



## *ARL Bimonthly Report 222*

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#### **Collaborate or Die: Designing Library Space**

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A couple of years back, memorable advertisements for J.D. Edwards & Company began appearing in magazines such as *Time*, *Forbes*, and *Fast Company*. A businessman stands on a busy street corner. Crowds rush by him. He holds a sign that reads "Collaborate or Die."

"Collaborate or die" may be a bit of an overstatement. Collaboration might not pose a life-or-death choice, but it is required for designing the library of the future. This article discusses the impulse for collaboration, the social nature of design, collaborative design in libraries, and lessons learned.

#### **The Impulse for Collaboration**

Collaboration grows more important every day. In a shrinking world, technological, ecological, social, economic, and political complexity increases at an accelerating rate. There are fewer and fewer arenas in which individual action suffices. Collaboration is not simply desirable it is inevitable. In all but the rarest of cases, *one* is too small a number to solve problems, educate students, create new knowledge, and produce greatness.

Jeremy Shapiro and Shelley Hughes in their *Educom Review* article, "Information Technology as Liberal Art," present a compelling case for collaboration.<sup>1</sup> They suggest that the saturation of daily life with information organized and transmitted via technology, and the way in which public issues and social life are increasingly being shaped by issues such as intellectual property and privacy, require an information curriculum that is multidimensional.

Collaboration is key if librarians are to educate their clientele to be critical and self-sufficient users of information. No one alone has the expertise to address the full range of information literacies outlined by Shapiro and Hughes. The broadest range of educators will need to combine their resources, facilities, and expertise.

In addition, pedagogy and learning methods have undergone a significant transformation. The guide on the side has replaced the sage on the stage. Active learning and group work are preferred over passive modalities and the solitary learner. Students are working in groups as they search for mutual understanding and create new knowledge. Collaborative learning requires collaborative space.

Libraries often represent the largest footprint on university and college campuses. This footprint has a compulsion of growing. When space is scarce and expensive, it is difficult to justify responsibly facilities that are not fully utilized. Creative minds have called for collaboration in space management. Wise souls talk in terms of stewardship rather than ownership of space.

### **Social Nature of Design**

Design is central to many disciplines. In engineering, for example, design traditionally is described as beginning with the identification of need and concluding with a finished product. Conventional wisdom presents design as a linear, morphological process.

Recent ethnographic research portrays design in a dramatically different light. Eugene Ferguson reflects on the process of engineering design in his treatise *Engineering and the Mind's Eye*.<sup>2</sup> Ferguson concludes that design is not a totally formal affair, and that drawings and specifications come into existence as a result of a social process. Members of a design group can be expected to have divergent views of the most desirable ways to accomplish the work. Designers engage in informal negotiations, discussions, laughter, and banter as they wind their way to the final outcome. Like learning, design is a social process.

### **Collaborative Design in Libraries**

What happens when the impulse to collaborate meets design? The transformation of the University of Washington's undergraduate library and collocated libraries are an outgrowth of collaborative design.

In 1994, former University of Washington Provost Wayne Clough, now President of Georgia Institute of Technology, put together a team to "do something about technology in learning." At first blush it had nothing to do with space. Upon a closer look it had everything to do with space.

The team was composed of representatives from the library, computing, and undergraduate education. Clough asked the team to address three questions: (1) could technology be used to create learning communities; (2) could technology be used to encourage engagement among faculty, librarians, and students; and (3) could information and technology literacy be integrated into the curriculum?

The team launched a small pilot called UWired. Sixty-five students were given laptops for a year, an integrated curriculum was developed, and 12 librarians and faculty were trained in the transformative use of new technologies.

At the outset, space emerged as a problem. No existing classrooms were designed to facilitate collaborative learning in a networked environment. A different type of learning space had to be built, and would be situated, appropriately, in the library.

Students, faculty, technologists, instructional designers, librarians, and an architect hammered out the design using a collaborative visioning process. At the time, there were few models to emulate and no common vocabulary to describe such a space.

The group appropriated the term "collaboratory" from a concept Nobel Laureate Joshua Lederberg proposed as an alternative structure for teaching and research at a National Science Foundation workshop in 1989.

The collaboratory is envisioned as an advanced, distributed infrastructure which would use multimedia information technology to relax the constraints on distance, time and even reality. It would support and enhance intellectual teamwork in both research and teaching.<sup>3</sup>

Since 1994, two more collaboratories, a Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology, and the UWired Information Commons have been built using a similar collaborative design process. These collaborative spaces now occupy over 16,000 assignable square feet within the undergraduate library.

The symbiotic relationship between traditional library functions and "nonlibrary" functions within the same physical structure has launched innovative services, realized significant benefits for learners and educators, and forged new relationships and administrative structures. The Program on Educational Transformation through Technology, UWired, a digital animation lab, Digital Copy Services, public art, multimedia student production, and a faculty development center now come together under one roof. While some may say these are "nonlibrary" functions, they represent the transformed library of the future, reshaped through collaborative design.

