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In Search of the Information Commons Model in Arts Libraries: A Library Travelogue and Discussion

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Available at: https://works.bepress.com/margaret_ericson/1/
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Janette Blackburn
Shepley, Bulfinch, Richardson & Abbott

Bixler Art and Music Library, Colby College (designed 1991)

Photo: Margaret Ericson. c2008.
We seek to build an "information commons“ for openly sharing ideas.

To create commonality demands allowing for possibilities and letting in what is new, what is other.

The universal is open, not closed; unfinished, not fixed.

And the universal is inclusive; its emphasis is on what unites us rather than what sets us apart.


Ellen Lupton is Director of the Graphic Design MFA program at Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) in Baltimore.
• **Information Commons 2.0**
  – Exists in common physical and virtual space

  – Collaborative model, partnerships between e.g.
    • Information Technology
    • Library
    • Faculty
    • Writing/Teaching Centers
    • Multimedia Technology

  – Supports and also engages students in the learning process.

  – Promotes self-directed and collaborative learning

  – Promotes information access to physical and digital collections

  – Promotes information creation: state of the art multimedia technologies, with client services and training.
Margaret’s Site Visits / Year Built

• Tufts University, Lilly Music Library (2007)
• University of Texas Austin, Doty Fine Arts Library (Art, Music, Theater) (2006)
• Binghamton University: 2 Information Commons (Main Library and Science Library) (2006-7)
• Cornell University, Sidney Cox Music Library (2001)
Space/Design Precepts of Information Commons

• Human Centered Design
• Open concept
• Freedom of movement
• Comfort
• Unique visual features
• Design encourages learning
• Design fosters collaboration & sharing: between students, faculty, librarians
• Knowledge creation
  – Production
  – Media hardware and software to create a product
  – Practicality
  – Not limited to use of net resources
• Collaborative service model: IT and Library Staff expertise are available providing tutoring or “consulting” services

Doty Fine Arts Library, University of Texas, Austin
Photo: Margaret Ericson, c2008
Space/Design Precepts of Information Commons

• **Human / Learning Centered:**
  • Making user data the centerpiece of redesigning technologies and spaces.
    – Assessment
    – Focus Groups
    – Surveys: Students and Faculty
    – Observational data
  • Reflecting user learning needs and habits in furniture and spaces for learning
Preparation: 
Assessment Plan of the UT Austin Fine Arts Library

Partnered with Institutional Research

Focus Groups

Counts

Observation

Survey of Students

Survey of Faculty

Example plan: UT Austin Fine Arts Library

Project purpose
The purpose of evaluating the use patterns of the Fine Arts Library (FAL) is to:

- Determine how current patrons use the FAL.
- Determine the library needs of students, faculty and staff in the College of Fine Arts (CFA).
- Develop ideas for improving the FAL facility, equipment, and services.
- Develop ideas for making the FAL facility more attractive to patrons.

Project uses
The results of this project will be used to make changes to FAL facilities, equipment and services to better serve the needs of CFA students, faculty, and staff.

Project components
The study includes the following components:

- Conducting two focus groups with one group composed of undergraduate students and the other composed of graduate students.
- Conduct systematic counts of patrons in various areas of the FAL at regular intervals for two weeks.
- Conduct ethnographic observations of the FAL and its patrons using data forms, still photography and video.
- Administer a survey of current patrons to document whom currently uses the FAL, how they use it, and obtain feedback on potential new uses.
- Administer a Faculty/Staff Survey to document how Fine Arts faculty and staff currently use the FAL and obtain feedback on potential new uses.

MIT’s Lewis Music Library:
Opened in October 1996 / reflects the early commons aesthetic

Lewis Music Library at MIT
** start tour **

4. First Floor and Mezzanine

Space/Design Precepts of Information Commons

- **Open concept**
  - Unconfined nature of space
Space/Design Precepts of Information Commons

• **Open concept**
  – Unconfined nature of space
  – Use of glass or transparent materials to create sound buffers, or create private spaces
Space/Design Precepts of Information Commons

• **Open concept**
  - Unconfined nature of space
  - Use of glass or transparent materials to create sound buffers
  - Modular furniture which also creates private space

Binghamton University Information Commons. Hermann Miller Pods. Photo: Margaret Ericson, c2008
Space/Design Precepts of Information Commons

