



High Density Storage: From There to Here and Beyond



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ABSTRACT

This article presents results from a national survey regarding library high density storage, as well as qualitative and quantitative analysis of various aspects of a library high density storage facility at a major academic research institution. Findings are contextualized within a discussion of the past, present, and potential future of library high density storage.

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INTRODUCTION

Library high density storage has become fairly commonplace at institutions across the country, and is rapidly evolving to meet changing demands on academic research institutions and the future of patron and institutional needs. Library high density storage can be defined as storage that is designed to optimize the space available. Material is most often shelved by size, not classification or any other content descriptor, not directly accessible or browsable by patrons, and is retrieved by library staff or students who are safety-certified to operate heavy equipment through the use of an industrial lift or other mechanized retrieval system.

The modern library depository began to take shape in the 1980's with the design and construction of the Harvard Depository...The "Harvard Model," as it came to be known, has been used for the majority of high-density storage depositories built ever since...The most unique feature of this type of facility is the storage system's design. (Weeks & Chepesiuk, 2002, p. 160)

Harvard opened the first vault of their high density depository in 1986, and most library high-density storage facilities follow the Harvard Depository model. The Harvard Depository model operates under the following mission, "The mission of the Harvard Depository is to promote effective use of space on the Harvard campus and the retention of financially and historically valuable resources by providing a secure, reliable, and cost-effective archival environment for the storage and retrieval of primarily paper-based materials" ("The Harvard Depository: Mission," n.d.). In many instances institutions are moving beyond the goal of preserving content locally, to providing access to the global collection of content shared across institutions and for which there are often

multiple copies available for varying forms of distribution and preservation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There was a great deal of professional literature published a decade or so ago regarding the onset of high density storage facilities and what their impact on academic research library collections and policies would be. For the purposes of this article, high density storage is defined as a library facility where materials are organized by size, not any classification scheme, and shelved in trays to maximize available space. That facility might have shelving of various heights, and may involve mechanical retrieval rather than human-operated lifts. Much of the literature revolves around sharing expertise in implementing a new high-density storage facility, such as the article "Going Off-site: Implementing a Plan for a Library Storage Facility," where the authors conclude that "The value of our off-site facility cannot be stressed enough; we now have gained additional space for newer materials and for creating a more pleasing library environment for our patrons" (Collins, Dujmic, & Hurlbert, 2006, p. 49). One of the prevailing concerns relating to high density storage is the provision of adequate access. As Bellanti notes, "Providing good access to library material in remote storage is the key to making the use of remote storage an acceptable option for dealing with overcrowding in libraries on prime campus land" (Bellanti, 1992, p. 93). In addition to the need for quick retrievals of material for circulation as needed by patrons, high density storage impacts the availability of content for interlibrary loan and document delivery services. Many library high density storage facilities have implemented services which help bring to fruition the goal articulated by Seaman, 2003, where "transmission of electronic files can speed delivery of requests and transform high density remote storage facilities into a kind of twenty first century scriptorium that distributes rare texts to scholars upon demand" (Seaman, 2003, p. 101).

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Space issues have been, of course, and still are the driving factor in the decision to invest in library high density storage. Space issues in libraries can arise from many different avenues: growing collections, the need for improved public spaces in libraries such as group study space or learning labs, campus recovery of spaces for classrooms or other needs, etc. In one aptly titled article “Buying Time: The Leveraged Use of a Library Storage Facility” the role that high density storage can play in alleviating space concerns pending funding for more major construction of traditional library spaces is discussed (Knight, 2007). Many institutions are still in fact in the process of building high density storage facilities largely due to space constraints, conducting site visits and collecting information on the best practices in creating such a facility. However, the cost associated with construction, as well as the frequent need to build such a facility remotely, limit the viability of this solution for some institutions. Additionally, due to the very nature of retrieval of stored items, staffing requirements differ significantly from traditional library facilities. Even the types of ergonomics required to avoid injury differ, as noted in the article “The Pain of Storage” (S. A. Atkins, 2005).

Not only are high density storage facilities unique in their operational requirements, but they have a major impact on related library issues such as print retention, preservation, selection criteria for transfer, and collection management in general. As Jones and Fisher comment in relation to the construction of a shared remote storage facility, “The development of effective and judicious selection criteria for this process was a key consideration, as the decision to send materials off-site is not always a popular one with library users” (Jones & Fisher, 2004, p. 1). An Association of Research Libraries (ARL) SPEC Kit in 2013 focused on print retention concluded that “Off-site shelving, collaborative retention agreements, and careful deaccession are the existing pragmatic answers to the question ‘Can research libraries simply keep adding print holdings forever?’” (Britton, 2013, p. 13). As Lizanne Payne noted in her report “Library Storage Facilities and the Future of Print Collections in North America” in 2007,

High-density storage facilities have moved into the mainstream for collection management in academic libraries. This is the optimum time for the academic and library communities to leverage this collective capacity to develop a broader, system-wide approach to maintaining print collections across institutional boundaries. (Payne, 2007, p. 29)

Moving beyond the original local space needs to thinking more broadly about the future of library collections and the role of high density storage is relatively new.

