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Academic Libraries: Changes and Challenges

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Bridgewater State College
Maxwell Library

Founded in 1840, Bridgewater State College is one of the oldest teacher preparation institutions in the United States. The College today is considered a large "basic master's" degree granting institution.

Library Statistics (FY2009):

More than 305,100 volumes

Materials budget was approximately $760,000.00

Web counts exceeds more than 4.3 million hits

Public Higher Education Institution, 4 year and above
Undergraduate Instructional Program: Bal/SGC: Balanced arts & sciences/professions, some graduate coexistence
Graduate Instructional Program: Postbac-Comp: Postbaccalaureate comprehensive
Enrollment Profile: HU: High undergraduate
Undergraduate Profile: FT4/S/HTI: Full-time four-year, selective, higher transfer-in
Size and Setting: M4/R: Medium four-year, primarily residential
Basic Master's L: Master's Colleges and Universities (larger programs)
Undergraduate and Graduate enrollment for 2009 was 10,249—8497 undergraduate and 1772 graduate students
Approximately 315 faculty and 1500 other staff

Library statistics: The total number of items in the library far exceeds these reported statistics. The count does not indicate the thousands of bound journal volumes in the collection, the more than 500,000 pieces of microfiche and reels of microfilm, the hundreds of uncataloged items in the Archives & Special Collections Department
Budget: FY09 Books, $61,114 Audio/Video $14,435 Journals and databases $645,082 Standing orders $34,776
Web counts: Successful Hits July 2008-June 2009 Fall semester=1,853603; Spring semester=1,589,929; Summer semester=886,926

What is an academic library?

"Library"

"[A] collection of information, sources, resources, and services: it is organized for use and maintained by a public body, an institution, or a private individual. In the more traditional sense, a library is a collection of **books**."

Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

The word "library" refers as much to our physical plant as it does to the collections as a whole that our housed within our facilities. This word represents spaces and objects. It begins to frame our world view—library as place represents comfort and solidity, scholastic endeavors and personal curiosity fulfilled. As archetypes libraries are bulwarks against a savage culture that embraces the new, forgets about its past, and reminds us all of our civic responsibility—our obligation to preserve our history, our accomplishments, our attempts to capture ideas and concepts, to identify facts and reasons, to spark our imaginations. When I conjure up an image for a library, as I daresay you do, some monumental edifice emerges, a building that seems intrusive and at once off-putting, one that is comfortable on the inside as much for its contents as what it keeps at bay. However, there is one aspect of this construct that is neglected—staff, customers, students, users, patrons, librarians, or any other word we use to describe the people who use and work in these buildings.

Consider: physical and virtual spaces

Donald Beagle

"Conceptualizing the Information Commons"

Journal of Academic Librarianship. Vol. 25:no. 2 (1999:Mar.)

New service delivery model for academic libraries that affect two parallel constructs:

the online environment,

the physical facility

I was fortunate to work with Don Beagle when we were both at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte, in the mid- to late-1990s. This simple form of the information commons was pioneered when the J. Murrey Atkins Library was undergoing a much needed renovation and expansion of its physical plant. What benefitted this transition was twofold: a new university administration keen on updating the infrastructure across campus and academic computing offices housed in the same building. Purpose and proximity converged. This was at a time when many academic libraries were converting their print serials collections to electronic format, when CD-ROMs were replaced by web-based products. In order to capitalize on these forces, the interface between user and library evolved. Within the library, the information commons was developed actually as a series of information "centers"—a progressive chain of technology-rich atolls. For the novice, a simple set of library tools; for the intermediate information seeker, library tools and a standard suite of productivity applications; for the most skilled, access to more applications, more tools, and even peripheral devices. For faculty, a separate teaching with technology laboratory.

> "The emergence of the Information Commons concept on both the virtual and physical levels poses a fundamental question of organizational planning and design: how do we adapt an institution that has grown up around the print tradition to manage service delivery in the highly complex and fluid digital environment?"

