collection Development Team revised the policy for videos and began to collect comprehensively. In the summer of 2007, librarians identified and purchased 861 highly rated academic and popular films based on Academy Awards, the Criterion Collection, Sundance Film Festival Awards, and other authoritative film title lists. A dedicated video budget for continued retrospective collecting and up-to-date collection building was created and fondly nicknamed, the "Every Movie Ever Made" fund by the acquisitions unit. Three years later, this budget continues to be supported and is also supplemented by various subject funds. The video reserves fund is also used to respond directly to faculty requests for course related content.

As of June 2010, the Penrose DVD collection has grown 328.73 percent and houses 6,371 DVDs. VHS cassettes also continues to be acquired for classroom use as needed and grew 5.23 percent to 5,802 VHS Cassette tapes (see figure 1).

WHY OPEN STACKS

When the librarians discussed moving the video material to open stacks, they revisited their reasons for keeping them in closed stacks. The critical concern had been the value of the collection. Educational videos are priced significantly higher than films for popular consumption and many of the titles would cost over \$300 to replace. This assumption was invalidated when in the spring of 2009 during a valuation project of all library materials it was revealed that an average book in the circulating collection was valued at \$71.93 while the average DVD was worth \$50.60.

The librarians also looked at circulation statistics. Penrose had never limited media circulation by university affiliation. All of the university community including undergraduate students and community borrowers could check out videos; however, in general, patrons were not checking out videos. Even circulation for the new popular films remained flat. It is possible that the students, faculty, and staff were not even aware that Penrose had a video collection that circulated. They were not browsable because the stacks were closed and completely out of sight, as patrons had to rely on using the online catalog and research guides for discovery. Students either did not know Penrose had the films, or the closed stacks were a barrier for access.

MAKING SPACE FOR A NEW COLLECTION

As the collection grew, the space for DVDs and VHS Cassettes behind the circulation desk was quickly becoming overcrowded, and the library was confronted with a media housing and space crisis. A library staff reorganization which merged all three units of Access Services (Circulation, Reserves, and Interlibrary Loan) meant that there was no longer sufficient space to store this collection behind the circulation

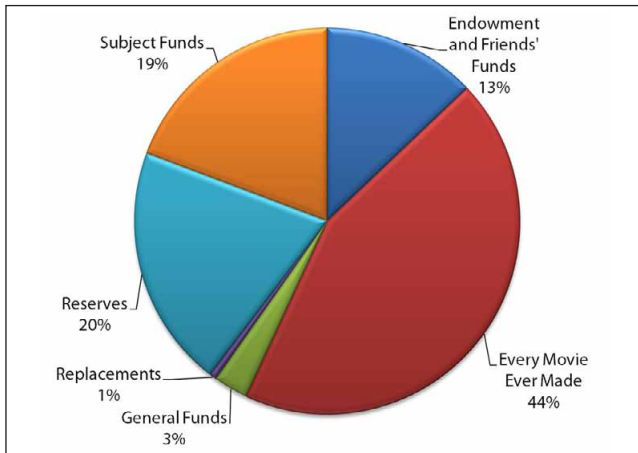


Figure 1. Video Acquisitions by Fund Type 2007–10

desk.¹⁶ After discussing several potential secure locations, the library teams agreed that an open, browsable display would best accommodate the growing collection and increase visibility and use. In January 2008, the videos were moved into a highly visible area on the main floor of Penrose that had previously housed portions of the reference collection.

The hope was that enhanced browsability would aid serendipitous discovery of the videos. This initiative required changes in policy and practice. All DVDs, previously classed in accession order, were re-classed in the Library of Congress classification system. They were placed in locked cases and both VHS cassettes and DVDs were given security strips. New equipment for desensitizing material and unlocking cases was purchased, and new circulation procedures were established. In addition, the night circulation staff was charged with the maintenance of video shelving and shelf reading.

Since this new location is in a prominent area on the main level and the collection is now intended to be more popular in nature, several steps were taken to ensure the best browsing experience. As recommended in Pat Lora's article, "AV frontier: When does a librarian need to think like a retailer?," the videos are displayed to showcase the covers of material to increase visibility and use.¹⁷ The library desired to maintain much of the original ephemeral content and packaging as possible, and although the DVDs are re-housed in new security cases, the original covers and inserts are maintained and accompany the DVD. When it is not possible to reuse the original material due to unique packaging, the cover is scanned in color and reprinted for display.

Not only did technical services staff ensure that the original packaging materials are kept intact, access staff worked to ensure a shelving configuration that allows patrons to browse comfortably. The DVD shelves are on one large wall facing the library's research computer area. This is a high traffic area with an attractive eye-level display, giving patrons plenty of room to step back and view the collection. The special sloped shelving displays the DVDs at an angle for easy title reading and prevents DVDs from slipping. This arrangement allows

patrons to review cover material and make selections without staff intervention.

