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Changing Spaces

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Changing Spaces

Our library spaces are being reconfigured. How can we use this opportunity for our patrons' benefit?
By Lauren M. Collins

As print collections shrink in favor of the electronic delivery of information, library space—once needed to hold the volumes we counted on to justify our existence—is no longer necessary for that purpose. Those of us who manage law libraries with large footprints are regularly asked to justify the continued maintenance of space that houses much smaller collections. Even those with smaller library spaces find themselves, at the very least, with more space than they had before and facing decisions about its use.

In his article, “Designing a Law Library to Encourage Learning,” Lee Peoples writes about effectively using leftover law library space to encourage and improve student learning and help the law school meet accreditation requirements. However, these spaces can be expensive, and, despite benefits that are obvious to us, law school administrators may require a great deal of convincing to support them. Librarians are left to become creative about the continued use of library space in ways that are affordable and of obvious benefit—or be willing to surrender it. Space can be “commandeered,” as many know anecdotally and as Professor Peoples points out in his article. Fortunately, commandeered space isn’t always poorly used, and both planned and unexpected space changes can add positively to our students’ learning, comfort, and convenience.

Furthering the Law School Mission: Law Schools Creep into Library Spaces

The support of other law school functions is a more frequent use for available law library space. For example, the Sarita Kennedy East Law Library at St. Mary’s University houses the law school Career Services Office. Other libraries house classrooms, faculty offices, and facilities for law school journals.

“Having classes held here in the library helps create more library traffic,” observes Ronald E. Wheeler of his former library, the Dorraine Zief Law Library at University of San Francisco School of Law. As resources are more frequently accessed remotely, getting students into the library to meet faculty, take classes, or participate in favored student activities helps them discover or remember our information services and social spaces. Where our tradition was to reserve our reading rooms for . . . well . . . reading, several schools have



An event held in honor of the 30th Anniversary of the Sarita Kennedy East Law Library at St. Mary’s University. Photo courtesy of Bethbiriah Sanchez.

recognized that these make excellent gathering spaces.

“We have a big, bright reading room in the library that is regularly used for speakers, meetings, luncheons, and receptions,” says St. Mary’s University Law Library Director Robert H. Hu. This means changing our thinking about noise, food, and drink in the library, but that is a battle many of us stopped fighting long ago.

A space sharing arrangement that is increasing in popularity is one between clinics and the library. The University of Cincinnati College of Law Library, for example, is home to the Lois and Richard Rosenthal Institute for Justice, a part of the Ohio Innocence Project. Another example is the newly renovated space that has been developed for Concordia University Law School where

space-sharing between the library and the clinic was part of the initial construction plan. The law library at Concordia houses a portion of its clinical staff offices and student work carrels, while other clinical space stands alone in the law school building. Phillip Gragg, director of the George R. White Law Library at Concordia, finds that the space arrangement “keeps the library relevant by supporting the law school at every level.” To address the unique challenge of clinical space in open areas—client confidentiality—the Concordia clinical space has a separate entrance. This issue is minimized at the Rosenthal Institute since Innocence Project clients must be met away from the law school. The space that houses the Institute requires card swipe access, which prevents non-law school affiliates



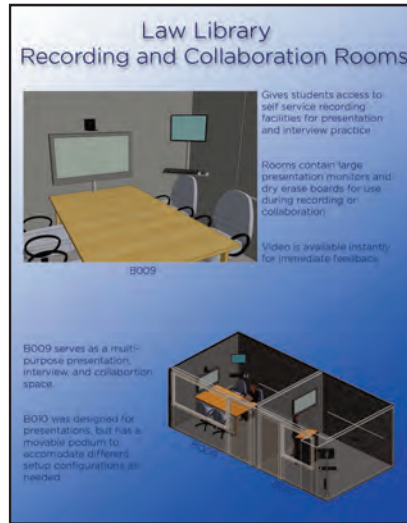
Outside of Concordia University Law School Library showing the separate entrance for clinic offices and student workspace housed within the law library. Photo courtesy of Phillip Gragg, law library director.



from entering the area.

Reconfigured library space may also uphold the law school mission by supporting job placement for recent alumni. When I arrived at Cleveland-Marshall College of Law, construction was underway on a Solo Practice Incubator. The project, a 10-suite office space for recent graduates to hang their own shingles, was being constructed in 3,755 square feet of library space with a separate entrance off the main street. The space, with floor to ceiling windows, had been occupied by some student carrels, but mostly stacks. The incubator displaced just over 30 ranges and required a great deal of weeding and shifting. Though it required a lot of work, in a library as large as ours, displacing stacks to support our law school's access mission by providing space and some limited services to entrepreneurial new graduates is an obvious win. Arguably, the Incubator in the library furthers the concept of the library as the laboratory of the law school. Practically, it gives us opportunities to examine the legal information needs of our alumni who opt for small firm or solo experiences after law school and develop supporting services.

documents newsletter announcing the need for new facilities. Space that had formerly been used to house part of the technical services staff was dedicated to



A graphic illustrating the capabilities of the Recording and Collaboration Rooms at Cleveland-Marshall College of Law Library. Image courtesy of Dan Thomas, assistant director, technology operations.



