



CASE STUDIES

Ten Years Later: A Joint Library Evolves

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ABSTRACT

In 2003, a unique joint library was created. A partnership between the San Jose Public Library system and San Jose State University, the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library serves a city population of more than a million and a campus population of over 30,000 students. With different patrons and different missions, bringing the two library cultures and functions together presented many challenges, but the library today is a vital, innovative space for learning. In the ten years since its opening, however, the cost savings envisioned when the library was created have not been realized. Also, the partnership originally presented in the library's organizational structure has undergone alterations. This restructuring was driven by changes in funding, staffing, and patron needs. Despite this organizational evolution, the King Library still provides a richer resource to its communities than either partner could have provided alone and can serve as a model to other communities considering the creation of a joint library.

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INTRODUCTION

In August 2003, an innovative, new venture opened in San Jose, California: the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Library. A collaboration between the City of San Jose and San Jose State University (SJSU), the King Library brought the main branch of the San Jose Public Library (SJPL) system and the SJSU University Library together into one building. “[T]he joint library is not a merger; it is a marriage,” wrote Patricia Senn Breivik, then dean of the University Library. “In a merger, one side or both lose their personality; in a marriage, they remain two separate entities, each contributing different strengths and talents to the partnership” (2005, p. 401).

The marriage of these two libraries has now reached its tenth anniversary, and the partnership has evolved. The overwhelming logistics of bringing together two institutions with different cultures, different systems, and very different patrons have been surmounted and are now taken for granted in the day-to-day work of serving the public and the academic community. How the initial plans for this collaboration changed and why provides an interesting study of how joint libraries evolve as they move from the planning table to the real world.

BACKGROUND

What makes the King Library unusual as a joint library is the size of the populations it serves. SJSU is the fifth largest campus in the California State University system, with more than 30,000 students and 1700

faculty members (San Jose State University, 2013). The San Jose Public Library system is one of the most active nationwide, serving a city with a population of over one million and handling annual checkouts of nearly 14 million items across its 23 branches (San Jose Public Library, 2013). Today, the King Library has an annual gate count of more than 1.2 million people and handles a collection of over 1.6 million items (Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library, 2012).

Like many other joint libraries, the creation of the King Library had its roots in fiscal necessity and demands for space. At the time the joint library was proposed, SJSU's existing facilities, the Clark and Wahlquist Libraries, had to store over 50% of their collections off-campus because of space limitations (Kauppila & Russell, 2003, p. 255). The San Jose Public Library's main branch was also having growing pains and had to discard old items every time it acquired new ones (Eanes, 2010, p. 3). Alone, neither the city nor the state could afford to build a library of the size required to meet the needs of their growing collections, but by joining forces, they could.

In 1997, university president Robert Caret and then-mayor of San Jose, Susan Hammer, announced their plan for a joint library to the public. An Operating Agreement was drawn up in December 1998, and in October 2000 ground was broken on the northeast corner of the SJSU campus for the new King Library (Liu & Whitlatch, 2010). The path from announcement to groundbreaking was far from smooth, however. The first stumbling block was funding.

At the outset, the proposed new facility was to cost \$40 million to build, but as the planned library grew in size to 475,000 square feet, the cost ballooned to an eventual \$171 million—more than four times the original estimate (Freeman, 2001, p. 22). By lobbying at the state level, receiving funds from the City of San Jose's Redevelopment Agency,

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and harnessing a determined city government, the city/state team brought together the necessary money to meet the cost. However, as the plan became reality, public and university constituents began to fight the joint project.

There were several concerns on the university side, beginning with whether public use of the university's collection would reduce access to research material for students and faculty (Freeman, 2001, p. 24). Theft of university materials—resources often far more expensive than those in a public library collection—was also a concern. Another fear was the type of reference service public librarians could provide to students whose questions centered on scholarly research. On the public side, residents worried that the large new main library would divert funds from the branch libraries, which accounted for 80% of circulated materials for the library system (Freeman, 2001, p. 24). Slowly, by degrees, detailed budgets and the very active involvement of all constituencies in the planning process calmed fears and brought the project forward.

The potential benefits of the joint library also helped allay concerns. Although the final cost for the library was \$170 million, this was still \$10 million less than it would have cost to build two separate, smaller facilities (Freeman, 2001, p. 22). A joint library also provided the opportunity to offer enhanced services and more resources to both university and public library patrons. These economies of scale were accompanied by a more qualitative measure: the benefit of bringing the campus into the community. Harry Meserve, a university librarian, wrote “[T]he university has traditionally been a part of the community in which it exists while at the same time being separate and apart from that community” (2006, p. 26). The physical placement of the new library at the corner of campus with an entrance facing into downtown San Jose was intentionally designed to provide a bridge between “town and gown” (Meserve, 2006, p. 37; Woods, 2004, p. 206).

