LIBRARIES AS SPACES FOR 21ST CENTURY LEARNERS & LEARNING
Report of an LSC/CNI Roundtable

Setting the Stage

A group of librarians, architects, and facilitators gathered in Washington, DC, for an LSC/CNI Roundtable in December 2018, in which they would draft documents, or "job descriptions," identifying and describing key characteristics of spatial types within 21st century academic libraries. These documents would eventually serve as a foundation for assessment of those spaces. The event was co-sponsored by the library/IT organization the Coalition for Networked Information (CNI) and the Learning Spaces Collaboratory (LSC), a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the process of planning learning spaces.

LSC Roundtables are designed to focus on the future of planning learning spaces for 21st century learners. CNI's work in this area focuses on spaces that have a particular connection with information organizations and professionals, such as digital scholarship centers, learning or information commons, libraries, computing labs, multimedia centers, and centers for teaching and learning. This roundtable was designed as a resource for the LSC emerging Research Initiative (RI); participants were challenged to identify key characteristics of spaces that are becoming the kaleidoscope of spaces in 21st century academic libraries. The conversation would set the stage for post-occupancy evaluation of these particular environments.
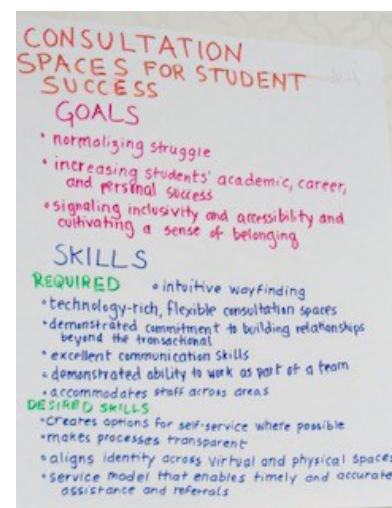
In her opening remarks, Learning Spaces Collaboratory (LSC) principal and lead workshop facilitator Jeanne Narum emphasized the effect of space on the experience of the user, noting this is one of the persistent issues for librarians in planning spaces. She suggested that prompting questions can spark creative conversations within the planning team about how to connect students and experts, and how to make a space less mysterious and more welcoming to users.

Priming participants in this manner, Narum urged the librarians and architects present to be thinking, continuously throughout the Roundtable, about ideas to take back to their campuses and offices for their colleagues to explore.

At this time, she also planted the first seed of the notion of "permeability," an emerging concept of what spaces should be, what kind of serendipitous collisions, interactions they enable, the kind of interactions—immediate and virtual—that are becoming the hallmark of the 21st century academic library.

One aspect of LSC Roundtables is the involvement of architects who provide perspectives on learning spaces projects, share stories about recent projects and interact actively with academic participants throughout. The four participating architects at this event presented aspects of their own recent experiences with library design.

Another feature of LSC Roundtables is that these are working sessions, with participants engaged in small groups to discuss issues and ideas presented in opening remarks and to translate them into resources that are useful for their individual campuses and the broader community. This LSC/CNI Roundtable focused on developing job descriptions for different spatial types within a 21st century academic library.
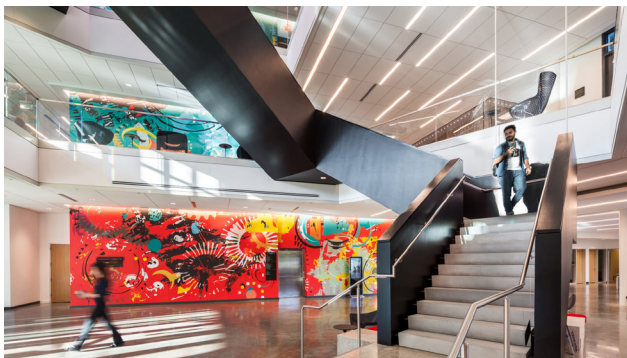

CONSULTATION SPACES FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

GOALS
- normalizing struggle
- increasing students' academic, career, and personal success
- signaling inclusivity and accessibility and cultivating a sense of belonging

SKILLS
REQUIRED · intuitive wayfinding
- technology-rich, flexible consultation spaces
- demonstrated commitment to building relationships beyond the transactional
- excellent communication skills
- demonstrated ability to work as part of a team
- accommodates staff across areas
DESIRED SKILLS
- creates options for self-service where possible
- makes processes transparent
- aligns identity across virtual and physical spaces
- service model that enables timely and accurate assistance and referrals