Beagle's question is provocative. However, its premise is a bit suspect—is the tail wagging the dog? As we know, many academic organizations are conservative, ponderous, and slow to adopt new frameworks for conducting this business of education. Thesis, antithesis, and synthesis ensure a steadfast administrative model—one where mavericks don't sprint out too far in front of the pack; where laggards are tolerated as intellectual luddites, and where the norm is practiced by those whose own management style was inculcated by like associates. How can institutions change rapidly when we, their staff and employees, insist that change be enacted over time, that the rules of governance run their course, that we are all treated equally even if we do not contribute equally. And in our libraries, I am sure each of us can share stories of those who refuse to use computers; who still believe in the sanctity of print, who excoriate wiki tools as unreliable, who argue that all students must learn how to use microfilm. Boy this sounds rather cynical, doesn't it? It is dramatic, though. However, as administrators we have the enviable task of developing new organizational models, acquiring new skill sets, promoting new methodologies for creating, preserving, archiving, and discovering content.

When the organizational and technological systems are functionally integrated and strategically aligned, the institution can maximize its personnel, fiscal, and technological resources. The structure has to be flexible enough to enable change and stable enough to provide continuity.

This adaptation strategy—to be both flexible and stable--has been referred to as the "cloud" model. In this environment, purpose and mission are evaluated continually; goals are adapted, deployed, redeployed, and reinvented. Skill sets are refreshed as new technologies emerge and (professional) life long learning practices encouraged to maintain currency. Fiscal planning is often a temporal exercise—new products, new prices, new tools enter the market place not on a set calendar that is convenient to budgets; older products, older tools crash and burn seemingly at the most crucial time of the academic year. Then, of course, this paradox relies heavily on the personalities of our staff. These are the normal challenges that make our jobs as administrators interesting.

Strategic Planning

Align library goals with academic and administrative missions.

Build infrastructure support models that complement current conditions.
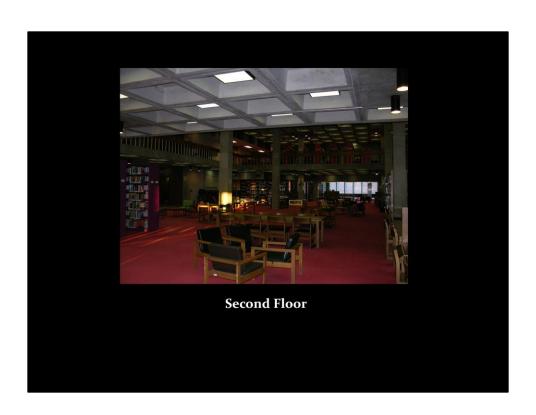
Examine service functions.

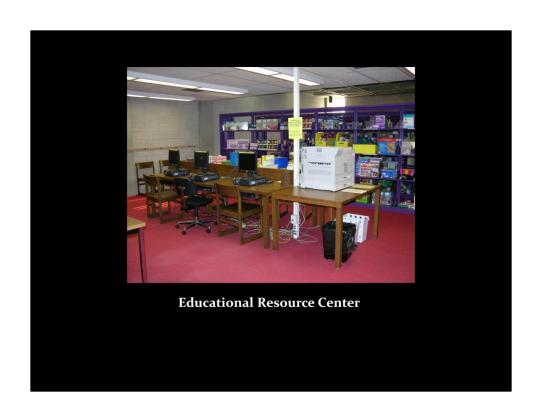Identify and set priorities based upon SWOT analyses.

Manage expectations.

When you renovate either the physical plant or the organizational chart, these are touchstones that should be examined. Whether you begin bottom up, top down, or concurrently the more clarity of purpose you have, the stronger the partnerships are, the more transparent the process is will engender more willingness to implement changes than to merely impose them. This is time consuming, labor intensive, and requires an immense amount of patience and humility. Remember that no matter how many times you say one thing, no matter how many times you write down the one thing, no matter how many times it is repeated, it will be interpreted by others and meaning will be imbued where you think there is none.

First Floor, Front Entrance

First Floor

Second Floor

Educational Resource Center

Special Collections storage area

Consider functions

Bernard Tschumi

"Architecture is not simply about space and form, but also about event, action, and what happens in space. ... [P]erhaps all architecture, rather than being about functional standards, is about love and death."

Manhattan Transcripts (http://www.tschumi.com)

Bernard Tschumi is one of the world's foremost architects. One of his finest buildings, the Blue Tower, was recently opened in New York City. First recognized as an essayist, thinker and theorist, Tschumi's writings extol architecture not just as structures but as a set of related purposes. Buildings are about emotions and ideals, about purposefulness and incongruities. In this model structure is restriction; buildings are shaped by those who inhabit, work in, and move through them no matter how briefly—they change from moment to moment. The play of life is what is important. What occurs within the container provides value, structures provide merely environment.

