

The current situation at University of Arizona Fine Arts Library

By Bob Diaz, Special Collections Librarian/Archivist and curator for the Performing Arts and Architecture at the University of Arizona Libraries

The University of Arizona (UA) Fine Arts Library is one of three branch libraries that are part of the University of Arizona Libraries system. It is located a little over half a mile away from the UA Main Library on the northwest corner of campus in the School of Music building, and it primarily serves the information needs of the faculty and students of the School of Music. The School has a strong performance-focused curriculum, but it also offers advanced degrees in musicology, ethnomusicology and composition, among other areas. Musicology faculty and their graduate students have long been accustomed to using the Library on an almost daily basis, as it is conveniently located just down the hall from their offices. The Library is also used by students and faculty in the School of Theatre Arts, Television and Film, the School of Art and the College of Architecture, all of which comprise what is known as the University's Fine Arts complex. The Center for Creative Photography and the UA Art Museum are also in the vicinity.

The Fine Arts library started out as the University of Arizona School of Music Library well over fifty years ago, and was initially managed by staff of the School of Music. It primarily housed a highly prized collection of scores and recordings that distinguished faculty such as Dr. James Anthony had carefully built over several decades. In the early 1990's, management of the library was handed over to the University Library, and the collection was expanded to include books, journals, audio-visual and other materials that had formerly been housed at the Main Library. Consolidation of collections and a change in management of the Library were seen as positive moves, particularly given that the University Library's budget was much healthier than that of the School of Music's. Over the years, the University Library has poured thousands of dollars into building the Fine Arts Library's collections, and to providing access to online resources such as journals and databases. It has also invested large amounts of funds for renovation of the space, increasing it in size and providing more room for library materials, student study rooms and computer terminals.

Unfortunately, over the past 20 odd years, other branch libraries in the vicinity, such as those of the School of Architecture and the Center for Creative Photography, have been forced to close due to heavy budget cuts. At one point the University library administration also wanted to close the Fine Arts Library, but the faculty and friends of the School of Music fought hard to keep it open, and they succeeded. The passage of new student fees dedicated to library services in recent years has helped keep services going. However, with continued budget cuts in recent years, the Library's hours been severely reduced, and keeping faculty and students "happy" has been a difficult, if not impossible goal to reach.

When Covid-19 hit in March, the entire campus of the University of Arizona was forced to shut down, and all courses were moved to an online environment. All of the Libraries were closed, and staff were asked to work from home. Patrons were told to hold on to their books, the

collections were inaccessible, and ILL services came to a grinding halt. Nevertheless, the staff did its best to continue to provide services virtually. Still, many patrons expressed frustration, particularly graduate students and faculty whose research was thwarted because they couldn't get access to the Library's collections.

In early August, the Library moved to providing additional limited services. Patrons could finally return their materials and request books and computer equipment. However, it wasn't until later in the month, when school started, that the Library opened some of its space to the campus. The Albert Weaver Science Library and the Health Sciences Library are now open during the week, but seating has been reduced and there are stringent rules in place that require the wearing of masks and social distancing. The Main library lobby is open for picking up books and interlibrary loan materials as well as loaner laptops and other equipment, but the rest of the facility is closed.

The Fine Arts Library is also closed until the end of the year, but patrons can request materials online, and pick them up within a day or two at the Main Library. Reference and instruction continue to be provided virtually. Librarian Rachel Castro has been the liaison to the School of Music since 2015. She had this to say about the current situation.

"When the Fine Arts Library closed, the biggest concern was access to print resources, particularly scores and reference materials. Since the library has resumed limited services, needs have shifted toward access to technology and building an understanding of evolving library policy. For example, there have been requests for access to laptops, cameras, and micro-film printers. There have also been questions about returning items, dealing with delays in transiting library materials and interlibrary loans, and changes to our late return policies/ fees".

At present, librarians and archivists continue to partner with faculty to provide online instruction, and reference service is provided virtually to the campus community and beyond. Patrons can also request digital copies of materials housed in Special Collections. While nobody knows when campus life will get back to normal, the University of Arizona Library staff remain committed to providing access to print and online materials as well as other resources. We all look forward to the day when our libraries are once again filled with students and other visitors busily engaged in learning and study.