Revisiting the Library Storage Literature Review

*This literature review continues work done by Phyllis O’Connor in 1994. This review examines the literature surrounding library storage between the years 1995-2021 in order to identify trends, themes, and ideas that have emerged in the intervening years, as well as confirms themes and ideas that remain the same. Some of these themes include a deeper focus on metadata, collection maintenance after items have been transferred to storage, and issues of preservation. What remains constant is the need for communication with all stakeholders, and the importance library storage plays in providing access to patrons.*

*Keywords: library storage; offsite storage; remote storage; literature review; trends;*

# IntroDUCTION

In 1994, Phyllis O’Connor wrote a library storage literature review praising the literature’s usefulness in priming librarians new to remote storage. While some principles of successful library storage remain the same, such as the importance of “planning, coordination, and attention to detail” and acknowledging that each library has their own needs for a storage facility (P. O’Connor 1994), nearly three decades have passed, and the landscape of library storage has changed greatly:

* Vendors have developed library inventory management software specifically for library storage facilities
* Libraries have fully embraced electronic document delivery as a means of providing access to patrons
* Metadata has been introduced to cataloging departments
* Patron needs and information-seeking behaviors have been influenced by online retail and the digital revolution
* Shared facilities have become much more prevalent among academic libraries.

Because of these changes, this narrative literature review seeks not only to confirm themes found in the O’Connor article, but identify new themes, trends, and ideas in the library storage body of literature from 1995 to 2021. These findings additionally provide a starting place for research into library storage practices.

# RESEARCH METHODS

The literature reviewed in this article was obtained through an exploratory survey of library storage-related literature by the author at the beginning of their library storage career. One round of articles was sourced by leveraging connections with colleagues, who had created their own library storage bibliographies (these titles can be found by searching “library storage” in Google Scholar). Next, articles were selected from the reference lists of previously-obtained articles as gaps in these bibliographies were identified. Following that, remaining articles were identified by performing searches in library catalogs, ProQuest’s Library and Information Science Abstracts (LISA) database, and Google Scholar with the keyword phrases “library storage”, “high-density storage facilities”, “offsite/off-site shelving”, “offsite/off-site storage”, and “remote library storage.” Finally, once the topic sections of this review were determined, additional keywords were specifically added to LISA and Google Scholar searches, such as “microfilm”, “special collections”, “preservation”, “shared print”, and “metadata” for those topics that were less frequently written on. These searches were performed both intentionally and organically over the course of other job-related duties between November 2017 and September 2021, until saturation was reached and search results became less relevant. Out of 160 articles collected, a total of 139 articles were included in this article.

The collected literature covers the years between 1995 and 2021, though a few articles outside those dates are included where necessary to provide context. Literature formats include English-language peer-reviewed articles, monographs, book chapters, dissertations, reports, blog posts, conference proceedings, and webinars. Articles that make observations or claims about library storage practices were included, while those that merely mention the use of library storage without making any claims or observations, or which were about data storage were excluded.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Like the O’Connor article, this review assigns articles to one section each based on their main topic, but many articles cover additional topics beyond the section they are assigned to. Topics were selected by identifying the main subject of each article and categorizing articles by those subjects. This process revealed sections that were not present in the O’Connor article, hinting at the new trends, themes, and ideas discussed in this article. While O’Connor only presents sections on Classic Literature, Planning, Selection, and Implementation, this article will cover these and other, more specific aspects of library storage, such as shared collections, patron access, metadata, and preservation.

A note on terminology: The names for library storage vary greatly throughout the literature. This article will use “library storage” to refer to all manner of closed stack warehouse environments for storing library materials. Additionally, “cooperative storage facilities” will be used to refer to all storage facilities that house collections from multiple institutions. Finally, all references to O’Connor 1994 will be referred to as O’Connor unless otherwise cited.

# Planning and Implementation

The majority of the literature reviewed in O’Connor talks about the planning and implementation of storage facilities, since she notes that widespread consideration of high-density (or the Harvard model) library storage began appearing more frequently only in the 1980s, and at the time of publication, many libraries would be starting their own programs. The article itself seeks to elucidate “the many decisions that must be made in order to implement a successful storage program” (P. O’Connor 1994, 17) concluding that “developing a successful storage program requires a vast amount of planning, coordination, and attention to details” (P. O’Connor 1994, 44).