Collocated libraries also are illustrative of collaborative design. In 1994, the Washington State Legislature decided that the state's newest community college, Cascadia, and the University of Washington's Bothell campus (UWB) should be built on the same campus and share services and space to the extent possible. Shared library space and services have an appeal that can be compelling. A team familiar with the needs of community college and baccalaureate students and faculty designed programs and services for a library that opened its doors in 2000. Since Cascadia had no students, and very few staff until fall of 2000, and UWB had grown steadily for a decade in temporary quarters, planners avoided many of the challenges that arise when two mature institutions merge.<sup>4</sup>

The UWB/Cascadia Library and other collocated libraries such as San Jose State University/San Jose Public Library and the Nova Southeastern University/Broward County library are not an aberration. They represent a trend that is evident especially in California, where the Reading and Literacy Improvement and Public Library Construction and Renovation Bond Act of 2000 is creating a boom in public library building. Public libraries must collaborate with local schools by building joint facilities or other mutually beneficial programs to receive state support from the bond act.

### **Lessons Learned from Collaborative Design**

Collaboration is a choice. It can't be mandated. It's hard work. It's fragile. Collaborative design doesn't come naturally.

Budget structures, administrative lines, and reward systems can create barriers to collaboration.

A shared vocabulary needed to begin the conversation is often lacking. During a recent campus review of facilities at the University of Washington, the capital and space planning office called for new terms and definitions to capture the emerging forms of collaborative space in libraries.

Collaborative design requires negotiating skills, making tradeoffs, and sharing control. Collaborators learn how to cross boundaries and have a high tolerance for ambiguity. Successful collaborators get beyond the subtle barriers created by their professional roles. The persona one presents to the world can get in the way. Innovative organizations pay attention to supporting the skills and providing the latitude needed in collaborative design.

Collaboration is different from cooperation or coordination in vision and relationships, structure, authority and accountability, resources and rewards, and people.<sup>5</sup>

*Vision and relationships.* Collaboration requires the commitment of organizations and their leaders. Two or more organizations are not just mashed together, but rather a new common mission and goals are created.

*Structure, responsibilities, and communication.* In collaborations, a new structure and/or clearly defined and interrelated roles constitute a formal division of labor. More comprehensive planning includes joint strategies and measuring success in terms of impact on needs of those served. Many "levels" of communication are created in collaborations. A memorandum of agreement sometimes is crafted as a formal articulation of the collaboration.

*Authority and accountability.* Authority is determined by the collaborators to balance ownership. Leadership is dispersed, and control is shared and mutual. Risk is shared in successful collaborative design.

*Resources and rewards.* Resources are pooled or jointly secured for a longer-term effort that is managed by the collaborative structure. Organizations share in the results and credit. More is accomplished jointly than could have been individually. Collaborations are successful when resources are used prudently and creatively. Collaborative design ultimately magnifies available resources and reduces unit costs.

*People.* Successful collaborative design is based on people, but not dependent on a single personality. Collaborations require mutual respect, trust, mentoring, and humor. Sustaining the *esprit de corps* of an evolving or long-term collaboration requires that attention be paid to explaining the culture to newcomers. The largest investment will not be in the facility, which will wear out, or in furniture and equipment, which will be replaced, but in people, who bring the space to life.

In the end, collaborative design enriches the user experience by creating library spaces that work. Collaborative design enlarges research and learning opportunities for both faculty and students. Collaborative design has a better chance of addressing the needs of diverse communities than less collaborative approaches. Collaborative design can solve pressing problems within constrained resources, not the least of which is space.

Many who have engaged in successful collaborative design will tell you that collaboration is its own reward. The process is difficult but exhilarating. Some would say that there is a basic human urge to explore and discover, to engender new relationships, and create wonderful new space. Members of successful collaborative design teams say they would have done the work for nothing. The payoff is not money, or even glory. The reward is the creative process itself. People want to do good work, to do work worth doing, and to create space that addresses real needs. Given a problem that the whole organization needs solved and a chance to do it well, individuals engaged in collaborative design will work tirelessly for no more reward than the one they give themselves.

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## Footnotes

1. Jeremy J. Shapiro and Shelley K. Hughes, "Information Literacy as a Liberal Art," *Educom Review* (March/April 1996): 31-35. [back to text](#)
2. Eugene S. Ferguson, *Engineering and the Mind's Eye* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992): 32. [back to text](#)
3. As described by James Duderstadt, then President of the University of Michigan, in the *University of Michigan University Record* (7 December 1992): 7. [back to text](#)
4. Cynthia Fugate, "Only Connect: The Collocation of the University of Washington, Bothell and the Cascadia Community College," *C&RL News* (January 2001): 9-10. [back to text](#)
5. For further discussion on lessons learned, see Paul Mattessich, *Collaboration--What Makes it Work: A Review of Research Literature on Factors Influencing Successful Collaboration* (St. Paul, Minn.: Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, 1992) and Murray Shepard, Virginia Gillham, and Michael Ridley, "The Truth is in the Details: Lessons in Inter-university Library Collaboration," *Library Management* (1999): 332-37. [back to text](#)

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