
Earthquake recovery at the Libraries of the Claremont Colleges

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Disaster preparedness must be a constant concern.

The Claremont Colleges is a cluster of five undergraduate colleges and the Claremont Graduate School, located in Claremont, California. On February 28, 1990, at 3:43 p.m., an earthquake of 5.5 magnitude shook the Claremont area, with the epicenter later determined to have been precisely in north Claremont.

Honnold/Mudd Library is the central library for the Claremont Colleges, housing the main collections of social science and humanities materials. As soon as the earth finished its immediate shaking, the Honnold/Mudd Library was evacuated, and the building declared closed until the damage could be assessed. When it was deemed safe to do so, a few key members of the Library staff reentered the building and did a walk-through for a preliminary damage assessment. It was discovered that not only were about 200,000 books off the shelves and on the floors, but also many areas of shelving had either completely collapsed or were leaning at precarious angles. A phone call was immediately placed to the company that had already been in the process of making an inventory of our shelving and preparing a proposal for improving our bracing to bring it all up to California Code and make it as seismically sound as possible. This call took place at about 4:30 p.m.; it was agreed that one of the company's structural engineers would meet a group of Library staff at 7:30 p.m. for a walk-

through of the central Library and the three campus libraries to assess the damage and to determine what could be done to allow the Libraries to resume operation.

The walk-through took two and one-half hours that evening. The engineer was very knowledgeable and able to determine what types of structures in the shelving had failed and what might be salvaged. We all took many photographs of the affected areas, both for insurance purposes and to show others what kind of damage the Libraries had sustained. When the evening walk-through ended, the staff members and the library director agreed to meet in the director's office first thing the next morning to plan our strategy for recovery. It was announced that although the central library would be closed to patrons, the staff would be expected to report to work to begin the cleanup. The three campus libraries had comparatively little damage and book displacement and were all able to remain open for the remainder of the week. The central library was in fact closed Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. We reopened on Monday, March 5, with three areas still considered unsafe and the materials inaccessible.

The morning following the earthquake, a designated group of about eight staff members and the library director met to plan the recovery. We established priority areas for cleanup, based on the

following factors: 1) amount of book displacement and visible damage to shelving; 2) advice from the structural engineers and the company's crews who were already on site dismantling broken shelving and shoring up some shelving that would be salvageable; and 3) areas that were declared safe by the engineers but needed to have fallen books reshelved. Staff were not allowed to enter any area that had not been checked and declared safe. In many cases, all that was needed was tightening of bolts, and in some cases, new cross (sway) bracing was installed immediately. Some shelving was damaged beyond repair and had to be replaced.

Most staff members worked, in different shifts and in teams, throughout the weekend, as did the work crews from the bracing company. We were able to devise some methods for picking up the books and reshelving them, so the work would progress relatively efficiently and in as organized a way as possible. Some psychological problems were encountered, as the aftershocks continued and some people were more frightened than others to be in the building. After a couple of particularly strong aftershocks, some staff members left, and that was accepted. We made sure that people took frequent breaks, kept talking to each other to help release anxiety, brought in lunch each day so we could "picnic" and share our experiences; and we continually reminded all workers to use the "buddy system" (never to go into a work area alone) and to notify a person at a central desk area where they would be working. Particularly, during these first four days, the aftershocks were frequent and very unnerving to most people; it was vital that we knew exactly who was in the building and where, in case there was a need to evacuate the building again. In addition, as each team of workers was taken to a work area, the staff member in charge always pointed out the closest exits from that area should evacuation be necessary. Honnold/Mudd Library consists of three joined buildings, with one central entrance and exit. There are, however, several emergency exits which can be used if an evacuation is needed, and these doors and stairways were always shown to the work crews. Hard hats were offered to the workers as the aftershocks continued, and many people appreciated this protection in case books again fell from the upper shelves.

For the first four days after the earthquake, the recovery work went fairly smoothly and much faster than expected. By Monday, we felt we could reopen the library to the public, with the exception of three areas that still could not be approached because of collapsed shelving. These areas were roped off and barriers placed to prevent people from entering. Some people still tried to bypass the barriers, sometimes to attempt to retrieve books, and sometimes because they were just curious.

The morning after the quake, we began receiving telephone calls from other libraries in the area, offering help in the form of volunteer staff or resources. The Inland Empire Libraries Disaster Response Network (IELDRN), in which the Claremont Colleges participate, had in fact come to the library on Friday, March 2, for a meeting and tour of the facility. This Network is composed of representatives from several libraries in the Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Riverside counties areas. The group was founded for the purposes of exploring methods of disaster preparedness and recovery for libraries and for providing mutual aid for each other in the event of a disaster. Many of the Network libraries provided volunteer workers to help with Claremont's recovery from this earthquake, beginning on Monday, as did other libraries throughout the Los Angeles area. The Mutual Aid Agreement of IELDRN worked magnificently throughout this recovery period. Network members provided advice, volunteer workers, and general moral support. The Network has proven its function and its worth in exactly the kind of situation it was designed to address.

The Honnold/Mudd staff held daily meetings for approximately the first two weeks following the earthquake to assess where we were in the recovery process, and to arrange on a daily basis for our needs for volunteers in addition to our own staff. We found it very worthwhile to accept the offers of volunteer workers for some aspects of the recovery; it not only gave our staff a break from the constant and intense activity, but it let us know that our library and community colleagues cared and were willing to participate in this process. It has been estimated that the complete recovery process (with the exception of the repair of many books that were damaged as they fell from the shelves and will need mending or rebinding) took approximately 1,000 man-hours of work time, spread over four weeks. We have, despite the cause, learned a great deal from this experience about shelf bracing; about staff capabilities, needs, and concerns; and about our own vulnerabilities. Since this earthquake we have a heightened awareness of the fact that it *can* happen to us, that disaster preparedness must be a constant concern and responsibility, and that we must depend on each other both within our own organization and within the Network associations that we form. It is essential to stockpile supplies for dealing with disasters to library collections, and it is equally essential, if not more so, to communicate with our colleagues in the local area for preparedness and mutual assistance. ■ ■

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