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Jane Skoric

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New Voices

The Library That Almost Wasn't

Jane Skoric is a bibliographic services assistant at the CSUMB Library and a student at San Jose State University SLIS.

The year was 1994; the place, a former Army base on the central coast of California. The mission was to build, within a matter of months, the twenty-second campus of the California State University (CSU) system. The team was a group of dedicated, high-energy, idealistic people. Their unofficial motto was "Run until you're tackled."

The library is usually at the core of a university, but not at this campus. "The concept that our new campus would not have a library originated with the then-Chancellor," recalled Steve Watkins, coordinator of technology development and a founding librarian of the Cal State Monterey Bay (CSUMB) Library. In an age dominated by the image of the World Wide Web and electronic resources, the planners decided to build a twenty-first century campus with a "virtual library" in place of a traditional one. The idea intrigued some and horrified others.

Watkins remembers, "Fortunately, one of the founding campus deans and the campus President decided to go ahead and renovate one of the old military buildings into a modest library facility." The building was to be a single-story, rectangular structure. So abbreviated was the timeline for the new campus, however, that the renovation was not completed in time and classes began without a library. Watkins said, "One thing that I remember well was a very vocal clamoring from the pioneer group of students to get the library open as soon as possible."

The CSUMB Library actually opened in the fall semester, 1995. There was still a "high-level mandate," however, to prefer and select electronic publications over print. As a result, the facility acquired a reputation as "the library without books." More than six years after opening, tour guides continued to describe the futuristic lack of print resources. The guides would then point proudly to the library's 40 computer workstations. Watkins, however, notes that library staff has been "quietly acquiring current monographic imprints at about half the average rate of the established CSU campuses. We have stack space for 65,000 volumes and are fast approaching the practical shelving capacity."

During the past decade, the CSUMB

Library has undergone redesign work. Watkins noted that, "While the design of the renovated space looked like it would work well for the stacks and public reader space, most of the staff spaces, including the service points were less than optimal." Efforts to improve services resulted in relocating Interlibrary Loan and Bibliographic Services. Half the student study rooms were transformed into librarian faculty offices.

What, might you ask, does the future hold for a library that had such a precarious beginning? As the CSUMB Library celebrates its tenth birthday, the library staff is looking forward to shedding their current home. The campus that began with a few hundred students is now planning to build a library that will serve approximately 8,000 students. Amazingly enough, the one time "virtual library" will become a building that will eventually store a projected 880,000 volumes!

Groundbreaking for the Tanimura and Antle Family Memorial Library will take place during the spring 2005 semester. The library's anticipated completion date is mid-2007. According to the official press release:

The proposed 200,000 square foot, three and four-story building will be the centerpiece of the campus. More than a landmark building, the library affords opportunities to develop a community resource for learning that will honor and preserve the rich heritage of the Central Coast and its diverse communities. There will be multiple group study rooms as well as several lecture theaters, classrooms, and approximately 1,600 study nooks. Sections of the library, including a small café and computer labs will have extended hours, allowing students and members of the community to access services late into the night.

A lot can change in ten years. First there was the California University without a library; then the vision changed to a "virtual library" which never really materialized. Soon, the campus that didn't have a library will have a library housed in the largest building on campus. Additional information about the new library can be found at: <http://library.csumb.edu/about/building/index.php>

Jane Skoric