

Academic Library Identity and Space Design

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Abstract:

In academia, the library can be considered the heart and soul of the campus as well as instrumental to the curricula and course design for teaching and learning. How is the library perceived and identified for all the value created for stakeholders? The modern library is not just about books anymore, it is so much more. How do people identify with the academic library? What can make the most difference to contemporary students/researchers/scholars? How are spaces designed to recognize and enhance, all the multifaceted elements that stakeholders identify with the library?

Keywords: Organizational Identity | Space Attributes | Renovation | Design Elements | Programming Needs

*****Note: Full text of article below**

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Abstract: In academia, the library can be considered the heart and soul of the campus as well as instrumental to the curricula and course design for teaching and learning. How is the library perceived and identified for all the value created for stakeholders? The modern library is not just about books anymore, it is so much more. How do people identify with the academic library? What can make the most difference to contemporary students/researchers/scholars? How are spaces designed to recognize and enhance, all the multifaceted elements that stakeholders identify with the library?

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How do stakeholders identify with the academic library?

Institutions and organizations all have an organizational identity that offers a shared perspective of the organization's purpose, values and culture. This is how the organization is viewed as a collective no matter what specific traits, strengths or weaknesses might be occurring in smaller segments. This is different from the establishment of a brand identity because it is not a fad but creates influence over motivational factors such as uncertainty and belonging.

This can align with Place Attachment Theory, from which people can form emotional bonds to physical environments that serve a purpose in their lives. This equates to emotional attachments of social activities for recreational or social spaces and human resources protocols for workplace environments.

Academic libraries have multiple stakeholder types and each type has activities, resources, programming, and attributes that can form a connection and create that identity. Slide 2 in the presentation shows possible ways in which stakeholders identify with an academic library. Note the absence of books, as this design exercise was intended to speak to non-monograph elements.

The academic library's changing role

Academic libraries have evolved over time in order to modernize as a campus resource. The goal of enabling student success efforts is still critical but changes over time in how the library and its spaces are used. Technology puts more resources online and less for warehousing materials, student body make-up

is becoming more diverse with international recruitment, multigenerational students, multiple technological competencies and a vast array of life circumstances impacted by economic factors and pandemic protocols. Student success factors now focus on building work/life skills, fostering a sense of belonging, and creating a practical experience for students.

As a campus hub, the library is expected to meet complex academic needs as well as cultural and social needs of students and the campus community. Understanding these needs become critical to the investment libraries make in space allocation and design which includes how the library is integrated into the campus community.

As the library is for everyone, identifying and recognizing the challenges faced by a diverse array of students is important. Across the board, students can be suffering from housing and food shortages or other financial insecurities. The academic pressure can be worsened with issues of loneliness or the feeling of not belonging or fitting in with others, sometimes made worst with technology encouraging isolation. Libraries designed to meet these challenges will provide significant value for their campuses.

Themes of academic library identity (beyond books)

It was the goal of this presentation to engage the audience in a discussion of designing libraries with these stakeholder needs addressed. The themes vetted for discussion were student success factors, partnerships, play and well-being, knowledge creation and resources. The members of the IATUL Special Interest Group for Space <https://www.iatul.org/special-interest-groups/sig-space.html> participated in leading break out groups for each theme in order to render feedback. What follows is a summary of the initial presentation for each theme and the feedback generated from the breakout discussion.

Student Success

Academic libraries are paramount to student success factors within academic campuses. Ways to support students vary from institution to institution and the library's role can become complex. For example, students might need support emotionally with spaces dedicated for sensory/regulation, or with expression or inspirational attributes. Having the ability to network in groups or form active participation in events can all be appropriate uses of how spaces are designed. Meeting with groups can also be key as well as supplementing with staff training on mindfulness and/or trauma.

Creating active spaces for social interaction such as game night, contests, book clubs can make a difference to student success. Included within those spaces can be areas for arts/crafts as well as puzzles, providing Legos or creative construction tools plus a space for traditional board games.

Program goals for general student success factors are shared by the library as well as other units on campus impacted by student success strategies. These can include recruitment and retention goals, diversity and inclusion goals, mental health initiatives and all the related services that foster a collaborative, proactive approach to student success. This means spaces should be designed with flexibility, a place for community and a connection to the environment.