- **Open concept**
  - Unconfined nature of space
  - Use of glass or transparent materials to create sound buffers
  - Modular furniture which also creates private space
  - Reduced collection space
    - Compact shelving
    - Weeding

BEFORE: UT Austin Fine Arts Library
Space/Design Precepts of Information Commons

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  – Reduce collection space
    • Compact shelving
    • Weeding

AFTER: UT Austin Fine Arts Library
Space/Design Precepts of Information Commons

• Freedom
  – Flexible / Movable furniture
  – Untethered access to info: Wireless. Are there enough outlets for wireless laptop users?
  – Have portable devices available for checkout

University of Texas Fine Arts Library: Power strip installed around entire perimeter of building, with movable tables and chairs.
Photo: Margaret Ericson, c2008
Space/Design Precepts of Information Commons

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Lilly Music Library, Tufts University. Mobile AV equipment unit for various types of playback sit under most of the 22 custom built workstations. Photo: Margaret Ericson, c2008
Space/Design Precepts of Information Commons

- **Comfort**
  - Design for a variety of learning styles
  - Have different types of furniture

Space/Design Precepts of Information Commons

• **Unique Visual Features**
  – Signage
  – Branding
  – Unique Artwork
  – Furniture
  – Displays

Fine Arts Library, University of Texas, Austin.
Media clusters kiosk signage, 16 workstations.
Photo: Margaret Ericson, c2008
Signage: Binghamton University Information Commons.
Map to available computers on campus in library and online.

Need to find a computer?

Instead of walking around the Info Commons to look for an available computer, just check the map on the left before you go on your journey.

Grey computers are available.
Blue computers are in use.
Red computers are offline.
Computers that are out-of-order have the yellow caution sign.

This is a live map showing computer usage in real time.

Photo: Margaret Ericson, c2008
“Hanging Piano” at UT Austin, Fine Arts Library

University of Texas
Fine Arts Library
Austin, Texas

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS ARCHITECTURAL AND ENGINEERING SERVICES
WWW.UTEXAS.EDU/PHYSICALPLANT/AE/

Size: 12,000 sq. ft.
Cost: $300,000

The University of Texas’s Fine Arts Library was transformed into a cutting-edge integrated learning and research center by adding new computing and multimedia technology, streamlining print reference collections, and generating visual interest through the display of student art and that of guest artists, along with a grand piano suspended overhead.

PHOTO BY CHARLENE ZVOLANEK
Furniture: Binghamton University Main Library Information Commons:
Hermann Miller “dogbones”

Photo: Margaret Ericson, c2008
Lilly Music Library, Tufts University.
Basement Level, however.....
Beautifully lit, open feel, nicely appointed with artwork, views of
green space.

Photo: Margaret Ericson, c2008
Space/Design Precepts of Information

**Knowledge Commons**

- Arts users need the ability to create music or art or a project from start to finish in one location
- Need software to do this
- Peripherals: scanners, printers, audio/video devices, headphones, midi keyboards, etc.

Sidney Cox Music Library, Cornell University: Music Computer lab / classroom with full suite of music creation software, large monitors, and midi keyboards. Photo: Margaret Ericson, c2008
Space/Design Precepts of Information Commons

- **Collaborative Services**
  - IT and Library “consultants” within the library
  - Services need to facilitate the practical needs of students and faculty
  - Both UT and Binghamton U. have IT staff and Library staff together in the library to provide tech and research help

Fine Arts Library, University of Texas, Austin. IT help situated by the computer clusters. Photo: Margaret Ericson, c2008
Space/Design Precepts of Information Commons

• Collaborative Services
  – IT and Library “consultants” together at the same desk or area in the library
  – Services facilitate the practical needs of students and faculty
  – At B.U. IT staff hired by IT, Library staff hired by Library. Extensive service training for IT staff provided by the library.

Binghamton University: Left, a Library Graduate Reference Assistant. Right, a Graduate Student Information Technology Consultant. Both at a shared service desk. Photo: Margaret Ericson, c2008
Space/Design Precepts of Information Commons

- Learning Spaces
  - Varied
  - Collaborative
  - Open for use by all
  - Social & Individual
  - Formal & Informal

"A collaboratory for undergraduate research and learning"

The Collaborative Learning Commons (CLC), currently being developed at UNC Asheville's Ramsey Library, brings together a variety of elements to foster student exploration and inquiry in new and creative ways. It is not a static computer lab. Rather, it incorporates the freedom of wireless communication, flexible workspace clusters that promote interaction and collaboration, and comfortable furnishings, art, and design to make users feel relaxed, encourage creativity, and support peer-learning. To this, add some specialized software, audio-video capabilities, self-help graphics services, color imaging, and production/presentation software catered to student learning and needs and it becomes a one-stop collaboratory for out-of-class assignments, writing, research, and group projects.

