

Moving the New York University Abu Dhabi Library

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Abstract

Using Steven Carl Fortriede's method in *Moving Your Library: Getting the Collection from Here to There* as a framework, we successfully moved the New York University Abu Dhabi Library from a library and offsite storage facility to one new library. While we generally followed Fortriede's advice, we deviated from his plan in three important ways: we created a color-coding system for the boxes, which eliminated the need to keep the boxes in strict order; we integrated two collections during the move (rather than before); and we created phantom books to create space for lengthy multi-volume sets in the smaller collection.

Keywords

Library move, collection move, project management, library relocation, collection relocation

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Introduction

In August 2014, the New York University Abu Dhabi (NYUAD) Library moved from its temporary location in the capital city of the United Arab Emirates, downtown Abu Dhabi, to its permanent location on nearby Saadiyat Island. Our collection consisted of approximately 39,000 volumes, housed in two collections of approximately 26,000 volumes and 13,000 each. We also moved a limited number of periodicals and CDs, and about 2,000 DVDs. This article discusses our adaptation of the method described by Steven Carl Fortriede in *Moving Your Library: Getting the Collection from Here to There* (2010). We created a color-coding system for the boxes, which eliminated the need to keep the boxes in strict order throughout the move; we integrated two collections during the move (rather than before); and we created phantom books to create space for lengthy multi-volume sets located in the smaller collection.

NYUAD's first students arrived in fall of 2010 to a temporary campus in downtown Abu Dhabi while we awaited construction of our permanent campus on Saadiyat Island, slated to be the cultural capital of Abu Dhabi with institutions such as Louvre Abu Dhabi. The capacity of the temporary library was quite small, approximately 10,000, and was about 9,000 square feet. Upon opening, we had well under 10,000 volumes, but as we added materials, we added additional storage space for books in a nearby residential tower ("the Annex").

Additionally, we increased the capacity of the original library by purchasing two additional ranges of three bays each for books all the DVD shelving. By summer of 2014, we held approximately 26,000 books in the Annex and 13,000 book in the main library, plus a limited number of periodicals and CDs, and about 2,000 DVDs.

Specialized library moving companies do not exist in the UAE. Further, since the entire university was moving, the decision was made to include the library as one of the major groups that would have its own dedicated team from the moving company hired by the university for planning and executing the move. However, this meant that library staff had no input on selection of movers and very little input on the Request for Proposals. On the other hand, because we had our own

dedicated team for planning and executing the move, we were able to work closely with the moving company.

As with any major endeavor, many people were involved, and there were many moving parts. I, as the Access and Public Services Librarian, was tasked with heading the relocation of the collection from the library's side, with support from the Access Services Team, particularly the Access Services Supervisor. The Library Administration Manager served as our liaison with the main university entities planning the move and worked on logistics for the rest of the library (e.g. equipment, staff offices). Since the library was part of the relocation of the entire university, our move was scheduled by the moving company and the university administration.

After extensive research, we selected Steven Carl Fortriede's (2010) *Moving Your Library: Getting the Collection from Here to There* as our principal guide. Fortriede's detailed instructions include advice for many different scenarios (e.g. hiring library movers, doing it yourself, staying open, closing, etc.). I highly recommend this book as the basis for moving your library.

Literature review

In addition to *Moving Your Library*, several librarians have written both general and specific guides for library moves and collection shifts. While moves and shifts are different, many of the logistical challenges are similar, so librarians planning moves and shifts would be wise to consult the literature in both areas.

Elizabeth Chamberlain Habich's *Moving Library Collections: A Management Handbook* (2010) is a hefty tome at 400 pages, compared to less than 200 pages in Fortriede. Included is a table detailing 200 library moves reported in the literature from 1929 to 2006 and an annotated bibliography of sources discussing move and move-adjacent issues, such as publicizing the new library, shrink-wrapping collections, and more. As one would expect with such a lengthy work, Habich details numerous different options for measuring the collection, calculating growth, and preparing a collection layout plan. Also discussed in detail are procedures for preparing an RFP and conducting the move with library staff, students, and volunteers. While the book references

spreadsheets available for download from the Habich's website, as of this writing the site appears to be down. The ability to download spreadsheets and other source material referenced in the Fortriede book is one of the strongest points in its favor. Habich describes her work as "the comprehensive guide to planning and managing library collections moves that I wanted when planning our move" (2010, xii), but the level of detail can seem overwhelming.