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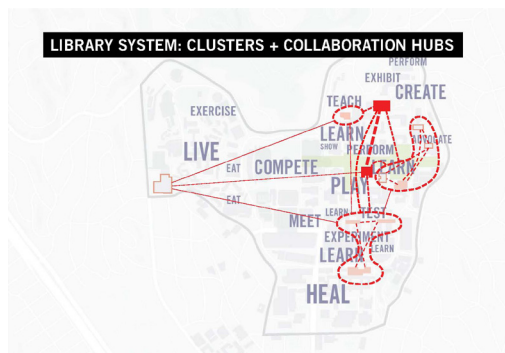Libraries as Spaces for 21st Century Learners & Learning
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THE ARCHITECTS

Damon Sheppard presented HOK's work at the US National Library of Medicine. He described the challenges of reconfiguring and improving the efficiency of both the public and staff spaces, incorporating strategies to help promote permeability that foster chance encounters. Project drivers included creating a flexible and collaborative work environment, increasing the amount of workspace, and preserving the site's historic character while meeting programmatic needs.

Kalyn Pavlinic of Sheply Bulfinch described the processes and goals for the Alfred R. Goldstein Library at the Ringling College of Art and Design in Sarasota, FL. The idea was to create a collaborative space that could serve as an extension of the studio experience and the student union, blurring boundaries between the interior and the surrounding landscape. The strategy was to create an environment that was approachable, with transparent, glass entryways, and with stairs as sculptural objects that could serve to connect and orient visitors.

Today's students are digital nomads with a new relationship to time, place and education.

Derek Jones of Perkins+Will described renovation work on the Douglas Schumann Library at the Wentworth Institute of Technology in Boston and the Waldo Library at Western Michigan University. In these projects, designers tapped into lessons from other space typologies, especially from the fields of hospitality, retail and branding. Derek discussed the idea of the 'uncommons'—the zoned 'connective tissue' between destination programs, that flex and adapt to changing demands. The design strategies sought to foreground culture and serendipity over transactional operations to meet the growing experiential expectations of students.

Janette Blackburn, based on her experience with library planning in her work at Shepley Bulfinch, outlined challenges inherent in libraries in all settings, as well as approaches to dealing with those challenges. She discussed several projects, including the library at Virginia Commonwealth University, the EdLab at Teachers College Columbia, and the library at the University of Notre Dame. Challenges included explaining the idea of the library to those who might or might not normally go inside, breaking down facility scale and creating neighborhoods within the space, and designing flexible spaces that could be open or closed depending upon needs.
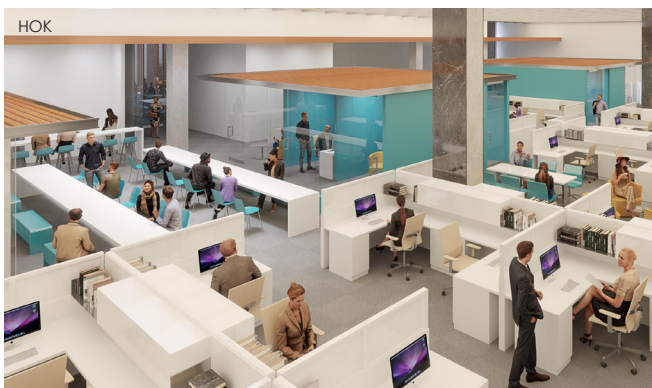
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THE JOB DESCRIPTIONS

1. STAFF SPACES

In addition to being a supportive, welcoming area for staff, this space should encourage permeability with students: security/glass doors could be open or closed depending upon the time of day, and the space could be used by students outside of staff work hours while maintaining its security.

It should be an approachable, inviting space with attention paid to flexibility and inclusion, perhaps in the iconography on display, as well as sensitivity to the privacy needs of staff and of the data with which they work.

