

To: The UVA Board of Visitors, President Terry Sullivan, Provost Tom Katsouleas
From: John Unsworth, Dean of Libraries, University Librarian, and Professor of English*
Re: Petition on Alderman Library Renovation dated May 29, 2018
Date: June 2, 2018

I understand that you will receive a petition from some faculty and graduate students asking the Board to “withhold approval of the planned renovations of Alderman Library until losses to its shelving capacity can be brought much closer to zero.” As your University Librarian, I do not recommend acceding to that request.

The concern about shelving comes from a subset of the library’s users who are alarmed by the unavoidable fact that we will lose floor-space for books in a renovation that replaces 10 half-height floors of book storage in the old and new stacks of current Alderman with 5 full-height floors of more mixed-use space. We can’t expand Alderman out, up, or down very much in the renovation, and our print collections—which have long since outgrown Alderman—will continue to grow (at the rate of about 35,000 books per year plus about 10,000 journal issues), so we, like every research library, will have some part of our collection in off-site storage. Harvard has about 60% of its collection in storage; we have about 20%. In our designs we show a renovated Alderman that could hold up to the same size collection as current Alderman, but the petition focuses on shelving and insists that no shelf be lost in that building—including shelving on four locked floors that haven’t been open to users for decades.

We respect the importance of input from all quarters in this project, and it is important for you to know that we have been working diligently with these faculty and graduate students throughout my time here—*see the first attachment listing our engagement efforts*--and sharing far more information about each stage of this process than has been shared by past library administrations involved in the 20 years of planning that led up to our meeting today. My staff have spent hours in meetings and email with one of the two authors of the petition to go over numbers and explain in detail what’s actually planned for this project. The plans have demonstrably evolved in ways that respond to their input, and yet they feel this is not enough. The petitioners also express doubt as to the real need of students for study space in Alderman, and they suggest the university build “student-oriented” spaces somewhere else. Happily, student Board member Brendan Nigro, and Andrew Williams, chair of the student government’s buildings and grounds committee, have stepped up to represent a different perspective, and Brendan has put together *an FAQ for students about the renovation project, here*:

<https://bit.ly/2JcTIZv>

I understand that the faculty concerns expressed in the petition are genuine. For that reason, I requested the addition of my English Department colleague Elizabeth Fowler to the renovation project’s central planning group and to the University Library Committee when I got here, because

* I am a UVA PHD in English (1988), and I spent 1993-2003 here as a member of the English faculty (tenured in 1996), and as the first Director of UVA’s Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities (<http://www.iath.virginia.edu/>). I am now a tenured full professor in the English department, and I taught a course for them this past Spring, on 20th-Century American Bestsellers (<http://bestsellers.lib.virginia.edu/>).

she is trusted by the bibliophiles and she has past training as an architect. She has ably represented the view that we need as much print as possible in the renovated building. *Her recent email to the English Department and the petitioners is the second attachment.* She says, "I hope and trust that [the BOV] hear the petition and the depth of resolve across Grounds as well as among alumni and the public, register it profoundly, but without wrongly concluding that we are rival parties advocating mutually exclusive things. I hope the Board will rightly conclude that the library renovation is an unusually, even uniquely important capital project for the University."

The preparatory work we've accomplished so far for this project will vastly improve our intellectual access to physical collections, beginning with our ongoing inventory of the 2.5M books, journals, government documents, maps, microfilm, Tibetan pechas, Flowerdew cannonballs, and other physical items in the Alderman collections (which constitute about half our total collection). No such inventory has been done since 1938, when the books moved in. We have found tens of thousands of lost books, and corrected tens of thousands of bad catalog records, including one that linked the speeches of Winston Churchill to a catalog record for *The Exorcist*. We have vastly improved the environment for infrequently consulted print in the Ivy Stacks expansion, where we now have what are considered to be 150-year preservation conditions, and plenty of shelving for 30 years of future print collecting. This coming year, we are taking the first floor of Clemons offline in order to put compact shelving throughout, so that during the Alderman renovation we can still have a humanities and social science browsing collection of about half a million books, with some room for the new print we will continue to buy during the renovation years. None of this is work we would have done if we weren't betting on the future of books at UVA, in the humanities and the social sciences.

The current collection of bound print (books and journals) in Alderman is 1.7M items. Our projections for the range of collection size that we could accommodate in a renovated library is from just under a million to just over 1.7M, depending on how much compact shelving we use. And if we add Clemons into the picture, we can add another half a million to those numbers. We will be connecting Clemons and Alderman in the renovation, and I'm comfortable committing to opening with 1.5M books between the two buildings, which is neither excessive nor negligible in a humanities and social science library, and it's not far off our current state. My goal in the renovation project with respect to physical collections is not linear feet of shelving or number of books, though. It is to preserve the capacity of the first four floors of the new construction so that we can increase high-density print collections in Alderman over time if we need to do so. I submit to the Board that we do not have a crisis for the future of print at UVA, and I hope the Board will also see *the third and fourth attachments*, emails from faculty members and University Library Committee members Lise Dobrin, in Anthropology, and Bill Sherman, in Architecture, expressing their views of the renovation project and its value.

The materials being presented to the Buildings and Grounds committee demonstrate that a great deal of thought has gone into this project, and that we are on track to produce a beautiful building that will serve the University's central academic needs for the next hundred years, including ample collections alongside plentiful workspace, with room for students and staff and services and events and processing and shipping and receiving and all the other things libraries do, in addition to providing access to print collections. Let's get started.