Remodeling large academic libraries: Survival hints

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How to warn your staff, inform your users, and shift your collection.

The intent of this article is not to address the design facets of remodeling academic libraries, but to share the experience gained during the year-long remodel of the five-story, 206,000-square foot main library facility (Hayden Library) at Arizona State University. During the remodel (which began immediately after the removal of the science materials to the new Science & Engineering Library in August 1983), eleven of the fourteen Hayden Library departments moved to new quarters and the entire collection of over 1.3 million volumes in the library's general stacks was shifted. This article provides direction on issues which can make or break a large-scale remodeling endeavor—communication with staff and users, signage, logistics, and collection shifting.

Communication with staff

As with any library endeavor, a successful remodel depends upon the cooperation of the library staff. Ongoing communication about the goals and progress of the project is a prerequisite. When a fixed amount of space is reallocated, there will almost always be some staff who will feel abused or neglected; their allocated space is perceived to be either less desirable, spacious, functional, or accessible than other departments. In a remodel which doesn't include the addition of sufficient square footage, it is not unusual for everyone to feel abused in some way. Consequently, it helps to give the entire staff an overview of what the project is to accomplish.

At Arizona State University our purpose was to use the space vacated by the science materials and services to increase shelving capacity, user seating and staff work space in some public service areas. We were forthright in stating to the staff that we knew that the net increase of space resulting from the remodel would not be adequate for our needs. But, at the same time, we emphasized that the project, particularly the relocation of certain departments, was planned to interface with the eventual building addition to the structure.

Another important reason for clear and frequent communication with staff, particularly during the period of construction and collection shift, is to ensure that all who provide directional help and information to users know what's been moved to where and are able to explain this in a positive manner to the public.

Before the construction phase actually began at ASU, heads of departments affected by the remodel presented their respective design plans for review and discussion in a series of meetings. The plans were first presented to other department

heads; then after the designs were firm, they were presented to the library staff at large. The logistical plan also was presented in the same manner. These presentations were followed up by status reports published at critical times in the Library's weekly staff newsletter. This helped to convey to the staff the complexity of the project and increased the level of tolerance to the ensuing disruption and inconvenience. It also promoted a sense of esprit de corps and communication among the total library staff and helped to relieve the "poor me" syndrome.

Communication with users:
Signage

University libraries usually are open all year, for over 100 hours per week. Consequently, it is likely that library users will be significantly affected by a massive remodel. Since a great many academic library users tend to be self-sufficient and do not ask for directional help, signs must be provided to guide them to the new locations for both materials and services. At ASU, we required a temporary signage system that could be updated daily (or even more frequently) and which could be maintained with little expertise. Because of the extent and duration of the remodel, we also needed a movable system that would allow a great deal of flexibility. Finally, we needed a signage system which could be used to provide both general information ("Current Periodicals closed for moving") and very specific directions ("HD 7000's moved to the northeast corner of Level 4").

Our solution was both simple and successful. We purchased twelve construction barricades (the orange and white ones commonly seen around street repairs), twelve 34" x 27" tablets (normally used as flip charts for group discussions), twenty-four "S" hooks, and some wide-tip marking pens. One barricade sign, with the flasher attachment, was placed in the main lobby to announce recent changes. Others were placed at strategic locations, such as in the Reference Room and by the elevators. When a department was closed for moving, the barricade sign announced the event and blocked the entrance. After the department vacated, the barricade remained and displayed a sign directing people to the new location.

Smaller versions of our construction-theme signs were hung by "S" hooks in the stacks to help people find their way through the maze created by the collection shift. These were made by cutting a slit in a 10" x 14" piece of heavy orange construction board and fitting a spiral tablet into it. Pages could be torn off as the information changed. Surprisingly few of these signs were vandalized or stolen.

This temporary signage system could be easily maintained by one person and moved about as needed. The tablets allowed a series of messages to be written at any time (one on each page) so that the top one could be torn off to reveal the new message as necessary ("Microforms closed for moving / Microforms now located on Level 2").

This system also allowed us to address another important concern. We posted signs which informed library users when specific areas were under construction and where they could find a quieter study space. We had few complaints, in spite of massive wall demolition that sometimes required extensive concrete cutting.

Use 3" x 5" index cards instead of a flow chart.

To keep our users further informed, we placed a full-page advertisement in the campus newspaper to announce changes in the library. This in turn sparked a number of articles by student reporters. In anticipation of inquiries from the press and others, it is wise to prepare a fact sheet which includes projected costs, improvements for library users, and how any increased space for staff will improve library service.

Logistics

The logistics of a massive remodel are more complicated than those of a move to a new, empty library structure. Don't start by trying to outline or flow chart the logistics; too much time will be wasted on revising and redrafting as forgotten details are remembered and new ones identified. It is better first to analyze the total project in its various parts and then organize them in the order in which they must be completed.