Open shelving also benefits the circulation staff. Before moving the collection to the public area, retrieving and re-shelving videos upon patron request at the service desk was a burden on the staff and affected customer service. Patrons were required to wait at the service desk while desk staff left the desk to retrieve the requested material in the closed stacks area. Patron wait time is now significantly reduced and circulation staff can remain at the service desk to concentrate on assisting patrons with other library needs.

CIRCULATION POLICIES

With greater visibility and higher circulation patterns, Penrose wanted to ensure availability of material to faculty in support of coursework and classroom instruction. Most faculty members place material on reserve or on hold in anticipation of classroom use. This practice has eased concerns of video material not being available when needed and so the existing loan rules for media were not changed. When not placed on reserves, videos circulate for one week with the option to renew once for all patrons except faculty members who have unlimited renewals. This one-week circulation period enables a quick turnaround. The only change in policy was the fines schedule. Originally fines were \$2.50/day for late video material. However, after the move to open stacks, patrons' requested a review of this policy and as a result, fines were lowered to \$0.50/day. This aligns with the policy for book fines.

By policy, most of the video collection does not currently circulate through resource sharing initiatives for the same reasons they were kept in closed stacks: fear of theft, damage, and loss of control of access when needed for classroom use. This policy is slowly changing as duplicate video titles and gift materials are now loaned through interlibrary loan and the regional shared catalog, Prospector.

Penrose wanted to provide quality materials including films for all of their patrons' use. Despite some concerns that Penrose was simply re-creating a "Blockbuster Video" for undergraduates to enjoy at leisure, the current distribution of circulation of videos is evenly distributed among the faculty and staff, and the undergraduates and graduates (see figure 2).

SECURITY AND PRESERVATION

One of the original concerns in providing browsable access to the collection was preventing theft of and damage to the material. Although DVD and VHS cassette circulation was parallel when all the media was in closed stacks, it was assumed that since it is a declining technology, there would be a progressively lower demand for VHS cassettes. Most new titles are released only in DVD format, and VHS technology is difficult to support as VHS players are now difficult to even purchase. With these assumptions, the probability of theft

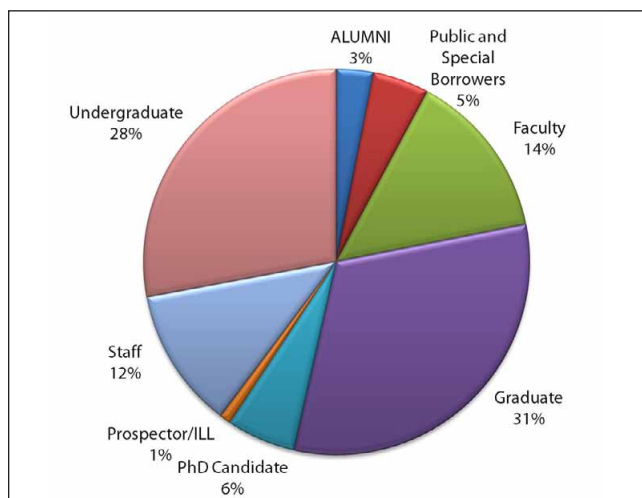


Figure 2. Video Circulation by Patron Type 2009–10

for VHS was considered low and the cassettes received far less preparation for the move. To save time and money, they were left in their original cases; however, since many titles are unique and still often used in the classroom, electromagnetic strips for security were added to each cassette. This was also necessary because many film titles are expensive and others are extremely difficult to replace. Since traditional book activator/deactivators are a threat to magnetic materials including VHS cassettes,¹⁸ and Penrose does not use RFID, a 3M Mediacheck Model 325 was purchased to securely activate and deactivate the cassettes at the point of circulation.

For the DVDs, security tags were placed on each disc and the DVDs were re-housed in locking cases. Originally, it was assumed that a DVD security label would be sufficient; however, the library security gates did not detect the signal from security labels when DVDs were in a laptop computer. This was a concern as laptops are very prevalent in the library; in fact, the university requires each undergraduate to own a laptop. Additionally, security labels can be removed from the discs with some effort. As a result, both the security strip and locking cases are used. The locking cases have multiple advantages. They allow for the disc to be on display along with the case, and they ensure that the patron must check out the material before use. Although this measure may seem extreme, the dual security system effectively addresses concerns about potential theft.

The security of the collection came at a high cost. Round security strips for CDs and DVDs are almost twice the cost of strips for print material. In addition, each DVD title needed a new lockable case, although these can hold up to two DVDs at one time. Access Services also purchased the aforementioned VHS Mediacheck and three de-couplers for the DVD cases. Two were purchased for circulation and one for the end processing unit in technical services.

