Welcome to the Libraries Centenary Exhibition

Through this exhibition we are drawn towards celebrating the 100 years of achievements realized through the Libraries in support of the University’s activities. Additionally, this exhibition provides us with an opportunity for reflection; to reflect upon not only what has transpired, but what our future might hold in the coming 100 years.

These are uncertain times for libraries who face challenges on many fronts. Rapidly evolving technologies, changes in scholarly publishing, financial constraints, the rise of the e-book, changing demands on library space and greater expectations of library users. Despite these challenges we remain positive about our future and our ability to continue to support the University in its teaching, learning, research and knowledge exchange purposes. To realize this we will:

- ensure our principles are aligned with those of the University, both in terms of our collection building and our service delivery;
- continue to build on our quality collections;
- emphasize our Libraries as places for people as well as collections, and ensure that a friendly, service oriented experience is available to all who enter our premises;
- collaborate at all levels that serve the University’s interests, including networking opportunities both locally on campus as well as further afield;
- remain agile as an organization so that, as circumstances evolve, we can respond to them appropriately.

Perhaps most significantly, we will be recognized, locally, regionally and globally as leaders in information service and delivery through our innovative approaches that others will follow.

Please enjoy the exhibition and I look forward to working with you to set our course for the next 100 years.

List of Librarians

1922-1950 Mrs Marie E.M. Ring
1951-1960 Mrs Dorothy Scott
1961-1983 Mr H.A. Rydings
1984-1999 Dr L.B. Kan
2001-2010 Dr Anthony W. Ferguson
2011- Mr Peter E. Sidorko

*Part time librarians from 1912-1922
The The Library collection was small in the early days. Some 25,000 volumes were available in 1950, which in many ways were not sufficient even for a student population of 200. Book lending was restricted to ten times and during the years 1956, 1,384 volumes were borrowed by members of the University. The Library was staffed by three full-time employees, including a librarian, a clerk and a secretary.

The Fu Ching Shan (6–11) Chinese Library was opened on 14 December 1952 after Mr. Fu Ching Shan donated a Library building along Shau Kei Wan. The building was a gift from the Shau Kei Wan estate. The 1,428-volume Library was donated by Mr. F.C. Ching and Mrs. F.C. Ching. The collection was donated by Mr. S.C. Hui, the first Secretary of Hong Kong. In April 1952, the new Library was opened.

Still, the collection was pitifully inadequate even with the increase of the student body from 3,200 (1950) to 6,100 (1953) and the purchase of the Chinese section of the Hunter Club Library as a unique collection of some 1,000 volumes of books on China and Chinese for $2,500. The accommodation was equally inadequate: book rooms were overcrowded for a student population of 10,000 to 12,000. Some 50 students were forced to use the Library for evening work since 1953. The Japanese invasion Hong Kong on 8 December 1941: the only university buildings which escaped serious damage during the years of hostilities were the main Library of the Main Building, housing the Main Library, the Fu Ching Shan Library Building and the Ting Cheung Ming Building. The Japanese took over the Library and the Librarian was interned.

In 1945 the Japanese started confiscating private and institutional libraries and centralizing the valuable collections at the Fu Ching Shan Library. Some 240,000 volumes were received from Hong Kong, the Fu Ching Shan Library staff took the responsibility for preserving these books during the war. The Fu Ching Shan Library was housed in the Library of the Government at the Connaught Territorial Building X. The Library was reconvened on 13 September 1946. The war ended in August 1945. The Library suffered little damage during the period of hostilities and occupation. In October 1945 in special again for the use by staff and students to correspond with the inauguration of the first postwar university session. In the meantime, staff members were busy checking Library buildings to determine the line of books during the occupation and returning books collected during the occupation to their rightful owners.

By 1950, the Main Library included ten large rooms and four smaller rooms, all containing with such other, and situated on the ground floor of the Main Building. It occupied some 1,400 square meters and could accommodate 31 students. The collection grew from 9,080 in 1944 to 18,100 in 1948. Despite additional rooms allocated to the Main Library, the problem of housing new acquisitions was getting worse in the mid-1950s and reached in a diminishing of staff available for an increasing number of staff and students. Planning of a new Library building started in 1956 and approval for construction was given in October 1959.

