

# A New Chapter for the Corcoran Library:

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## Transforming an Art School Library into a University Art and Design Collection

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**Abstract**—In February 2014, Washington, DC's financially ailing Corcoran Gallery of Art and its College of Art + Design were absorbed by the National Gallery of Art and The George Washington University, respectively. This article describes the Corcoran Library's transformation into an art and design collection within a larger university library system. It also addresses the process's benefits and challenges, lessons learned, and ongoing questions. While the Corcoran Library's situation is unique, this case study speaks to the larger trend of library consolidations and closures in North America and aims to impart valuable takeaways to librarians faced with these changes. The author is a former employee of the Corcoran Library and now serves as GW Libraries' liaison to the Corcoran School.

*[This article is based on a paper presented at the session "Engaging Change: Thriving amidst Shifting Library Landscapes" held at the ARLIS/NA + VRA Joint Conference in Seattle, March 2016.]*

### INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

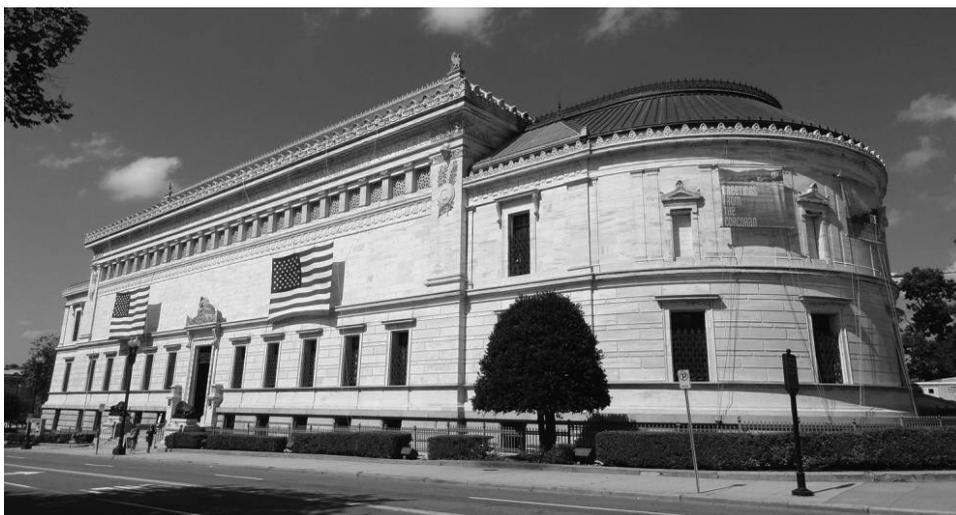
February 2014: A historic deal is announced which splits the financially ailing Corcoran Gallery of Art and its College of Art + Design between the National Gallery of Art and The George Washington University, respectively.<sup>1</sup> Selected works of art would travel to the National Gallery, while the college would transform into the Corcoran School of the Arts and Design within the university's college of arts and sciences.

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1. David Montgomery, "Corcoran Gallery of Art and College to Split Apart, Partnering with National Gallery, GWU" *Washington Post*, February 19, 2014, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/a236132e-9994-11e3-b88d-f36c07223d88\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/a236132e-9994-11e3-b88d-f36c07223d88_story.html).

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*Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America*, vol. 36 (spring 2017)  
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**Figure 1.** The Corcoran Library formerly occupied gallery space in the iconic Beaux-Arts Ernest Flaggs building in Washington, DC. Image by Daderot. Source: Wikimedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Corcoran\\_Gallery\\_of\\_Art\\_-\\_Washington\\_DC\\_-\\_DSC01051.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Corcoran_Gallery_of_Art_-_Washington_DC_-_DSC01051.JPG). Creative Commons CC0. Please see the online edition of *Art Documentation* for a color version of this image.

Along with legal hurdles and plans for the historic building itself, these elements of the transition have been described well in the press. The transformation of the Corcoran Library, however, has been afforded little to no coverage.