The University of Oregon previously hosted (and has now archived) an excellent web guide to undertaking shifts in libraries by Shirien Chappell (2006), *Moving Library Collections: Planning Shifts of Library Collections*. Chappell lays out detailed instructions for measuring, laying out, and practicing collection shifts. While the focus is not on moves but rather on shifts, it is comprehensive, with images that clarify instructions, hyperlinks throughout the document to other sections, and a helpful glossary at the end. Many of the steps discussed and much of the advice given will apply to library moves. A light-hearted but helpful article from Richard Snow (2005), "How Not to Move a Library: Misadventures in Moving", provides several tips regarding approaches to avoid, such as hiring local, non-specialized library movers, mobilizing too many library staff, following different approaches when measuring the collection, re-organizing library staff before rather than after the move. While not the thorough step-by-step guide of Fortriede, Habich or Chappell, nonetheless it is worth reading this article, if for no other reason than moral support.

Adapting Fortriede's method to our needs

Measuring the shelves - waypoints and phantom books

Fortriede advocates dividing the collection into sections separated by waypoints. "A waypoint is a defined spot in a collection designated by the call number of the book to be filed immediately after the waypoint" (Fortriede 2010, 35). Flags representing the waypoint are inserted as the books are packed at the beginning of each section, and destination shelves may be labelled with the waypoint call number. In this way, the collection is divided into manageable pieces and any errors that occur are limited to that section. As the saying goes, how do you eat an elephant?

One bite at a time.

We decided to set waypoints at the start of each range of four to six bays in the Annex (our larger collection). This is a somewhat arbitrary decision that libraries should make depending on their situation. We chose to set waypoints based on the collection in the Annex because we were going to move it first, and it would be easier to explain these waypoints to the movers. We created an additional waypoint at the start of the N call number range because we decided to set those shelves at five per bay rather than six, since many art books are tall. Thus, we needed to know exactly where the N range started. We considered doing this for TR (photography) as well, but decided to change these on the fly since our photography collection would only account for only about 15 shelves.

Fortriede advocates integrating collections before moving whenever possible, but this was not feasible for us given our space constraints. He also suggests interfiling while unpacking both collections, or a complicated system for unpacking all collections onto the shelves, then interfiling on center shelves. Neither approach sounded reasonable to us. So, we moved the larger collection first and the smaller one second.

The smaller collection was actually comprised of one main collection that ran from A-Z in the Library of Congress call numbers and a smaller collection of materials from the Loeb Classical Library which were shelved separately but would be integrated into the collection during the move. Books in the Loeb Classical Library run throughout the call number range, but are concentrated in the B (Philosophy) and P (Literature) call numbers. To accommodate this collection and other multi-volume sets, we measured any multi-volume sets that were longer than one foot and inserted a phantom book in the Annex to represent this extra space. Phantom books were repurposed label boxes, made of cardboard, the size of a piece of paper and approximately half an inch thick that had been labeled “leave XX shelves empty.” That way, when the Annex collection was being unpacked, extra space could be left to accommodate these longer sets of books. In hindsight, it would have been worth the additional time to carefully consider not only multi-volume sets, but also sets that

were shelved directly next to each other and include those in the phantom books exercise. The PA section in particular was bursting at the seams when we integrated the books from the Loeb collection.

Now in technicolor

We assigned each section a color and printed labels for each section in the designated color.¹ Some colors were striped to aid in differentiation. Unfortunately some of the colors, while different on screen, were too similar once printed. So we further differentiated colors by adding black dots on one set as necessary. Having assigned each section a color, the boxes only had to be placed in order shortly before unpacking. Additionally, since our movers were mostly functionally illiterate, at least in English, using colors and numbers allowed them to put the boxes in order independently.

We also used the colors when creating the collection layout map, of which we printed two large copies to be posted in the new library and made several smaller copies for hand-held use.

Fortriede does not advocate for moving with boxes. Rather, his preferred method is moving with custom-designed library trucks (Fortriede 2010, 28–32). We did not have this option. Books are packed into boxes in call number order, from left to right, with the call number facing the packer. We found it necessary to add packing material to the boxes to ensure the books did not move out of call number order. Fortriede calls for the books to be kept in order at all times. We were able to avoid this by introducing the color system.

