

The Eaton Collection and UC Riverside Libraries: A Study in Driving Alignment

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The Eaton Collection of Science Fiction and Fantasy is the largest publicly accessible archive in the world of “speculative fiction” or SF. This category includes not only science fiction and fantasy but also horror and utopian literature. The collection came to the University of California (UC), Riverside in 1969 when the family of the late J. Lloyd Eaton was looking for a library to take his book collection of about 7,500 hardcover editions of science fiction works ranging from the mid-19th to the mid-20th centuries.

At a time when even public libraries refused to collect science fiction, UC Riverside was fortunate to have the now deceased Donald G. Wilson as university librarian. A science fiction enthusiast himself, Wilson rightly reasoned that a genre as popular and influential as science fiction was worthy of academic attention, and that if no reputable institutions were building science fiction collections it was time for at least one institution to do so. Wilson acquired Eaton’s collection in toto for the library’s rare book department (now called Special Collections and Archives).

Wilson’s decision to add a popular genre to a university collection was met with some criticism and even ridicule, but UC Riverside has had a succession of university librarians who shared his vision for a research archive of science fiction and fantasy. As a result, the Eaton Collection has grown from its original nucleus of 7,500 works to over 100,000 volumes, ranging from the 1517 edition of Thomas More’s *Utopia* to the most recently published titles in many languages. As a Level-5 collection, it encompasses not only printed monographs but also serials, comic books, anime, manga, and realia. Presently, the total number of items in the collection is well over 300,000.

In an independent study published in *College & Research Libraries* in January 2006, the Eaton Collection was ranked as the leading science fiction collection among all ARL Libraries.¹ The attainment of this status has been the result of strategic efforts to mainstream the Eaton Collection into the libraries’ mission, budget support, overall operations, cataloging and processing of materials, preservation, community outreach, the university’s academic and research programs, and student use.

Central to Mission

Most important to integrating the Eaton Collection into the central fiber of the UC Riverside Libraries has been the libraries’ alignment of the collection’s mission with the goals of the university for academic excellence, premier scholarship in selected areas, and the development of interdisciplinary alliances across a spectrum of research centers, academic departments, and faculty groups. From the perspective of the libraries, showcasing the Eaton Collection as one of the campus’s most unique and valued collections has been successfully advanced over the past eight years in the following ways: (1) revitalizing the biennial Eaton Conference in 2008 after a 10-year hiatus, involving the University Libraries and the College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (CHASS) in the planning; (2) providing curricular

support for the newly established “designated emphasis” in science fiction studies at the undergraduate and graduate level, the first steps towards establishing a degree in this area; (3) using the Eaton Collection as an asset in attracting two leading literary scholars and an award-winning creative writer to the university to establish the academic program; (4) securing support from the Creative Writing Department to implement a Student Science Fiction Short Story Contest with awards announced at the biennial Eaton Conference; and (5) serving as the lead institution in developing a national consortium of research libraries with significant science fiction collections.

The first revitalized Eaton Conference, held in 2008, was funded by three entities: the libraries, CHASS, and the Office of Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost. The conferences have been attended by the science fiction scholarly community, scientists, and leading science fiction writers, and regularly attract several hundred attendees.

One of the highlights of the revitalized biennial Eaton Conference has been the presentation of the annual J. Lloyd Eaton Lifetime Achievement Award to a prominent author. The award was created by the University Libraries to honor luminaries in science fiction and to cultivate fan interest and participation in the conference. Ray Bradbury was the inaugural recipient of the award in 2008. His presence on the program brought in an audience of more than 400 for the presentation event. The other recipients of the Eaton Award to date have been Frederik K. Pohl (2009), Samuel R. Delaney (2010), Harlan Ellison (2011), Ursula K. Le Guin (2012), Ray Harryhausen (2013), and Stan Lee (2013).

The libraries view the Eaton Collection as one component of a “three-legged stool,” as described by UC Riverside’s previous chancellor, which includes the collection, the science fiction academic and research program (encompassing faculty researchers and national and international scholars who travel to Riverside to use the collection), and the Eaton Conference.

Connecting to Research

The Eaton Collection has been a major focus for growth, visibility, and prestige of the libraries and a key component in building bridges with faculty, students, and CHASS. Planning for the future, the libraries have followed trends in publishing and fandom, investing in genres such as manga and role-playing board and electronic games. Faculty have also been heavily involved in requesting materials for their instructional and research needs. As one example of bridge building, the dean of CHASS made a decision one year ago that he would generously fund, from a grant, \$30,000 to acquire the media resources needed by a new faculty hire in the science fiction studies program. The current head of Special Collections and Archives is integrated in faculty communications channels, collaborating with creative writing and science fiction faculty on preparation of grant proposals as well as in the planning of the Eaton Conference.

One of the most recent and exciting outcomes of the collaboration between the libraries and CHASS is the publication of a new open access and online peer-reviewed journal, the *Eaton Journal of Archival Research in Science Fiction*, the first journal published by the college and the libraries. Launched in April 2013, the journal is managed by graduate students with faculty advisors. In addition, both the university librarian and head of Special Collections and Archives are members of the editorial board of this journal.