Located within the Corcoran's iconic Beaux-Arts Ernest Flaggs building (500 Seventeenth Street NW, Washington, DC), the library occupied former gallery space on the second floor of the hemicycle (Figure 1). Accessible from both the classrooms and galleries, it served curators, museum staff, faculty, and students, with a primary focus on supporting the art and design college curriculum. Graduate courses of study included MA programs in art education, teaching, book arts, exhibition design, interior design, and new media photojournalism. Undergraduates could earn BFA degrees in digital media design, fine art, fine art photography, graphic design, interior design, and photojournalism, as well as a BA in art studies (a major incorporating art history with studio art practice). As a college within a museum, the Corcoran College of Art + Design, founded in 1890, provided over 600 degree-seeking students (as of 2014) with ample exposure to artworks and visiting artists, and it gave students unique opportunities to display their works in a gallery setting. Its twenty-five full-time professors, as well as many adjuncts, were also working artists with connections to galleries and museums throughout the capital region.

To support the college curriculum, librarians collected specialized art and design materials including studio technique books, artist monographs, exhibition catalogs, and texts on the history of art, architecture, and design; a particular strength of the collection is the field of photography. The library also housed complementary materials on humanities and social sciences. Holdings comprised 36,000 books, 1,500 DVDs, and three hundred artists' books, as well as subscriptions to over one hundred period-

icals and forty databases. Graduate theses were also cataloged and housed by the library. In addition to collections, the Corcoran Library provided study and social space with carrels and large tables, several desktop computers, and two free photocopier-printers that students often used for creating chapbooks and posters. Librarians' personal desks, as well as the reference/circulation desk, were adjacent to the main reading room, creating ample opportunity for patron interaction. Students also donated many artworks to the library, which adorned the walls of the attractive, sky-lit space. In 2010, several student workers were on staff with four full-time library professionals; this number dwindled to one and a half librarians and one technical services professional by early 2014, due to ongoing budget cuts.

The fate of the Corcoran's beloved library was not outlined in the original February 2014 announcement. However, in June 2014, in the course of negotiations among the three parties, administrators decided to move the entire Corcoran Library into The George Washington University's Estelle and Melvin Gelman Library. Despite concerns that the library would be dispersed or relegated to storage, it was agreed that the Corcoran Library collection would be kept together as a unit on a separate floor from the general stacks. Over the next several months, library staff from both institutions worked to physically relocate the Corcoran collection while minimizing disruption to patrons.

#### **PART OF A TREND**

While stemming from a unique set of circumstances, the relocation of the Corcoran Library speaks to the larger trend of library consolidations and closures in North America. In the year immediately following the merger, two publications added to the case that individual university library branch shutdowns are not aberrations; rather, they are an increasingly common occurrence that warrants analysis by the profession. In *Difficult Decisions: Closing and Merging Academic Libraries*, Sara Holder and Amber Butler Lannon identify budgetary concerns and the shift toward digital resources as the major factors leading university libraries throughout North America to consolidate branch libraries and reduce service points.<sup>2</sup> The editors, who were leaders of now-consolidated branch libraries at McGill University, present their own story as well as other case studies that address issues relevant to managing patron and staff expectations, maintaining high quality services, and handling collections. While Holder and Lannon's text explores the closure of academic branch libraries of all disciplines, Stephen Patton and Kristina Keogh's "The Branch Art Library in ARL Institutions" shows that closures or consolidations of separate art libraries into general collections have increased in Association of Research Libraries member institutions since the 1970s.<sup>3</sup> The authors call on professional organizations such as the Art Libraries Society of North America (ARLIS/NA) to support formal, standardized tracking of branch art li-

2. Sara Holder and Amber Butler Lannon, *Difficult Decisions: Closing and Merging Academic Libraries* (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, a division of the American Library Association, 2015), vii.

3. Stephen A. Patton and Kristina M. Keogh, "The Branch Art Library in ARL Institutions: A Longitudinal Study and Environmental Scan," *Art Documentation* 34, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 257. For a review of the literature on current practices in branch libraries and their value and viability, see 251–53.

braries and their collections and spaces in order to allow informed evaluation of their nature and value.<sup>4</sup>

Recent art and architecture library transformations present illustrative examples of Patton and Keogh's findings. Leslie Abrams's 2011 article "A Case Study in Transformative Renovation and Organizational Change at the University of California, San Diego Arts Library" describes the combination of separate art and architecture, music, and film libraries into an innovative single-service-point arts library within the college's main Geisel Library.<sup>5</sup> Despite the success of this reorganization, in 2013 the university eliminated all branch libraries due to budget constraints.<sup>6</sup> The University of Maryland's art and architecture libraries faced a similar fate when in June 2014 the administration announced a plan to integrate these branches into the main McKeldin Library. Cindy Frank and Christine Henry's "How the University of Maryland Architecture Library Avoided Closure and Emerged as a Professional Library" describes how librarians, faculty, and students used creative techniques to generate and successfully present a plan to university administration that reimagined the architecture library as a twenty-four-hour space with a self-checkout machine and limited staffing.<sup>7</sup> The Art Library continues to exist as well, with somewhat limited hours.<sup>8</sup>