HOK

Must be able to:

- Support staff morale and retention
- Be flexible enough to accommodate staff and student needs
- Manage permeability
- Balance professional collaboration and personal space
- Accommodate "choice" work environments
- Reduce barriers based on hierarchy

Must:

- Be approachable
- Reflect culture/personality and goals of the institution
- Be sensitive to privacy needs
- Support staff wellness and sustainability
- Be able to leverage technology to optimize room scheduling
- Support and encourage social interaction

Must accommodate/nurture experiences:

- Be welcoming/purposeful/comfortable
- With a digital promotion wall
- With nested services—concierge/navigator/expert
- Accommodates/welcomes external communities
- Promote serendipity
- Be as hospitable as hotel lobby bar for receiving and orienting users

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THE JOB DESCRIPTIONS

2. INNOVATION ZONES

This space should support various types of experiences: it should incorporate robust multi-media, making, recording, consultation, collaboration, and focus areas. Small enclosed/ semi-enclosed spaces are important components, as is a large, flexible/changeable area.

Friendly and welcoming to non-academics as well, designers of this space would look to the hospitality industry, co-working spaces, and other spaces outside of libraries from which to draw inspiration.

Must to be able to:

- Bring together: Faculty/students/industry/ public partners with library and learning expertise

- Encourage exploration through a variety of means:

  · New pedagogies

  · Curricular assignments

  · Faculty/ student projects

  · New ideas

Must have technology and equipment to accommodate:

- Data visualization

- VR/ AI/ immersion/ gaming

- Digital & physical making

- Long-distance collaboration

- Team-based activities

Must have spaces that afford a variety of activities:

- Small enclosed & semi-enclosed

- Convertible-day/evening use

- Ubiquitous writable surfaces

- Seamless, easy to use technologies

- Variety of environments

  · User-controlled lighting

  · Many types of furniture

  · Multiple scales and atmospheres

  · Inclusiveness—gathering without segmentation

  · Support of food and drink

  · Large/reconfigurable/enclosed teaching space

Duke Edge Research Commons. Photographer: Kat Nania Kendon / Shepley Bulfinch

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This group defined their space, which they also called "hawker" space, as that area encountered right at the front of the library, just as visitors enter the facility, and they took their inspiration, in part, from retail models.

This should be an engaging space, tailored to the audience so visitors know it is for them. It should regularly offer something new and unpredictable, and it should be flexible in programming format, capable of reacting quickly to the environment.

Purpose:

- Engages
- Communicates a message
- Listens/empathic resource
- Customizes
- Commands Attention
- Leads to Purpose

Position Requirements:

- Delightful/charming & engaging
- Unpredictable to visitors
- Flexible—ambiguity and change
- No limitations on time
- Superb geo-location skills
- Fluency in digital and analog platforms
- Ability to create a 52-week schedule and willing to change at the last minute
- Aware of current events
- Ability to work with multiple bosses

Assessment

- Repeat customers
- 5-star social media rating
- Went viral
- High referral index
- Attracts donor interest

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This group envisioned their space as part of an ecosystem to support learning, rather than as one single type of space. Conceptualized in part to respond to a universal need for focus, participants pointed out that, often, students don't even have a private living space, and that even staff might need respite from the 'cube farm.'

The elements of this space should attend to both acoustic and visual sensibilities, and can be considered as on a continuum, between being alone versus being alone together.

Shepley Bulfinch

Purpose: intentionally supporting students' and staffs' needs for focus, concentration, and contemplation

- Features: to have a variety of quiet spatial types giving attention to:

  - Acoustics and visual

  - Alone vs. together

  - Support vs. independent

  - Proximity to support mindfulness programs, learning commons, student success support centers

- Roles and Responsibilities

- Teach for focus, concentration, contemplation—attention to program and to space design

- Counterbalance to collaboration spaces

- Providing privacy (however that might be designed)

- Supporting student academic achievement

- Supporting life-long learning for faculty, staff, alumni

SPATIAL CONSIDERATIONS: Acoustic, visual, tools, support

alone--together

enclosed/focus booth   open focus/carrel   "reading"/room

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A consultation space should signal diversity, equity and inclusion. Barriers to the site itself, and to resources within it, should be low, incorporating self-service options, including mobile and kiosk service points. It should also be flexible, capable of accommodating a variety of different partners.