The breakout group addressed 3 questions for student success:

- Describe spaces that you have designed in your libraries that intentionally designed for students to be able to work successfully.
- What kind of assessment methods do you employ to align your space with student success factors?
- What are your students asking for regarding enhancement of your spaces within your library?

Student Success Breakout Session Notes:

- Student lead initiatives for student success spaces include:
 - Sensory Spaces to provide a retreat from studying

- Students helped identify what they would like to see in the sensory space
- Piloted programs to understand what works well before investing in larger space
- Co-designed with Department of Disabilities
- Lessons learned on approach and applying it to other spaces to prototype
- Nap Pods
 - Lively discussion on whether the library should provide pods or not. Or should the library encourage students to go home and take breaks?
 - Institutions that have pods noted that they are successful and allow students to refresh in 15-20 minutes. Not meant for long periods of sleeping and that 1 or 2 pods fit their needs.
- Caring Facilities to provide spaces that meet all student needs
 - Family / Parent-Child Rooms
 - Rainbow rooms
 - Neurodivergent spaces
 - Prayer rooms
- Shift from collaboration spaces to more focused study spaces (split typical 60% of space is noisy vs 40% quiet) but varied per institution. Some had transition floors pending time of semester.
- Small/Individual conference rooms – seeing an increase in need and use since COVID
- Need to be bookable and include easy to use technology with the room
- Use as interview rooms
- Individual Pods are commonly used – but some have accessible issues and need to work with local Fire Marshal to see if have impact on building codes
- Zoning space to create complete quiet floors

Partnerships

The partners that are include in library spaces are important and can become part of the way in which a library is identifiable to various stakeholders. These can be internal or external partners in which their purpose or services complement the library to create a holistic environment. And this would be customized to individual campuses and needs. Examples of this range from Friends of the Library groups, with dedicated space to other departments within the university that offer specific services or purposes for student needs.

On many campuses the library becomes the gateway to other learning opportunities or enhancements and is part of the campus ecosystem for the student experience. The library can pull together the academic needs as well as recreational or residential needs of full-time students. Designing the library with this broader goal in mind can be for building long term relationships that will ultimately benefit students.

Adjacencies and how partner spaces are integrated with the library can also create efficiencies and financial support with multi-use environments. This leads administratively to the library's role in terms of being the host for sharing space or pop-ups or having partners as a permanent home base in the library. The Community and Beyond slide offers examples of partnerships that complement and support traditional library services.

This breakout session also addressed three questions for discussion:

- Describe spaces that you have designed in order to bring in an internal library to the advantage of your students with the library?
- What kind of cross assessment methods are you employing to reinforce the value of that partnership?
- What are your students asking for in terms of collaboration between units?

Break out session notes included:

Examples of partnered spaces:

- Living room concepts
- Pop-up mental health services
- Language practice spaces
- Learning support and writing services
- Online consulting as needed
- Student success services that are near entrances for easy access
- Need for troubleshooting the financial model that supports multiple activities

Agreement and values notes included:

- Discussion of university strategy priorities and how partnered space needs advocacy for ongoing support and sustainability
- Importance of financial agreements that prevent the library from becoming the primary support by default
- Agreements need to link back to the library's values for support
- Communication across divisions important to achieve common goals and objectives
- Reporting structures and administrative responsibility should be clear
- Segregated or siloed partners can duplicate efforts and be unproductive
- Individual relationships between staffs are important

What do students want?

- One Stop Shop
- Consolidated service points
- Appropriate partners that complement each other not conflict
- Online/website information should be integrated as well

Play and Well Being

Libraries have always been a hub for people to interact and spend time with one and another. One of the main goals of academic librarians is for students, to engage with their library resources. As the role of academic libraries changes, libraries must adapt to how to present themselves. That's where gaming labs or gaming events come into place.

The library supports the whole person is a concept that is critical for the library's role and value within the campus community. This includes well-being needs for physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and social needs with a connection to environmental factors.

