

CIRCULATING PROPOSAL  
AN ARCHITECTURAL PROGRAM FOR ALDERMAN LIBRARY

The faculty is delighted to respond to the invitation of Martha Sites, University Librarian, and of the Office of the Provost, Thomas C. Katsouleas, to contribute to a vision of the University Library.

**I. GUIDING PRINCIPLES for the renovation of Alderman Library**

1. The University Library is a **World Heritage Site Library**: books have always been integral to UVA's architecture as nowhere else on earth. Our founder designed the Rotunda around books and their use so that the University would nurture enlightened democracy by means of the very fabric of its built environment. Preservation and curation are our key responsibilities as stewards of North America's most important UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the library is the core of that heritage. Keeping the permanent collection at the center of grounds preserves our distinctive residential culture (Cornerstone Plan, pillar 1) and strengthens our research infrastructure (pillar 2).

2. We must **specialize**: UVA's primary World Heritage lies in our 18<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup> century book collections: print materials curated by Virginians over the centuries. We are one of a very few importantly distinctive university libraries such as those at Bologna, Oxford, Harvard, Chicago, Yale, and we have an opportunity for leadership. We must not rush like other lesser libraries to become merely a station on the information highway, with copies of data that are equivalent to anyone else's. As we must maintain the columns of the Rotunda, we must maintain our distinctiveness through preservation of the original material culture of our permanent collection, a collection that is rapidly appreciating in value and rarity (Cornerstone Plan, pillar 5: stewardship of our resources).

3. **Codex at the core**: our magnificent permanent collection is largely made up of the codex, the bound book. It is our primary holding, our wealth, our resource; the University's innovation in other more ephemeral media continues to emanate from our expertise in the codex. Our acquisitions and preservation should reflect that generative relation: the permanent collection of print materials must be conserved and expanded.

4. Library architecture should **express the structure of knowledge**. Expanded distribution of space in the library according to the classification scheme we share with our sibling, the Library of Congress, helps wayfinding and memory in an organic way, ingeniously organizes the population of users so that readers feel ownership and the excitement of expanding their territory, and helps to imbue the structure with meaning and process (Cornerstone Plan, pillar 3). Culling the collections is a wastefully expensive operation that cannot anticipate scholarly need and is destructive of our primary capital in the permanent collection. If Ivy Stacks is expanded, the new space should be browse-able by readers as open stacks and should be reserved for a particular class of materials, so that the distribution of books across the library system makes intellectual sense.

5. A renewed Alderman should be **nimble**: it must, as it has so richly, nourish electronic innovation but it should *avoid* investment in the architectural "hardware" of evanescent trends: e.g., it is nimble to keep any wiring, etc., for quickly changing electronic platforms, projection, computing itself out of the walls, ceilings, and floors (an extruded approach – easily reconfigured -- is appropriate to the electronic infrastructure).

6. We should be an **owner not a renter**: rebalance library expenditures to consolidate and expand our World Heritage Site specialty as we move through the 21<sup>st</sup> c. Commercial pressures to destroy our holdings and rent back images of them must not succeed; the property rights of the University should be defended by reinvesting in the most stable, sustainable platform, the codex, and by developing the electronic apparatus around it (Cornerstone Plan, pillar 5). Rebalancing expenditures means serving the permanent collection by valuing it and new material acquisitions above ephemeral data rentals, and by exploring new ways of funding the University's research needs for ephemeral data via grants and revenue streams particular to other kinds of laboratories on grounds.

7. What **21<sup>st</sup>-century research** looks like must guide architectural renovation, and the book faculty, those for whom the library is the primary laboratory space, will be the best gauge of that effort (Cornerstone Plan, pillar 4). Books as material artifacts are the objects and tools of study for a significant rank of the faculty, and cannot be marginalized without harm to UVA's research prominence. Design criteria will include maximizing book-to-human interactivity while accommodating electronic aids (in fact, the book faculty has been at the forefront of digital humanities innovation). Science shows that students retain information they read in a book more efficiently than that they access digitally (Cornerstone Plan, pillar 3.8, evidence-based teaching and learning).

8. A **commonwealth of knowledge** has been preserved in our print acquisitions over the last centuries. The LC Classifications curate print material as common knowledge, organized according to a distinctively American system that has been selected and shaped by generations of scholars and librarians rather than by the exigencies of commercial search engines. You and I go into the University Library, and we have a chance to find what is and has been known, touched by thousands of hands, in the interests of a commonwealth of knowledge, and on that chance rests our possibility of finding out what may yet be known. This heritage is our responsibility to our students, to our fellow citizens, and to the future.

