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About the Newton Gresham Library

Mission

Newton Gresham Library faculty and staff envision a library that supports and enhances the development of critically thinking, educated and informed lifelong learners. The Library is integral to the University's learning and research mission and endeavors to create physical and virtual environments that promote discovery of new knowledge and the transfer of existing knowledge. The Library fulfills this mission by providing organized access to a diverse array of quality print, electronic, and other resources and by continuously improving the effectiveness of its bibliographic, instructional, and reference services.

Overview

The Newton Gresham Library serves the research needs of the Sam Houston State University community. The library holds over 1.3 million books, bound periodicals, and government documents and a variety of formats, including multimedia, digital collections, microforms, microfiche, phonograph records, videotape, and newspapers. Other groups of materials housed in the Newton Gresham Library include paperbacks for recreational reading, current periodical issues, new books, and a children's literature collection. A multimedia lab, music listening room, study carrels, a small lounge area furnished with vending machines, and a copy center, including a public fax machine are provided for the convenience of students and faculty. Library holdings information may be electronically accessed through an online catalog from hundreds of library and campus computer workstations, as well as remotely via the Internet.

Sixteen librarians, twenty-six support staff, and a number of student assistants provide reference, interlibrary loan, circulation, acquisitions, and other library services to the faculty, staff and students of the University, as well as to visiting scholars and off campus users.

History

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History

SHSU has had three library buildings, and all are still in use. The Peabody Memorial Library, begun in 1901 and completed the following year, was the first college library building in Texas. It served the campus until 1928 as the library, and then became increasingly compromised as the band hall, faculty offices, and television and radio studios. Finally it had deteriorated to the point that the Regents approved its demolition; however, a public protest caused a retraction of this death sentence. After a complete restoration it was rededicated in 1991 as a splendid period structure. The Estill Library, completed in 1928, served as a library until the present Newton Gresham Library was completed in 1968. Estill was renovated at that time as a classroom building and was renovated again as an administration/classroom building in 1997.

The progression of honorary names is significant. The first library honored George Peabody, whose philanthropic fund made possible the creation of Sam Houston Normal Institute in 1879; even before the Peabody was built, the few thousand books that comprised our collection in the nineteenth century were housed in a large room in the Main building ("Old Main" when it was new) which was called the Peabody Memorial Library Hall. The Estill Library was named for our 5th president, Harry Fishburne Estill, whose administration (1908-1937) was the longest in our history. The Newton Gresham Library was not given its honorary name until 1985, though it opened in 1968. Present at the dedication was Newton Gresham himself, a longtime member of the Board of Regents, a Distinguished Alumnus, and SHSU benefactor.

Architecturally the three buildings are representative of their respective periods: the Peabody is an eclectic little building shaped like a Greek cross, with embossed metal ceilings, hardwood floors, and fine stained-glass windows; the Estill has huge arched windows to provide natural light for what was a double-height reading room before its first renovation, and the exterior is decorated, as were most imposing libraries built between about 1920-1950, by the names of literature's giants—Shakespeare, Virgil, Goethe, Poe, Hugo, Tolstoy, Homer, and Cervantes [in that order, as one stands in front of the building on the Quadrangle]; the Newton Gresham is a typical contemporary library, with its large (an acre on each of its four floors) open plan, huge window walls, and an imposing central stair. A serendipitous discovery occurred during the renovation of the Estill Building in 1996-97: the architect found large clerestory windows that originally lighted the book stacks but for unknown reasons had been sealed off from without and within; perhaps they were leaking or condensing moisture on the books. They have now been uncovered and flood a handsome atrium with natural light.

Once remarkably open and uncluttered, the present building has steadily lost open reading areas as book stacks encroached on the glassed-wall areas. Though Gresham Library is not as congested as the earlier two buildings were in the last years before they were

superseded, seating must be maintained for the much greater use the library receives at the present time. Rapid replacement of reference book sources by computer-based services has freed space in the reference area to be utilized by work stations for research.

A Department of Library Science was organized in 1937, and the program was always intimately linked with the library building until 2002. At that time, a new classroom building accommodated not only that program but also the tutorial center whose original location was on the first floor of NGL in 1991. In late 2003, renovations to Newton Gresham Library were completed that incorporate the space previously occupied by Library Science and the SAM (Student Advisement and Mentoring) Center.

Newton Gresham Library now occupies the entirety of the building's four floors for the first time since its construction.