In addition to shared print repositories and other means of leveraging high density storage in new ways there are other areas where high density or off-site storage facilities are playing an increasingly important role. As Priddle and McCann note in a forthcoming *College & Research Libraries* article, their study investigating the role of off-site storage in the curation of special collections demonstrates that “off-site storage is a major part of the current responsibilities of professionals in the field; that it impacts many aspects of varied roles, especially public service; and that its use will only continue to grow in the future” (Priddle & McCann, n.d., p. preprint). Special collections, area studies materials including vernacular language, and varying formats are all increasingly becoming a staple of high density storage collections, and will require further investigation.

THE BROAD PERSPECTIVE

SURVEY RESULTS

In May and June of 2015, the author conducted a national survey to create a better picture of the library storage environment as it currently stands, and help inform where we go from here. The survey was sent to the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) Library Directors list, to the

Center for Research Libraries (CRL) Print Archive Network (PAN) list-serv, and to a locally held short list of known institutions with high density storage facilities. As noted in the introduction to the survey, high density storage facilities are changing the library landscape in many ways: facilitating shared collection development, reducing overcrowding of shelves, offering new services, and opening the door to rethinking the future of print collections. In many cases, storage facilities are now serving functions that they were not originally intended to, resulting in a host of new challenges, and for which there is little to no available literature. The survey is intended to be a first step in better understanding the high density storage environment as it current stands and track trends moving forward.

As indicated in Fig. 1, 74 (82%) of the 90 responding institutions were universities, and 39 (43%) had enrollment figures of greater than 30,000. As the survey was sent to all the ARL institutions, not only those known to have a high density storage facility, only 45 (50%) of the responding institutions currently has a high density storage facility operated locally the Library. However, an additional 2 (2%) have a high density storage facility operated by the campus with services provided for non-Library units, another 10 (11%) have a state or consortially operated storage facility, and 2 (2%) more participate in a commercially developed and managed storage facility. Altogether, 65 (72%) of respondents have some involvement with a high density storage facility, and another 5 (6%) have plans to build one.

Institutions were also asked what the total projected maximum storage capacity of the facility is, and though several indicated that they did not know, the majority of the facilities are slated to hold between 2 million and 7 million volumes. For the 48 institutions responding to this question, the average year in which the first or only module of storage opened was 2002. The oldest module was opened in 1978, while a number of institutions just opened their first module of high density storage in 2015. Twenty-one (23%) of responding institutions have already built additions to their facility, and another 24 (27%) have plans to do so within the next five years.

There was quite a bit of variation across institutions regarding inventory control, collection development, and selection and retention criteria. The author had previously informally surveyed several groups regarding the software used in library high density storage, but results are not as uniform as previous inquiries would suggest. Generation Fifth Applications, Inc. (GFA) Library Archival Solution (LAS), is used by 19 (27%) of the 70 responding institutions with some involvement with high density storage. Another 27 (39%) of the storage facilities make use of the library’s integrated catalog only, and the remaining responses varied widely, but the majority of those not using GFA or only the library integrated catalog use some version of a locally created solution that ties into their online catalog. There was not an apparent correlation between the date a high density storage solution was implemented and the type of software solution used.

As noted previously, one of the major challenges locally is the prevalence of duplicate copies from the first few years the storage facility was opened. Somewhat surprisingly, 14 (16%) of the respondents indicated that they still accept duplicate content with no caveats, while 13 (14%) accept duplicates across the storage facility and other library collections, 17 (19%) only accept duplicates for rare or particularly valuable materials, 5 (6%) have duplication policies that vary depending on the contributing library or institution, and the other 19 (21%) do not currently accept duplicate content for ingest into the storage facility, but did at one time. Institutions were also asked to comment as to whether or not there are any formats or specific condition issues which preclude accessioning into the facility, and of the 56 responses to this question 18 (32%) had no format or condition requirements, while the remaining grouped responses in descending order were: nothing with mold or infestation of any kind; no special collections, and no audiovisual formats. The majority of respondents from institutions with high density storage, 59 (84%), indicated that their storage facility handles non-English language material just as any other, while only 2 (3%) indicated that

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