Evolving Library Collections

- Deemphasizing physical collections
- Creating partnerships
- Focusing on unique collections
- Developing digital collections
The changes in library space are both a cause and function of changing library collections. As you heard from Jill, more libraries are opening fully functional offsite facilities to hold larger portions of their collections as circulation number continue to decrease.

We have begun deemphasizing our physical collections both for the sake of space and because so much information is now available digitally and through other institutions.

With the growing availability of digital resources and the opportunity to use material held at other institutions, libraries now have the opportunity to focus on what can set them apart – what unique resources and research opportunities can they provide to their community.

Infographic: http://librarynext.gatech.edu/
At this point, it should be obvious to all of us following the Sorrells renovation that modern libraries are less about stacks and more about space. To a large extent, libraries have been able to manage this transition by emphasizing digital resources over physical ones and by reducing the number of easy to access, commonly held title in our collections.

Of course, some users still prefer physical material. Many libraries are experimenting with alternate methods of access and retrieval. As Jill discussed, many new offsite facilities are fully staffed and offer reading rooms – so books stored there are no less accessible than books still stored in the main library.

But how, when books are housed offsite in closed stacks, do we still allow for the serendipity of research? Other libraries are offering tools like virtual shelf browsing so users can explore holdings through methods other than catalog searching. John Hopkins is one of the many universities experimenting with virtual shelf functionality in their catalog.
The changing size and treatment of our physical collections has been made possible not only through the availability of digital resources, but through the creation of consortia and partnerships that expand the availability of material held at other institutions.

As you can see from the chart borrowed from BorrowDirect, cross institutional lending has been steadily increasing over the last 16 years, as institutions narrow their collecting focuses.
While these types of library consortia are not a new development, the depth of service provided by many of them is.

For example, members of the Big10 Academic Alliance, including the University of Chicago have access to each other's collections through YouBorrow, but are also able to enter discounted licensing agreements with Springer Journals and Web of Science, for example. They also opened a shared print repository for journal backfiles at Indiana University, allowing other institutions to remove the volumes from their collections.
The development of collaborations and consortia has also gone beyond traditional lending arrangements. They have also been integral in the development of tools and services. For example, both Northwestern and University of Chicago are members of “Chicago Collections.” Chicago Collections was created as a central repository for information on archival collections about Chicago, in Chicago, but it now provides members not only with a place to share information about their collections, but also with a digital collections platform, access to workshops, participation in grants, and assistance with metadata generation.
Thanks to the increased availability of traditional print material through partnerships and other avenues, many institutions have begun to focus on their unique collections and more heavily feature them. This includes not only archives and special collections, but areas of collecting focus.

Northwestern highlights all of these areas on their main page – having both a section for “Distinct Collections” and “Only at Northwestern.” They name their transportation library, their archives and special collections, and a number of other specialized libraries and collections on campus.

In the same vein, University of Chicago lists both notable collections and information on their special collecting areas, such as their Map Collection and East Asian Collection.
In concert with a growing focus on unique and specialized collections, many libraries are placing increasing emphasis on building digital collections. This includes growing digitization programs, development of new access tools, and strongly highlighting those digital collections.

For example, Duke offers the ability to search their digital collections via the library’s main search tool. They also advertise their efforts through a regularly updated and comprehensive blog.
As many of you know, CMU has long provided access to our digitized collections, and we are continuing to look for ways to improve our tools. We recently migrated to new version of ArchivalWare and the archive is also in the process of developing an online exhibit for the upcoming 50th anniversary of the merger of Mellon Institute and Carnegie Tech.
Because of the growing emphasis on unique collections and digital collections, the profile of digitization programs seems to be growing as well. The majority of universities we looked at highlight their digitization programs in some way. Many also include the ability to convert AV assets in house, and many provide access to these services to students and staff.

Emory’s Digitization and Digital Curation department has its own Lib Guide, and shares specifications on their scanners. They also offer avenues for students, faculty, and staff to suggest and propose projects.
Improving access to collections is hugely important – when collections are moving to closed stacks, and we build larger digital collections – access tools are essential.

All of the institutions we looked at have some type of system for digital collections – some more comprehensive than others and some larger than others. Several, including Duke, are in the process of migrating too and launching new systems. All institutions also featured their digital collections prominently and made them easy to find.

Where there's still along way to go in this area, it's clear that institutions are placing resources and energy in this area.
Several people mentioned the need for more offsite staff, more personnel for collections management and maintenance, including stacks maintenance, more circulation and IT staff. There was also a broad desire to improve our access tools through user experience design and usability testing and a larger R&D programs.

Finally, there was a call for the development of a comprehensive collection development policy.