

# Reclassification of an art and design library

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Reclassifying a library is something which many librarians have tackled over the years. However, the task is always done with the technology and services available at the time of conversion. This is an account of reclassification using a modern Library Management System (ALMA), alongside our comments and tips on the sheer practicalities of moving every single book to another shelf location; all done, in our case, under the pall of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design (DJCAD), which had its origins in the 19th century, became part of the University of Dundee in 1994. An art library was present from the early 1930s,<sup>1</sup> and it contains books and journals from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Today, it is a well-used collection supporting the teaching and research needs of the DJCAD students and staff, across diverse subject fields in the fine and decorative arts, architecture and related areas.

1. Carr, Richard. *A History of the Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art*. Dundee: University of Dundee, 1992.

## Background

During the twentieth century, the library was classified by a modified version of the Universal Decimal Classification (UDC) system, with typed schedules maintained and updated over the years by staff based in the library. The collection was always intended to be easily browseable by Art students, and over the years, the librarians adopted rules to support approaches such as the arrangement of titles within classmarks by the artist, photographer, or sculptor (as subject), using the first 3 letters of the artist's surname after the classification number. This was later extended more widely, and used within Jewellery, Architecture, and Design areas, where named Jewellers or Architects or Designers could be highlighted.

With changes to the university library staff structure during recent years, including a centralisation of the acquisition and cataloguing staff at the university's main library and new methods of book acquisition across the University of Dundee library system, including shelf-ready books, the DJCAD library could no longer realistically continue to maintain a separate and highly modified classification scheme. In 2018, a decision was made to reclassify the DJCAD library to the Dewey decimal scheme as used in the main library as well as two other site libraries of the university.

## Book collections in the DJCAD Art & Design Library

Currently, in 2024, the print book collection of the DJCAD library (and related collection in a library storage area) amount to nearly 84,000 items, and purchasing for this library remains largely in the printed format, despite having a university library policy with an e-book preference. Publishers of art, design and photography books have typically not rushed wholesale into the e-book format, largely due to the complex issues of image rights. The print book remains predominant in this subject field.<sup>2,3</sup>

## DJCAD students and library use

Student numbers at DJCAD are currently just under 14 percent of the total number of Dundee students studying on campus. However, borrowing records over the previous two years at Dundee shows that items from the DJCAD library

2. Kam, D. Vanessa. "The Tenacious book, Part 1: the curious state of Art and Architecture Library collections in a digital era." *Art documentation* 33, no. 1 (2014): 2-17.

3. Steele, Thomas D., and Jody Bales Foote. "Reclassification in academic research libraries: is it still relevant in an e-book world?". *Cataloging & classification quarterly* 49, no. 1 (2011): 14-32.

were borrowed at some 63 percent of the numbers issued at the Main library, which serves most of the University Schools and student users, and itself holds over 117,000 recent print publications, predominantly teaching and reading list focused (in addition to a wide range of online books and journals). The print books at the DJCAD library are a valuable resource for the students, and likely to remain so for the foreseeable future.

Anecdotal reports from DJCAD library staff over many years have been that the art and design students tend to use book browsing as a favoured method of finding useful resources, especially when images are being sought, so the arrangement of books on the shelves is seen as important to the users.

Investment in a reclassification project was widely approved amongst DJCAD academic staff and students, and further discussions with them established the preferred approach, which was to continue the artist, geographical and period focus which the UDC classification had allowed.

## Early stages of planning the project

When the decision was made in 2018 to reclassify, staffing had to be considered. With only one part time cataloguing post, plus four other acquisitions staff, it was clear that a decision to out-source significant areas of the project would be needed. Some dedicated funding was secured by the university library, and following a tendering process we started working with Working with the Library support company, Backstage Library Works, a plan was developed for our MARC catalogue records to be exported, reclassified, and for new spine labels to be supplied for all the books involved. We planned to do the relabelling process ourselves, using Library staff, and spreading the work over periods when classes were not in session, to keep additional costs as low as possible.

During these early stages we reviewed a range of articles discussing reclassification projects,<sup>4,5,6</sup> and the practicalities involved. The Backstage Library Works company also gave us useful general advice: one key point being not to underestimate the amount of space needed during the actual relabelling part of the process.

## Classification issues and decisions

Although the chief purpose of the project was to enable Shelf Ready processes to be applied to the DJCAD library, it was also important to respect the original principles of the library layout and ensure that the subjects were arranged in a manner best suited to the needs of both students and staff. Given that DJCAD is chiefly a browsable library, we try we try to keep books on particular artists and designers co-located wherever possible.