When conducting a move using by packing the books in boxes, Fortriede suggests placing pockets on each box to hold the box number so that the box may be reused. Our moving company was not interested in doing this, so instead we used labels. During early testing, we discovered that the labels, which initially adhered to the box, would peel off over the course of several hours. So, we taped over each label with clear packing tape. A mistake we made was when, during unpacking, we applied the labels to the shelves. It made it easy to see that the boxes had been unpacked in order at a glance, but the labels were extremely difficult to remove from the shelves. In fact, some

are still there two years later. If I had it to do over again, I would not adhere the labels to the shelves shelves at all. Our team monitored the packing and unpacking so closely that this additional check was not necessary.

Our moving company supplied the boxes and estimated that we needed 2,400. 80% of the boxes were “small,” approximately two feet long, just over one foot wide and one foot tall. The remaining were larger boxes, intended for the art and photography books. In hindsight, it would have been better to allocate an even larger percentage of boxes to the small size and just a handful to the larger, as most of the oversize books fit by simply reorienting the box (packing along the width rather than the length). We were also fortunate to be able to rapidly acquire more boxes if the need arose, since other moves within the university were going on at the same time.

All hands on deck! Involving the entire team

As Fortriede explains, involving the appropriate amount of library staff in the move is crucial (2010, 6–9). He suggests a planning committee of one to eight members (2010, 6). We tried convening a group of five members, but eventually decided instead on a team of two members to plan the move, with periodic updates for feedback to the director and all library staff.

During the actual move of the collections we involved all library staff members, about twenty people. There were several teams of four library staff members each. One library staff member would monitor the packing efforts of each packing team (there were two teams from the moving company packing at any one time). Another staff member was available to fill in if/when necessary for each team (this person ended up peeling and preparing the box labels). A third staff member served as “language liaison” -- this staff member was fluent in the language(s) spoken by the moving teams and could answer questions in that language. The majority of the workers from the moving company, who did the packing, spoke minimal English and could not read English. The Planning Committee Move co-leader and I served as the main supervisor for the location and could make any and all decisions necessary. The move co-leader and I worked the entire day exclusively on the move, while the rest of the library staff worked from 1.5 to 4 hours per day on the move.

At the destination, our setup was similar during the initial move of the first, larger collection: we had one library staff member monitoring the unpacking efforts of each team, someone available to fill in, a “language liaison,” and a supervisor. Because the new library was substantially larger than the two original libraries, we ended up having three to four teams from the moving company unpacking at a time. We found that one library staff member could monitor two teams from the moving company who were unpacking materials. Staff from the moving company unpacked boxes directly onto the shelves, with guidance from library staff. The supervisor on site checked to ensure that all boxes from the relevant section had been received and placed in order before unpacking began. We also checked about half-way through each section to adjust the fill rates as necessary. For the first few colored sections, we assigned a library staff member to shelf-read after the boxes were unpacked. When we found that the books were indeed arriving in order, we ceased this practice.

When we moved the smaller collection that was to be integrated into the larger one, we had an additional role of “reshelver.” Well before the move, all library staff (including the director) took part in a reshelving exercise designed to note each employee’s speed and accuracy when shelving. Employees who rated highest in speed and accuracy were selected to be “reshelvers.” Instead of the staff from the move company unpacking directly onto the shelves, they unpacked onto book trucks. We were fortunate to have over 70 book trucks available, so did not run out. Then, the reshelvers were responsible for interfiling the books from the smaller collection onto the main shelves.

The moving company had additional teams of staff who removed the books from the Annex or library, moved the books to the loading area, loaded and unloaded the moving trucks, and assembled and broke down boxes for re-use. These tasks were done without library staff supervision.

A few days before the move, the Access Services Supervisor and I presented the plan to the entire library staff, which included Access Services, Acquisitions, Reference Librarians, Library

Administration, and Academic Technology. The orientation reviewed roles, demonstrated proper packing techniques, explained the color-coded collection layout map, and went over the timeline. While most staff worked with books and were familiar with LC call numbers, the Academic Technology team was not and so were assigned roles that did not rely on their knowledge of call numbers. Staff were encouraged to ask any and all questions they may have had.

Many felt that we were “overstaffing” and would not need the number of people that we had assigned to supervise the move, and they were proved right. However, I was pleased to have assigned more people than necessary and to be able to let people go to do other work, rather than assigning fewer than necessary and needing to call for emergency help. Indeed, it was fortuitous on a few shifts that we had assigned the number of people that we had, since a few people fell sick and/or had car trouble and were late or missed their shifts entirely.