The 1950s was a decade of unprecedented development for the Library. Its book stock grew from 13,000 volumes to 250,000 volumes, whilst the number of professional staff increased from one in 1950 to sixteen by 1964.
In September 1961, the Library celebrated the move to its first Library building (now Main Library, Old Wing) dedicated to curriculum, research and discovery. Sir Robert Black, then Hong Kong Governor, launched the building and officiated the grand opening of the new Library.

In January 1962, the Fung Ping Shan Library (East Asian Collection) was consolidated and moved into the new Library. At the same time, the Main Library collection experienced rapid growth and soon outgrew the building. In a short period of 5 years, two floors (5/F & 6/F) were added to the original Library building, fortunately designed with future expansion in mind. A further floor at mezzanine level was also built in 1963 where the Hung On-To Memorial Library (Hong Kong Collection) was housed with some of the remarkable treasures from the Library’s special collections.

The ensuing years witnessed the Library’s further expansion and establishment of branch libraries:

- Medical Library was founded in December 1963 and located in the Patrick Manson Building, a pre-finished site of the Faculty of Medicine. In January 2002, it was relocated to a new Library in the Faculty of Medicine building, a state-of-the-art facility well equipped with sophisticated information technology to provide a virtual learning environment conducive to study and research.

- Law Library was set up in September 1969 as a temporary accommodation of the Faculty of Law at Chinese University and later moved to the 8th floor of the Kennedy Building in July 1977 and again relocated to K.K. Leung Building in 1999.

- University Library is the central Library of The University of Hong Kong.
- Education Library was started in January 1979 on the sixth floor of the Main Library Old Wing and moved to Kam Tin Study Building in 1984.

- Dental Library was opened in 1981 in the Prince Philip Dental Hospital and extended with an additional floor in 1988.

- Music Library was founded in 1982 on the second floor of the Main Building and relocated to the first floor of the Hong Kong Ying Building, another historical site, in 1996.

- Library with the new Learning Commons in 2011.

- Library with Learning Commons in 2011.


Print and electronic resources

From 1940s to 1980s, both print and electronic resources were expanded. In August 1974, the total number of current journal titles exceeded 4,000. In August 1976, the collection increased to 200,000 volumes and the number of new titles cataloged a year exceeded 20,000. The collection reached 1 million volumes in June 1993.

On electronic resources, the Library was quick to learn the new technology and position itself as early adopters of computing resources. In 1986, for the first time, Online Information Service was offered using the ORBIT system of SDC Search Service, Santa Monica, California, with a satellite link arranged by Cable & Wireless (now ITCCTC). Later in 1988, CD-ROM based information services were introduced. The core compact, cheap and robust mass into storage medium made available interlibrary and economical access to the fast growing electronic information sources.

Library automation - from in-house systems to integrated library management systems

The decade from 1970s to 1980s saw gradual transition from systems built by libraries in-house to integrated library systems created by third party vendors. The University of Hong Kong Libraries' first automation efforts began in 1979 with the development of a Marlin-Based Cataloguing (MARC) database. Local in-house systems were also created for acquisitions, serials control, cataloguing and circulation. Automation for cataloguing and circulation started in 1981 and serials control in 1983. The serials control system was capable of creating a complete list of holdings at seconds search speed along with handling the financial aspects of serials management. Automated book acquisitions system also went live in April 1986. For the East Asian materials, an in-house microcomputer system was developed in December 1986 for book ordering and accounting in the Hong Kong Social Library. The first online public catalogue was available in January 1986, allowing online access to a short form catalogue containing much of the Main Library's active stock.

In 1989, the great leap forward took place when the Library implemented the DRA Integrated Library system with all major library applications - acquisitions, cataloguing, circulation, and serials replacing the in-house system designed in the 1980s. Subsequently, the online public access catalogue was renamed ILACON - access for DRA Go Online.

