

Information Commons
New Service Model:
Exploring Partnerships
Changing Staff Roles

Susan McMullen
Reference and Information Resources Librarian
Roger Williams University
Bristol, Rhode Island USA
SEDIC
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smcmullen@rwu.edu
<http://faculty.rwu.edu/smcmullen>

Library Transformation in the USA

Library →
Information Commons →
Learning Commons

What is the Information Commons?

- Physical location within the Library
- Constitutes a high-tech, technology-rich environment
- Provides technology hardware and support and a variety of computer labs (multi-media, faculty development, scanning) integrated into traditional library services
- Provides a variety of collaborative learning and work spaces
- Provides integration of space, service and staff
- Is Library-Centric

Transitioning to the Learning Commons

Includes all aspects of the Information Commons, but to a greater extent

- Strategically aligned with the vision of the university
- Services and technologies are more seamlessly integrated
- Encompasses all of the Library, not just one floor or section
- Not Library-Centric: Brings external functions and activities into the library such as:
 - Faculty Development Center for teaching & learning
 - Academic support services
 - Greater emphasis on creation and construction of knowledge (i.e. Institutional Repository)
 - Includes cultural functions and activities: exhibitions, lectures, performances

3 Main Ingredients

- Space – New Building? Renovation? Repurpose?
 - Encourage individual and collaborative learning
 - inviting, flexible, comfortable
- Services
 - Collaborative
 - Seamless integration
 - Consolidation of service points
- Staffing
 - Flexible
 - Cross-trained
 - Partnerships and Collaborations

What does the Learning Commons do?

- Transforms library space into a dynamic learning environment
- Operationally integrates academic support units - scattered staff are co-located
- Allows for the synergistic combination of knowledge, skills, and expertise of information professionals.
- Recognizes the social dimension of learning -- collaborative work spaces, soft seating, café
- Fosters academic community

More than books

- What do you want to happen in the space?
 - Planning focus has shifted – less about collections, more about student learning
 - “Librarians want to think less about the “stuff” that their building will house, but rather ask what do we want to happen in this building” (Bennett, 2007)
 - Spaces need to be technologically enabled, flexible, and inviting – enabling students to become active participants in the production of knowledge

Components of this New Model

- Computer Workstation Clusters
- Collaborative learning spaces
- Presentation Support Centers or Digital Media Studios
- Instructional Technology Centers for Faculty Development (Teaching & Learning Centers)
- Electronic Classrooms
- Soft Seating
- Writing Centers and other academic support services
- Cafe’s and soft seating for socialization and discussion
- Spaces for cultural events and programs

Examples:

http://faculty.rwu.edu/smcmullen/site_visits.htm

Moving toward this new model for service

- ❑ Project shepherd(s) – interested stakeholders
- ❑ Identify and Nurture Campus Partners
- ❑ Seek Administrative Buy-in
- ❑ Strategic planning – how does the IC/LC fit into the strategic mission/vision of the university – strategic alignment
- ❑ Tactical planning
 - Gather user feedback through surveys, focus groups, etc.
 - Scenario building – envision how new services will impact building use and learning outcomes
- ❑ Communicate, communicate, communicate

Creating Successful Partnerships

- ❑ Strong Leadership willing to invest time
- ❑ Mutual understanding of organizational goals
- ❑ Organizational consultant
- ❑ Active staff development/training plan
- ❑ Joint projects
- ❑ Co-location of Staff – leading to natural human relationships
- ❑ Communication

Create a Culture of Service & Collaboration

- Network/listen/learn
 - Sharing information leads to improved service and fewer frustrations and errors
- Regularly scheduled meetings with service providers leads to mutual understanding and respect
 - Resolve problems together and remove barriers between organizations with different cultures and values.
- Build Teamwork – retreats, staff appreciation days, etc.

Challenges for Staff Collaboration

- Each department (Information Technology, Library, Writing, Media Services, etc.) has its own organizational culture
- Different leadership & working relationships
- Different working styles
- Who shapes this new “culture”
- Who owns the space – the Library – I.T. – Academic Support?
- Territory is an issue – boundaries
- How to get staff to buy in – so that everyone feels like an active participant

Libraries and Information Technology Departments: Learning to Work Together

- Library Centric
 - No co-location of I.T. and Library staff
 - IT and Library retain separate organizational structures and cultures but work together on projects
- Partnership
 - Library and IT remain separate departments but they may share work spaces and collaborate closely as partners within the Information or Learning Commons
- Merger
 - Library and IT are merged organizationally.
 - Report to the same boss who administrates both the Library and Information Technology Departments

Ways to Facilitate Ongoing Collaboration

- COMMUNICATE
- Memorandums of Understanding
 - An agreement among stakeholders providing a framework for the partnership (vision, services, governance, funding, review)
- Be clear in Expectations
 - i.e. what the Library expects from IT
 - What IT expects from the Library
 - What both can expect from IC Steering Committee
- Protocol for Conflict Resolution
- Cross-training