Along with changes to academic art libraries, the related phenomenon of art museum library closures and reductions has prompted an ARLIS/NA Museum Libraries Division survey on the current state of art museum libraries, with the goal of preparing a white paper on the subject. The researchers cite the 2016 library closures at the Barnes Foundation and the Indiana University Art Museum as the impetus for this project.<sup>9</sup> Although art museum and academic arts libraries are currently confronting changes in the economy and the academy,<sup>10</sup> the literature has shown that positive outcomes can be achieved when librarians work together with users to adapt to new circumstances.<sup>11</sup> This case study will describe the process by which the Corcoran Library transformed into a university art and design collection while remaining responsive to user needs.

## THE COLLECTION TRANSITION

On July 1, 2014, the Corcoran Library transition team began planning for the complete transfer of all Corcoran Library materials to Gelman Library with a deadline

4. Ibid., 259–60.

5. Leslie Abrams, "A Case Study in Transformative Renovation and Organizational Change at the University of California, San Diego Arts Library," *Art Documentation* 30, no. 2 (Fall 2011): 64–69.

6. Leslie Abrams, "Evolution of the University of California, San Diego Arts Library" (ARLIS/NA + VRA 3rd National Conference, Seattle, Washington, March 11, 2015).

7. Cindy Frank and Christine Henry, "How the University of Maryland Architecture Library Avoided Closure and Emerged as a Professional Library," *Art Documentation* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 114–29.

8. See "Art Library | UMD Libraries," accessed November 19, 2016, <http://www.lib.umd.edu/art>.

9. Anne Evenhaugen, "Questions Related to the State of Art Museum Libraries," ARLIS-L post, September 7, 2016, <http://lsv.arlisna.org>.

10. Ruth Wallach, "What's in a Brand? The Art Library and the Changing Academy," *Art Documentation* 23, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 34.

11. See also Laurie Phillips Gibson, Alicia Hansen, and Deborah Poole, "You Can't Hurry Love: Patience, Perseverance, and a Positive Attitude Move a Music Library," *Notes* 63, no. 1 (September 2006): 13–42.

of mid-August. This short timeline reflected the National Gallery's impending ownership of the Corcoran Library space, as well as the team's goal to have Corcoran materials available and circulating by the start of the fall 2014 semester. Despite the announcement of the Corcoran deal in early 2014, legal hurdles continued into the summer. Paperwork finalizing the merger between the institutions could not be signed until the District of Columbia courts gave permission to the Corcoran Board of Trustees to alter William Corcoran's 1869 founding charter. In addition, a group of students, faculty, and staff called Save the Corcoran presented arguments against the Trustees to stop the deal.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, despite the Corcoran Library transition team's impending deadline and rapid pace of work, any action had to be fully reversible in case the court struck down the agreement. By August 18, however, the judge approved the merger, and by August 21 the deal between the Corcoran and the university was officially signed;<sup>13</sup> less than twenty-four hours later, movers began to pack up books and furniture from the Corcoran Library. Ahead of schedule, items from the newly-dubbed "Art & Design Collection from the Corcoran" were in place and circulating by August 30, 2014 (Figure 2).

With only two months to relocate an entire library, rigorous project management was essential. Led by the then-head of Gelman Library's access services, the team was composed of Corcoran and George Washington employees possessing pertinent knowledge and skills, including a reference and instruction librarian (the author) and a cataloger from the Corcoran, Gelman Library building operations managers, the shelving manager, the resource description group coordinator, the art history liaison librarian, and other university employees as needed. Although the team leader did not have formal training in project management, she had familiarity with its principles including scheduling tasks based on dependencies; the importance of flexibility, creativity, and communication; and the value of stakeholder input.<sup>14</sup> The team leader also relied upon the project management expertise of The Kane Company Library Relocation Services for the physical transportation of library materials. Because the Kane team was able to plan and execute packing, shipping, and unpacking of all of the library's contents, common pitfalls associated with moving such as boxing items in the incorrect order or inefficiently using staff time could be avoided.<sup>15</sup>