Later, when the move began, an additional (very brief) orientation and packing demonstration was conducted for the moving company’s employees. This orientation was a collaboration between the moving company manager, myself, and the language liaisons who translated on the fly to the workers doing the packing to ensure that they understood exactly what was to be done. Library staff were there to ensure that the moving company employees packed the books in the correct order, facing in the correct direction, and applied the correct colored labels to boxes (that is, in order and in the right color). Library staff worked alongside the movers and everyone took breaks each morning and afternoon, enjoying snacks paid for by the library. This spirit of collegiality, engendered by the library’s close collaboration with the moving company’s supervisor, went quite far in ensuring a positive outcome.

Most library staff members had smart phones and an SMS group was created to allow for quick and easy mass communication. We used What’sApp, (“WhatsApp” 2016) a popular, free app for Apple and Android devices that allows users to send messages over wifi or data rather than via text. This SMS group has endured and is used for both fun announcements, like snacks in the break room, and serious announcements, like a bad weather warning. Another option could be

Yammer (“Yammer” 2016), which is like Facebook, but for companies.

Preparing the new library

As Fortriede suggests (2010, 83–84), we prepared the new library for the move by cleaning the shelves and labeling the shelves with the appropriate section color on each bay and flags where waypoints began. Fortriede suggests creating blocks that are custom-cut to the length of the space necessary at the end of each shelf (2010, 81). However, we had too many different fill rates to make the custom-cut board practical. We instead chose to put a piece of masking tape on each shelf to indicate the fill rate. In this way, it would be crystal clear to the unpackers where they should stop. After the move, it was very difficult to remove all these pieces of tape, and if I had to do it over again I would use painter’s tape instead of masking tape, because it removes more easily.

Lessons learned

Overall, the move to the new library on Saadiyat Island went very smoothly, but there were a few issues and course corrections along the way. As we finished packing sections, we wrote down the number of boxes on one sheet of paper so that we could verify at the destination that all boxes were accounted. The moving company did this as well, but they counted overall boxes per moving truck, not per section, which we felt left too large a margin for error. To enable the person at the receiving end to verify, we also took pictures of the paper and sent it back and forth via email and SMS.

The moving company brought the boxes in to the library in no order whatsoever. They then grouped them by color, then put the boxes in order. Library staff confirmed each color was complete before beginning to unpack the books. As Fortriede explains, it’s important to stack the boxes in the order in which you will unpack them (filling either from the beginning or the end) and no more than four boxes high (2010, 117–18): so, in our case, the first stack had 1, 2, 3, 4, the next 5, 6, 7, 8 and so on. Books were unpacked directly onto the shelves.

When we reached approximately halfway in each section, the supervisor on duty did a quick calculation to adjust the fill rate if necessary. In most cases, it was not necessary, but in some, we

realized that we needed to either leave the shelves a bit emptier or a bit more full than originally planned. While the sections had started out as a standard four to 6 bays, in the new library they ranged from ten to fifty bays each, due to the differences between shelving in the Annex and the library, and the different fill rates assigned to different call number ranges. By performing this check at the halfway point, we further minimized any problems: adjustments were spread over 30+ shelves rather than only the final five or so.

After all the books were shelved in the new library, we found one small area of two to three shelves that had to be completely reshelved, because they were totally out of order. Otherwise the books stayed in the correct order, which was our main concern and worry.

Conclusion and recommendations

Libraries conducting a move, whether by professional movers or independently, will be well served by consulting Fortriede's *Moving Your Library*. Additionally, I suggest that those in charge of the move consider implementing colored labels, performing checks halfway through unpacking each section, and, if integrating collections after the move rather than before, introducing phantom books to account for large multi-volume sets. These relatively small adjustments to the plan as detailed by Fortriede will help the move run more smoothly for everyone, and save time and effort particularly for the library team.

When initially tasked with moving the library, I was concerned about the move and integrating two collections. Ultimately though, with the strong support of the entire library team from the director onwards and an excellent moving company, our move finished in about half the time we originally estimated, with minimal errors. It was an experience I'll never forget and a good opportunity for the library team to bond. I am grateful to everyone who helped make it a success.

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Notes

¹ After the labels were printed, I learned of the website ColorBrewer (Brewer 2016), which provides up to nine different colors in a variety of hues. While designed for map making, it would have been very helpful for identifying enough different colors to create the collection layout.