Meeting User Needs in a New Library

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It was in March 2009 that I was told that there would be a new Library in the Sunway University College Academic Block that was going to be built. Would I be able to plan the “perfect” library?

I was keen to adopt the concept of the “Learning Commons”. I frantically read up all I could about the concept.
Defining the Learning Commons

The terms “learning commons”, “information commons” and “learning spaces” have often been used interchangeably to denote libraries. Milewicz (2009) thinks that “a library by any other name is still a library”. Harland (2011) agrees, and said that what matters is all of them provide a common goal – a centralised information service and assistance hub to meet the research, teaching, and learning needs of the wider university community.
Attributes of the Learning Commons

The Learning Commons aims to “provide a modern learning environment that merges information resources with state of the art technologies in a central service point dedicated to the enhancement of teaching and learning for the entire academic community” (Hunt, 2008).
Attributes of the Learning Commons

- The Library collaborates with other campus units, like IT and Teaching and Learning, to provide services to users that “can start the research process: locate, evaluate and select the information they need; get research or technical assistance, and complete assignments from one location” (MacWhinnie, 2003)
Attributes of the Learning Commons

- The Learning Commons is learning oriented and facilitates active, independent and collaborative learning. It is learner centered, focusing on student needs, preferences and work patterns. Staff of the learning commons understand that technology and resources are used for effective learning.
Excerpts from Proposal
(28 April 2009)
Who are the users?
Move in higher education from a teaching culture to a **learning** culture

A **learning** culture focuses on helping students become independent learners

**Learning** is a social process - learners benefit from social interaction with their peers. They also like to “study along” with others. Seeing other people working provides encouragement.

Students who **learn** in small groups demonstrate greater academic achievement, express more favourable attitudes towards learning.

IT improves student **learning** outcomes.

- Very achievement-oriented
- Technologically savvy, grew up with the Internet
- Expect to get information fast and easy 24/7 (ATM attitude)
- Prefer experiential, hands-on learning - rather learn by trying things than listen to a teacher talk about it
- Use technology extensively to network and socialise
- More comfortable in image-rich environments than text
- Crave for interactivity - prefer to work in teams and with peers
- Multitask more frequently
- Study at all hours of the night
PERSONALITY OF THE LEARNING COMMONS

- Open, friendly, energetic and abundant with resources
- Activities visible to academic community, with students actively engaging in individual learning and group work
- Students receiving support from librarians, study skills experts and IT personnel
Outcome 1: Skills Development

Enable students to acquire skills to locate, retrieve, evaluate and use information effectively

Provide instruction on computer, information and learning skills

Provide Individualised instruction on retrieval and manipulation of information
Outcome 1: Skills Development
Enable students to acquire skills to locate, retrieve, evaluate and use information effectively

Provide a wide-ranging collection of online and printed guides and self-paced tutorials
Outcome 2: Information Access

Enable students to access information to facilitate learning

Provide information resources to support curriculum and research in a multitude of formats

Provide facilities for searching and using e-resources
Outcome 2: Information Access
Enable students to access information to facilitate learning

Provide use of specialized software to complete projects, e.g. SPSS, Excel, etc.

Provide timely document delivery
Outcome 2: Information Access

Enable students to access information to facilitate learning

Provide remote access to information resources 24/7
Outcome 3: Access to Quality Facilities

Provide a variety of learning spaces and workstations

- Space for quiet study
- Group study areas
Outcome 3: Access to Quality Facilities

Provide a variety of learning spaces and workstations

Individual and Group Workstations

Training Rooms
Outcome 3: Access to Quality Facilities

Provide a variety of learning spaces and workstations

Spaces for Laptop Use

Printing, photocopying and scanning
Outcome 3: Access to Quality Facilities

Provide a variety of learning spaces and workstations

Group Project Rooms

Instructional Lab
Outcome 3: Access to Quality Facilities

Provide a variety of learning spaces and workstations

Exhibition & Lounge Area

Viewing Zone
Outcome 3: Access to Quality Facilities

Provide a variety of learning spaces and workstations

Extended Hours Area

Drink & Phone Area
Outcome 4: Improved Support

Support structures to facilitate learning

Collaborate with other university service points to identify resources and expertise