As the Library's collections, services, and programmes continued to grow, it was obvious that more space was needed to house the expanding collection and provide an inviting environment for learning and study. To accommodate these, another major expansion was initiated - to build a new Library extension (now Main Library New Wing) on the site of the old Student Union Building. With the approval of the LIPAC (now WLC), the Library New Wing was constructed and became fully operational on 1 July 1991. The official opening ceremony was held on 19 December 1991, where Sir David Wilson, then Hong Kong Governor, described a plaque commemorating the event and toured the new Library building. This again restructured the Library, another significant era for the University of Hong Kong Libraries.
The Age of Information and Collaboration, 1991-2011

The period from 1991 to 2011 was characterized by major changes in many different aspects of the Libraries. Many of these changes were a result of the advancements in computing, networking and information technology that occurred during the period.

Moving on to the Web era: 1991-2001

The developments and improvements in the last twenty years in database design, data storage and access might be incomprehensible for those of us who did not witness them. In April 1993, the Library took what was then a major step forward from restrictive access to designated workstations of CD-ROM databases, with the installation of its first CD-ROM browser. This gave users networked access from multiple locations in the library to a growing collection of indexing and even full-text databases on CD-ROM.

The transformation was sped up with the introduction of the Internet and World Wide Web in the mid-1990s, as the Libraries launched the HKU Libraries Web site in 1993. This served both as a portal to information about library services, and a gateway to databases that had become accessible not just on the local area network, but remotely through the Web.

And parallel to the revolution in database access was the replacement in 1996 of the library’s integrated library systems with one called INNOPAC, which comprises both the public catalogue (the new Dragon) with a Web interface and the other back-end modules which are still in use today. No longer a novelty, the integration of records in Western and Asian languages that came with the new system was a hallmark of the time. Also innovative was that the new Dragon allowed users to view their circulation records, and manage book requests and renewals. For the first time, users could cross-search multiple local library catalogues simultaneously.

In the years that followed, the potential of the Web was fully realized with the many online services that the Libraries introduced: book recommendations online, subject guides to Internet resources, Electronic Reserve Collection, to name a few. Perhaps one of the most notable achievements was the creation of E-XamBase, a database of HKU’s past examination papers, which previously had to be borrowed at the circulation counter. This was the Libraries’ first of many Digital Initiatives of special materials, digitized for ease of searching and access. Other special projects that made available online valuable local collections included the Last Governor Online, Hong Kong Journals Online, Historical Law of Hong Kong Online, etc.
With the Web and evolving changes in learning and teaching came demands for a corresponding upgrade to the Libraries’ physical premises and information technology infrastructure. In 1996, the entire Liberals system was re-cabled to Fast Ethernet, which was replaced by a Gigabit Ethernet backbone several years later. 1996 also saw the Main Library open an Electronic Information Centre, later named Knowledge Navigation Centre, which was continuously expanded to provide users with the latest hardware and software to integrate learning, research and digital publishing.

In 1999, the Libraries participated in the university’s Digital Campus initiative, installing over 600 network access points so that users could connect their notebooks to the campus network from anywhere in the Library. This was followed by another project in April 2001 that made available Wi-Fi connection, a relatively new technology at the time, in the Main Library. There were only 4 access points then—now there are 62 access points and the communication speed, at 100 Mbit/s, is ten times faster.

As network speed improved and the different barriers to data access were broken down, the need for space changed from one for physical books and shelves to that for users. What followed was the establishment of the Fung Wah Storeroom, completing the Libraries’ indaba and a compact storage facility for less frequently used materials, many beginning to have electronic equivalents online as the Libraries’ e-solution began to grow. The revolution freed up much needed space for more user seating and workstations.

For many, be they freshmen or alumni, the move from the familiar Library of printed materials to one of computers, electronic information and the Web had meant not as much convenience but challenges. Information literacy was not just a buzzword but a survival skill in these times of information change. As a result in September 1998 the Libraries cooperated with the Department of Computer Science and Information Systems, and the Computer Centre to introduce a new three-credit General Education Course, Foundations to Information Technology (ITE), for first year students. This was developed in conjunction with many new short courses on the use of databases and information searching.
The next level: the decade from 2001

Innovation and user-centered services were the key as the Libraries ramped into the new millennium. Many new projects started to take service excellence to the next level in support of the university’s teaching and research activities.