The benefits of this system, however, go beyond security. For one, the cases are all uniform in size which improves the overall look and feel of the area. They also help in quality

control at the point of circulation. Because the barcodes have been placed inside the cases, circulation staff must unlock the case and then verify the case contents against a pop-up note on the screen noting the number of discs and any additional material in each case. The pop-up during check-in is another useful tool as service desk staff can immediately notify patrons when a borrowed disc is not accounted for. The cases also protect the material from possible damage. Patrons have returned cases that have been mauled by pets and the discs have been unharmed. This dual security system has proven itself to work well as demonstrated in a recent video inventory which shows that in three years of open access only two DVD titles are currently unaccounted for.

As circulation for DVDs continues to rise and the collection grows, Penrose needs to maintain DVD quality. To address an increase in use, Access Services purchased an Eco Smart System for cleaning and refinishing DVDs, CDs, and CD ROMs. This machine helps clean and maintain highly circulating DVDs and to date, only three DVDs had been so roughly scratched that they could not be resurfaced and needed to be replaced.

CLASSIFICATION

After resolving to place video material in open stacks, the library had to decide how to classify the material for display. The Collection Development Team determined that the legacy VHS collection originally housed in accession order would go to the open stacks unclassified. This permitted efforts to focus on classifying and processing the DVD collection. After the open shelving arrangement was established, catalogers began reclassifying the cassettes to match the DVDs. The classification scheme of the DVD collection required extensive library-wide discussions between Reference, Collection Development, Cataloging, and Access Services. Since the DVDs needed to be relabeled before the end processing staff transferred them to security cases, the library took the opportunity to consider all options.

Documentaries were to be classed by Library of Congress (LC) classification based on their subject matter. Fictional films required closer attention. Currently, LC selects films for archiving and preservation and not for general research collections. Films had been given an accession number not an LC classification in the Library of Congress. Because of this practice an LC classification range for fictional motion pictures or television programs has never been created. Some libraries have taken the classification ranges for books and documentaries about film genres or the classification numbers for film scripts and assigned comparable call numbers to their fiction films. Other libraries arrange their fiction films in straight alphabetic order, by inventory number, or by country or language of origin rather than classifying the material by LC call number.

As many of the fiction films were purchased to support literary studies programs, Technical Services offered a different approach. For films that came from scripts produced

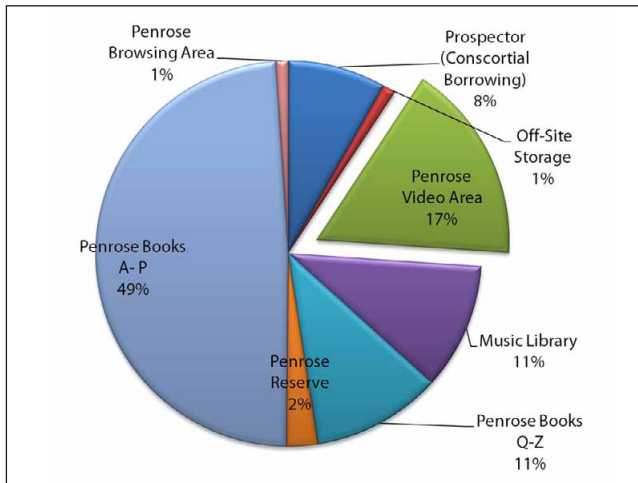


Figure 3. Video Circulation by Collection Location 2009–10

originally for the screen, catalogers would use PN1997/PN1997.2, the call number range for film scripts. Television series and TV-movies would be classed in the number for individual television programs scripts, PN1992.77. If the film script originally came from a work of literature, a cataloger would class it with literature. For example, all film and television adaptations of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* would be classified similarly as the book, PR4034.P7. This allowed for all adaptations from one author to be placed in a single location. The classification method was approved by the public services librarians and soon after Technical Services started the project of moving the DVDs to security cases and reclassifying films as needed. Reclassification and re-housing of the DVD collection was done concurrently to save on labor.

As part of the classification discussion, librarians considered either providing a straight alphabetical list separated from the documentary classification or dividing the films by genre. The alphabetical list was met with some approval but the majority favored the distinction of the film adaptations. Genre division was a potential problem since many films could easily fit into several genres and additional discussions would be needed to decide on how many specific genres to use and how to arrange them.

This LC classification method does have drawbacks. The system is complex requiring the catalogers to receive additional training in the creation of film call numbers. The complexity also can be perplexing to patrons. Patrons initially think the films appear scattered. However, once a librarian or staff member shows patrons the classification patterns and how certain material is placed together, they start to see the connections. Additionally, catalogers have to make judgments on when something is an adaptation. Catalogers consider the films credits and user expectation when making that decision.