We still see case studies related to planning as institutions create new library storage programs. Because of the immense differences in each library and storage facility (the size, the purpose, who can use it, how patrons will access materials, ideal workflow for services and staffing), each case study provides an opportunity to learn something new. Throughout the literature about planning, a few themes emerge: clear communication with stakeholders, having a solidified collection policy, preparing materials as much as possible before moving (barcoding, cataloging, de-duplication), and considering as many options as possible (Austin and Seaman 2003; Collins, Dujmic, and Hurlbert 2006; Currie, Corvene, and Stewart-Marshall 2006; DeGeorge and Seaman 2002; Hackman and Loebe 2018; Heaney and Cannon 2012; Nitecki and Kendrick 2001; van Duinkerken, Kaspar, and Sullenger 2018). Finally, Heaney and Cannon (2012) provide a useful book-length case study of planning and implementing high density storage (including from the perspective of the main libraries) at Oxford University, while van Duinkerken and colleagues’ monograph (2018) attempts to approach planning from a more general angle.

# Facilities

The facility itself is what distinguishes library storage from on-campus libraries and from each other in terms of operations: some facilities are high-density, some utilize automatic storage and retrieval systems, some shelving units are moveable. Between articles O’Connor cites (see Cooper 1989; Creaghe and Davis 1986) and today’s literature (Courant and Nielsen 2010; Teper and Atkins 2003), costs of library storage per item appear to be dropping, making high density storage more affordable as time goes on. However, where library storage facilities were once considered a more cost-effective option than building new libraries to accommodate growing collections, some libraries are starting to look for more affordable options than constructing new high density library storage facilities (Austin and Seaman 2003; Giffin, Huhn, and Harland 2019; Chepesiuk 1999). The trend seems to be leaning toward either refurbishing already-existing facilities (Turvey-Welch & Johnson, 2017) or sharing storage facilities with other institutions--either as part of a shared print program, or for individually managed storage (see Shared Storage). Despite this trend, however, institutions are still constructing and opening new library storage facilities, thereby continuing the need for literature about planning, implementation, and construction such as those included in O’Connor (see also Lane and Dill 2001; Scott 2001; Mook and Walker 2004).

Automated storage and retrieval systems (ASRS) are mentioned in O’Connor as an alternative to the Harvard model of library storage. This kind of system persists in facilities and the literature today, the benefits of which include faster turnaround times (Burton and Kattau 2013; Peasley 2012; Sundstrand 2008) and the capability for on-site high-density storage when offsite is not an option (Amrhein and Resetar 2004; Haslam 2005; Shirato, Cogan, and Yee 2001). These types of storage facilities seem better suited toward smaller storage collections—the hundreds of thousands instead of the millions one finds in offsite library storage—and additionally have further technological concerns to contend with (Kovalcik and Villalobos 2019; Seaman 2004). Like with offsite high density library storage, these articles cite the importance of communicating these benefits to users, and making sure the process of requesting and receiving materials is as seamless as possible. With these benefits, however, come drawbacks, such as power outages and the logistics of collection maintenance.

More generally the literature contains the environmental scans/surveys of library storage in North America and beyond. The Association of Research Libraries (ARL) has published three SPEC Kits: 164, 242, and 295 (Deardorff and Aamot 2006; Reed-Scott, Merrill-Oldham, and Association of Research Libraries. 1999; Steel 1990) that provide an executive summary and results of surveys of libraries’ storage facilities and policies in addition to supporting documentation. Aside from the SPEC kits, there are other articles and reports that describe the state of library storage and forecasts collections trends that will impact them, particularly electronic resources (Payne 2007; Shenton 2005). Facilities overviews (Block 2000; DeGeorge and Seaman 2002; Dickinson 2000; Haslam 2005; Laskowski 2016a; Snowman 2005; Wright, Jilovsky, and Anderson 2012; Seaman 2003; 2004) create a picture of how facilities are run, from ingestion to circulation. Topics that are less-frequently written about appear in the literature as well, such as safety concerns working in library storage (S. A. Atkins 2005); disaster preparedness specifically in a storage context (“Preparing for the Worst: Disaster Planning for High Density Storage” 2012; see also Robertson 2011); and the efficiency of the Harvard model compared to other models (Mitchell 2017; Mitchell and Loo 2017) , all of which present opportunities for further research.

# Providing Access and Determining User Impact

The biggest impact of implementing library storage is that access will look different from what patrons are used to. In O’Connor, we see mentions of the “inconvenience” and the inevitable lack of browsing that patrons face when items are moved offsite. This concern has not gone away in the interim. Patrons still need to place requests for the items they need, they must wait, and they are not able to browse (Seeds 2000). In order to decrease this impact, it is even more important for materials to be well cataloged with sufficient metadata (Hazen 2000) and provided to patrons in a timely manner (Hulse 2001).