Obtain a large supply of 3" x 5" cards and keep them available at all times. Every time a step comes to mind, it should be written down—always write only one step per card and leave room for adding notations later. As the deck of cards grows, they can be color-coded to identify similarities, such as who will be involved (e.g., professional movers, stacks personnel, construction personnel, the telephone company, or various library staff with related responsibilities). For each step, further identify others which must be completed first in order to make it happen. It helps to be extraordinarily detailed. For example, if professional movers are involved, one card should state: "Movers move X department or item from Y to Z" and another should state "Requisition movers for the move of X." This level of detail is necessary since requisitioning must usually be done some weeks ahead.

The next phase of the logistical planning requires a large working surface where the cards can periodically be spread out to organize them. At this

point it is still useful to retain the logistics in card format, so it can be conveniently carried by the principal planner at all times. This allows cards to be made and filed as new steps come to mind in meetings, at dinner, or in the middle of the night.

Finally, acquire a large planning board. Use a portable bulletin board if it is big enough (a home probably can be found for it after the remodel is finished) or purchase an inexpensive piece of fiberboard from a building supply outlet. At ASU our planning board was 5 x 4 feet, hinged at the middle and on wheels so it could travel to presentations and working meetings. When the final stage of planning is reached and all cards are in the proper sequence, the total plan can be recorded in another format—if it is really necessary. But consider that once the remodel commences; changes and additions inevitably must be made. We used only the planning board at ASU. It was placed in a strategic location where those involved could refer to it and the general library staff could make note of the details, sequence of events, and progress.

Some books wander back to the library long after being withdrawn.

Collection shifting

The two key ingredients of success in a massive collection shift are: 1) accurate measurements and 2) efficient use of personnel. Again, it is much easier to move a collection into a new, empty library because usually the space allowed for future growth provides some room for error and juggling the collection into final order. However, when shifting within an existing library it is essential to take accurate measurements. Very simply, you need to know the linear footage of available vacant shelf space and the linear footage of materials which must be accommodated. At ASU our goal was to create a serials floor which would house the Current Periodicals and Microforms departments and all bound serials in an adjacent open stack area. This required not only pulling all serials from the existing open stacks on three floors and relocating them on the floor which had been emptied of science materials, but also shifting the general monograph stacks to absorb those which were removed from the areas designated as the new locations for Technical Services and Government Documents.

More than one year before the collection shift (or even the remodel) began, stacks personnel labeled each serial volume to designate its eventual location[1] on the new serials floor. They also measured the linear feet each serial title would occupy (leaving room for growth). This data was cumulated by Library of Congress Classification. Thus, we could predict fairly accurately how to space the serials on the new floor. In fact, the data was accurate enough to allow us to load the vacant shelves concurrently in several LC Classifications.

Our next step in planning the collection shift was to measure the entire stacks collection (including the serials) in each LC Classification. To determine the linear footage of the monographs in each classification, we simply subtracted the figure previously determined for serials in that classification. A less labor intensive but less accurate approach is to analyze the library's collection statistics and growth rates, as reported by Technical Services, with a standard measurement for the number of volumes per linear foot. In fact, this is how we initially began to plan the collection shift at ASU. Fortunately the delay in the opening of the Science and Engineering Library allowed us to conduct a comparison of those figures with actual shelf measurements and, as a result, we determined that the "formula" approach is inaccurate and too risky when shelf space is at a premium.

Although actually measuring the shelf space may appear to be labor intensive, it speeds the actual shift and can avert potential catastrophe. For example, it has been reported that another + 1 million volume academic library was so confident in its statistics that it started loading a floor of general stacks from both directions. When the workers met in the middle, there were over sixty book trucks of materials left over.

The second key ingredient in a successful collection shift is the effective use of personnel. Some libraries have moved collections by using professional movers, while others have utilized the entire library staff. Neither of these solutions was practical at ASU because the flow of the collection shift depended upon major construction which was completed in segments. Because the construction phases spanned more than one year, the collection had to be maintained in working order and accessible to the public during the project. Consequently, we hired a night crew of temporary stacks personnel to shift the collection between 11 p.m. and 7 a.m., Sunday through Thursday. This meant that they were working only one hour during which the library was open, and that time was a known low-use period. Our regular daytime stacks personnel participated minimally in the shift. They retained their primary responsibility for keeping the collections in working order and for reshelving materials.

[1]The labels were left on permanently so that serials taken to other floors or checked out would be reshelved on the right floor.

To expedite the total project the night crew, working from August 1983 to May 1984, also moved and installed the shelving equipment and handled a major portion of the relocation of light office and study furnishings. The utilization of a night crew to shift the collection and to clear areas scheduled for construction allowed the total remodel project to progress steadily. Construction did not halt while library personnel and movers did their work. Thus the hazard of frustrated contractors assigning their crews to other construction projects was avoided.

