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# New core text service at the University of Kent

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In October 2008, at the start of the new academic year, students at the University of Kent were presented with a new way of accessing and using key course materials for which there would probably be a high demand.

Prior to that academic year, course texts could be found in either a closed-access short-loan collection or on the main library shelves. Loan periods for the short-loan collection were mainly overnight, for return the next morning by 10 am. Loan periods for undergraduates in the main collection were either four weeks or one week. There was comparatively little movement between loan categories.

The new way of accessing and using key materials was named the Core Text Collection (CTC). It is located on the entry floor of the Templeman Library in an area with its own RFID security system. The collection consists mainly of books but there is also a large collection of video material in both vhs and dvd format, and a new and well-appreciated laptop loan service.

The collection is arranged in the same way as the main collection (Library of Congress) and there are ample OPAC screens available for students to check the availability of material. Shelving is well spaced so that during periods of high demand there is plenty of room to browse. Students are encouraged to use self-issue and return machines (3M). There is also a loans counter where students can take queries about loans and any items that the self-issue and return machines have difficulty in handling.

The Templeman Library has used tattle-tape security for nearly 20 years to protect its stock. One of the issues that help-desk staff were used to

dealing with was the missing books that had not been issued. Shelving staff knew of many hiding places within the library where students used to place materials so that others could not locate them. These tended to be high-demand items that were either very expensive or out of print and that were required for completing assessments.

All the CTC material is protected with RFID tags. Material cannot be removed from the CTC location without being issued and the RFID tags being deactivated. This effectively gives better control over high-demand material because it must be with a named borrower if it is not within the CTC. The use of a digital library assistant scanner enables staff to locate misfiled stock quickly.

All CTC's printed material has a special yellow Core Text Collection spine label, and additionally items that are loanable for a period of less than one week have their spines marked with coloured tape. The colours enable students to see at a glance the loan periods available for the material they need.

#### **FROM SLC TO CTC – THE PROJECT**

Approval for the change was given at the end of 2007 and the initial planning took place over the next few months. In May a project group was formed by the Head of Library Services, with staff from lending services and a representative from both academic liaison and research services (ALRS) and user services. The project group met on a regular basis (slightly less than weekly) until the project was completed. The Head of Library Services had prepared a project plan and each task was discussed as appropriate; members of the group were able to input comments based on their different viewpoints. The project plan was invaluable in keeping the project on course. The regular meetings and the discussions on the progress of each task kept all the tasks within view and within timelines.

#### **RISK-MANAGEMENT**

Not all staff were enthusiastic about the project and the project team used the objections that were raised as part of the risk-management process. The project was also highly susceptible to equipment and building supply delays. These areas were given generous timeline allocations to ensure that the project was completed on time.

#### **SELECTION OF MATERIAL FOR THE CTC**

There was evidence that students had avoided using the short-loan collection. Many felt that the loan periods and the early return time, with heavy fines and the inability to browse, were disincentives. The collection was relatively small and students by preference borrowed quite heavily from the main collection. Little use had been made of the usage data that was available from the library management system to inform loan periods.

Lending services experienced difficulty in maintaining acceptable re-shelving criteria and ALRS staff fielded complaints from users who were unable to find material that had been returned but not re-shelved.

A decision was made to include a wide range of material in the new collection. In addition to the short-loan collection material, all copies of one-week loan (OWL) material that had been borrowed since September 2006 were to be included. These criteria ensured that course materials for courses that only ran in alternate years were included. The CTC at Kent would potentially be far larger than many similar collections in other academic libraries. The new collection would total 90,000 items.

By this time (summer 2008), exams were under way and most student texts were being returned. A sub-project was set up to 'de-OWL' items not required for CTC. Once this was completed, the RFID equipment arrived and the remaining OWLs could be RFIDed. A mix of lending services staff and students were employed to do this work. All new stock was also supplied with RFID tags.

In some subjects it was felt that the selection criteria for CTC were too broad, and liaison librarians were able, if they wished, to withdraw materials to the main collection. A full review of the collection is planned and it is widely anticipated that many items will be withdrawn from the area through lack of use.

#### **NEW LOAN CATEGORIES**

Loan categories had not been changed for many years. This was an opportunity to introduce changes. There were system limitations but, mindful of the objections from students to very short loan periods, we decided to introduce just one addition – a three-day loan – and modified our previous overnight loan to a rolling 24-hour loan.

## **BUILDING WORKS**

Much of the project plan worked around the necessary changes to the building that had to take place. The budget was very tight and the project group had to approve all changes to planned expenditure. The area where the CTC was to be located had previously been used for periodicals. The old short-loan collection area would house most of the current periodical material that had previously been located in the new CTC area. Back runs of periodicals were relocated to a remote store and the basement stores. As more staff resources were to be devoted to servicing the CTC, a decision was also taken to demolish the issue desk in the entrance and open out the area.