In the catalog, DVDs and VHS cassettes are assigned separate item locations that both display as "Video Area" to the patron. The separate item locations allow for the library

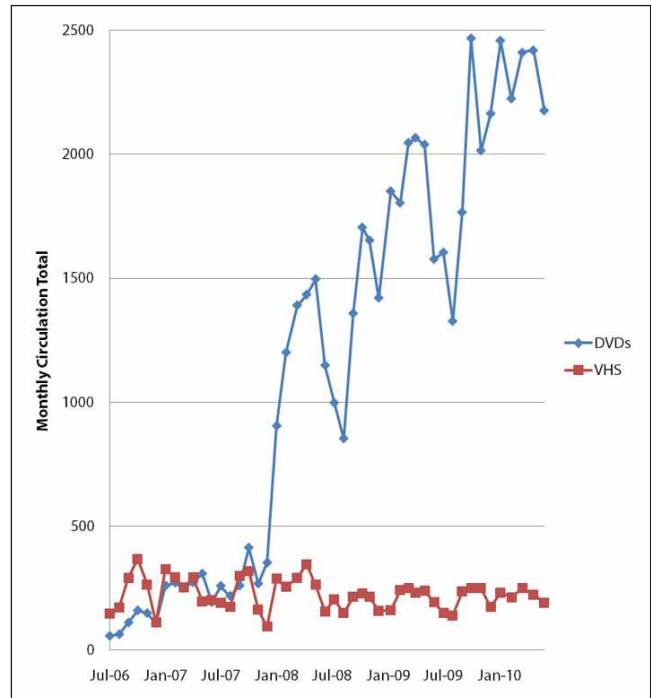


Figure 4. Video Circulation Trends 2006–10

to collect statistics and set loan parameters for each type of material.

CONCLUSION

Thus far, opening up access to the videos and increasing the scope of the collection policy has been greatly welcomed by faculty, students, and staff. Even though the collection was aggressively enhanced throughout 2007, the move to open shelving at the beginning of the 2008 Winter Quarter proved to be the driving factor for increased circulation. In the first year, DVD lending increased by 323.67 percent (9,342 in FY0708 and 2,205 in FY0607) while VHS lending decreased by 2.5 percent. Now, video circulation accounts for 17 percent of all circulation within the library system contrasted with 4.6 percent in 2007 (figure 3). This trend continues as DVD lending increased again in 2010 by 107.02 percent (figure 4).

While the DVD collection has seen a total 777.10 percent increase in circulation over the past three years, the VHS circulation remains flat. A strategy was devised to both provide greater access to VHS material and to plan for its eventual removal as viewing equipment becomes harder and more expensive to acquire. Media viewing stations, including a multi-region DVD/VCR player for PAL (Phase Alternate Line, a broadcast standard found in Western Europe and other parts of the world), were relocated near the Video Area. This equipment allows access to video material that patrons may not have the technology to view.

Technical Services has begun the reclassification project of the VHS cassettes to match the DVD collection. This will make it easier for patrons to find materials that they need and will also help in the future selection processes. The reclassification project has provided the staff an opportunity to inventory the collection and place material in protective cases when needed. The Collection Development Team developed a systematic plan to buy DVDs of the high-use VHS cassettes and prioritized acquisition by number of checkouts and use in reserves. The team also plans to allow the duplicates to circulate outside the DU community. As of fall of 2010, 405 tapes (9 percent of the VHS collection) have been replaced by DVD. Most these titles had circulated at least 30 times before replacement. For some documentaries and foreign film titles, Penrose owns the only remaining VHS copy in the consortium. This adds value to the regional collection while extending the use of the material.

Circulation statistics and patron feedback has proven that patrons have welcomed the change. The challenges the library faced with housing and display not only helped the decision making process about moving the collection, it helped the library frame discussions for future growth.

While some librarians had concerns about the security and longevity of the videos when moved to open stacks, the move has created few new problems. Allowing students, faculty members, and other library patrons to easily browse the collection has increased circulation, increased classroom use of material, and increased patron feedback. At the Circulation Desk, patrons express their surprise at finding the material already on the shelf in anticipation of their needs and ask for additional seasons of a television series, additional films by a certain director, or more material on a particular topic after seeing what is already available.

The positive effect of open stacks has had on the service to patrons was immediately recognized on many levels. In addition to increased circulation and use of the collection, the visibility of patrons actively browsing shelves of DVDs near the library main entrance promotes a positive atmosphere that shows the library as valuable resource to the campus community.

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