The Corcoran Library transition team met daily for one-hour meetings through mid-August to discuss essential steps of the merger and think through any issues brought up by team members. Every task was tracked in an action-items list that included a description of the task, deadline, responsible team member(s), and any other pertinent information. The action-items list and all other documentation were stored

12. David Montgomery, "Group Launches Legal Action to Stop Corcoran Deal," *Washington Post*, July 2, 2014, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/94652d5e-01fc-11e4-8572-4b1b969b6322\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/94652d5e-01fc-11e4-8572-4b1b969b6322_story.html).

13. David Montgomery and Maura Judkis, "Judge Approves Corcoran Gallery of Art Plan to Partner with National Gallery, GWU," *Washington Post*, August 18, 2014, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/18eefdbc-2326-11e4-8593-da634b334390\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/18eefdbc-2326-11e4-8593-da634b334390_story.html).

14. For more on project management best practices see Project Management Institute, *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK Guide)*, 5th ed. (Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute, Inc., 2013).

15. Joanna M. Burkhardt, "Do's and Don'ts for Moving a Small Academic Library: Fourteen Helpful Tips," *College & Research Libraries News* 59, no. 7 (July/August 1998): sec. 5-8.



**Figure 2.** The Art & Design Collection from the Corcoran in Gelman Library. Photograph by William Atkins, The George Washington University. Please see the online edition of *Art Documentation* for a color version of this image.

in a shared Google Drive folder. The range of topics addressed by the team included shutdown procedures for the Corcoran Library, such as cessation of circulation and collection of all checked-out items; selection of books for weeding or offsite storage; creation of a budget for temporary workers, movers, and processing materials; and the transfer of database and journal subscriptions to university accounts.

Because of the decision to house the Corcoran collection as a separate art and design unit on the first floor of the library, the team also needed to map out a floor plan for the new location with considerations for ease of use, Americans with Disabilities Act compliance, fire exits, and lighting. This area on the first floor, which is actually one below the entrance floor due to remodeling in 2013, had formerly held a reference book collection. These books were removed and placed into Gelman's new reference area or general stacks by call number in a concurrent project. The decision to keep the Corcoran book and journal collection separate (rather than incorporating it into the general stacks) was ultimately the decision of the university's dean of libraries, who at the beginning of the process had consulted with fellow Association of Research Libraries directors, Corcoran librarians and faculty, and other stakeholders to learn about the unique ways that art library materials are used.<sup>16</sup> This arrange-

<sup>16</sup> For more on art student information needs see Polly Frank, "Student Artists in the Library: An Investigation of How They Use General Academic Libraries for Their Creative Needs," *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 25, no. 6 (November 1999): 445–55 and Jeff Gatten and Mike Bryant, "Rock the CASBAH: CalArts' Student Behaviors and Habits," *Art Documentation* 29, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 63–69.

ment would allow the collection to remain browsable and, most important, to retain its identity as a legacy of the Corcoran. Moreover, from a practical viewpoint, Gelman Library stacks could not quickly absorb more than 35,000 volumes into already packed shelves.

Along with the physical library move, electronic records for books and periodicals had to be incorporated into the existing catalog. Working with two different integrated library systems (EOS and Voyager), the resource description group was able to import all electronic records from the Corcoran Library, as well as link records for duplicate items. This also involved creating unique location codes for the Corcoran collection so that patrons would know whether to look in the Corcoran collection or the general stacks for a particular item. These records needed to integrate with the shared catalog of the Washington Research Libraries Consortium as well. Because of the complexity of this process, cleanup of serials records continued through mid-2016.

In terms of physical processing, catalogers assigned university barcodes to Corcoran items and affixed light blue spine labels over call numbers to prevent Corcoran items from being reshelfed in the general stacks. Newly purchased books for the art and design collection receive the same treatment.<sup>17</sup> Luckily, Corcoran books' existing Tattle-Tape set off Gelman Library door alarms, eliminating the painstaking task of replacing magnetic security strips. Unfortunately, the Corcoran Library's DVDs were housed individually in clear plastic sleeves, while Gelman's DVDs are stored in security cases, with multi-part sets placed together in one case; this required both the rehousing of all DVDs and the recataloging of DVD sets. Because Gelman's film collection was relatively small and was already located on the first floor next to the Art & Design stacks, Corcoran videos were interfiled with the existing collection.