The new construct

Form follows vision!
Learning Commons

The learning commons is a set of integrated services that function on multiple levels—it is an education space, a social space, a cultural space, a virtual space, a work space, and a personal space.

The shape of our future

Information Commons
 Level 1
 Level 2
Physical space, provides access to traditional library services, high-technology rich environment, productivity software, library-centric

Transforming library service through information commons: case studies for the digital age / D. Russell Bailey and Barbara Gunter Tierney

Information commons, learning commons, academic commons. Whatever terminology you employ, know that this is our new lexicon. These are expressions that only touch on our functions and features.
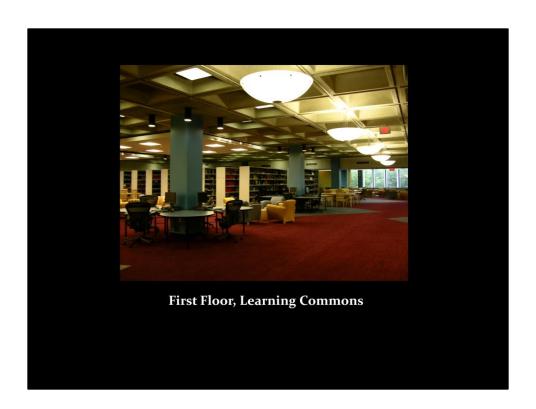
Learning Commons
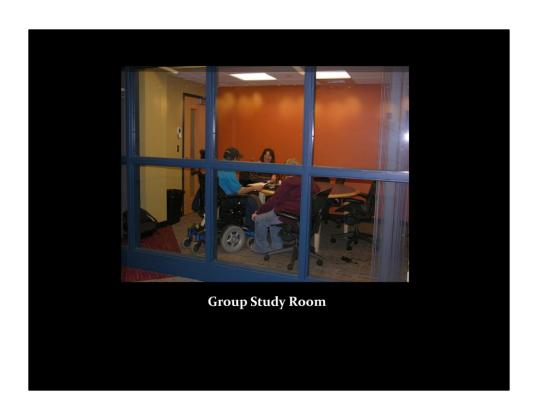   Level 3
    Level 4
Includes all aspects of levels 1 and 2, but to a
    greater extent. It is NOT library-centric!
    The learning commons integrates other
    student- and faculty-support services into a
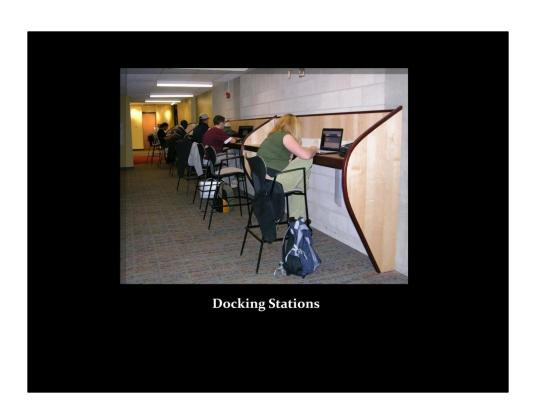   knowledge creation center.
Transforming library service through information commons: case studies for the digital age / D. Russell
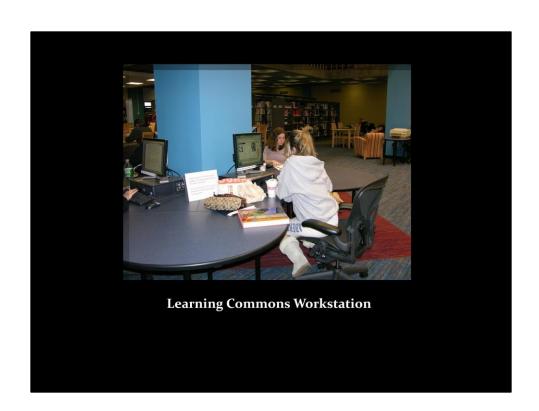   Bailey and Barbara Gunter Tierney

Partners in educating the whole person.

First Floor Reference Services

First Floor, Learning Commons

Group Study Room

Docking Stations

Learning Commons Workstation

Trends

Teaching Commons

A learning area for instructors

More sophisticated instructional design

Collaboration between subject specialists, courseware experts, content specialists

Locally created digital content, streaming content, large data sets, social tools

Questions?

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