Document delivery is one method of circumventing long wait times. While photocopying services were available in O’Connor, document delivery as a service has expanded, first using Ariel document delivery software, and now using services like OCLC’s Article Exchange and ILLiad’s Odyssey protocol. Document delivery is even a standard function of integrated library systems like Alma. Hulse (2001), Kruger (2003), and Norton & Vardaman (2005) write about the potential for document delivery out of storage—especially for remote learners—before it was a well-established service, but Sewell (2013) shows how these suggestions in action can work successfully with document delivery providing the majority of access to offsite materials. Hulse does point out, however, that “facsimile” delivery isn’t always an option for certain materials, such as archival boxes, rare books, and non-print media.

Therefore, another part of providing access to offsite collections is the logistics of delivering the requested items to the patron. At the time of writing the O’Connor article, patrons were expected to accept the longer turnaround times. As patrons have become more accustomed to quick turnaround times from other avenues, however, the time it takes to retrieve items from offsite becomes more of an obstacle to providing quality service. Libraries may wish to take cues from UPS, Amazon, and other logistics companies (Lugg 2011) or they may apply other logistics principles, such as keeping high-demand objects in closer reach, or decreasing the amount of steps between Points A and B (Reynolds et al. 2020) and using user expectations to inform delivery time goals. They should also take geography and courier schedules into account (Kelsey and Kendrick 2001).

When it comes to determining actual user impact of this perceived lack of access, there still isn’t much definitive literature published. The oft-cited Barclay (2010) article “The Myth of Browsing” discusses user impact, but is only theoretical. The studies that do exist, each with their own limitations, suggest that circulation stays the same or goes down after moving materials to storage (Hill, Madarash-Hill, and Hayes 2000; Maddox Abbott 2020b; Peper 2008) but that follows the general trend of decreased circulation numbers in all libraries. This, unfortunately, makes it difficult to capture the true impact moving items offsite has on user access.

# Project Moves and Faculty Buy-In

Much of the contemporary literature surrounding library storage comes in the form of the moving project case studies, which exist on a smaller scale than the wholesale collection moves associated with the opening of a new facility, that appear in O’Connor. These projects additionally have a distinct number of items to be moved, unlike the ongoing transfer of material offsite as general collection maintenance. These case studies cover myriad topics from moving/transfer best practices (Lingle and Robinson 2009; Marien and Mundt 2015; Poehlmann 2016; Reeves and Schmidt 2011; van Duinkerken and Romano 2016), to the challenges of maintaining quick turnaround times (Guimaraes and Collins 2018; Knight 2007; Thibodeau 2010; Walker 2008), alternatives to offsite library storage facilities such as commercial storage (Burton and Kattau 2013; Vargas 2005), and strategies to obtain stakeholder buy-in for these moves (Dietsch, Cryer Heet, and Thibodeau 2015; Lucker 2012; Peasley 2012; Schroeder, Martorana, and Granatino 2013). Each facility is different, and the circumstances surrounding each move is different, so there are valuable lessons to be learned from this type of literature. Most attempt to distill generalized takeaways more applicable to other institutions. Some major common points suggest:

* Seeking out faculty input in the selection process
* Communicating with all stakeholders at all points of the transfer process
* Considering patron access during and after the move
* Reading the literature to familiarize oneself with common snags
* Starting planning as soon as possible and being flexible in the face of changes

These suggestions also appear in the O’Connor article as applicable the wholesale collection moves.

# Collection Maintenance

In the past, newly constructed storage facilities were seen as opportunities for opening up shelving on-campus. In fact, the O’Connor review characterizes library storage solely as a form of on-site collection maintenance. The issues of selecting items to be transferred offsite have not changed much since 1994, and today’s literature mostly discusses looking at statistics, such as:

* Circulation history (including interlibrary loan),
* Age
* Faculty input
* Number of copies (Austin 2002; Britton and Renaud 2013; Carpenter and Horrell 2001; Chen 2016; Powell 1998; 2001; Tabacaru and Pickett 2013; van Duinkerken, Kaspar, and Sullenger 2018; Jones and Fisher 2004)

or large spans of material that clear up space quickly, such as serial runs (Hazen 2000), duplicates (Shlomo 2003), or any combination thereof. Though, more recently, arguments can be made that relying on usage is not always enough to clear enough space on-site (Payne 2014; Johnson 2021). It is generally recommended that libraries codify these criteria into a collection policy. The literature in O’Connor mentions selecting items in poor condition to go into storage where they are less likely to experience extra damage, and Atkins and Weible’s (2007) study of whether items were less likely to go missing after going to library storage, found that the number of requests going unfilled due to items being missing went down significantly.