To this end we went through the DJCAD UDC classification scheme and identified the main areas where we would try to maintain the existing structure. For example DJCAD originally classified artists at 75 + the area code in UDC and we followed this practice in Dewey, using 759 numbers.

An area which did need addressing, however, was the over-use of 709.2 (in UDC used for works by artists not defined by one form of art). Instead of putting all these artists' works at this number in Dewey, we assigned the numbers for types of art, for example 'Installations or Conceptual Art', where works are concentrating on one form. The artists' works may be split, but in the final layout we considered that it ultimately made them more discoverable.

## Initial preparatory work

In the academic year 2018/19 considerable preparatory work was done by removing some 9,700 items to an on-campus storage facility, generally where lower usage indicated this option. This was done to thin out the rather densely packed shelves ready for the big moves ahead, and to ensure that the collection was supporting current teaching needs. The storage facility, located within the DJCAD Buildings, is easily accessible and the titles remain together in a DJCAD location continuing to use the UDC classification system.

This left the DJCAD library at just over 40,000 book items, plus a wide range of other resources – including journals, maps, and DVDs, all of which continue to be arranged by local schemes.

4. Cope, E. "From UDC to DDC : reclassification at the University of Bath." *Catalogue & index*. no. 169 (2012): 68-73.

5. Spalding, Anne. "Changing places: some practical outcomes from a reclassification project using DDC22." *Art libraries journal* 36, no. 4 (2011): 41-43.

6. Lawes, Elizabeth, and Tania Olsson. "Reclassification at Chelsea College of Art & Design Library." *Art libraries journal* 36, no. 4 (2011): 34-40.

## Exporting and working on the bibliographic records

Dundee uses the ExLibris ALMA Library Management System, and the work involved us exporting a full set of the DJCAD bibliographic records to Backstage. There were some 27,000 bibliographic records involved. Records were matched against OCLC World cat via Backstage's Marcadia system, to see how many would be automatically matched. Some 12,575 records were updated by Backstage as part of this initial project. After this process, there was manual matching (again by the Backstage company). Then the records, with their new 082 field, were imported back into ALMA.

A few problems were encountered. The initial match rate with Backstage was relatively low, around 42 percent. The class marks assigned automatically via OCLC were not always Dewey 23, and the OCLC supplied numbers were set out in a different way to the University of Dundee class marks; for example, extraneous punctuation appeared in the class mark, and there were no spaces after every third digit. Backstage was able to assist us with cutting, but sometimes these were inappropriate for our needs (for example for biographies, where we preferred 'artist' coding).

Backstage then carried out manual reclassification on the remaining records, and a final 1853 records, for which they failed to find any matches were worked on by University of Dundee library staff. Our staff used the OCLC classify tool to find suitable class marks, and the Library Hub Discover service, where we were often able to find an appropriate number as other art libraries using Dewey are contributing to the National Bibliographic Knowledgebase.

Work continued over the Summer of 2019 on the records, and we anticipated carrying out a reclassification relabelling process during coming institutional vacation periods, and particularly during the Summer of 2020. However, the Covid-19 pandemic got in the way, and with the first lockdown in March 2020, all on site work ceased. With library staff working from home, much of our activity had to be focussed on supporting online teaching, with revamped reading lists and e-book and e-textbook resources helping to support students in their second semester.

## Work on the bibliographic records

We also used the opportunity of working from home to make further checks and updates to the bibliographic records to suit the requirements of the school, with a focus on biographical and critical works being grouped together. This period of intermittent working on the bibliographic records continued over the remainder of the 2020/2021 year, and into the following academic year 2021/2022.

Our updated ALMA records showed both the 080 UDC class mark and the 082 Dewey class mark. Under the UDC arrangement, the artist's name had been used in the 080 \$\$b field. We were keen to retain that focus, and staff worked through spreadsheets of records generated from ALMA, assigning UDC 'artist' coding into the 082 \$\$b field, where the conversion had assigned an author. This was all done prior to the Backstage label production.

## Relabelling process and practicalities

The work on actual relabelling started in early summer of 2021, whilst the library remained closed to students, but staff were allowed to return to the office, under Covid-safety conditions.

Following a final export of our records, Backstage produced labels, which they supplied to us in the UDC sequence order. Each label was in two parts – the main new Dewey label, alongside a smaller side part that showed the old UDC number, title detail, and barcode.