## **SELF-ISSUE AND RETURN**

The Templeman Library had invested in 3M equipment but there was a feeling that it was underused. To speed up the changeover and to release lending-services staff for other, higher-priority tasks, a decision was taken to cease staffing multiple service desks for issuing and returning books.

This decision proved almost immediately to be correct, the figures for self-issues going up from 52% to 80% and for self-returns from 67% to 85% within the first month. There were queues at the machines and user feedback requesting more machines.

## **RFID ISSUES**

Feedback from early implementers of such systems in academic libraries led us to decide to continue with tattle-tape as a backup to RFID. RFID gates are currently installed only at the entrance/exit to the CTC. All new stock is RFID-tagged and all CTC stock has been RFIDed.

Staff reported many false alarms and user difficulties with the self-check machines. 3M have been most helpful in working with us to resolve these issues. It is important to ensure that new library users are shown how to use self-check and that the machines are set to issue receipts only when the RFID tag has been successfully deactivated. As we have chosen to use both tattle-tape and RFID tags, we must ensure that tattle-tapes and RFID tags are positioned according to the manufacturers' instructions. False alarms will occur when tattle-tapes and RFID tags overlap. Good practice ensures that staff are available

both to answer questions and to assist users who may have missed out on training.

## **LAPTOP LOANS**

As part of a number of service improvements in 2008/2009, a laptop loan service was set up during the autumn.<sup>1</sup> This has proved very popular with students, and the distinctive blue-and-white Kent covers can be seen all round the library – particularly in the café and in the group working areas.

## **COMMUNICATION**

This is always difficult to get right. For library staff there were e-mails soliciting opinions and all project documentation was made available on our 'Sharepoint' site. All staff were encouraged to look at the documentation and comment if they wished.

Information services has a regular newsletter that carried details of the service improvements and other changes for library users and the Templeman Library website<sup>2</sup> carries details of all services, including the CTC.<sup>3</sup> Inevitably some users were very surprised when they entered the Templeman Library to find that the imposing loans desk had disappeared and so had many of the books from the main-collection shelves.

## **STAFF AND USER REACTIONS**

Libraries tend to attract staff who prefer stability and dislike change. Many staff felt that the changes were happening too quickly and would have preferred a longer time-frame and more time to become accustomed to new practices. Other staff enjoyed the challenge of becoming involved in a new project that aimed to substantially change the student experience. They worked hard to ensure that work streams within the project were completed on time. The most difficult feature of the new CTC has been the great extent to which the library collections have been split, and this caused concern to both information services staff and academics. It was noted that this seems to have been accepted more readily in other academic institutions, where separate undergraduate libraries seem have been set up. In reality, after initial confusion most users seem to have accepted the split. It is far easier to assess the availability of core material when it is separated out in this way.

All our stage 1 (year 1) undergraduate users knew nothing different, but student users have been very positive and the collection is experiencing very heavy use. It is very useful to be able to see the availability of all copies and to make a choice about loan periods. The way in which the collection is managed enables staff to assess the use of items that might previously have been used but not loaned.

In subjects where students often hide material and the material can only be made available in print format, material that was previously confined on open shelves has been moved into CTC so that its usage and movement can be tracked. This helps us to evaluate whether it has a small number of heavy users or is required more widely.

There are no reader spaces in CTC; readers are encouraged to borrow material and take it out of CTC. Some postgraduate and teaching staff find this inconvenient as there is now a wider range of material restricted in this way than before.

Video material is kept confined to CTC at the request of the user departments, and loans are not normally allowed for students. Viewing stations have been provided in CTC and this has caused problems for students who need to view this material and who are used to being able to watch it in a room where the lighting can be dimmed, which is not possible in the CTC. Students have also requested a quieter area to view the material.

Liaison librarians have encouraged user feedback where a book appears to have been given too short or too long a loan category. It is easy to investigate loan patterns and amend loan categories if appropriate at the time of need. Waiting for formal reviews would not be responsive enough to demand in these subject areas.

The Templeman Library has for a number of years had difficulty in ensuring that newly returned books were re-shelved sufficiently promptly when items were in high demand. Peak return times coincided with vacation periods and the re-shelving task seemed overwhelming for a number of reasons. From the inception of CTC a new standard has been agreed for re-shelving of CTC materials: a maximum of 24 hours from return time, with the main collection having a 48-hour period. The speed with which lending services have been able to return material to shelves is much appreciated by students. This is a result of the short distance books now travel to their return

point on the shelf, plus the ability of staff to identify and re-shelve the material in most demand.

Further enquiries about this project can be made to any of the project team:

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#### REFERENCES

- 1 See <http://www.kent.ac.uk/library/help/guides/laptoploan.pdf>
- 2 <http://www.kent.ac.uk/library/>
- 3 See <http://www.kent.ac.uk/library/using/borrow/core-text.html>