

Fig. 1 This photo is from 1925 to 1931 - the period when the white wooden entrance in the background served as the sole entrance to the Grand Reading Room. The 1931 South Tower addition replaced this with another single entrypoint.

Special Series

SIBRARIES

INTRODUCTION

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It is my great pleasure to introduce a new multi-issue SOURCE series on Library spaces.

The majority of these spaces will be familiar: branches offering rows and rows of materials, public service points, study and collaboration spaces, technology and computer labs, and some of the most familiar architecture on campus. There are many spaces less familiar, though, including closed rare collections, collection processing and conservation areas, and expansive offsite storage buildings. The 11 facilities comprising the physical George A. Smathers Libraries represent the care and work of innumerable past and present library and university personnel.

IN THIS SERIES, WE HAVE ASKED PEOPLE WHO KNOW A SPACE TO TELL ITS STORY FROM THEIR PERSPECTIVE.



*Fig. 2 Over 4,000 fans gathered outside Library West, homecoming weekend 2019 at Plaza of the Americas for ESPN's College GameDay, where Florida Gators legend, Emmitt Smith was the guest picker.
(Photo: Courtney Culbreath/UAA Communications)*

Fig. 3 Main entrance to University Library in 1957 and walkway between West and Smathers Library prior to the construction of the University Colonnade.



In this SOURCE issue we hear about Library West, which was completely renovated and expanded to reopen in 2006. At that point it had been nearly 20 years since a new Library was built at UF (Marston Science Library in 1987) and times had changed substantially. What the planners for West got right in understanding and anticipating user needs and behaviors and what they did not have shaped that branch and informed subsequent renovations at every branch, including West. The University Colonnade, to those who do not recognize the name, is the concrete and brick covered walkway between West and Smathers Library (previously known as Library East). This is a utilitarian structure, having served generations of students and Hare Krishna lunch patrons seeking refuge from rain, and affording much needed shade from the Florida sun. As you will learn, the Libraries envision a more attractive, welcoming, and accommodating Colonnade connecting Library West with the Plaza of the Americas - and are seeking donor funding to realize this vision.



Fig. 4

We will also hear the story of the Grand Reading Room (Fig 4.), in the Smathers Library. This terrific space literally connects us with the land boom-funded birth of the modern UF campus of the 1920's. The room was most significantly altered decades ago by the expansion of Smathers Library, due to the post-World War II explosive growth of Florida and the University, but the Grand Reading Room remains a space in transition. We will also hear the roaming story of the storage of library materials. A growing university, shifting patron needs, the blossoming of technology, the shift to electronic media and the limits of existing library branch footprints have required a continuous assessment and rebalancing of the space dedicated to collections versus other uses. Every major renovation in the history of the UF Libraries began with considerations of where to move materials, either temporarily or permanently, so the long history of storage facilities, some more makeshift than others, fits well here. We will also hear from the newest and very much the oldest UF Library space: the Governor's House Cultural Center and Museum is located in St. Augustine. The space and its unique collection take the Smathers Libraries, always steeped in Florida history, to the beginning of the European presence in that history.



Fig 5. Iconic view of the 2006 north wing of Library West.

IN THIS SERIES, ALL OF THE SPACES AND THE TELLING OF THEIR STORIES BY MY GENEROUS COLLEAGUES WILL REFLECT A NUMBER OF THEMES THAT COMBINE TO REVEAL A STORY OF LIBRARIES AT UF. TO NAME A FEW, THESE INCLUDE:

- The increasing demands of a growing university.
- The shifting demands in terms of space to support changing instruction, learning and research models.
- The introduction and adoption of new technologies.
- Limits in the amount of space and ongoing repurposing.
- An appreciation for aesthetics in enhancing visitor experience.
- The importance of restoring and maintaining historic spaces as entrusted legacies.
- Commitments to expanding equity and inclusion for the University of Florida community, and explorations of the roles of Library spaces in that.



Fig. 6 Library West's New Books Area



Fig. 7 West's Movable Shelving



Fig. 8 Study Space with a View

I hope you enjoy the series. The idea for it formed before the pandemic, and planning continued as its impact on the use, access and occupancy of library spaces were realized. Perhaps these stories will be even more compelling, and both the familiar and less familiar information they contain will be of more interest to readers, now. Please know, we are very much looking forward to a point in the future when our Library spaces are again more accessible.

With all well wishes to you and yours, thank you for reading.

Brian W. Keith