Fall 2015

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Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University

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September 19, 2015, was a milestone for the Merrill-Cazier Library. It marked the 10-year anniversary of the opening of the library to the university community. It seems like it was only yesterday but it is really 3,650 yesterdays. I thought it would be interesting to look back to our original 2002 planning document and see how the library has lived up to expectations. That planning document summarized five key concepts that were used as the basis for the design and development of the library. The new library was to be: both a place and a portal; a focal point that marks the physical, academic, and cultural center of the campus; the hub of learning; a place to engage the community, support inquiry, and promote discovery; and finally, an environment rich in resources and technology.

As a place, portal, and physical center, the Merrill-Cazier Library has far exceeded the original expectations. Annually, the library has averaged just below one million visitors with some days having upwards of 7,500 visitors. Our group study rooms, a feature that the students greatly wanted enhanced, had 50,213 reservations during 2014-15. The analytics on the library’s web presence show 529,000 total sessions that year. These numbers demonstrate that the library has established itself as a focal point on campus and a hub of learning.

A welcome surprise has been the library’s atrium serving a cultural role for the campus. The library has had a variety of exhibits that often tie the materials within the library’s Special Collections and Archives to a university event. Presently, there is an exhibit commemorating the university’s Year of Water. A gallery talk or lecture accompanies these exhibits, and they have been well received by the public and university community. These lectures are often financially supported by the Friends of the Merrill-Cazier Library and have been supplemented by the two lectures that group sponsors annually.

Overall, the Merrill-Cazier Library has lived up to the goals outlined in the original planning document, embodying the vision of the intellectual center of Utah State University. The library serves the community as a physical, cultural, and virtual destination.

John Elsweiler
Associate Dean of Public Services
Celebrating Staff

Each year the library chooses three Employees of the Year. Below are statements from colleagues who nominated the outstanding 2015 award recipients: Sara Skindelien, Rose Milovich, and Becky Thoms.

Sara Skindelien
“Sara’s friendly, can-do attitude makes it a pleasure to work with her. She’s a creative problem-solver... and she has been instrumental to improving the efficiency of the communication and workflows between SCA and Digital, which has directly contributed to our increased productivity... The library is incredibly lucky to have her, and... we are so glad that we get to work with her!”

“Sara is very proactive and always willing to help. She is consistently positive and brings a lot of skills and talent to the library, and is a valuable collaborator with both SCA and Digital Initiatives.”

Rose Milovich
“Rose is to be commended for keeping the exhibitions coming together. Through constant changes of shows, dates, parameters, configurations, mediums, she does her best to make it all happen... She is also an amazing source of knowledge for how to repair and conserve all manner of books.”

“Rose is an amazing coordinator for the Exhibition committee. She really knows what she is doing and how to get the job done. On top of that she is willing to take time and help out with odd fix up jobs when books have been in a bit of a ‘bind’.”

Becky Thoms
“Becky has taken her rapidly shifting roles in the Digital Initiatives Department in stride and has proven to be a most capable leader. I appreciate her management style, which is firm and supportive, but also fluid and willing to adapt in order to accommodate shifting needs and goals... She works well cross-departmentally and represents our work on both state and national levels.”

“Becky is doing the work of three people: department head, copyright librarian, and IR librarian. She is very well organized and keeps projects moving. She is pleasant to work with, but also firm in making her point and representing her department.”

Friends Lecture Fall 2015


November 5, 2015
7:00 pm
Merrill-Cazier Library Room 101

Jim Steenburgh is professor of atmospheric science at the University of Utah. An avid backcountry and resort skier and creator of the popular blog Wasatch Weather Weenies, he is a leading authority on mountain weather and snowstorms and led the award-winning numerical weather prediction team for the 2002 Olympic Winter Games.
When I was little...there were Burmese military everywhere. They came to our village they were attacking us.... We had to sleep in a forest for three or five days....[when] things quiet down we come back to our village again.... The Burmese military were coming and forcing people...to become a porter. And they were looking for especially like 18 to 17 years old man or woman....me and my friend we were just really scared. We were like 'uh it's not safe to live in here anymore. Let's just go to Thailand. Let's just cross the border'. ~Aye Win interview with Meagan Gill, May 19 2015.

Aye Win’s compelling story, along with the recollections of 15 other Cache Valley refugees, was collected during the May 11–29, 2015, Library of Congress/USU Field School for Cultural Documentation. The field school offered hands-on ethnographic training for beginning field workers, including six graduate students and two undergraduates. Sponsored by USU’s Merrill-Cazier Library and English Department and a generous donation from W. Brent and Bev Robinson, the field school focused on the documentation and preservation of the “voices” (stories) of Karen, Burmese Muslim, and Eritrean refugees in Cache Valley. The three-week course covered research ethics, interviewing and sound recording techniques, photography, ethnographic observation and field note writing, and archival organization of fieldwork materials.

Professor Lisa Gabbert (director of the USU Folklore Program) and Randy Williams (Fife Folklore Archives Curator and oral history specialist) collaborated with colleagues Drs. Guha Shankar and Margaret Kruesi (American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress) to create and co-teach the unique course. Chit Moe (Karen community member), Nelda Ault Dysin (Cache Refugee and Immigrant Connection), and Lorien Belton (USU Refugee Assessment Project) informed the course direction and helped teach segments. Field school students learned from and worked collaboratively with Merrill-Cazier Library staff to create a robust digital collection and produce three informative online exhibits highlighting the Cache Valley refugee communities interviewed. The exhibit was presented at a standing-room-only event on May 28 at the Logan Library and included the “voices” of several of the interviewed community members.

