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Kebede Gessesse

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THE SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING LIBRARY
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA:
A Library Profile
By Kebede Gessesse

The University of Alabama's Eric and Sarah Rodgers Library for Science and Engineering (SEL) was created in 1990 by the amalgamation of two separately-run science and engineering collections that were housed at separate locations. The $500,000 modern library was officially dedicated on September 14, 1990. However, the facility opened for use earlier in the summer of 1990. It is named after Drs. Eric Rodgers and Sarah Rodgers, two prominent and long-time faculty members of the University of Alabama.

THE BUILDING
SEL is the first departmental library at the UA built with the intent of taking maximum advantage of computer-based information systems for research. It has 43,000 square feet of space, with a seating capacity of 285. It is a high-tech library providing traditional services and research materials as well as current communication technology. The reference area alone occupies an area of 6,000 square feet. It is located on the main floor of the two-story building. Approximately two-thirds of this space is allocated to published media, i.e., printed collections. The remaining space is used for the microfiche/microfilm collection, computer and CD-ROM workstations, reference librarian's office and a handicapped services room.

THE COLLECTION
Core subjects covered in SEL acquisitions are astronomy, biology, chemistry, geology, mathematics, microbiology, physics and computer science, as well as chemical, civil, electrical, industrial, mechanical and metallurgical engineering.

The Library's current collection is approximately 200,000 volumes, including monographic series, bound journals, and government (NASA) documents. Its current subscriptions total 1,800 titles. There are several other forms of research materials, which include over 100,000 industrial standards and specifications acquired in microform formats.

THE STAFF
The library is staffed by four professionals including the Head, and four paraprofessionals at Library Technical Assistant grade. Student assistants are also available to help in performing some of the routine tasks during each semester session. Every professional librarian in addition to his/her major assigned area of responsibilities, is scheduled to serve at the reference desk on a rotation basis. However, the responsibility for such routine and administrative duties as the preparation of work schedules for the reference desk, student work assignments and supervision, ordering and custody of
the department’s supplies and stationery, keeping statistics, as well as coordination of online search requests, is left to be handled by the Unit’s Head.

SERVICES
Like any large or medium sized special/academic library, SEL is organized into various units or sections. These are: Reference Services, Bibliographic Instruction, Electronic Communication Laboratory, Circulation & Reserve, Serials & Monographic Processing, Microforms, ILL, and Online Research. This paper focuses only on the public services component.

As a primary goal, the library is always open and accessible for information to faculty, students and staff of the University of Alabama. In addition, it plays a significant role in rendering information services to the general public, including individual researchers working for manufacturing and industrial agencies around the area, and other scientific communities across the nation.

Reference
The reference collection contains essential sources such as directories, indices, dictionaries, encyclopedias, and bibliographies. Reference librarians are available during the day time to assist users in using these tools and explain how to use AMELIA (the online catalog) in order to locate materials on shelves within the University library system. During 1990/91 alone, over 8,000 questions—directional, informational/research and telephone questions have been answered by the Reference Services. Over 200 online research requests have also been conducted. In addition, 2,000 ILL requests, both incoming and outgoing, have been processed.

Indexing and Abstracting Services
These services provide data and/or lists of references to help readers identify the documents by subject, author, keyword, etc. The reference department has a separate section where indexes and abstracts are displayed and made accessible to users. The most important titles in the science and engineering areas include: Biological Abstracts, Chemical Abstracts, Mathematics Review, Physics Abstracts, Science Citation Index, General Science Index, Index Medicus, Zoological Record, Engineering Index, Index and Bibliography of Geology, and Applied Science and Technology Index.

The Current Periodicals section is located in close proximity to the Reference Desk for easy supervision and directional assistance. A photocopy machine is installed nearby to facilitate the users’ needs for making copies of articles from journals.

Microforms
This area houses all of the microfiche and microfilm collections of industry standards and engineering/technical specifications owned by the library. It is serviced from the reference desk. There are two microfilm and microfiche readers and one reader-printer for each microform type. They are operated using photocopy cards or coins. The size of the microform collection at present is around 60,000 microfiche and 28,000 microfilms respectively. The microfiche collection consists of the following specific industry standards: ASTM, ASME, ANSI,
ASHRAE, and AASHTO. With more and more information being made available on microforms, this area has a potential growth in the future.

Interlibrary Loan Services

Library users are provided with a service to accommodate their information needs through an interlibrary loan service. Materials that are not available within the University Libraries system can be obtained from other outside sources by filling in ILL forms. The reference desk staff accept requests and conduct verification and then forward to the ILL Services unit for the final processing of borrowing the required material.

Electronic Communication Laboratory

The library features the online cataloging system, AMELIA, which enables patrons to search electronically for needed information. A scientific communication laboratory contains equipment which provides instructions for teaching students how to use online database searching equipment and operating stand-alone electronic search systems. The Laboratory has sixteen computer workstations with IBM PS/2 model 60 microcomputers and CD-ROM players.

Since the fall of 1989, the Laboratory has been used primarily by students involved in a research project to conduct experiments with two groups of students, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education’s College Library Technology and Cooperation Grants Program. In addition, the facility is being used for library instruction classes. During the past year, librarians have utilized the electronics laboratory for conducting numerous class sessions on the use of CD-ROM products and online database searches on CAS/STN, DIALOG’s Knowledge Index (KI), and CLASSMATE to faculty and graduate students.

The electronics laboratory operates as a local area network using Novell software. In addition, just at the time of the preparation of this paper, installation of a gateway to the University’s mainframe was completed. Therefore, access to both local and remote bibliographic databases is now more readily available to faculty and students campus wide.

In conclusion, collections of materials from the two previously separate science and engineering libraries were combined to form the 200,000 volume holdings of the new SEL library, a component of the University of Alabama Library System. In its design and capabilities, the Eric and Sarah Rodgers Library for Science and Engineering stands ready to meet the sophisticated demands of electronically accessible information services through the 21st century.

Kebede Gessesse is Associate Professor/Science & Engineering Reference Librarian, University of Alabama, Eric and Sarah Rodgers Library for Science and Engineering, Box 870266, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0266. He received the BA degree in education from Haile Sellassie I University, later receiving the MLS degree from Syracuse University. He was named to his present position in 1990.

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