Developing the Medical Center Library as an Active Learning Space

Today, information is digital and the library is a site for teaching, mentoring and collaborative learning. Librarians are active instructors. Students work together on team projects. The library has evolved into a place for all these important educational activities.

Need for Change

Group work areas in libraries are often located near individual spaces for quiet study. This frustrates quiet-seeking students working alone, while student teams can’t find the right space and tools for effective collaboration.

A better approach includes providing dedicated spaces for both individual and team work in a range of settings spread throughout the library, progressing from open team spaces to private study spaces.

Renovations Begin

Through generous funding from the Lo family – Patrick, Emily, and their daughter, Daphne, who graduated from the School of Medicine in 2011 – renovations to the Med Center Library will begin soon. Their support will facilitate the first phase of library updates by creating a space where students can go for quiet, focused study, away from distractions. Specific improvements include new seating, desks, carrels, and tables with built-in electrical outlets and dedicated task lighting.

Read on for more examples of the proposed renovations to the library.
The Integrated Library Environment

Plans for the renovation of the Med Center Library include four different work spaces specific to the varying needs of medical students. They are:

Focus Spaces:

- Support the need for extreme focus and concentration by blocking distractions
- Present opportunities for postural changes and physical movement
- Offer a variety of analog and digital tools, including task lighting and power/data access

Examples

Even when focused work is required, students sometimes prefer to work in the presence of others. The shape of this computer pod allows students to work alone, and then quickly work with someone next to them, without changing locations.

This configuration is for students who prefer a semi-private space for studying. Task lights at each seat gives students the option to add additional light to their workspace if needed.

This study cave is configured in pods, allowing students to still feel connected to others while getting serious work done.

“Our library at the medical campus at Saint Louis University is an area that is at the heart of this institution, physically as it sits right above one of our main lecture halls, and as the home to countless hours of marathon study sessions. With some much needed improvements, it has the potential to be a focal point of what we have to offer at Saint Louis University.

Addressing the lack of dedicated study rooms and dated furniture are probably at the forefront of creating a library that matches the caliber of this university. Dedicated study rooms are a high priority, as well as bringing in new furniture both as an aesthetic upgrade and simply to help students stay comfortable through the pain of long study schedules.”

JJ Wojcik
President, M.D.
Candidate Class of 2015
Informal Spaces:

- Provide power access in as many places as possible
- Support various postures students use while studying and working
- Offer large work surfaces and some privacy

Examples

Students seek comfortable spaces that support individual or group work. Power access in the table lets students charge their devices in a convenient place.

Team Spaces:

- Offer flexible, customizable furniture to meet collaborative, privacy, and ergonomic needs
- Provide visual display tools, collaborative technology and acoustical privacy
- Create multipurpose, adaptable spaces to host group work of different sizes

Examples

A sliding glass door lets light into the studio while providing some acoustical privacy.

A flexible space supports small groups by giving them the physical tools they need to get working quickly.
Quiet Spaces:

- Provide very comfortable seating
- Create niche spaces that feel intimate
- Offer a small surface for a cup of coffee or mobile device

Examples

Small booths with high back screens are a nice hideaway spot for students who need serious quiet.

This setting is large enough to seat a small group, and offers enough visual privacy to make students feel like they have their own little corner of the library.