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Sidney Cox Music & Dance Library, Cornell University. Seminar Room. Photo: Margaret Ericson, c2008
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Fine Arts Library, University of Texas, Austin
Lessons Learned
Designing New Music / Arts Library Spaces

• No one “way”, prescribed model
• Prescriptive ideas out of date as technology and students’ habits change
• Music in central library, arts branches (with theater, media, dance, art), music branches, music w/ integrated media centers
• Assessment is crucial
• What modes of learning and study are unique to music/arts users?
• What can we identify as common features based on assumption of constant change?
• What features might distinguish a music / arts information commons given our “community” of users?

Who We Are

1874 H H Richardson

Shepley Bulfinch 2009
Our Collaborative Environment
Expanding Breadth and Complexity

Where We Have Been....

Shepley Bulfinch
Expanding Breadth and Complexity

….and Where We Are Headed…

“Building an intellectual community and a series of interrelated places”
Services for Learning and Instruction

Key Opportunities
- Library as Place
- Library without walls
- Information Literacy in the College
- Curriculum
- Instructional spaces in the Library

Variety and Engagement
- Active and Quiet
- Collaborative
- Events and Outreach
- Focused Research
- Informal Learning
New Tools and Synergies

Library Trends

Key Opportunities
- Portability/ Plug and Play
- Desktops and Laptops
- Output-intensive Activities
- Immersive/ Virtual Learning Tools
- Instructional spaces in the Library

Faculty / Library / IT Partnerships
- Digitization projects
- Teaching in the library
- Curriculum development
- Collaborative work areas
- Accessible staff
The Changing Face of Collections

Library Trends

Key Opportunities

- Varying modes of access
- “Browse-able” or not
- Automated Retrieval Systems
- Print “On Demand”
- Digitization
- Consortia

Focus on Special Collections

- Instruction
- Outreach
New Strategies for Workspaces
Access and Action

- Cross Training/ Evolving Skill Sets
- Blurring of Traditional Roles: Public and Technical Services
- Outsourcing/ Simplification of Materials Handling/ RFID
- Flexible Space
- Collaborative Space
- Visible/ Accessible
Columbia University (before)
Teachers College | New York, NY
Rice University (before)
Fondren Library | Houston, Texas
Rice University (after)
Fondren Library | Houston, Texas
Rice University
Electronic Resource Center

Before

After
What about your Library?
Special Needs of Music Libraries

- Sound and Film Collections
- Books and Scores
- Multiple Formats
- Specialized Equipment and Software
- Acoustical Control
- Access to Power and Data
- Rapid Pace of Change
- Creating and Rehearsing
Create Your Own Commons…

Service Points
Flexibility and Functionality
Library and IT Partnerships
Specialized Equipment
Range of Environments
Instructional Spaces
Workspace
(listening, viewing, creating, researching, studying, collaborating…)
Service Points

- Consolidation
- Consultation
- Approachability
- Changeability
Flexibility and Functionality

- Reconfigurable
- Multi-functional
- Wireless Data
- Ubiquitous Power
- Glare-Free Lighting
- Sound Control/Acoustics
Flexibility and Functionality
Flexibility and Functionality
Flexibility and Functionality
Library and IT Partnerships
Link; Teaching and Learning Center | Duke University
Specialized Equipment
Specialized Equipment

David B. Weigle Information Commons | University of Pennsylvania
Range of Environments

Link – Teaching and Learning Center – Duke University
Range of Environments
Create, Rehearse, Perform
Instructional Spaces

- Flexible Configuration
- Evolving Technology
- Access to Primary Sources
Work Spaces

- Individual/Collaborative
- Proximity to Help
- Access and Visibility
- Multi-Use / Multi-Media
- Acoustical Control
- Evolving Technology
Informal Learning and Collaboration

Cox Computing Center | Emory University
Focused Research
Comfort and Variety

The Commons

Shepley Bulfinch