The relocation of the Corcoran's beloved artists' book collection required special consideration that would balance preservation with ease of access.<sup>18</sup> At the Corcoran Library, the artists' books had been housed in boxes and folders behind the joint circulation/reference desk, as the space was always monitored by staff; in Gelman Library's unmonitored open space, this type of storage would not be feasible. Therefore, the collection was moved as a unit to the Special Collections Research Center's secure storage, where it has since been recataloged for more efficient retrieval, as well as given a unique location code for browsing in the public catalog. Although the artists' book collection has a fairly large footprint, it was essential that it remain in the building rather than in offsite storage to allow students and faculty to access materials without a long waiting period or prescheduled appointment. This decision reflects its purpose as a teaching collection for the Corcoran's Art and the Book program, whose students study professionally made artists' books to inspire their own work. Although GW Libraries owned a small collection of artists' books before the merger, they were not actively collected or promoted; now, artists' books have robust usage from Corcoran

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17. Art and design books, journals, and databases, as well as artists' books, are purchased using funds added to the university library's base budget for the purpose of supporting the Corcoran School. Purchases are made at the discretion of the art and design librarian and by faculty request.

18. For a discussion of preservation vs. accessibility, see Louise Kulp, "Artists' Books in Libraries: A Review of the Literature," *Art Documentation* 24, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 7–8.

School students and others, with frequent class sessions, exhibitions, and individual patron visits to Special Collections.

The Special Collections Research Center is now also providing access to the Corcoran Archives, which were transferred into the possession of the university in June 2016. A gift from the Corcoran Board of Trustees, the archives were not part of the original deal among the institutions. The opening up of the archives is particularly significant, as the nearly 2,000 boxes of materials had been inaccessible since 2007 when the Corcoran's last archivist departed.<sup>19</sup> Since the acquisition of the archives, Special Collections has fielded daily on-site and remote requests for use of the materials.<sup>20</sup>

### CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

With the physical relocation of the Corcoran Library, students and faculty have experienced both benefits and drawbacks. The most obvious change is that, rather than being located within the same building as classes and studio space, the library is now a seven block walk away; this undoubtedly reduces visits between classes and may discourage some library users altogether. As Jeff Alger points out in "The Value of Architecture and Design Branch Libraries," a library's close proximity to classrooms and studios provides the opportunity for spontaneous, focused browsing when the need for visual references arises, as well as study and social space that does not take students too far away from their work areas.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, with the library's relocation it is now more difficult for librarians to have chance encounters with students and faculty.

Nonetheless, library users have gained several benefits. Rather than standard business hours (9:00 to 5:00 on weekdays), Corcoran materials are now available 24/7 within the Gelman Library. Furthermore, in addition to the specialized resources offered by the Corcoran collection, students now have access to the general collection of GW Libraries and the rest of the Washington Research Libraries Consortium, including an increase (from forty to four hundred) in the number of databases to which they have access. This has greatly eased the difficulties of performing interdisciplinary research in an art and design library that was reliant on interlibrary loan for non-art materials. As Alger points out, the "increasingly interdisciplinary nature of scholarship" makes the use of specialized libraries challenging for patrons whose line of inquiry spans various subjects.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, Gelman has dedicated, technology-equipped instruction space, allowing engagement with many more classes than in the semesters prior to the merger.

Likewise, the library transition has created many challenges and opportunities in terms of communication and relationship building. News of the library's relocation,

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19. Peggy McGlone, "Public to Get Access to Corcoran Archives for First Time in Nearly a Decade," *Washington Post*, June 9, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/arts-and-entertainment/wp/2016/06/09/george/>.

20. For more information and access instructions for the Corcoran Archives, please visit <http://library.gwu.edu/src/corcoran-archives>.

21. Jeff Alger, "The Value of Architecture and Design Branch Libraries: A Case Study," *Art Documentation* 29, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 49.

22. *Ibid.*

plus shutdown procedures like the circulation stoppage and closing date, were communicated through social media, paper signs throughout the Corcoran building, and e-mail messages sent to patrons. Although many library users were understandably distressed by the closing and relocation of the library, I was presented with the opportunity to create relationships with users by allaying fears and solving issues.