## II. SITE CONSIDERATIONS for the renovation of Alderman Library

1. **Code compliance** and infrastructure: Alderman must become fully compliant with the current fire code. Compliance could be minimally invasive in the stacks, per the baseline proposed in the DEGW 2007 report: work with the fire marshal early, install sprinklers in ceiling space between the stacks, or, if absolutely required for compliance, reluctantly above them; fire blocks may be required to suppress chimney effect, but we should welcome a huge payoff for retaining the stacks as they structurally support the rest of the building, would be ruinously expensive and awkward to remove, and, as built, are very suitably and desirably human-scaled (Cornerstone Plan, pillar 5). Throughout the building, egress must be expanded, lighting and climate control require complete redesign, finishes need refurbishing, asbestos containing materials must be remediated in habitable spaces, and ADA compliant elevators are desirable even if not required by code. These renovations can be achieved in a number of ways without disturbing the basic structure of the core and the centrality and integrity of the permanent collection.

2. **Volume** of volumes: plan to expand the codex collections by retaining the core and incorporating books more creatively in the rest of Alderman; consider that the renovated building should enshrine, protect, display, and make tangibly accessible to patrons 3.5 million volumes

with an anticipation of more. (Cf. Widener (3.5 million) at Harvard, Regenstein (4.5 million) and Mansueto (3.5 million) at the University of Chicago, Sterling (3.5 million) at Yale and the Bodleian at Oxford (12 million).

3. **Ceiling heights** should (following a primary Jeffersonian design principle) facilitate daylighting and wayfinding but not waste volume with grandiosity.

4. The two voluminous **light courts** should be greened (vertical and roof gardens?), made usable (café and study space?), and used to improve circulation and accessibility of the spaces around them, including the stacks. Consider enclosure. (Cf. the larger British Museum.)

5. **Connections** in the library precinct: making usable the space between Clemons and Alderman is very desirable (cf. University of Chicago's libraries). The terrace between Alderman and Clemons includes an ample stack of space that should be captured for use.

6. **Furnishings:** seating is not a good in itself, as students don't need merely another place to sit on Grounds; what they need from Alderman is a place at the bookshelf and research table that engages them with the permanent collection. Architectural control of light and of the acoustic environment (not the removal of books) is the primary key to engineering the flexibility over time of built space: Alderman can accommodate more classroom and other group meetings with books by building spaces that control audition in order to focus (individual niches), isolate (classrooms), or elevate (façade and entry) attention. Books are a primary material resource in refining the acoustic environment and should be incorporated in every room, wall, divider, enclosure, and corridor: they are a most gorgeous (in aging) and affordable (we already own them) decorative finish, highly insulating, attractive, and meaningfully symbolic. Perceived safety of carrels and other niche spaces can be easily gained by turning desk spaces perpendicular to the exterior walls, retaining light and views. Individual carrels and the ability for individuals to make temporary collections (perhaps even exhibits) of books are highly desirable (Cornerstone Plan, pillars 1 and 3).

7. **Footprint** and "headprint" of Alderman: agreed it should not encroach on the primacy of our first library, the Rotunda (where some presence of the permanent collection in the Dome Room and elsewhere must always be maintained). Footprint, with substantial site engineering for drainage, should expand and open up to the north, and, because scholarship is more central to our mission than athletics, Alderman should dominate the sports fields and courts.

8. **Face the public:** access to and legibility of the permanent collection should be increased several magnitudes. The North Elevation should be recreated by an expanded footprint and represent our commitment to public outreach by providing a new face to the world, a new entry to both Alderman and the University's core, a new orientation towards approaches from the north and west. The library should speak across the road to Carr's Hill in a dignified way at human scale and reconfigure vehicle and pedestrian traffic so an organized, rational, and dignified approach to the Rotunda is created. The entry should provide a view into the permanent collection, offer space for display and interpretation of undergraduate, graduate, and faculty research, and enlist the public in research (Cornerstone Plan, pillar 2, serving the public). The building's North Elevation should express the codex, recognize the larger organization of knowledge as it has evolved from Jefferson's time to our own, and initiate the ceremony of research. A renovated Alderman Library will provide access to our past, present, and future.