

Reimagining the Library: Designing Spaces to Meet the Needs of Today's Students

Kathleen Baril, Kelly Kobiela,
Ohio Northern University

Abstract

Libraries, long the heart of academic life, nonetheless have been perceived as a passive space for physical resources and quiet study. Changes in the dissemination of information, as well as teaching and learning methods that focus on high-impact practices, have driven library staff to reimagine the physical buildings of libraries. To meet the new needs of students, Ohio Northern University planned a full renovation of the first floor of its undergraduate library. Current space and space usage was analyzed, considering how collaborative learning and undergraduate research might be conducted in renovated spaces. Ethnographic studies such as observations, focus groups, and surveys were used to learn how students studied and how they used the space. Assessments completed after renovation revealed that the new space appealed to students and reflected improvement as studying and learning spaces, but further studies are needed.

Keywords: *academic library use studies, ethnography, library facilities, library space, user-centered design*

doi: 10.18833/spur/1/2/9

Although libraries have been the center of academic life for a long time, they may only be perceived as quiet places to study and find books rather than as part of the larger learning environment on campuses. At Ohio Northern University, students engage in a variety of high-impact practices as defined by Kuh (2008, 9–11), including first-year seminars, capstone courses and projects, collaborative assignments and projects, and undergraduate research. Heterick Memorial Library, the undergraduate library at Ohio Northern University, provides extensive

assistance to students with research through information literacy sessions embedded in courses, but the library's space did not adequately support undergraduate research and learning. With administrative funding and a generous donation, the library's first floor was transformed into a learning space for the twenty-first century that supports undergraduate research and active learning by adding collaborative spaces and new resources.

Literature Review

In the last 20 years, academic libraries have slowly migrated from passive facilities housing books to dynamic learning spaces that fully support the learning of their institutions. Many libraries now have spaces designated for quiet study and more interactive work, along with individual and collaborative zones, that have new technology supporting students and their research. Library literature has extensively covered this shift in libraries' missions as they adapt their spaces to respond to changes in pedagogy at their institutions and in the dissemination of information (Beagle 1999; Lippincott 2012; Lowry 1994; Seal 2015; Steiner and Holley 2009). Several researchers also have studied how students use library space and how space may be best designed to meet students' study and research needs (Andrews and Wright 2016; Foster and Gibbons 2007; Harrop and Turpin 2013; Montgomery 2014). Most literature on student research and libraries focuses on course-related research and study rather than undergraduate research as defined by the Council on Undergraduate Research: research "that makes an original intellectual or creative contribution to the discipline" (CUR, n.d.) As a result, very little research exists on the intersection of undergraduate research and library space.