For example, during the summer of 2014, Corcoran patrons had walk-in access to Gelman Library, but because of the legal limbo, they could not get university identification cards to check out books. When the Corcoran Library requested that checked-out items be returned, several graduate students working on theses were concerned about lack of library book access. To solve this issue, I worked with access services at Gelman to arrange temporary borrower cards for these students. I have also publicized myself as the go-to person for any and all questions from Corcoran patrons regarding use of Gelman Library. Fielding questions from “how do I put books on reserve” to “how can I access artists’ books” to “how do I do research at Gelman Library” has allowed me to build stronger relationships with Corcoran students and faculty throughout the past two years.

This relationship building has been particularly important due to the uncertainty students and faculty have experienced during the reorganization of the Corcoran. While many had concerns ranging from tuition to curriculum to class size, an almost universal refrain was distress over the loss of community the independent art school had provided. One Corcoran senior interviewed by the university’s student newspaper *The Hatchet*, explained, “Even though the Corcoran is a little bit broken, we do see ourselves as a family.”<sup>23</sup> The grassroots Save the Corcoran group coalesced around the same sentiment, describing a “community that admires, loves, utilizes and needs the Corcoran.”<sup>24</sup> Among these feelings of uncertainty and loss, faculty have praised the library transition as the smoothest and least stressful aspect of the Corcoran-George Washington merger. In e-mail messages and discussions, faculty expressed their appreciation for continuity and a “familiar face” in the library, as well as the importance of having an advocate for the Corcoran collection within GW Libraries.

An unexpected benefit of the library transition has been additional opportunities for events and exhibitions related to the Corcoran School and collection. I have worked with the university art gallery to co-curate three exhibitions featuring artists’ books from the Corcoran collection, allowing increased visibility and publicity for these artworks (Figure 3). Partnering with a photojournalism professor, Gelman Library was able to host a photography and poetry exhibit in underutilized display areas. In addition, The Corcoran Art and the Book program held two book launch events in the library that featured student-made collaborative artists’ books, which were then donated to the collection. Gelman Library also hosted an event in conjunction with Al-Mutanabbi Street Starts Here 2016—a nationwide series of events and artworks com-

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23. Colleen Murphy, “At Rescued Corcoran College, a New Kind of Uncertainty,” *The Hatchet*, February 23, 2014, <http://www.gwhatchet.com/2014/02/23/at-rescued-corcoran-college-a-new-kind-of-uncertainty/>.

24. “About,” *Save The Corcoran*. Archived November 2014. <http://wayback.archive-it.org/4811/20141110152311/http://savethecorcoran.org/about/>.



**Figure 3.** Artists' books exhibit *Woven Words* at the university's Luther W. Brady Art Gallery, with *Uluhaimalama, Legacies of Lili'uokalani: Music and Mana'o of Hawai'i's Last Queen* by Allison Leialoha Milham. Photograph by William Atkins, The George Washington University. Please see the online edition of *Art Documentation* for a color version of this image.

memorating the 2007 bombing of a well-known center of booksellers and intellectuals in Baghdad, Iraq.<sup>25</sup> Holding these events in conjunction with instruction sessions, orientations, and individual research assistance appointments has allowed the library to remain a partner with the Corcoran School despite the collection's removal from the Flagg building.

### LESSONS LEARNED

Although the circumstances of the Corcoran Library transition are unique, the rapid rate of change in the library landscape indicates that many librarians could experience similar situations in the event of a closure or merger. As such, several lessons from the Corcoran Library transition may prove useful to readers.

Assemble a broad team based on skills and knowledge. The Corcoran Library transition team included not only librarians, but also experts from across the institutions who had insights on all aspects of the planned move. A leader with a strong background in project management is essential, and so is a shared list of tasks or action items that is carefully managed. It is also important to capture institutional knowledge that may be lost in staffing changes, including locations of records like vendor

25. Sonja Staum-Kuniej, "The Power of the Arts to Speak: The Al-Mutanabbi Street Starts Here Project at IUPUI," *Art Documentation* 34, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 223–24.

contracts, collection development policies, and other useful documents. As Stephanie Atkins and Betsy Kruger make clear in the Association of Research Libraries SPEC Kit *Managing Large Projects*, “Human beings are your most important resource [italics in the original].”<sup>26</sup>