O’Connor makes no mention of collection maintenance after books are accessioned in to storage, but these facilities have rapidly filled up. Instead of building new facilities, some library practitioners are discussing the unique challenges of deaccessioning materials from library storage, such as filling gaps and getting a complete picture of the collection (Bravender and Long 2011; McHale et al. 2017; Tanase and Bluhm-Stieber 2004; Ward and Aagard 2008). Conversely, Hickey (1999) argues in favor of restoring stored materials to the main stacks if usage increases. This issue is also mentioned in the O’Connor review, mostly as a way to appease dissatisfied patrons and rectify bad selection decisions, but has not been discussed since. This sentiment is also echoed in the Association for Library Collections & Technical Services’ *Guide to Review of Library Collections: Preservation, Storage, and Withdrawal* (2002).

Collection maintenance is ultimately made easier by the availability of library storage specific software, either developed in house, or commercially through CaiaSoft or GFA (van Duinkerken, Kaspar, and Sullenger 2018).

# Metadata and Cataloging in Remote Storage

O’Connor’s review only mentions changing the catalog as a necessary part of implementing a storage program. Cataloging and metadata as a whole have become more complex in the intervening years, which has yet to be truly reflected in the literature. Case studies and articles mostly about access will highlight the importance of good metadata and a good catalog when items are sent to library storage, but articles specifically about the metadata/cataloging needs and practices of library storage are harder to come by. Not only does good metadata allow patrons to access items held offsite, but it also assists in collection maintenance necessary in the moving of collections offsite (Beisler and Ragains 2010; Ilik 2012; Laskowski and Lenkart 2015) and prevents having to undertake expensive catalog cleanup projects down the road (Laskowski 2016b). Most articles in this category mention the necessity of and challenges associated with de-duping before items are stored.

Cataloging and metadata are also essential for the function of cooperative facilities and shared collections (Downey 2012; van Ballegooie and Borie 2019). The literature surrounding these issues provide practical examples of what other metadata and cataloging departments have done, such as dividing up an uncataloged collection into priority groups (Beisler and Ragains 2010) or prioritizing print-only titles and complete serials runs (Ilik 2012), and making sure that shared collections are as consistently cataloged across all institutions as possible (Downey 2012; van Ballegooie and Borie 2019).

# Preservation and Special Formats

The preservation environment of library storage is mentioned in O’Connor as one of the considerations to take into account when selecting materials to be moved offsite. Today’s literature expands upon that idea. One of the major benefits of library storage facilities is their capacity for ideal preservation conditions—cooler temperatures, low relative humidity, and security. Last copy depositories, dark archives, and shared print are also forms of storage-related preservation (Murray-Rust 2009). Most preservation conversations will happen in the planning/building phase of a new facility (see Baker and McCarthy 2006). Conway (2001) and Murray-Rust (2009) outline the ideal preservation environment, and Mosbo (2013) provides a case study of what can happen when those preservations elements fail in a storage environment. It’s because of HVAC failings like in Mosbo, that Christoffersen (1996) writes a thesis outlining how buildings with the proper construction can provide passive climate control to storage facilities in place of machinery.

Literature surrounding special formats in library storage tend to skew toward archives and special collections since, along with increased security, library storage facilities’ preservation and conservation potential is high, making them ideal places to keep archives. Articles in this category discuss the unique challenges of storing special collections (Carlson 2014; LaFogg and Weideman 2001; Priddle and McCann 2015; Sundstrand 2011).

For government documents collections, an article from Wilhite & Haygood (2020) outlines how they moved their government documents collection offsite, and the seemingly endless roadblocks they encountered. This article pairs well with Beisler and Ragains (2010) who used a “yellow-card system” for cataloging their uncataloged GovDocs collections. This method, in which staff divided a collection up into sections that were more manageable to catalog would additionally work well for microfiche and pamphlets collections. Government documents in library storage also have their own collection maintenance issues, due to collection size and legal constraints of the Federal Depository Library Program (Mix 2010). Finally, microfilm generally do well in standard library storage conditions, excluding more flammable materials that need careful handling and cold storage (Murray-Rust 2009).

