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UNLV Architecture Studies Library: Space Planning – Thoughts after Five Years of Occupation

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Of course, you identify some problems and pluses, but each building is unique and generates its own new problems and pluses. For what it’s worth, here are some problems and pluses with our building, seen from the perspective of a five-year occupation [opened fall 1997]. [Facts on the UNLV Architecture Studies Library are available at http://www.library.unlv.edu/arch/archbran.html, including floor maps, and a virtual walkthrough.

Pluses

Alcove for copy machine a good move. Noise buffer. Entrance to copy area coincides with group study tables. Also we made it big enough that we have been able to add a second copy machine. Noisy microform reader there as well.

Flexible area at entrance – even before we moved in we had changed the function of that space from reference to exhibits, juries, all-school meetings, receptions and lectures. The brochure shows the current configuration, the plan with square footage indicated gives the original usage. Big open space may give appearance of waste, but I am really glad it is there.

Shelving units arranged for expansion – sounds like common sense and is – stacks were arranged so that seating and stacks increments were accommodated, i.e. when we needed to add a range, we moved seating but did not need to move any existing stacks.

Signs – we didn’t put any up until after we had been in the facility for six months. This allowed us to find out what signs were really needed. I would say we are a minimalist sign facility! We did however need to have a sign indicating the existence of a second floor, even though the stair to the second floor is more than obvious. Go figure. Of course it was history students that seemed oblivious! The only other signs we have are for: copier, periodicals, books and a directory on clear plastic to put on a column near the entrance.

Negatives that I might have predicted

Background: I worked with architects on three schemes for the architecture library in five years. The last was under a great deal of pressure because the previous project had consumed a lot of time and come in over budget three times! AND we needed to be in the facility to get accredited. So though I might have predicted a problem, it had to be severe before it would be heard – they did not want to hear about problems.
Special collections space. I had thought I had too much, but in less than five years I find I could use and want much more. In fact, I had a substantial collection that had to be moved to the main library special collections, and subsequent donations that we have not been able to keep in the ASL.

Sun glares on computers at certain times of year/day [about one hour, day-light savings period]. I would not trade our windows for anything, but some way of compensating should have been anticipated. Western facing long windows also pose problems with lecture/slide shows during daylight savings periods.

Networking with the library, but not with architecture. Definitely we had to be on the library’s network, but having access to the School’s network would have been advantageous for the students. It may just be a lost opportunity.

Librarian’s office is quite removed from the action, a problem and a plus: a problem because the students don’t know I am back here, a plus for the same reason! The placement was not something I had input on, due to the get-it-done nature of the project. In the plans for the previous iteration, my office was across from the circulation desk.

Negatives that were predicted without result

Marlok set-up: pro – can track who enters; con – must rely on someone else to program, can never close early, and it’s subject to bugs. I like the fact that the marlok records who enters [which of course a key would not]. I’d just like to have control, and in fact during planning it was agreed that the library would be responsible for the programming.

Lights – the problems identified prior to construction did in fact prove to be problems.
1. Lights coming from the very high ceiling in the two-story space were supposed to have a means to lower them for changing the lights – they somehow never got that. Result: big machine required to reach, lights changed only in summer, troughs in floor due to weight of machine, and north emergency exit had to be redone so that big machine would fit through.
2. The other light problem: can lights – I strongly stated on more than one occasion that I did not want can lights. We have them, and they have the negative effect you would expect – dark and too-light spaces. Per Archi-Tech Nov/Dec 2002 article “Digital Libraries in Transition” by Sara Malone “libraries nowadays need an ambient type of lighting … because [of] the flexibility of on a nonspecific light source….,” – therefore higher ceilings to be desired.
3. Longevity: Can-lights have to be replaced far more frequently than tube fluorescents – every one we have has had to be replaced in the last 2-½ years. For the tube fluorescent lights, the longer the fluorescent the less they have to be changed, e.g. 4’ lights have been changed rarely – only 2 in 3 years, 2’ lights – we find one every four months that goes out. Luckily the lights in the two-story space last for years.
Negatives that show up in occupation

All offices and study rooms are equipped with light sensors. I don’t find they work reliably.

HVAC balancing problems, still, after five years!! And why is special collections always the hottest and most humid space??

Mold – our particular problem. Can you believe the contractor put the cement pad adjacent to the outside doors sloping toward the door?!

Cable trays were something we proudly planned and implemented in the name of future flexibility. In first five years we haven’t needed to use them. Indeed they have created dangerous depressions in the floor, thanks to the machine needed to change the lights. Today, I would plan for wireless future flexibility to provide for access points for future power/data [no metal grid in walls].

Jury use in both the gallery space and in group study rooms has been harder on the walls than we expected. We have addressed this by adding plywood on top of the walls. The idea is that we can replace the plywood more easily and more effectively than replacing the walls.

Changes necessitated by technology and/or time

UNLV Libraries’ ideal replacement schedule:
   Carpet 5-7 years
   Paint 7 years
   Lounge chairs 10 years
   Couches 7 years
   Service desk chairs 5 years
   Patron chairs 8 years
   Office furnishings 10-20 years
   Staff chairs 7 years

Networking – drops had been pulled to carrels, but not activated until 3 years after opening. We also activated drops in the two groups study rooms.

Have added more computers, scanners, color printer, 2nd copier. Complete upgrade for staff and patrons machines in 2001.

Will add a new network switch/cluster of drops since we are now, just now, out of drops. We thought we had plenty of extra, but they have been needed for added computers, for the new pay-for-print systems, and for additional scanners and printers.

Will be adding receiving stations for media transmission from the main library.
Reorganized staff workroom to provide for an additional staff space [one more classified, plus stable graduate assistant workstations].

Have added huge models which were gifts from firms in town.

Our basic goal is to be able to offer the same services that the main library offers, even though our hours are more limited. If we are to accomplish that goal we will be making additional changes, mostly related to technology. We would have to add satellite conferencing capability, videoconference facilities, smartboards, audio in rooms, microform computer devices, self-checkout and DVD players. The timing will be dependent on patron demand. UNLV’s new Lied Library, which opened one year ago as a state-of-the-art facility, already wants to add a video editing/instruction technology production studio and a digital projects production work space. Obviously a never-ending challenge.

**Student critiques**

We have asked for input from the students in a variety of ways, one-on-one and in classes. Some of their observations:

Furniture not comfortable enough.

Not enough daylighting.

2nd floor egress needed to get quickly to studios.

Need a shelf in the bathroom to put purse on.

Color and visual interest needed. Their suggestions include: use color to bring out aspects of the architecture e.g. the stairwell; accent soffits with darker colors; install a water wall; fiber optics around columns to make more lively; vary blues, greens, and purple for study areas as monotone colors are boring and induce the body to create its own stimulation; have adjustable light; use bright colors to attract folks to where they can get help, like circ desk; mobile with color coming down from high ceiling to make it seem more intimate; use purple to inspire creativity; muted colors induce feeling of fatigue; more incandescent lighting needed; more live plants; neon signage; digital display over circ area

But bottom line, and something I have heard frequently, the library space is seen as the “best” space in the entire building. I can’t take credit for it, but I certainly glory in it. And it pretty much ensures that visitors to the School always see the library!

Miscellaneous additional issues: slides, areas needing most planning (circ, classroom, stacks), allotments of SF, software selections, planning/moving process, reliance on others, control over windows, planning for future expansion