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Library Services and Spaces: Addressing the Needs of a Changing Campus

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The OHSU Library has undergone many changes in the last two years to serve its users better. With the opening of the Collaborative Life Sciences Building (CLSB), a joint venture between OHSU, PSU and OSU, there was an opportunity to design a library space from the ground up. With changes in the MD curriculum and changes in library operations, there was a chance to redesign existing library space in the Biomedical Information Communication Center (BICC) to better fit the current and future needs of the OHSU community.

The Collaborative Life Sciences Building (CLSB)

In July 2014, the Collaborative Life Sciences Building opened as part of a joint venture between the Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU), Portland State University (PSU), and Oregon State University (OSU) on the South Waterfront Campus of OHSU. The idea was to combine education and research potential for these three universities in one venue. The OHSU Library created a space to address the needs of the graduate programs, including, but not limited to, medical, dental, physician assistant, and pharmacy. The Learning Resource Center (LRC), as it is known, is designed around student study needs in particular. There are fourteen small group study rooms, many with LCD screens with HDMI connections, which students can use for collaborative study. There is also a popular, larger group study room, seating eighteen people. Many students use it to view streaming lectures as a discussion group using the whiteboard; others use it to practice a presentation using the technology available in the room.



Library Service Desk in the BICC.



The LRC is a popular place for students to spend time. It is available with badge access 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It was purposely designed with comfortable lounge seating as well as study space with tables, so students have a choice of where to go. Also, around the lunch hour, it is a lively place with people looking for a place to eat, others looking for a place to catch up on reading, and still others looking to check out a reserve book, the only print material in the LRC. This multipurpose use of the space has caused conflict at times when some students are studying for high-stakes exams, and others are not. But library staff are there to diffuse the situation. As part of the creation of the space, consideration was given to both quiet areas and collaborative, “talking” zones. The designated collaboration area is in the front where 24 public computers are available for students to use for accessing internet and library resources and statistical software. They are in high demand at peak hours, trailing off when classes are in session. The quiet area is in the back of the LRC, where there are study tables, as well as a beautiful view of the OHSU Marquam Hill campus. Additionally, there is a Meditation Room, something that was requested by the student council while the LRC was being built, so students would have a quiet place to go to meditate or pray.

The library is responding to all of the changes happening on the South Waterfront by being proactive with staffing. After collecting usage data for the past year, the staff decided to address the increase in traffic to the LRC by increasing service hours at the desk from 12–6 pm, Monday–Friday, to 8–5 pm, Monday–Friday. Many of the university’s curricular programs have moved to the South Waterfront, so the library has to increase its presence in the LRC as well. Assessments are ongoing and adjustments will be made to ensure the effectiveness of these changes.

Biomedical Information Communication Center (BICC)

The OHSU Library on the Marquam Hill campus has also undergone significant renovations to address the changing needs of the OHSU campus.

Phase One: The Library Service Desk

In 2013, the Library Service Desk was created to serve the needs of the library’s users better. Instead of having to decide between a circulation desk and a reference desk when they have a question, library users would need only to go to one desk, and a library staff member would help them find the appropriate person to address their need. From the staff side, this is more efficient because it allows the library to staff one desk instead of two simultaneously. This was crucial for two reasons: the liaison program was being reformed and librarians needed to be away from the library more, and the LRC was opening in six months and the library would need to staff the LRC desk at that time.

The newly-formed liaison program, addressing the needs of the research, clinical and educational missions of the university, emphasized building relationships with liaison groups and being where the user needed the librarian, which was often in their space, not at the library. Liaison librarians began holding office hours at their liaison spaces and going to their liaison offices when needed. The new model called for an appointment-based system, where the librarian could spend time with the faculty member to answer their questions, rather than a drop-in model.

To create the Library Service Desk, the Associate University Librarian held monthly journal clubs with the entire department to discuss how other libraries combined service points, what worked and what didn’t, and what the library could learn from them. Then



a series of training classes were created and taught by appropriate library staff, and all staff who covered hours on the service desk were required to take them. The series started with an interactive class, “How to Conduct a Reference Interview,” and continued with a series of seven more specific database and resource-focused classes such as “PubMed,” “Consumer Health,” “Clinical Databases,” and “Resource Sharing.” Appropriate follow-up one-on-one training was given to all staff as they were scheduled on the now-combined Library Service Desk. For the staff who had previously staffed the circulation desk, this meant training on answering basic reference questions by liaison librarians and when to hand them off appropriately. For staff who had previously staffed the reference desk, this meant training on using the ILS and other circulation procedures.

To address the physical needs of the space, a task force was created to create a proposal for combining the service desk, removing the reference stacks, (which took up a rather large part of the space on the third floor of the BICC), and moving the staff areas which were behind the previous circulation desk. They gathered input from everyone who would be affected by the move and made the proposal to both the Associate University Librarian and the University Librarian. It was approved, but ultimately got held up because of university facilities issues. The library decided to move forward with a scaled-back version of the plan, and ultimately that has been a better decision. The Library Service Desk is currently where the circulation desk had previously been; a large group of staff cubicles was removed and others shifted, providing a substantial space for library users. Reserve materials were moved to shelves visible to the users, and now they are used more than ever. Before the move, they were hidden, and many students did not know they existed. With the Library Service Desk, library staff provide more efficient service and a single service point, with effectively trained staff who understand what our users need.

Phase Two: Collaborative Study

To address the changing needs of the curriculum, library staff wanted to update the study spaces in the BICC. Prior to 2015, the third floor of the BICC held public computers in a maze of individual study carrels. In 2014, the School of Medicine launched its new curriculum, “Your MD,” which was more collaborative. The Interprofessional Education Initiative is a huge part of the campus culture, where all the professions learn together in a team-based environment. Simply put, individual study, while it still has its place, is not the cornerstone of the twenty-first century educational system. The fourth floor of the BICC, where the library has its 24-hour study space, had many open study spaces, but the computers were also held in the same individual study carrels. The decision was made to remove the carrels on the third and fourth floors and replace them with



Learning Resource Center chairs.



open tables. Another reason this was time critical was for safety; the electrical wiring for the computers ran through the metal cubicles, and this was causing some of them to short out.

Library staff identified early on that the computing spaces in the LRC were working well. The students liked the open tables and were using them to work together. Also, the furniture that was used in those spaces was holding up quite well. When considering what to replace the older cubicles with, staff decided to use the same furniture since it was a tested resource. After working with OHSU facilities staff and vendors, the decision was made to order tables of a different size but of the same model. Different chairs were ordered as well because library staff designed a user test of three chair models, and students overwhelmingly preferred a cushioned chair to a plastic one.

In order to cause as little disruption as possible, the work was done over the holiday break of 2015 when no classes were in session. Because networking and electrical wiring actually ran through the cubicles themselves, the work that needed to be done to reinstall this wiring into the floor took almost the two full weeks. Library staff provided several weeks' notice to students about the upcoming work, instructing them to study in the LRC if they needed to do so. There was very little pushback to the space being offline for two weeks, and once the work was completed, feedback has been positive. Few people miss the cubicles, and most people comment on how open the space feels now. There is still individual study space on the second floor of the library for those who want it, and appropriately to the design of the BICC, that is the quiet area.

Adapting space and services to the needs of the users is crucial to keep the library a valuable partner in the campus community. The OHSU Library worked with its campus community to learn about its needs and implemented changes to ensure the library would be an integral part of the community for years to come. 🐼