One year later

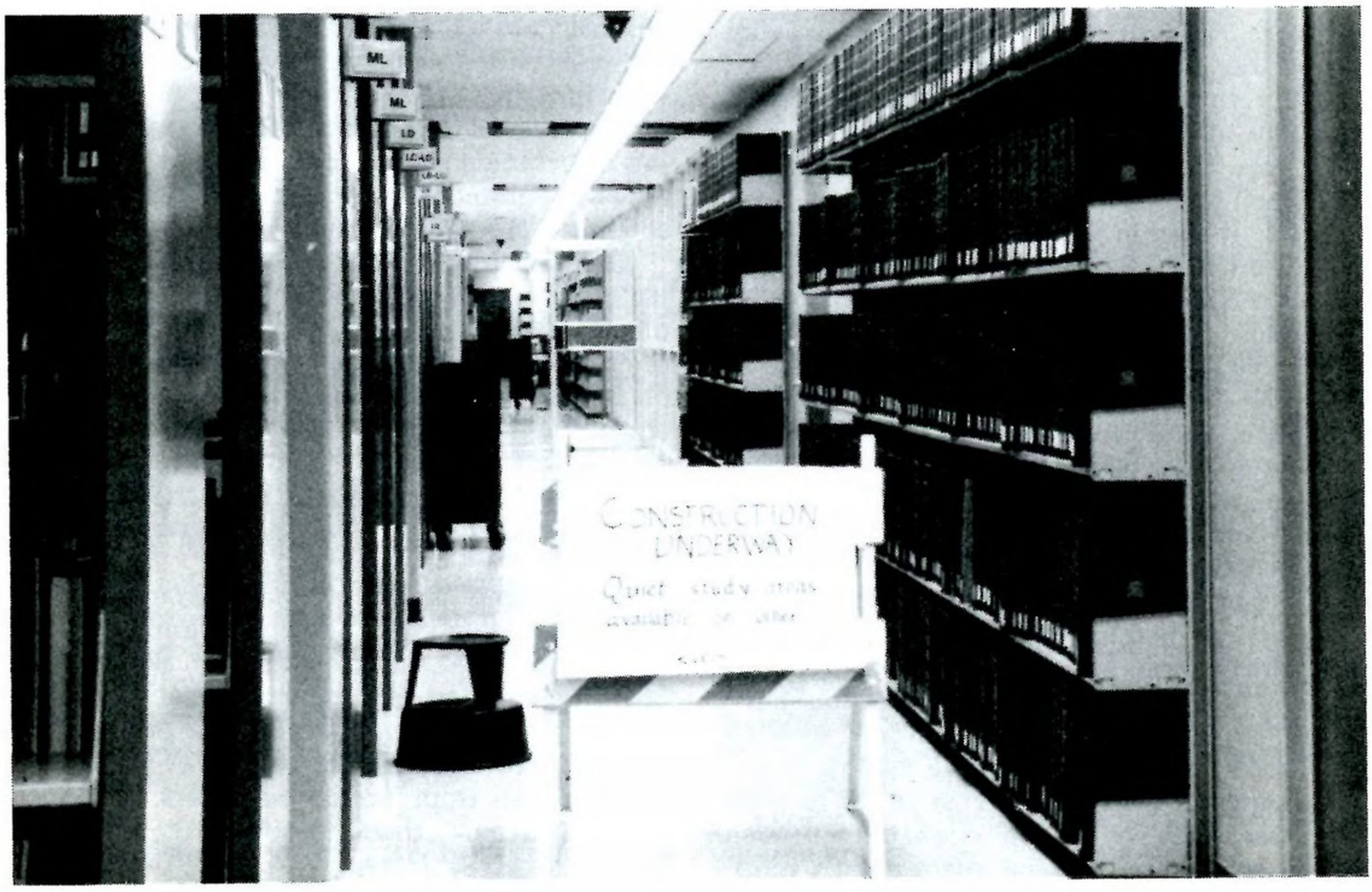
As with any remodel project, it is interesting to look back to examine what worked well, what didn't, where planning paid off, and where luck saved the project. At Arizona State University Libraries, such an analysis was imperative since predicted collection and staff growth dictated future system-wide building expansion. The new Science and Engineering Library will be full in the 1990s; Hayden Library, the remodel of which was only completed in 1984, is scheduled for a $11.5 million expansion within five years; the Music Library already cannot house its new acquisitions; and the Architecture Library is scheduled to move to new quarters sometime in the future.

Given these conditions and positive past results, communication regarding library space and design has continued with the library staff at large. We have found that keeping the staff informed about needs and plans is a critical ingredient to good morale and a patient outlook. We have also recognized that regular staff turnover in a large organization requires a periodic refreshment of the corporate memory regarding past developments and long-range future plans.

