

University of Chicago's Joe and Rika Mansueto library make book retrieval a robotic affair

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Visitors to the Grand Reading Room of the Joe and Rika Mansueto library at the University of Chicago will be in for a bit of a surprise. The books are not on shelves for the reader to peruse, but stored under the building, in tightly packed in bins stacked five stories deep. This new library relies not on you navigating the stacks armed only with your knowledge of the dewey decimal system, but in knowing what you want.

The library, which is designed to accommodate modern online research,

has the capacity to retrieve a requested journal and deliver it to the circulation desk. Students can then pick it up at the desk and the [automated system](#) will return it. The complete retrieval process can take as little as five minutes. The system relies on a set of computer-activated robotic cranes to do the actual retrieving and delivery. They delve into one of the five-story book storage chambers, which are located directly beneath the reading room. In each of the bins about 100 books are stored, which brings the [libraries](#) total capacity to roughly 3.5 million books.

The rooms are, of course, designed with ideal archival conditions in mind. The entire system is designed to thwart water. The bins are air tight, and the chamber is equipped with both a system of drains and a special outer slurry wall designed to keep water from seeping into the room.

While this \$81 million may be interesting it is certainly cost prohibitive, so don't expect to see one in your town any time soon. While some laud this as the future of the library, this reporter has to wonder what will happen to research if this is the case. After all, some of the most important bits of information can be gleaned by accident. If you have ever been walking the stacks and found exactly what you needed, even when it was not on the computer generated list, then you can see how this system also has drawbacks.

More information: [news.uchicago.edu/multimedia/j... library-how-it-works](http://news.uchicago.edu/multimedia/j...library-how-it-works)

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