Dennis Ingrassia working at the Morton Lane Credit Union branch in the Charles B. Sears Law Library, SUNY Buffalo Law School. Photo courtesy of Beth Adelman, director of the law library and vice dean for legal information services.



The Cleveland-Marshall College of Law Library Solo Practice Incubator

Spaces of Convenience: Sometimes Opportunities Come from out of the Blue

Some of the most interesting space projects in law libraries have focused not on student learning, but on their convenience. The Charles B. Sears Law Library at SUNY Buffalo Law School provides space for two non-traditional services from outside partners. The first is a passport acceptance facility that has been housed in the law library since 2005. The idea came from a government

the facility after a staff reduction. The library did not pay any renovation costs, and the State Department, according to Law Library Director Beth Adelman, "did a nice job of integration," so the integrity of the remaining space for library use was not disturbed. The facility's services include taking photographs, which has turned out well for students sitting for any standardized test, such as the MPRE. As an added

bonus, housing the facility, which requires no costs to the library in addition to those already associated with maintaining the space, generates income from the State Department's execution fee of \$25 for all new passport applicants, which goes directly to the library.

The creativity doesn't stop there for the Sears Library space. While banking at the Morton Lane Credit Union's main branch in a suburb near the University at Buffalo's South Campus, a casual conversation between Adelman and the credit union manager led to the idea to open a branch in the law library. The credit union's plan to find a space on campus had just fallen through, and, according to Adelman, "The Law Library's central location on the North Campus 'spine,' a second-floor walkway, allows access to many buildings without having to brave the harsh Buffalo winter. This is a convenient location for the law school community and the university community." Both the credit union and the passport acceptance facility draw students, faculty, and campus administrators into the law library. Though no statistics are available, Adelman says there is strong anecdotal evidence of success, including the fact that the facility has brought both the university president and the provost in as customers.

Designing to Encourage Learning: What About Those Student Learning Spaces?

There is a wealth of literature on the evolution of library space. Although most focuses on undergraduate academic



libraries, the change in focus to what have been labeled “learner-centered” spaces applies to law libraries as well. In “Libraries Designed for Learning,” a 2003 essay written on behalf of the Council on Library Information Services, Scott Bennett found the “changing character of student study space needs” to be the second strongest motivator of investment in new or renovated academic library space between 1992 and 2001. (At that time, the highest-ranking motivator was the growth of collections, which we now know was not well predicted by those investing in construction and renovation projects in the 1990s.)

As early as Bennett’s 2003 essay, many of the factors legal educators are currently encouraged to focus on were discussed as goals for library space. These include social learning, collaborative student activity, and experiential course material. In planning library spaces in support of these activities, Bennett stressed the need for spaces that accommodate the technology needed for information literacy instruction and learning. Professor Peoples’ article brings Bennett’s research into the law library and the 21st century, suggesting space design that encourages learning as a way to not only support students but to exceed the ABA standards for physical facilities at the same time. ABA standards, Peoples points out, have historically driven an increase in our collection sizes and, thereby, the size of our library spaces. Peoples highlights the potential we have to strengthen our roles in the law school by driving the development of spaces that encourage learning in the library.

In support of collaborative learning, many schools already provide group study rooms or computer clusters outfitted with webcams, DVD players, monitors, smart boards, and other technology. This allows students to share the information on a laptop with a group or take impromptu notes that can be uploaded to a computer and saved. These spaces, though valuable and heavily used, tend to be more formal, often requiring reservations for use and subject to rules about group size. Current thinking suggests we should now be considering the less-formal commons to encourage student learning. Whether an information commons—connecting information professionals, technology, and learners in a social setting—or a broader learning commons with the goal of sharing of knowledge more generally, these spaces, it is argued, fit students’ social learning styles and, when supported by teachers and technology,

improve modern students’ educational experiences. Unfortunately, this reconfiguration of space, which normally requires increased electrical outlets, updated furniture, and reliable security, can be expensive.

Peoples’ article cites two law libraries with plans for a learning commons at the time the article was written—Florida State University College of Law, which planned to update a portion of its library space, and the Oklahoma City University Law School, which had plans to move into a new space later that year. To that number, I can add our own plans, similar to those at Florida State, to turn our microfilm area into a commons and the new construction at Georgia State University College of Law. The success in completing these projects has been varied.

In our own library, funds made available by the university from technology fees collected from all university students and awarded on a competitive basis allowed us to start our project by developing two recording and collaboration rooms. Inspired by a conversation with our career planning director about the declining interview skills of students, we applied for funding to upgrade two study rooms. These rooms are equipped for self-service recording and afford students an opportunity to practice for mock trials or clinical work, classroom presentations, or job interviews. Working with career services and the clinic, we will have volunteers, both staff and alumni, who will review students’ practice presentations and provide feedback using CALI’s free MediaNotes software.