Furthermore, we have continued to share liberally our prospectus of the library's space needs and plans with the academic community whenever the opportunity is presented. This has allowed the library's ever-present needs to become a given fact on campus, created sources of exterior support, and eliminated the "But I thought you just remodeled!" attitude.

The temporary barricade signage system has become a permanent means to address sudden needs to redirect or alert library users. In a +2 million volume library system, there is always some building maintenance project underway. User irritation and complaints have decreased noticeably as a result of the continued use of the signs to direct them to quieter areas.

After recently approaching several smaller remodels and collection shifts more casually and encountering more problems, we realize that the amazing smoothness of the 1983–84 Hayden Library remodel and the subsequent 1.3 million volume shift can be attributed to intense planning,



Signs at Arizona State alerted library users to potentially noisy areas.

reasonably accurate measurements, and some luck. We also learned that collection content can influence the time and cost of moving library materials. For instance, it took much longer than planned to shift the government documents collection because the materials tend to be smaller, more slippery, easier to damage, and harder to keep in order. The most efficient approach to moving such materials would be to use one crew to move the volumes and another to shelf-read after the materials are on the new shelves.

We also know now that we were extraordinarily fortunate in the quality of the personnel working the night stacks crew. While we did experience some minor attendance problems among these employees, generally they exceeded our expectations in productivity, initiative, and ability to follow instructions. Undoubtedly the key to their good performance was the night supervisor, who had several years' experience as a stacks employee in the same library. There must be a good interface between the night crew and the day people who are also involved. It's essential for the person ultimately responsible (and who works days) to have an understanding of how much work should be accomplished each night and to check daily to see if adequate progress has been made; leave clear, written directions; require feedback from the night supervisor and take proper measures to react to it; and arrange periodic meetings with the night supervisor.

What would we do differently the next time we face such a large-scale remodel project? The one area that still looms as a source of potential disaster is predicting shelf space and layout for very large collections. After all of our calculations, our serial floor is fuller than we predicted. This may be due to ASU Libraries' healthy acquisitions budget which has allowed subscriptions to expand at a higher rate than anticipated 3–4 years ago. Our monograph stacks also appear to be fuller than anticipated. Interestingly, a concurrent Technical Services retroconversion project is turning up a number of books for which the library has no shelf record. This confirms Circulation personnel's suspicions that some books wander back into the library long after they have been withdrawn as a result of non-return from users. Whether there is a sufficient number to significantly throw off shelving calculations remains to be seen. Other libraries should consider taking a random inventory of high use areas of the collection to test reported collection statistics and sample for possible problems.

The arrival of microcomputers on the library management scene brings a much more efficient means for maintaining up-to-date collection statistics and making long-range estimates of shelving needs. It also becomes much more realistic to utilize call number specific standards for the number of volumes per linear foot. The size of the collection and the amount of available space greatly influence the relevance of collection analysis. ■■

Letters

Copyrighted tables of contents?

To the Editor:

In their article, "Keeping faculty current" (*C&RL News*, September 1985, pp.392–94), authors Hassig and Lewis tell of their successful use of photocopied tables of contents to create customized current awareness packages. They do not address, however, any possible copyright law implications of this practice. Section 108(g) of the revised Copyright Law states: "The rights of reproduction and distribution under this section...do not extend to cases where the library or archives, or its employee...(2) engages in the *systematic reproduction or distribution* of single or multiple copies..." (emphasis added).

The system described by the authors, whereby faculty members sign up for regular receipt of photocopied contents pages, sight unseen, appears to be systematic reproduction. Did the authors consider this?—*Mark E. Funk, Head, Collection Development, University of Nebraska Medical Center Library.*

The authors respond:

The copyright law has many ambiguities; establishing precisely what is legitimate is difficult at best. However, we feel that the Lehman Library service should not be a problem in the eyes of journal publishers. While it is true that we provide photocopies of the contents pages to faculty on a regular basis, we have not run across contents pages equipped with the copyright clearance note nor do we believe that distribution of these pages is likely to affect sales of the journals. It is even possible that the distribution of the contents pages to faculty may both promote journal usage, foster sales, and enhance a journal's prestige.

Also, the differential in pricing between individual subscriptions and institutional subscriptions indicates that publishers expect multiple usage of their publications. Perhaps most importantly, we do not believe that the contents page service may be equated with document delivery where copyright would clearly have to be considered. We are not distributing the actual journal articles; we are simply advertising their existence and availability in the library.

The contents page service has been in operation for many years—at Columbia and at other institutions—and the revised system described in our article has actually decreased the amount of routine photocopying. It is of course possible that we are misinterpreting the law. If we were to receive protests from journal publishers, we would naturally remove their titles from the service.—*Debra Hassig & David W. Lewis, Lehman Library, Columbia University.* ■■