As in any marriage, however, some activities were designed to be shared and some to remain separate and this is true of the operations of the King Library. Administration, Human Resources, Special Collections, and the Children's Room were planned to function independently, but to benefit from the economies of scale that motivated the creation of the library, four main areas were intended as integrated university/public services:

- Access Services
- Information Technology
- Reference Services
- Technical Services

How these merged functions were imagined and how they operate now is an intriguing examination of what happens when planning and reality meet.

ACCESS SERVICES

Access Services include circulation, course reserves, interlibrary loan, and stack maintenance, and all of these functions provided some challenges when bringing the two libraries together. An immediate and obvious concern was dueling classification systems: the public library used the Dewey Decimal System and the university used the Library of Congress Classification System. It was decided that each collection would keep its own system, with public library books shelved on the first and third floors, and the university collection occupying the other floors. Two exceptions were the Reference collection and the periodicals; these were merged and made consistent by using the Library of Congress classifications (Kauppila & Russell, 2003, p. 259).

Another worry during the planning stage of the library was borrowing privileges, especially among the faculty. Providing public access to the university collection was seen as diminishing access for students and faculty as the resources they needed went off-campus and across the city. The ideal of equal access was preserved, although borrowing privileges between public and university patrons differed both in the

quantity of checkouts and the checkout period allowed. Both libraries kept the option of changing the system in the future if problems arose. Those problems never materialized, even though currently the public use of university materials is higher than faculty and student use, with 65,923 checkouts of university items by public patrons versus 64,957 checkouts by university patrons (Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library, 2012). The library borrowing consortium (called Link+) and Interlibrary Services both provide materials to faculty quickly and conveniently, so access continues to be seamless.

The workload at the time of the merger was—it was hoped—fairly distributed between SJSU and SJPL (Fig. 1). Because the demands of this new, merged library could not be accurately predicted, the staffing was at best an educated guess, but the original structure has stood the test of time (J. Kowalewski Ward, personal communication, December 19, 2013). In 2003–2005, all but three organization-specific units were shared functions. Some of these functions have changed and other functions have been added, but many Access Services units remain shared (Fig. 2).

There are managerial challenges in running these merged units. Conflicts between city and campus employees working together require two managers to resolve, and the lines of reporting can often be complex (J. Kowalewski Ward, personal communication, December 19, 2013). Budget and staffing pressures also create a constant give-and-take in workload distribution. Beginning in 2007, budget cuts forced a 51% reduction in the number of student workers hired by the campus, a cutback that was phased in over the next four years. In 2010, hiring by SJPL was frozen and some positions still remain unfilled. As the number of employees waned and new responsibilities arose, different staffing strategies had to be created to maintain a balance between the two institutions.

Another challenge is the high level of turnover among public library pages and aides. Restricted to no more than 12 h of work per week, the high cost of living in San Jose often causes these employees to leave for jobs with more pay and more hours. This rapid turnover is exacerbated by the slow hiring process that is common in public institutions, which results in the public library often being shorthanded. Institutional philosophies also result in staffing changes. SJPL has a strong commitment to cross-training, and the result has been nine different co-unit heads in Access Services in ten years. This philosophy combined with employee turnover means there is a constant emphasis on training and professional development at all levels. Despite these challenges, the public/

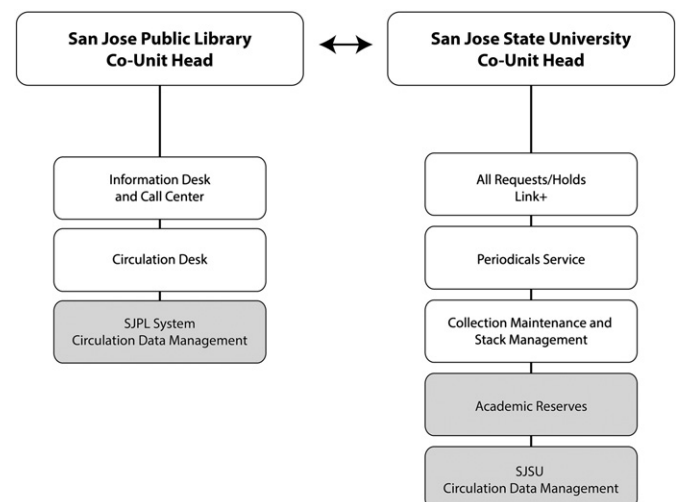


Fig. 1. King Library Access Services organization chart in 2005. Note 1: gray boxes are non-merged units.

Initially proposed organization chart on the left was adapted from “We’re Married! The Rewards and Challenges of Joint Libraries,” by P. S. Breivik, L. Budd, & R. F. Woods, 2005, *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 31 (5), p. 403. Copyright 2005 by Elsevier. Adapted with permission.

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