For space design, this allows a broad interpretation for experiential learning opportunities in which play not only supports well being but also grows learning with various technologies and types of activities. The presentation included information regarding Makerspaces which has been a growth area for many academic libraries.

This breakout session also addressed three questions for discussion:

- Describe spaces that have been intentionally designed or included to support your campus health and well-being mission?
- What kind of observations and studies help to determine the appropriate elements of casual spaces and areas dedicated to care?
- How do you identify popular trends that support the whole student?

Break out session notes included:

- Intentionally designed spaces included sensory spaces, tech specific spaces, student kitchens, library cafes, lounge (couches and coffee tables) for that living room affect
- Desire to remove shelving to utilize spaces differently
- Multi-language welcoming tools
- Art, student works, exhibits
- Relaxation spaces
- Purposeful spaces for games
- Plants and nature options
- Flexible and diverse lighting options

Observation notes included:

- Assessing time spent on campus and how that time is filled
- Use of students in interior design programs for perspective
- Observational studies, interviews, surveys
- Storyboarding walls

Notes on Trends included:

- Recognizing the needs for PT and commuter students
- Themed rooms such as use of classic furniture
- Events that utilize library resources and provides creativity
- Requests for prayer or meditation spaces
- Overflow outside spaces
- Engage students to be involved in décor

Knowledge Creation

Libraries should create an environment in which a dynamic and forward-thinking approach to librarianship, emphasizing the importance of knowledge creation, community engagement, and adaptability in a changing information landscape is part of the culture. This is evident in research hubs, digital scholarly space creations, visualization labs, etc. Designing spaces that invite networking helps build the relationships that will ultimately create knowledge. This can come in the form of advanced disciplines and might be institution specific.

Those questions for discussion were:

- Beyond stacks, how is space dedicated to student networking and development of research and knowledge?
- How do you determine success has been achieved using library resources?
- What is stakeholder needs to reinforce knowledge creation success?

Notes and comments from these questions include:

- Need to create spaces for:
 - Debating
 - Sciences, such as a Science Café
 - Interdisciplinary spaces for knowledge exchange
 - Spaces for digital scholarship with IT support
 - Faculty seminars
 - Develop learning outcomes
 - Spaces that are flexible with technology, furniture and capacity
 - Wall displays

- Posters, exhibit spaces
- Spaces with stakeholder input along with vendor recommendations

Resource

Our final theme was around resources but without a focus on print materials. It was felt that trends for resources are going forward relate to better access, use, & convenience. There still can be a digital divide and accommodating users with disabilities is critical to any solution. Digital spaces need to be more personal & inviting and the use of social media can heavily influence resource selection and use. Resources need input from the user community so concepts such as a student presence on the library advisory or digital suggestion boxes can make a difference in the purchasing power with limited budgets.

The future of open access models of publication and archival initiatives like Internet Archive drive a future that will impact space development significantly. This will still require further development of faculty confidence for these resources for long term influence on space.

Other space considerations around resources focus on the presentation of space and how access can be gained in multiple ways. Many libraries are creating hybrid spaces to pull together diverse resources in both print and electronic, and both openly available and for purchase.

This groups discussed these questions:

- How are your spaces identified as resources owned and available beyond traditional books and media?
- How important is remote storage options important to your library?
- Have you accessed the value of books being warehoused vs how that space can be used for different programs?

Notes and comments from these questions include:

- Growing options for on demand resources instead of subscriptions
- Remote storage should be visible and even browsable if possible
- Remote storage shouldn't be mysterious but exciting and important, not second level
- Hoteling spaces can include a resource connection for appropriate pairing
- Assess and determine who uses print vs. electronic resources for future influence
- The concept of browsing is important to users, find a way to browse across the board
- Staff spaces can include resources for credibility

Conclusion and next steps

The purpose of this presentation was to explore concepts and themes in which students (and other stakeholders) identify with the academic library. The discussions and feedback of the five groups provide some foundational ideas for the future of library design and because this was across a diversity set of conference attendees, this demonstrates a broader look as oppose to a case study approach. These findings and feedback will be used to inform further research into an academic library's identify and how future space design will be influenced beyond the common trend of replacing book warehousing with other scholarly needs.

Resources

<https://www.library20.com/page/about>

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