AERIAL VIEW OF UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA LIBRARY WEST: SOUTHERN FACADE. WESTON MCDONNELL. CIRCA 1970. UFDC.UFL.EDU/UF00054341.

The Later Years

1968 to the Present

CARL VAN NESS / EMERITUS UF HISTORIAN 1984 - 2022

The second chapter in the history of the George A. Smathers Libraries did not begin on a happy note. In almost every category of library work, the Libraries were lagging well behind in the 1970s and 1980s. The same could be said of the University of Florida. The problem was financial, as the state university system expanded after World War II. In 1947, the state supported three universities; in 1965, it supported nine. All nine clamored for their share of state funding. From the postwar years until 1970, the University of Florida rose slowly in national rankings. The 1970s, though, showed significant decline.

The issues facing the Libraries were far graver than those of the university, however. A self-study undertaken in 1971 revealed serious deficiencies in every facet of the Libraries apart from public services. Staffing levels and salaries were among the lowest in the nation. The acquisitions budget was especially dire. Spending per engineering faculty came to $19 whereas the national average was $210. The self-study warned that the College of Engineering could lose its accreditation due to the lack of library support. A physics professor described the library as "useless" and noted that he spent $400 a year to build his own library. Nationwide, library expenditures in relation to total university spending averaged 3.5 percent. At UF, it averaged 2 percent of a university budget that was itself inadequate. And libraries around the world were being hit with the first round of book price inflation.

Poor finances did not deter the library staff. Frontline staff received high marks from the faculty for research assistance. Demands on reference staff increased as library materials found their way into the undergraduate curriculum. Technical services staff worked under difficult conditions to ensure that books and journals were adequately cataloged. Beginning in the 1970s, librarians were given primary responsibility for book selections. Previously, faculty from the colleges had chosen titles. The change resulted in more balanced and comprehensive collections. The Libraries also employed a liaison model that ensured a closer collaboration between librarians and faculty in the colleges and departments.

The university's finances improved in the 1990s when the state adopted a tiered budget system that gave preferential

treatment to UF and FSU. This coincided with a shift to tuition-based funding and relative budget stability. In the 21st century, the budget woes of the previous century slowly faded from view. Although librarians continued to complain about the ever-increasing costs of library materials, the days when the library budget threatened the accreditation of a college were long gone.

Physical plant deficiencies were as severe as the budget morass. Library West opened in 1967 and reached near stack capacity in three years. Some of the collections that had been moved there were returned to Library East (now Smathers) as early as 1970. The greatest need was for a science library, as the science collections were scattered about the campus at multiple locations. The colleges and departments that housed them had no room for collection expansion and coveted the spaces already provided.

The first proposal for a science library was approved in 1967. That proposal failed and another went forward in 1976. It wasn't until 1982, however, that the proposal was funded, only after the Libraries agreed to give up half the proposed space to the College of Engineering. The Central Science Library opened in 1986 and was dedicated as the Marston Science Library in 1987. The creation of the library required a massive reallocation of staff and monetary resources, not to mention the relocation of over 600,000 volumes. Until 1985, the Hume Agricultural Library remained outside the University Libraries and was funded through the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences. The Hume Library also had a different cataloging system and its own technical services personnel.

The half-built Marston Library did little to relieve the space problems. To compensate for the lack of shelf space, the Libraries' looked for alternatives. Like a game of whack-the-mole, the Libraries would employ any space it could find on or off campus, only to lose that space and then move the materials to a new space. The situation had reached a crisis level in 1997 when Director Dale Canelas (1985–2004) implored the Provost to build a permanent storage facility. In bold letters she highlighted the urgency of the matter: "The message is

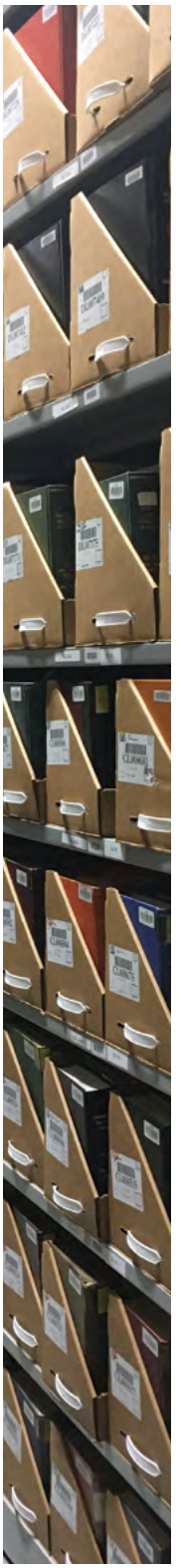
MARSTON SCIENCE LIBRARY (MSL) OPENED IN 1986. UFDC. UFL.EDU/UF00094148.

