

Libraries—Energized Communities for Learning



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If any single campus facility represents new trends in higher education it is the library. Consider the transformation in styles of learning, the continuing evolution of on-line research and communication, the emphasis on nurturing student life and, last but not least, the growing competition among universities and colleges for students, faculty and donors.

And it's just not services and facility requirements that have changed. The image and atmosphere of the library has evolved from passive to active—from a hushed inner sanctum to an energized environment. Reflecting the life styles of Generation X and

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the upcoming Generation Y, there's more conversation, cyber cafes, group learning and sharing, need for technology and the ever-present quiet clicking of laptops.

How to accommodate that much change has been a major question for librarians, facilities directors and campus administrators. For some, the solution has been to renovate and add on, upgrading a building that is often a campus landmark and expanding to offer new services and accommodate growth. For others, where renovation was too costly or impractical, or the benefits of a new facility too attractive, the solution is a new, technologically sophisticated building. Indeed, to become or stay competitive for students and faculty, some institutions have made the construction of a new library a symbol of their intellectual commitment.

Very often the wish lists for revitalized libraries—whether brand new or renovated and expanded—are strikingly similar. Institutions want to make up for technology deficits and introduce a whole range of new services for research and learning. Portions of the library may be designed to stay open longer to draw students from their

dorm room nests into the larger social, interactive community of the library. And from an institution-wide point of view, it may also provide a significant opportunity to upgrade the campus plan.

Imagining the New Library

The model for the new library is one that's loaded with technological power and an active participant in helping students and faculty make the most out of their learning experience. It is a building that offers a continuing invitation for use. Both an intellectual and social community builder, it has the ability to lure students out of their residential sanctums into the private yet communal experience of library research, study and learning. However, finding the successful balance between traditional and new services and environments, without compromising the library's fundamental identity—making it both welcoming for casual exchanges and a place for serious research and study—is challenging both librarians and architects in creating new facilities.

In many cases, the design of the facility itself leads the way. More and more frequently, institutions are combining new resources with the standard library, whether it's a conference center, exhibition space, facility for learning and new technology, or perhaps a cafe or bookstore. Librarians are borrowing concepts from shopping malls, mega bookstores, and student centers to make their facilities life-style friendly. Adding a new, compatible service component makes the building more of a destination and a place not just for study, but for all of the on-line activities that are now part of daily life.

There's a synergy that occurs from linking services and facilities, and it brings more users into the building more frequently. And as library hours are extended to accommodate late night study and research, the life of the building is extended. In fact, we have found that students gravitate to the new library facilities, particularly in the evenings, to study and prepare for classes that may



1. Ferris State University Library for Information, Technology, and Education/entry from campus green

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not be directly related to the use of the library's collections. They also congregate in the library as a social destination, permitting much greater contact with fellow students.

When the building program is expanded, facility planning becomes even more crucial. Understanding what services and spaces should be adjacent or nearby is more important. Being able to maintain visual orientation within the space and with the campus at large, and to easily find one's way throughout the facility are essential to making patrons feel welcome, ensuring continued use and creating a sense of security.

Complexity Brings Richness

An often unforeseen benefit of combining uses is that the spaces within the building will become richer and more complex. Certainly, many of the traditional elements of library design retain their power and can be translated into compelling new spaces, while taking advantage of other design opportunities to link the building with the campus. Large window walls, aside from bringing in welcome daylight, can offer a visual connection between the campus and the interior. Grand study halls and research rooms, which have centuries-old histories as centerpieces of the library building type, remain a very effective space for suggesting the community of learners.

To accommodate various styles of learning and use, library interiors should offer a variety of environments and atmospheres, from traditional library carrels to group learning spaces with tables and formal seating and more private, lounge-like settings with comfortable sofas and armchairs. While good lighting for reading either books or computer screens is always important, using a variety of fixtures and sources of illumination can create settings for different interactions. Adequate levels of illumination for all areas, including lighting book stacks from top to bottom are essential. Similarly, library acoustics have to be designed area by area, either to muffle the sounds of conversation across a large space, or to add clarity in group learning and teaching areas. In all cases, visual, audible, and tactile comfort is crucial.

Last but certainly not least, technology is omnipresent and libraries need to be wired for computer use in virtually every area.

Since the technology constantly evolves, telecommunication systems need to be planned so that upgrades can occur without disruption of operations. Developing fully engineered solutions that provide for future expansion and flexibility to address change is imperative. Providing for emerging technologies such as wireless must be considered as well. Many libraries now include research training sessions to make sure students and faculty get the most out of the on-line research tools. And many group learning and conference facilities require special telecommunications so that they can host off-site teaching and conference sessions.

How successfully all of these elements are brought together depends first on the institution's vision for what this energized facility could be, followed by well integrated teamwork within the institution in developing this vision—among administration, faculty, students, and librarians—led by the architect and library programmer. These discussions can include everything from the role of the institution on the campus and the quality of light and ease in technology adjustments to which services should be adjacent and what seating works best for different uses.

A candid, positive dialog between the librarian and architect is crucial. In part, it's to make sure that the largest to the smallest requirements for the new facility get addressed. But it's also to make sure that the librarian and other involved parties realize the level of problem solving and added value that architects can bring to realizing the vision. A transformed library is very achievable when one vision is embraced by the institution and architect.

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1, 2. The New York Public Library, The Science, Industry, and Business Library/double-height exhibition Hall; Reading Room; 3. Ferris State University Library/24-hour informal student court; 4. Bryant College Library/double-height Reading Room