Next, communication with stakeholders is crucial so that they understand the nature of the changes taking place and their effect on library services. Social media, targeted e-mails, and physical signs can help reach the most eyes. Patrons may feel upset or skeptical about proposed changes, so aim for clarity, frequent updates, and as much transparency as possible in order to allay concerns. Effective communication can foster “buy-in and ownership” of decisions made during the project; research shows that frequent and thorough communication is a major component of project success.<sup>27</sup> To enhance communication, designate a point person to handle concerns from users. This will create a feeling of personalized service, reduce the possibility of unanswered questions, and minimize duplication of effort by staff. This serves as an opportunity for outreach as well. Be sure that contact information for the point person is included in all communications, signs, and web pages.

Finally, be prepared to alter or adjust your project plan when circumstances change. It is unlikely that you will know all of the variables that could affect your project when you start out, so build in opportunities to evaluate and tweak your plan regularly. This could mean frequent meetings with the project team, creation of contingency plans, or willingness to reverse decisions or actions that have already been carried out. During the most intense months of the Corcoran Library transition, daily meetings allowed team members to remain responsive in the face of rapidly evolving conditions. In the two years since, the team has periodically reconvened in order to evaluate whether decisions made in 2014 are still benefitting the users.

### WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

In “The Branch Art Library in ARL Institutions,” Patton and Keogh contemplate the long-term outcomes of The George Washington University’s acquisition of the Corcoran collection, noting that “it remains to be seen whether, in cases such as this, institutions will retain the notion of separate or decentralized collections into the future. After a period of time, one may witness the complete integration or centralization of newer collections into the established institutional setting.”<sup>28</sup> After more than two years as an independent collection, at the time of this writing no definitive decision has been made in this regard.

Despite the advantages of keeping the collection together as a separate unit, challenging issues remain. For example, patrons unfamiliar with the Corcoran are often confused as to why there is a separate section of art books and journals from those in the general stacks; this is exacerbated by the existence of approximately 15,000 dupli-

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26. Stephanie Atkins and Betsy Kruger, *Managing Large Projects*, SPEC Kit 289 (Washington, DC: Association of Research Libraries, Office of Leadership and Management Services, 2005), 14.

27. Bruce E. Massis, “Project Management in the Library,” *New Library World* 111, no. 11/12 (2010): 528.

28. Patton and Keogh, “The Branch Art Library in ARL Institutions,” 258.

cate volumes (deduplication has not taken place due to the required time and manpower needed to identify and remove duplicates, as well as the popularity of many volumes). There have also been changes within the Corcoran School itself. Legacy students are moving quickly toward graduation, while freshmen enrollment in the Corcoran has dropped from 196 in 2013 (before the merger) to 151 in 2015. Of the original twenty-five full-time Corcoran faculty, only nine remain due to attrition and layoffs. Moreover, existing university arts departments, including studio art, art history, music, theater, and dance, are slated for absorption into the school. With these changes, the logic of maintaining a separate Corcoran art and design collection may come into question.

Conversely, if a donor can be secured for the creation of an attractive new space within the library, a larger art collection combining the art (N classes) and photography (TR class) materials from the general stacks with the existing Corcoran collection could be a positive solution. This vision for a true art reading room could perhaps recapture some of the Corcoran Library's essence, while at the same time welcoming new members of the larger art community on campus. This proposal (which has been submitted to the libraries' leadership team) envisions a glassed-in area with large study tables; vitrines for student art, artists' books, and Corcoran Archives materials; consultation areas for librarians to meet with patrons; a new books area; and computers and printers. Although the Corcoran collection would be interfiled with other art books, this plan would allow all art materials to be easily accessed in one place and create a greater sense of community and added value for art students at the library.

Although the final physical state of the Corcoran collection is not yet clear, the importance of service to art faculty and students remains constant. The lessons learned thus far around maintaining robust communication with patrons and acting as a partner to the Corcoran School will be applicable into the future. The art and design liaison must continue to act as a bridge between the Corcoran School and GW Libraries by both providing opportunities for engagement in the library and by reaching out to patrons where they are, whether at art openings, thesis critiques, or school-wide meetings. In this way, as the Corcoran College of Art + Design continues its metamorphosis into a school at The George Washington University, the Corcoran collection can continue to adapt to the needs of its patrons.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

Many thanks to humanities librarian Elizabeth Harter for her invaluable advice on writing and librarianship.