At this stage, all our Marc records had their Dewey number, and it became possible to create a spreadsheet of item records from ALMA analytics, and sort the whole DJCAD book collection by the new Dewey number. Using this spreadsheet, we were then able to work out the approximate layout of the books across the available shelving in the library, putting guide Dewey numbers at the start of each shelf. A great deal of measuring went on at this stage. We started from shelf averages, but also paid attention to subject areas which tended to have thicker books (typical of these were collected works of artists or periods). We

largely retained the overall layout & flow of numbers around the library, keeping the Dewey 700-799 within the largest open area, for ease of access to the key subject areas of the library.

The labelling work started in early June 2021, and was carried out by a team of library staff, operating under covid measures – distanced, and with masks. Some fourteen staff were involved in the project over the following months, mostly working on a part time basis away from their other Library roles.

To help carry out the relabelling, we created a spreadsheet of physical items, with the usual expected fields, barcode, author, title, publisher, and date, plus the UDC and the new Dewey number – sorting the sheet by the UCD number, and then printing off sections of the collection, as staff worked on the relabelling of areas of UDC classified books.

Staff would match their printed sheets with the new labels created by the Backstage Company, which had been arranged in UDC order. Staff would then take a shelf load of books from a UDC classified section and proceed to relabel them, following the printed spreadsheet, alongside the Backstage labels, matching on the book barcode. Where a match was found, a note field in the appropriate row of the printed sheet was ticked, and the new label attached to the book. Where the book was not found, a cross was marked.

Completed sheets were gathered daily, and the barcodes of the books which had been relabelled were compiled into spreadsheets and processed via an ALMA normalization rule. This changed the class mark in the holdings record from UDC to Dewey. In this way, the catalogue closely matched the new layout of books on the shelves as work progressed.

Backstage had provided general background information on the process of relabelling a library. One of the key things we noted was that space was needed, to store books, when they were reclassified, but could not be placed in their new Dewey shelf as it was still fully occupied by UDC arranged titles. We used a mixture of study tables (labelled with appropriate new Dewey sections – placed as near as possible to their new location), and adjoining study rooms (including a café which was cleared during the Covid period, allowing us to use the whole floorspace). At times during the process, it seemed as if more books were in the so called 'swing space' than were on shelves. This was a period of hard work – trying to keep books in Dewey order on the floor, using bookends to help balance the (often very large and cumbersome) art books. Occasionally, whole bays of UDC classified books were removed to one of the study rooms, to make way for newly reclassified Dewey items.



Figure 1 Mid-reclassification; relabelled 'Dewey' books waiting for shelves to be clear of 'UDC' items.





Figure 2 Reclassified books being stored in Dewey order on the floor of a Café area.

Each member of staff kept their own library trolley and worked on different sections of the library collections. The first initial 'gap' in the original shelving arrangement was made by moving a large collection of DVDs to some spare shelving, and this then allowed the reclassified books on textiles to be placed in their final home shelves, and in turn, this opened gaps elsewhere in the collection.

As the weeks went by, it became useful to have a weekly update email on what was going on (staff were often on part time hours, or annual leave over the summer period). These included a note of which sections were being reclassified, so that any returned items could be either put back on the shelves if that section was not yet reclassified, or on a trolley for reclassification if the section had already been reclassified. Handwritten notices on the end of bays set out the Dewey/UDC numbers for that section.

### Students return to the library

By September 2021, when students were returning in person, the library was largely but not completely reclassified. We produced new shelf ends noting numbers, and a 'Welcome Back' whiteboard for the students, showing the layout of the Library, and sections which were still being worked on. Library staff continued to work on the relabelling, and eventually, following the second Covid lockdown period, the labelling process reached completion in February 2022.

### Continuing work on the Dewey classmarks, and conclusions on the project

Further work on the records has continued to the present time, identifying where subjects have not gone into the area expected. Some class marks provided were exceptionally long and have been shortened. Occasionally we had titles with more than one edition which were classified at different numbers.

In addition, we have sometimes found that the shelf ready classification is not always accurate for the needs of the DJCAD Library. For example, books purchased for a special purpose, such as books selected for their illustrations, arrive with a Dewey fiction number, rather than one for illustration.

Staff and students have engaged well with the new layout of their library. Most were already familiar with the Dewey classification system, through their use of the other libraries within the University of Dundee. The approach taken to the reclassification project, in retaining an artist and period focus appears to continue to support the work of DJCAD.

By chance, our reclassification work occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic period. The team working on the project considered that the actual relabelling and reshelving of the stock proceeded more swiftly than might have been the case had students been on campus as usual. With no students in the library, the project team was able to focus on the job in hand and achieve a largely complete Library in Dewey order by the time students returned for the 2021/22 academic year. Originally, we had hoped to largely reclassify the library by the end of Summer 2020. The pandemic delayed this achievement by some eighteen months.

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