Randy Williams
Fife Folklore Archives Curator

It’s no secret that finals week is tough on students. They trudge to the library for cramming sessions, huddling in group study rooms or holing up alone. They worry about what grade they got on their last exam and struggle to stay awake to study for the next one. Luckily, the library is here to help!

Since spring 2014, the library has offered stress-relieving activities at Paws & Breathe. On the Monday and Tuesday of finals week we provide relaxation sessions, games, snacks, and movies. Students are invited into the library to meditate or participate in muscle relaxation sessions. Free films are screened with popcorn and snacks available. Stressed students can also play BINGO and compete to win prizes donated from local retailers. However, the therapy dogs are by far our most popular attraction!

All of our participating dogs are certified therapy dogs. These dogs have a gentle temperament and a natural friendliness towards people. While receiving belly-rubs and scratches behind the ears, therapy dogs provide affection and comfort to stressed-out students. Public libraries have offered successful therapy dog sessions in which children practice reading to dogs for years. Though our dogs don’t get to hear any stories, they do get to enjoy a lot of love from USU students.

Pamela Martin
Coordinator of Outreach and Peer Learning

Surrounded by USU students at Paws & Breathe, Jack, a certified therapy dog, smiles for the camera.
Website Face Lift

This year, Merrill-Cazier Library kicked off fall semester sporting a fresh new look on its homepage. Drawing heavily from usability best practices and in-depth interviews with students, the new homepage is designed to help users quickly find important resources and services. We’ve added more white space, reduced the amount of content, and created helpful icons to make it easier for web visitors to accomplish their goals.

The new homepage is also responsive, meaning it adjusts to accommodate various screen sizes and devices, giving users the same basic website experience whether on a desktop, mobile device, or anything in-between. This redesign was a collaborative effort, none of which would be possible without the thoughtful work of our Systems team and valuable input of staff members across all areas of the library. We think this design benefits users, providing a more usable experience and offering new ways to use and interact with the library.

But this is just one small step. There’s still so much for us to learn about our users and their needs, and it will surely take a lot of technology and smart coding to keep pace with rising demands for ease and simplicity. But just like most everything we do in libraries, it will be the expertise and experience of our staff—the curatorial, human touch—that will truly make our efforts stand apart.

Alex Sundt
Web Services Librarian

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Yes! I would like to join Friends of Merrill-Cazier Library

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Thank you for your support!
The week of April 6-11, 2015, the Merrill-Cazier Library was buzzing with activity as many of the Research Week activities were hosted here. Some of the highlights of the events held in the library included:

- Faculty Author Exhibition and Reception – featuring 27 books by USU authors
- D. Wayne Thorne Lecture – honoring this year’s award winner, Alvin Hennge
- Student Research Symposium – showcasing posters and presentations from over 300 graduate and undergraduate students
- Ignite – featuring short, engaging presentations on the main stage from undergraduate and graduate researchers.

Perhaps the most rewarding (and busiest!) day was when students filled the first floor of the library to present their research at the Student Research Symposium. The Merrill-Cazier Library was packed from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. as over 300 undergraduate and graduate students from every college presented research via posters, on topics ranging from “Wealth and the Influence of Marriage” to “Thermal Transport in Twisted Carbon Nanotubes.” Judges evaluated the poster sessions and presentations, giving students a chance to hone their presentations skills. A list of the presentations and posters, along with abstracts and in some instances PDFs of the posters or presentations, is available in the library’s institutional repository, Digital Commons at http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/researchweek/ResearchWeek2015/.

The Ignite Speaking Event is a crowd pleaser. Students audition for a spot in this prestigious session. Their short, fine-tuned presentations focus on the stories of their research and what motivates them as researchers, as opposed to discussions of the research itself. Recordings of the session are available online at http://ignite.usu.edu/.

The Merrill-Cazier Library is a proud supporter of all of our researchers, and enjoys serving as a venue to showcase the amazing accomplishments of our faculty and students. Next year’s Research Week events will once again be held in the library. Look for the event April 11-15, 2016!

Betty Rozum
Data Services Coordinator and Undergraduate Research Librarian


Spooner, Michael. Are texts that display differently different texts? The role of the device in the making of meaning. Workshop at the annual meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication. Tampa, FL. April 2015.


Water has often been referred to as the life’s blood of Utah, but it is also the life’s work of many people at Utah State University, especially as it relates to the science of irrigation. USU has prioritized water research since it was first established as the Agricultural College of Utah in 1888, and even today there are more than 90 faculty members from departments in six of USU’s academic colleges currently involved in water research, teaching, and extension.

In recognition of these efforts and the 2015 Year of Water, the USU Libraries will host an exhibit detailing the rich history and contribution of USU’s water researchers, particularly in the area of irrigation. Organized by curators Dan Davis and Bob Parson, the exhibit runs till November 6th in the Merrill-Cazier Library Atrium. The exhibit features photographs, letters, and other materials from Special Collections and Archives, which illuminate the long tradition of irrigation studies and scholarship at USU.

In conjunction with this event, USU Libraries is also featuring a Year of Water digital exhibit: http://exhibits.lib.usu.edu/exhibits/show/yearofwater.