"The message is that the Smathers Libraries are full. All the libraries are full."

Dale Canelas,
Director of University Libraries, 1997.

that the Smathers Libraries are full. All the libraries are full. All the actions taken to assist with this space crisis have been 'band-aid' approaches, expedient in the extreme. They have caused massive collection damage and huge stress on the staff." The Provost responded with another band-aid by renting what had been the first floor of the Maas Department Store on 13th Street, only to lose that space when Lowes acquired the property. A permanent solution was finally found when the Florida Department of Transportation abandoned its warehouse on 39th Street and transferred the property to the University of Florida. Books and boxes began to arrive at the Auxiliary Library Facility (ALF) in late 2004, and the long march of library materials finally came to an end.

The Libraries' third building priority after Marston and ALF was a renovation of Library West. A proposal to expand Library West sat at the bottom of the building priority list for 14 years until President Chuck Young moved it to the top in 2000. When it went forward, the proposal included not only an addition but a complete renovation of the existing structure. With its emphasis on user spaces rather than books, not to mention a Starbucks, students began to refer to the new Library West as Club West. Ironically, the opening of ALF and the expanded West overlapped with the acquisition of the first electronic journals and books, and shelf space was no longer as urgent a need.



Notwithstanding the budget and building woes, the University Libraries would become a leader in the implementation and use of emerging library technologies. The Libraries' automation efforts took shape in the late 1960s after recommendations from a subcommittee on library automation and the arrival of a new library director, Gus Harrer (1968–1984). Three new positions were created, beginning with a systems analyst in 1968 and a computer programmer in 1970. The position of Assistant Director for Systems was created to lead the effort. In the 1970s, UF became the first library to provide access to an entire census. The 1970 census was stored on 120 reels at the university's mainframe computer facility and library staff provided access. More datasets followed, and within a few years the Libraries had acquired over 1,000 reels of bibliographic and statistical information. Access to the bibliographic universe of the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) began with the acquisition of two OCLC terminals in the mid-1970s.

FLORIDA ACADEMIC REPOSITORY (FLARE) STACKS, STATEWIDE SHARED COLLECTION OF LOW USE PRINT MATERIALS FROM ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN FLORIDA.

STABLE DIFFUSION AI PIXEL LIBRARIAN CHARACTER.

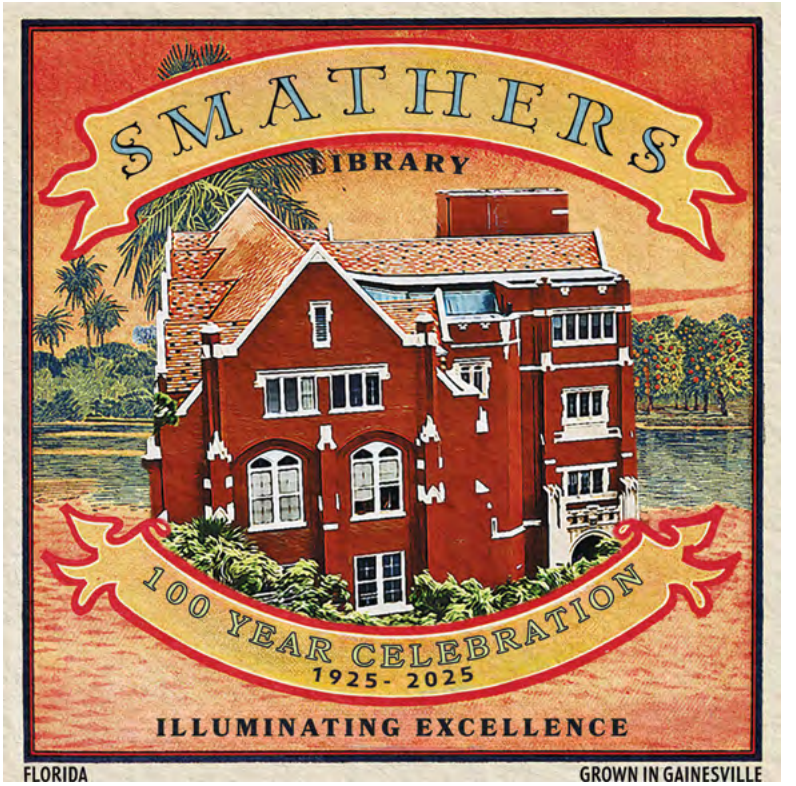
"We stand at the dawn of an era"

is how one administrator stated it when the Libraries acquired its first computerized collection management system, NOTIS, in 1980. Online cataloging ensued and, by 1986, there were enough titles to open the public interface called LUIS (Library User Information System.) Computer terminals began to appear in public service areas next to the card catalog. The NOTIS circulation module was also activated in 1986, replacing the old punch card system that had, itself, been a library innovation in the 1950s. Additions to the card catalog stopped in 1987 and the card catalog, with its 4,536 drawers, was removed in 1995.