# Shared Storage

There have existed various manners of cooperative storage facilities in North America since at least the 1940s, when the New England Depository opened. Outside of North America, valuable English-language literature about cooperative storage has emerged from Australia and New Zealand (Calvert 2019; Genoni 2007; Jilovsky and Genoni 2008; 2014; Renwick 2013), Asia (Sidorko and Lee 2014), and Europe (Mathisen 2005; Nicholson and Dumbleton 2005; Niederer 2016; O’Connor, Wells, and Collier 2002; Kempf 2005). We see a rise in the number of shared print programs, and by extension cooperative storage facilities, as acquisitions budgets are slashed or re-allocated, on-site library space becomes more and more necessary for other uses, and offsite space is running out with no funding for—or feasibility of—new construction (Clement 2012; Maddox Abbott 2020a). Payne (2014) predicts that shared storage facilities “will play an important role as the primary sites for long-term retention…of vital print volumes.”

In the literature, many of the issues we saw in O’Connor—ownership of materials, fiscal responsibility, governance, perceptions of collection management—still exist. Today’s literature provides case studies for specific cooperative programs, such as Ontario’s Keep@Downsview, Colorado’s PASCAL, and the Northeastern Ohio Regional Library Depository, and the challenges they faced during their transition to shared collections such as developing new collection policies, handling concerns of governance and ownership, ensuring accurate metadata, and the necessity of immaculate communication (Agee and Naper 2007; Bailey and Radnor 2009; Heyer-Gray et al. 2009; Horava et al. 2017; Maskell, Soutter, and Oldenburg 2010; P. O’Connor and Smith 2008; Sandler 2012; Valdes and van Duinkerken 2021; Oud 2001). Articles also describe newer challenges in shared collection maintenance, such as weeding (Gillies and Stephenson 2012), and the storage facility’s intersections with digital collections (Maskell, Soutter, and Oldenburg 2010). We also still see articles outlining the benefits of collaborative storage, including general literature about the rising trend of shared collections and characteristics of such collections (Bridegam 2001; Clement 2012; S. O’Connor and Jilovsky 2009; Payne 2005; Weeks and Chepesiuk 2003), as well as discussions of shared storage on the national scale both within and outside of North America (Fielden et al. 2005; Genoni 2007; Gherman 2007; Jilovsky and Genoni 2008; 2014; Kempf 2005; Kisling Jr., Haas, and Cenzer 2000; Reilly, Jr. 2003; Sullenger 2017; Yoon, Oh, and Kim 2008). We also see discussions of the different models of cooperative storage facilities:

* Retain-in-Place, where each member of a consortium stores their retention commitments at their own locations (Genoni 2013; Crist and Michaels 2013).
* Collocated , where each member of a consortium sends their retention commitments to a central location (Crist and Michaels 2013). The collections may or may not have shared ownership.
* “Last Copy” storage (repositories or depositories): storing a single physical run of a journal title or single copy of a monograph to be shared between institutions in case electronic copies become unavailable (Maskell, Soutter, and Oldenburg 2010; Wright, Jilovsky, and Anderson 2012). These physical copies are usually not circulated, and are instead meant to be archival.
* Resource-in-Common storage, where all participating libraries de-duplicate their collection before sending materials to the cooperative storage facility, sharing one copy of a resource—usually low-use—among them (van Duinkerken and Romano 2016). This is a strategy that can be utilized when cooperative storage space is running out later on.

Literature continues to cite clear communication, well-defined boundaries, equal or equitable participation among all institutions, and trust as the biggest factors of success.

It is also worth pointing out a gap in the literature surrounding transitioning away from cooperative storage, apart from Turvey-Welch & Johnson’s 2017 exploration of the challenges of collection maintenance and management after leaving a cooperative storage facility.

# Conclusion

Library storage does not fit into one section of a library but instead involves every aspect of a library system from collections to cataloging to communications to conservation, therefore the topics in library storage literature are plentiful. While the topics of moving, planning and selection are well-established, both in contemporary literature and the literature reviewed in the O’Connor article, the changes in the library storage ecosystem provide several opportunities for research. The maintenance of storing irregular formats and special collections, determining user impact, the logistics of better turnaround times and operations, and the complexities and unique challenges of cataloging for storage are only a few areas that would benefit from further research.

In addition to identifying new trends and topics that have appeared since the O’Connor article, this literature review underscores the ideas found in O’Connor: the need for constant communication with all manner of stakeholder—internal and external, the importance of accurate and clear metadata, and the role it plays in maintaining access to large library collections.

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