Academic Language Learning Service

IT Skills Support
(Expected in 2016)
Outcome 5: Safe & Secure Environment

Security of Library and Patrons

Entry & Exit

CCTV
Outcome 5: Safe & Secure Environment

Security of Library and Patrons

Camera recordings of users checking-in and checking-out
GROUND LEVEL

Library resources
  AV Collection
  Reserve Collection
  New Journal Issues
  New Books
  Daily Newspapers

User Assistance
  Service Counter

Facilities
  Smartcard Entry & Exit
  Computer Cluster
  Exhibition Area
  Checkout Stations
  Library Return
  Library Search stations
MEZZANINE LEVEL

Open from 8.00 am to 2.00 am the next day
Separate Entrance
Monitored by CCTV

Facilities
Entry & Exit
Silent Zone
Collaborative Zone 2
Quiet Study
BASEMENT LEVEL

Library resources
Open Shelf, Malaysiana, Reference, Harvard, Research Methodology

User Assistance
Help Desk
Academic Language Learning Service

Facilities
Library Search Stations
Computer Clusters
Training Rooms
Group Project Pods
Conference Room
Collaborative Zone 2
Instructional Lab
Printing Room
Drink and Phone Area
Toilets
Some Basic Statistics

- 72,000 sq ft
- 1,030 seats (90% more than the Old Library)
- Average of 6,000 Entries per day from March to June 2015 – overwhelming response to new Library
- 2,318 entries of Monash users from March to June 2015
- 37 complaints regarding new library received
Entries for first week
(6,000 to 8,000 per day)
Feedback from Students
March-June 2015

Not enough seats!

Overwhelming response from students to new library. Their expectations have been raised.

“Insufficient space for students to study during peak hours”
“Limited space are available for students”
“The Library has not enough space for students”
“Students occupying two tables when friends are away”

Library Action:
Library already has 1,030 seat. Another 120 seats have been ordered. Anti-hogging patrols are being carried out to free seats for users.
Feedback from Students
March-June 2015

Too Noisy!

Some students cannot accept the collaborative nature of the Learning Commons

“I am not able to study effectively as I am distracted by the noise”
“A Library should not need a Silent Zone. It should be silent throughout”
“Students should understand a library should have pin-drop silence”

Library Action:
Library provided silent/quiet zones and collaborative zones to cater to both types of users.
Feedback from Students
March-June 2015

Too Few Computers!

Students expect computers to be available to them at all times.

"Place more desktops"
"More computers should be placed in the Library"
"More computers"

Library Action:
Library has 115 wired computers. Policy of ITS is to phase out computers and to encourage students to bring their own laptops. Library has highlighted other computer facilities in the campus. Anti-hogging is also carried out at Computer Clusters.
Students Like to Study Along with Others

Students hog the Collaborative Zones to study along with their friends rather than have discussions. If they cannot find a place, they will not accept individual seats, but prefer to sit on the carpet in groups.

Library Action:
Library has a problem getting students off the carpets. More group study tables have been ordered, but not too many, as it could cause more noise in the Library.
Observations
March-June 2015

Students prefer to work in teams

Group Project Pods have become very popular with students. The five Pods are fully booked throughout the day. Each booking is for 2 hours. Students are seen using Group Project Pods for project discussions, presentations, making videos for their projects.

**Library Action:**
Library is looking at converting one of the Training Rooms into Project Pods.
Observations
March-June 2015

Students like to study at all hours of the night

Students like to use the Extended Hour Area to study to 2 am. Average number of entries per day is 1,600.

Library Action:
There are currently 209 seats on the Mezzanine Level. Another 42 seats will be added in August.
Observations
March-June 2015

Few students receptive to being assisted in academic writing

Very few students make use of this service

Library Action:
Library has done a lot of promotion for this service
Building Defects
March-June 2015

1. Lighting does not meet specification
2. Frequent leaks
3. Power points frequently did not work
4. Air-con occasionally not functioning
Thank You