The installation of NOTIS was a stunning success, but more remarkable was the ability of library personnel to tweak and amend the system when the need arose. So many changes were made that the original NOTIS coding would become unrecognizable. When it became time to select a common platform for all nine state universities, it simply adopted what UF had created. Technical services staff were also at the forefront of user applications. Suzy Shaw's 1987 *How to Search OCLC, Version 2.0,* utilized a video game to train librarians throughout North America. Public service personnel adept in the use of the new technologies earned high marks from students and faculty.

In the 21st century, the Libraries began to invest heavily in document digitization. The initial scanning hardware was purchased via a donation from former Florida Governor Farris Bryant. Under library heads Dale Canelas and Judith Russell (2007–2025), digital services became a library priority. As of September 2025, the University of Florida Digital Collections (UFDC) has amassed over 1,292,000 items (ufdc.ufl.edu/stats). This includes publications as well as audiovisual materials, manuscripts, and maps. A spin-off, so to speak, was the establishment of the Digital Library of the Caribbean (dLOC.com), an internationally recognized consortium of contributing institutions.

There were several iterations of a special collections unit in the 1960s before it was dissolved in 1972. The University Archives, Rare Books & Manuscripts, the Library of Florida History, and the Baldwin Library of Historical Children's Literature operated as separate departments until 1987, when a new special collections unit was created. This came after a consultant's report recommended consolidation in Library West. Instead, Florida History and Rare Books moved to East where they joined the University Archives and Baldwin. Ruth Baldwin and her incredible library came to the university in 1977. To accommodate Baldwin's collection, the Latin American Collection was moved from the South Tower of East to the North Tower.



Centennial Branch Citrus Labels

ONE OF THE SEVEN COLORFUL CITRUS-THEMED LABELS FOR THE DIFFERENT LIBRARIES UNDER SMATHERS LIBRARIES, CELEBRATING THE CENTENNIAL.

ADAPTED FROM THE CHICONE CITRUS LABEL COLLECTION. UFDC.UFL.EDU/COLLECTIONS/CITRUSLABEL.

The consolidation of special collections in Library East presented difficulties as the old library was long overdue for a physical overhaul. Funds to do so became available in 1987 when former Senator George A. Smathers made a significant donation. In honor of his gift, Library East was renamed Smathers Library. Environmental reconditioning of the stacks was the priority. The stack area was reopened in 1997 with Special Collections housed on the two lower floors and Latin America on the upper floors. Special Collections then moved into the Grand Reading Room and the South Tower. In the same year, the area studies collections—Judaica, Africana, and Latin America—merged with Special Collections to create the Department of Special & Area Studies Collections. Smathers' initial donation was followed by a multimillion-dollar commitment to provide future library support. In recognition of his service to the state and the university, the University Libraries became the George A. Smathers Libraries in 1991.

ENTRANCE TO HSCL ON THE FIRST FLOOR OF THE COMMUNICORE BUILDING. UNDERGRADUATE GUIDE TO THE GEORGE A. SMATHERS LIBRARIES. UFL.PB.UNIZIN.ORG/ULAGUIDE.

The J. Hillis Miller Health Science Center Library (HSCL) remained an independent library until it merged with the Smathers Libraries in 2009. As with most everything health-related at the University of Florida, the library's early development was imbued with the innovative visions of the first Dean of the College of Medicine, George Harrell. Harrell made the library an integral part of the teaching and research missions and ensured that an adequate collection would be available when the library opened in 1956. Throughout its history, it has also demonstrated a commitment to health practitioners and anyone seeking health information. HSCL was housed in the original medical building until it moved to the Communicore Building in 1974.

From its inception and continuing today, the glue that has kept the Libraries together through bad times and good has been the staff. This was evident during the COVID pandemic when staff went far beyond their normal duties to ensure that students and faculty continued to have access to library resources. Reflecting on the difficulties faced by the librarians, the 1971 self-study had this to say:

34TH ST. WALL CENTENNIAL PAINTING BY STAFF. 2025.

"Only a staff superior in ability and in loyalty to the University of Florida and its library system could have accomplished the tasks amidst the deterrents to morale and stability which prevailed."

The statement is as true today as it was in 1971.