Perkins+Will

Goals:

- Normalizing struggle

- Increasing students' academic career and personal success

- Signaling inclusivity and accessibility and cultivating a sense of belonging

Skills – Required:

- Intuitive way finding

- Technology-rich, flexible consultation spaces

- Demonstrated commitment to building relationships beyond the transactional

- Excellent communications skills

- Demonstrated ability to work as part of a team

- Accommodates staff across areas

Skills – Desired:

- Creates options for self-service where possible

- Makes processes transparent

- Aligns identity across virtual and physical paces

- Service model that enables timely and accurate assistance and referrals

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PLANNING FOR ASSESSMENT

One purpose of this LSC/CNI Roundtable was to inform an emerging LSC research initiative. Joan Lippincott, CNI, discussed the importance of assessing library spaces in order to determine if a project has met its goals. Planning a needs assessment can help establish project goals or objectives, which can then be used as assessment measurements after a space or facility has been completed and is in use.

To prepare for assessing a project, Lippincott suggested determining what information would be needed in order to plan the space for maximum benefit, especially related to the overall goals and interests of the institution. She encouraged participants to think particularly about goals related to student learning.

Lippincott encouraged participants—in the planning process—to consult known sources for credible information—such as the LibQual Survey and published, qualitative literature on studying habits—which have already gathered a great deal of information related to student preferences. With such reliable resources readily available, there is little need to repeat that type of study on the local level.

Instead, the considerable effort of new assessment projects can then be put toward examining locally unique or distinctive variables, particularly those related to learning. Furthermore, it is important to determine which sub-groups need be studied, such as graduate, commuter, or adult students, etc., for information about learners of particular importance to a particular campus.

Lippincott noted that many assessments of library spaces focus on places for "studying." She asked if broadening and/or deepening links to learning would be a priority: focusing on providing spaces that support specific programs (e.g. makerspaces or virtual reality spaces), supporting capstone projects or undergraduate research, or promoting student creativity through new media projects.

She provided some sample questions she would like to see libraries ask in post-occupancy assessment:

- Has the availability of new facilities and library expertise led to faculty making different types of course assignments, such as those that result in student content creation?

- Are students more competitive on the job market due to new library offerings/workshops?

- Do students spend more time on academic work when they have access to new/renovated spaces?

Lippincott urged participants to build these kinds of measurement strategies into their space planning to allow for before-and-after analyses.

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TAKE HOME IDEAS

As a wrap-up to the stimulating workshop, Narum called upon all participants to share the strategies and lessons they felt were most valuable from the morning's discussions and exercises, and which they would take back to inform their work going forward.

Several common themes emerged from the participants' take-home ideas:

- using the exercise of creating a "job description" to conceptualize spaces

- the concepts of cross-pollination, positive disruption to blend people into conversations who may be from other areas or specialties, but may be impacted by the work of libraries

- looking to others outside of the immediate library/higher education sphere; look at the activity you want to encourage and see who is doing it well

- tying in virtual and physical spaces deliberatively and strategically, via branding and other methods

- developing greater appreciation for quiet and/ or focus spaces and their value, and thinking about wellness in the library

Additional takeaways mentioned by workshop participants included:

- having a holistic view of spaces: how faculty assignments could shape services, bringing new people to the table, and stepping back and thinking about the link between students' various activities and spaces.

- how a physical space can reflect values and encourage diversity and inclusion

- creating "collision zones" and bringing people together informally to promote serendipitous encounters

- paying attention to staff needs, including how their spaces require fluidity and choice, even in small ways, and how it is as important to consider staff working styles as it is to think about those of students

- how/what spaces communicate

As the LSC shapes its program for the coming year, CNI will work as a collaborator to assist in understanding how institutions can make the most of their learning spaces and how they can assess the contributions new and renovated spaces make to the teaching and learning program of their institution.

The Coalition for Networked Information (CNI) is a joint program of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) and EDUCAUSE that promotes the use of information technology to advance scholarship and education. Some 250 institutions representing higher education, publishing, information technology, scholarly and professional organizations, foundations, and libraries and library organizations, make up CNI's members. Learn more at https://www.cni.org/.

The Learning Spaces Collaboratory (LSC) informs the work of campus planning teams with responsibility for shaping, maintaining and renewing undergraduate learning environments—whether the focus be remodeling a single classroom; recycling an out-dated library; renovating for interdisciplinary STEM learning and research; redesigning the landscape/greening the campus; imagining, designing, constructing, and maintaining a major new facility; developing/implementing a multi-year agenda for shaping formal and informal learning spaces campus-wide. Learn more at https://www.pkallsc.org/.

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