Budget Alignment

One of the strategies the libraries have used to communicate the value of the preservation and access to special collections is to have the head of Special Collections and Archives report directly to the university librarian, rather than to an AUL for collections and scholarly communications. This decision was made early on in the tenure of the recently retired university librarian Ruth Jackson because, in the absence of a full-time development officer, she felt it was essential that the head of Special Collections and Archives be an active member of the libraries' newly established development team.

This strategy has allowed the Office of the University Librarian to develop funding guidelines and policies to protect the Eaton Collection during periods of fiscal constraint within the UC system. During fiscal year 2010, for example, the university's budget reduction target ranged from 6 to 10 percent across all departments in order to meet the campus-wide target reduction of \$45 million. During budget hearings for the libraries, the question was raised by a faculty member of the Budget Advisory Committee on the wisdom of exempting the Eaton acquisitions budget from cuts, suggesting that science fiction was somewhat ephemeral as compared to research needs in other major disciplines. The libraries' prompt response was that attainment of recognition as a world-class collection is not easily accomplished and that the mandate from the chancellor was that star and unique programs should be targeted for continued investment to further strengthen UC Riverside's national profile.

Having Special Collections and Archives report directly to the university librarian has also provided an opportunity to profile the uniqueness of Eaton and other special collections, not only in the university community, but also with the central Development Office to insure collaborative planning for fundraising initiatives. Special collections provide unique opportunities to attract donors.

Mainstreaming Workflows

Interdepartmental guidelines for both the Collection Development Department and the Cataloging and Metadata Services Department document that Eaton, as one of the libraries' most important collections, will continue to be maintained at Level-5 in the collection profile. This focus has been maintained to fulfill the libraries' role as a unique center for preserving and making accessible, in perpetuity, the genre of science fiction. The libraries have also promoted the idea that the revitalized Eaton Conference should not be viewed as a "special collections" activity but rather as a library-wide event with the full support of the library administration. The first call for volunteers for the conference in 2008 received a remarkable response from staff across the libraries. Conference participation by library staff has been one of the best internal tools for communicating the value of special collections and their contributions to the library image. Staff view the conference as a fun event to support, and it has high visibility within the libraries, the university at large, and among the rapidly growing number of science fiction scholars.

Processing and cataloging work flows developed by the head of Metadata and Technical Services to reduce the library backlog directly impacted the accessibility of the Eaton Collection. The backlog reduction plan implemented the concept that gifts—many of which were Eaton materials along with government documents and other unprocessed materials—would be mainstreamed into the

cataloging workflow along with new acquisitions. This has been a remarkably successful strategy that has dramatically reduced all library collection backlogs, including Eaton. In essence, the libraries have developed a plan that insures all donations of English-language materials collections are cataloged as rapidly as possible by a number of skilled catalogers rather than one specialist. This has helped to eradicate the perception that too many cataloging and processing resources were being allocated to Eaton as compared to other disciplinary areas.

Community Engagement

As a premiere science fiction collection, Eaton serves three distinct groups of important users. The first is the community of national and international science fiction and fantasy scholars. The second is the science fiction fandom community, which has a high interest in fanzines and the lore of science fiction characters. The third is science fiction writers, some of whom are scholars and some of whom are creative artists. The libraries now collect artifacts and action figures to remain connected to all three audiences through an evolving exhibition program. Although fans like to see “things,” the libraries have established collecting guidelines that limit artifact additions to a “representative sampling” of items rather than a comprehensive collection.

Fans are pleased that UC Riverside librarians attend conventions and collect and preserve fanzines and the papers of science fiction and fantasy writers. The libraries rely on enthusiasts for gifts of fanzines, books, magazines, small artifacts, etc. Due to the blockbuster films that have been released over the past several years, the libraries expect more opportunities to cultivate supporters who desire to give collections, cash gifts, and endowed funding. The largest gift the library system is poised to receive in its history—a seven-figure endowment for the collection—will come from a well-known member of the science fiction community who photographed 20 years of conventions. His bequest also includes the 66,000 negatives of his photographic record of SF fandom, including candid shots of many of the leading authors in the field.

Future Directions

The “three-legged stool” as envisioned in 2007 by the then-chancellor continues to govern the role of the Eaton Collection and its impact on campus. The libraries partnered with CHASS and the Science Fiction Research Association to hold the 2013 Eaton Conference April 11–14, 2013. Over 200 paper proposals were received from around the world. To strengthen the collection, the libraries will maintain investment based on the needs of its constituents and integrate it into the digitization program, with special attention to developing methods of capturing, preserving, and making available the increasing number of “born-digital” science fiction materials. To continue alignment with the university science fiction academic and research program, the libraries host an annual lecture series showcasing science fiction writers and scholars, attend conferences geared to fandom, and pursue an endowment for funding competitive travel grants to bring scholars to the collection. Finally and most important, the libraries continue to work closely with the professors teaching science fiction to provide guest classes in Special Collections and Archives to introduce each group of incoming students to the rich resource available on their own campus.

Endnotes

- 1 Kevin Mulcahy, "Science Fiction Collections in ARL Academic Libraries," *College & Research Libraries* 67, no. 1 (Jan. 2006): 15.

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