Better access is obtained through. To improve remote access, EZProxy authentication was introduced in 2000, which was subsequently developed to function in concert with the university’s Portal services. This was followed by the ‘MyHKU’ (now called ResearchPortal), a federated search engine which allows one-stop cross-searching of multiple databases, and also WebBridge, a link resolver which connects article records to their corresponding full-text.

Better access to print resources. An inter-library delivery service was launched in 2005 to allow all borrowers to request books to be collected at any pickup locations. The program was expanded in 2007 to allow inter-library electronic article delivery for teaching staff.

Better access to local materials. To promote the visibility of HKU research and provide a one-stop search point, the HKU Scholars Hub, an institutional repository of HKU’s research and publications, was launched in 2006. The popular e-Videos Web site, which provides access to digitized video content of local TV programs and HKU materials, was revamped in 2010 with a YouTube-like interface.

Better access to other libraries’ materials. In 2005, the Libraries implemented a comprehensive open access inter-library loan system, ILIADS, replacing the paper system. The system enabled online requesting of materials held in other local and overseas libraries as well as electronic delivery of articles and other documents.

Meet i-Libraries. Library users began receiving library messages, including reminders, recalls and pickup notices, in SMS via mobile phones in 2006. Another service, MyLibrary MyAlerts, which allowed users to create personalized Web pages of favorite resources and receive real-time alerts of new library books and tables of contents of preferred journals, was launched around the same time. In 2007, World Wide OCLC, was created. This knowledgebase of the Libraries’ resources and services made use of the WorldCat technology, allowing users to share their knowledge and experience in the familiar Web environment. The following year, the OCLC catalog was further enhanced with a real generation interface and many Web 2.0 features including tagging and sharing. The Libraries also upgraded over one million printed volumes with radio frequency identification tags, allowing users to check-in and out these items using self-check-in stations.

Better facilities. In 2008 the Libraries opened the Student Learning Centre, a 7,763 square foot facility, which was the only such service on campus. Since 2010, the Main Library has been open around the clock during Revision Week and Assessment Period.

Better support for learning and teaching. The Libraries introduced the plagiarism detection software Turnitin and the bibliographic management software EndNote in 2004 and 2005 respectively. In addition to regular courses at all levels, extensive help and support is also provided on the use of the software.

Collections and service collaboration

The twenty years from 1991 onwards witnessed the Libraries’ collection expand at an unprecedented rate. By 2005, the number of periodical volumes was at 2 million, twice the size 10 years ago. The number of e-books increased from the initial two thousand titles in 2000 to over one million in 2006 and two million in 2010. But more importantly, during the same period the Libraries liaised and joined many collaborative efforts that would leverage on other libraries’ resources and make it possible to the community of academic libraries and service providers.

- 2006

Became the mirror site outside China for China Journal Net, the first and foremost full-text database of Mainland Chinese journals. The Libraries subsequently became the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) Database Exchange Centre in 2002.

- 2007

Joined ILL (Interlibrary Loan) Centre, and participated in record sharing with the world’s largest consortium of Libraries. The Libraries was the largest contributor in original cataloguing records in 2004, 2009 and 2010.

- 2009

Became the first member, outside of North America, of the Centre for Research Libraries (CRL), giving users access to over 4 million publications within the CRL, collections through interlibrary loan and electronic delivery.

- 2015

Following a pilot 2-year experiment with two local university libraries, took a leading role in establishing the Hong Kong Academic Library Link (HKALL), a union catalogue and inter-university service which allowed students and staff of the eight UGC-funded libraries to search and make direct requests for items in the combined collection of over 9 million books.

- 2017

Partnered with the Hong Kong Central Library to launch the first regional service for public library readers to apply for a temporary pass to an academic library in Hong Kong.

Into the future

On 1 January 2012, Mr Peter Sidhu became the sixth university librarian. The last twenty years have seen the HKU Libraries transform itself in technology advanced. This is likely to continue as computing and data technology companies, the publishing industry and academic service to support other players in meeting and anticipating the needs of their clients and users. There will be many challenges aside the wave of changes. The university curriculum will change to a four-year curriculum in 2012 and budget constraints loom. Noting changes are, but with a strong and seasoned team and the determination of the entire university, the HKU Libraries will be able to stay true to its mission in supporting HKU as a preeminent university.