The first phase of our project was relatively inexpensive and supported by an internal grant. Developing a broader, multifunctional commons area with technology to encourage students to explore experiential learning opportunities has proven cost prohibitive. We have completed architectural plans but have not been able to fully fund the remainder of the project. Even with the buy-in of law school administration and faculty who see the benefit of a learning commons space, funding priorities in a climate of decreasing law school application and admission rates can thwart the best of ideas for new uses of library space.

The Florida State University College of Law Library has been working on developing a learning commons for several years. Their plan includes an open seating lounge, several tech-heavy study rooms, a large room that can accommodate a 60-person class or lecture while remaining flexible enough to reconfigure for smaller break-out

groups, and an interactive lab that allows the instructor and learners to exchange the information on their devices in view of the entire class. The development of the commons at Florida State has also progressed more slowly than planned. The main challenge, again, is funding. Still, Elizabeth Farrell, associate director at Florida State, isn’t deterred. In fact, rather than consider pitching the project on a smaller scale, they have decided to do what they can, when they can.

“It’s alright to deliver something good in stages,” Farrell says. “Then the powers-that-be will hopefully say, hey, that’s working and students are responding and support the completion of the project.” In the meantime, they are garnering student interest by expanding their lunchtime offerings to cover law practice management tools and surveying students about their technology skills and needs.

“Word is getting out that you need a broader skillset than you get in doctrinal classes,” Farrell says. Building incrementally and surveying students for interest now will likely encourage financial support.

While selectively upgrading space to develop commons areas can be challenging, renovation or new construction presents a better opportunity to develop these spaces. Plans for both Georgia State University College of Law, which is currently constructing a new building, and Oklahoma City University Law School, which is renovating a historic high school for its new location, include commons areas. These areas are slated to meet the recommendations for learning areas, including (1) domestic areas, which are informal and welcoming spaces, usually permitting food and drink, that draw students and encourage “collisions” with staff and faculty; (2) plentiful, comfortable seating; and (3) connections for mobile devices that invite students to use their preferred technology to share information and ideas. These flexible spaces can be used for both formal instruction and informal, student-driven interaction.

At Oklahoma City University, student and faculty polls taken before the initial plans for the new space made way for the commons area. Students made it clear in surveys that they like a library that includes spaces that are completely quiet as well as communal spaces where they can work together. With a café already planned for the law school building, Professor Peoples, who is also the library director at Oklahoma City, thought it would be great to bring the communal library space students



requested and the café together. To make the commons central to law school activities beyond the library, the space includes a large collaboration desk that he will invite faculty to reserve for review sessions and other departments, such as the clinics and Academic Support, to use to deliver services to students.

Peoples, who was considering a commons area long before the move was planned, says a project like this is easier when you are starting with a new space. “Existing library space is up for question, as we know, and assumptions people have about the building you are in may get in the way of new ideas,” he says. “New construction is an opportunity to make the case for the library as an integral part of the law school.”

The lack of a large-scale renovation project and limited funds do not have to stop the initiation of spaces that encourage learning—there are versions of the commons concept that can be started with less funding. At the University of San Francisco, a commons area was developed at the cost of new furniture and a few additional electrical outlets.

Wheeler says, “We took out a bunch of shelving and installed a ‘commons’ type area with soft seating, couches, large ottomans, and lots of electrical outlets in the floor. Students use this area heavily now.”



Students use the commons area at University of San Francisco School of Law. Photo courtesy of John Shafer, research librarian and adjunct professor of law.

Still, something like this is only *relatively* inexpensive and, in times of recession, may be as far out of reach as a more elaborate renovation of space.

Investing in New Space Uses: Remaining Flexible is Imperative

If the initial expense in developing learning spaces is not a deterrent, the



A staff training session being conducted by Hollie White, digital initiatives librarian at Duke University J. Michael Goodson Law Library's Digital Initiatives Library (DIL). Photo courtesy of Alexandra Calevaro, digital initiatives intern.

potential for changes in technology and even human factors adds another layer of risk that can find a library regrouping to protect an investment. The Digital Initiatives Laboratory (DIL) at Duke University's J. Michael Goodson Law Library started with a different purpose. One of the law school's professors routinely required a final student project that required video production. The space was intended to equip students with sophisticated technology to facilitate these final projects. As fate and

percolating. Now the DIL is being used to capture history through the digitization of all of the law school's many photographs, to upload video to pages in the institutional repository that commemorate past conferences and symposia, and to serve as an instructional and collaborative space for discussions about the use of educational technology in the classroom.

Duke Senior Associate Dean for Information Services Dick Danner appreciates the ability of the space design to withstand the changes that have occurred since the 2007 renovation that resulted in the original plan.

“The space was designed with a different purpose, but, though changed circumstances have altered that purpose, it allowed us to focus our plans for tech-based projects by providing a place where we can work collaboratively that is flexible enough to adapt as our digital initiatives evolve,” Danner says.

There are likely as many viable options for the use of newly available library space as there are law libraries. Law school mission and objectives, funding, and unexpected opportunities all affect the types of projects any particular law library can and should pursue. We can find ideas in literature and from our colleagues, but we must be creative and remain open, flexible, and responsive to our own environments to choose the best course for our own library spaces. ■



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