

“Why Do We Need to Expand the Jones Library? The Library is perfect as is!”

In a perfect world, we wouldn't need any more square footage. We truly wish that re-designing our interior to flow more safely and efficiently would solve our problems. As some people have noted, we have several inefficiently used spaces such as in the atrium and on the top floor. Unfortunately, there isn't enough of that inefficiently-used space to give us what we need.

To fully understand the need, it's best to look at each Library department separately, which is what we did when writing the *Building Program*, which you can find on our website. For example:

Special Collections

1. Special Collections is in desperate need of additional storage space not only for the future growth of our collections, but also in order to house our current collections according to archival standards for preservation, security, and access. Our main storage space is at the back of the Special Collections department, but due to fire code, it cannot be a closed space. This results in inefficiencies with the HVAC system and also compromises the security of our holdings.
2. Without additional storage space, we will be unable to grow our collections. Staff have received inquiries from numerous parties, both organizations and individuals, who wish to donate vital historical records to The Jones Library, but we are currently unable to accept these donations because we lack the space to store them. If we were able to expand the Library and obtain the additional space we so desperately need, we would be able accept these offered donations. We would also be in a position to reach out to other members of the community to talk to them about the types of materials we collect, allowing us to diversify our collections so that they are truly representative of the Amherst community and its history.
3. A room on the third floor of the Library (in the original part of the building) is being used to capacity as storage to house some of our Special Collections materials. However, this is problematic for a number of reasons. First and foremost, this space is not climate-controlled and the materials stored in these areas are subjected to fluctuations in temperature and humidity, which leaves them vulnerable to deterioration. These records are also less accessible because of their location. Staff have to leave the department in order to retrieve these materials, which they can only do if another staff member is present in the department. Due to staffing constraints, there are many times in which this is not possible. The storage rooms are also so filled with materials that it is often very difficult to retrieve the needed items. All of these issues would be solved with a single, larger, secure storage area.

4. Off-site storage is not a viable solution to our storage needs. The costs involved with off-site storage are far greater than housing materials on-site. In addition, these materials would be largely inaccessible. Either a staff member would have to travel to retrieve requested materials or we would have to pay the off-site storage company to transport the materials to and from the Library. Most of all, off-site storage would greatly impede on staff ability to assist the public. Providing excellent customer service to all of our patrons is of utmost importance to all of us at The Jones Library and moving our valuable historic materials off-site would greatly diminish our ability to care for these records and to connect the public with the resources they need.
5. Our space needs go beyond just storage. We want to provide the best access we can to all of our collections. One of the ways we provide access is by arranging and describing collections (which archivists refer to as processing). Most of our collection is only accessible through the card catalog so people must physically come into the reading room to find out if we have items that are relevant to our research. Expanding online access to our collections requires that we have the space to process collections and, right now, we have no work space to process collections. Our very small work room does not allow us to process larger collections or oversize materials. A larger work space is essential in order to maximize public access to our collections.
6. Another issue is that Special Collections is very difficult to find. We are tucked away on the third floor in such a way that no one stumbles upon us. One of the comments staff receive most often when people first come to Special Collections is a variation on the following: “This is a beautiful space. I didn’t know this place existed!” We have tried to include clear signage and now have a vibrant new exhibit in the atrium to excite people about Special Collections, yet it is still a challenge for people to find us. We have extraordinary treasures and a range of resources in our collections that many more people would use – if only they knew about them! We need to be more visible within the Library.
7. We also host numerous school and group visits every year. We have to close the department whenever a group comes for a tour, class visit, or workshop because there isn’t space to accommodate both the group and other patrons in our reading room. We also have to set up tables in the exhibit space for workshops, such as our partnership with the Emily Dickinson Museum on an NEH grant to provide teacher training in using primary sources, and have to manage having people in the two spaces. This means that we aren’t able to talk to the group as a whole and we also require more staff to be on hand to provide coverage in both rooms. Having additional meeting space would potentially allow us to host these groups without closing the department. The groups would also have a better, more unified experience because they would not be fragmented into separate areas to accommodate the current space configuration.
8. The expansion of the Library is necessary in order to maintain Special Collections as the vital resource it currently is for the Town of Amherst. It is also vitally important to allow the department to grow, both in terms of its collections and its programming and outreach efforts. All of these activities are contingent upon the space that an expansion will provide.