Staffing the Commons: Integration of Service Staff

- Types of staff co-located in collaborative environment:
 - Librarians
 - Information technology staff
 - Instructional technology staff
 - Media/presentation support staff
 - Faculty Development/Teaching Learning Support Staff
 - Student Peer Tutors
 - Writing Tutors
 - Academic Advisors
 - Student Information Desk Consultants

My Study: Percentages of staff working in an integrated service environment

Library Staff	100%
Information Technology Staff	56%
Instructional Technology Staff	44%
Media Staff	27%
Faculty Development Staff	39%
Academic Support Staff	33%
Student Peer Tutors	33%
Student Information Desk Consultants	94%

Note: Percentages for I.T. staff does not include libraries with their own systems dept. (i.e. Duke)
It is difficult to determine Media Services Staff because it is often part of I.T.

Information/Learning Commons Coordinator

- Librarian or Information Professional who keeps all services working collaboratively
- Facilitates communication with all groups
- Identifies areas for improvement and sets the plan

Staffing the Information Desk

- Different perspectives coming together to achieve common goals and provide integrated service
- Three models observed:
 - Combined Reference/Technology Support
 - Separate Reference and Technology Support Desks (perhaps near one another)
 - Combined Circulation/Technology Support

Impact on Reference Librarians

- ❑ Most noted that they did not need advanced technology training
- ❑ Cultures learning to work together
- ❑ More use of paraprofessionals and students on information desk to answer basic questions
- ❑ Nature of Reference Work is evolving – Librarians are spending more time offering individualized research consultations

New emphasis on student workers

- ❑ Student information technology workers were the primary providers of technology support at the Integrated Service Desk
- ❑ High importance placed on utilizing the student work force effectively and cross-training.
- ❑ Vital characteristics of student workers:
 - Good customer service attitude
 - Adaptability to change
 - Desire to learn new skills

Indicators for Success in a Collaborative Environment

Bennett 2007 Survey of 56 Institutions examined three criteria that influenced success:

- ▣ Cross Training
- ▣ Increased Spending
- ▣ Changes in Administrative Structure

(Bennett, Scott. "Designing for Uncertainty: Three Approaches." *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 33, no.2 (March 2007): 165-179)

Findings from Survey

- ▣ Similar to my findings

82% indicated cross-training as an indicator for success

55% indicated increased spending was needed for success

32% indicated changes in formal reporting lines was necessary (with only 4 institutions reporting an organizational merger)

Importance of Staff Development

- Nourishing the staff through cross-training and staff development is essential for success
- As technology and the Commons environment evolve, positions and job descriptions change
- Staff who are most successful working in the commons:
 - Continually update their job skills
 - Enjoy learning
 - Are flexible
 - Don't feel threatened by the changing nature of their jobs

The Only Constant is Change

- Flexibility is the key to success
- Keep an open mind, be willing to embrace change
- Be adaptable – continue to find new ways to accommodate the unanticipated needs of our users.

Lessons Learned & Observations Informing Best Practices

- ❑ Inclusiveness in the planning phase is essential – involve EVERYONE
- ❑ You can never have too much communication – meet often and regularly and establish clear protocols for communicating to all staff
- ❑ Give staff a say in the decision-making process
- ❑ Be flexible and continue to evolve. Change will occur, go with it and see where it leads you
- ❑ Think about how the Information Commons will change the Library's program of service

Lessons Learned: Collaboration

- ❑ The key is successful partnerships
- ❑ Staff involvement is essential
- ❑ Allow time and space for staff to transition to this new model. Cultural differences will need to be negotiated for the best working relationships
- ❑ Physically placing staff in the same environment can help breakdown silos and encourage shared problem solving
- ❑ An organizational consultant can be useful for achieving buy-in
- ❑ The Information Commons does not have one owner – all partners are essential

Lessons Learned: Staff & Service

- ❑ Allow the service model to drive your progress
- ❑ All staff working at service desk need to offer the same level of excellent customer service
- ❑ Flexible, collaborative people make all services work together in the Commons
- ❑ Staff anxiety over new work spaces and responsibilities will dissipate as they work together in the Commons environment
- ❑ Technology support can be effectively offered by student workers
- ❑ Be careful not to create too many service points. Find ways to bring staff & services together
- ❑ The popularity of the Commons increases staffing demand.

References

- ❑ Beagle, Donald. "Conceptualizing an Information Commons." *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 25, no. 2 (03, 1999): 82.
- ❑ Beagle, Donald Robert and Donald Russell Bailey, eds. *The Information Commons Handbook*. New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, 2006.
- ❑ Bennett, Scott. "Designing for Uncertainty: Three Approaches." *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 33, no. 2 (03, 2007): 165-179.
- ❑ ———. "First Questions for Designing Higher Education Learning Spaces." *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 33, no. 1 (01, 2007): 14-26.

A full list of readings can be found at

<http://faculty.rwu.edu/smcmullen/Bibliography.htm>

More Information

- ▣ My sabbatical study site:

<http://faculty.rwu.edu/smcullen>