

## **Paper #2: Users and Space: Reconfiguring Space for Learning and Engagement**

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### ***The Challenge:***

The transition that college libraries face in the 21<sup>st</sup> century involves creating access to high quality collections in both digital and print forms while at the same time reconfiguring existing space to allow for active learning and engagement as well as study and research. As students become more active as creators and producers of knowledge and scholarship, often within a collaborative or mentored project or program, the challenging question arises: How do these new forms of activity fit within the traditional model of a library as a space for collections and individual (often private) study?

### ***History: The Instructional Moment***

The culture of college libraries has been shaped in no small way by what Evan Farber called “the university-library syndrome,” that is, the notion that somehow the larger the collection an institution has, the more effective it will be in addressing the scholarly needs of both students and faculty. Over the past 25 years, there has evolved another conversation, however, one that focused on the appropriateness of college library collection for teaching and learning rather than advanced research. Certainly, within the context of the liberal arts mission, this conversation has increasingly been driven by an idea of collections developed in cooperation with faculty to support undergraduate instruction rather than advanced research per se.

Since the mid-90s, with the rise of the internet and the corresponding explosion of digital resources available for both research and instruction, the traditional model of a “place” for quiet study and contemplation has been re-placed by the notion of the library as a space where many kinds of active learning and scholarship can take place. In early days, this meant the creation of computer labs/classrooms where something called “bibliographic instruction” might take place. In more recent years, as more institutions thought about the impact of information technology on teaching and learning, the concept of the so-called “learning commons” began to emerge in both theory and practice.

### ***The Evolution of the Learning Commons and the Role of Undergraduate Instruction:***

At the same time, as the level of library undergraduate instruction has increased over the course of the past 15 years, liberal arts colleges have come to place more emphasis on “active learning”

rather than traditional classroom instruction, thereby leading to the paradigm shift so well described by Robert Barr and John Tagg:

*In its briefest form, the paradigm that has (traditionally) governed our colleges is this: A college is an institution that exists to provide instruction. Subtly but profoundly we are shifting to a new paradigm: A college is an institution that exists to produce learning. This shift changes everything... We are beginning to recognize that our dominant paradigm mistakes a means for an end. It takes the means or method – called ‘instruction’ or ‘teaching’ – and makes it the college’s end or purpose. To say that the purpose of colleges is to provide instruction is like saying that General Motors’ business is to operate assembly lines... We now see that our mission is not instruction but rather that of producing learning with every student by whatever means work best.*

“Whatever means that work best” has in practice meant more library space devoted to dealing with what we might call the “critical literacies” (information literacy, visual literacy, reading and writing in both print and digital forms) and less space devoted to the storage of print collections. To provide a concrete example, the creation of the JSTOR digital archive of core journals has meant that college libraries have been able to reallocate more space to group and individualized learning spaces heavily mediated by various forms of learning technologies. This trend promises to accelerate and continue in the years ahead.

### ***Collection Impacts: Questions for the Future of College Libraries***

The multiple paradoxes of the current historical moment in the history of college library collection management and development are profound; the arrival of digital collections (e-journals especially) and advanced forms of resource sharing means that in effect college libraries are now “willy nilly” building high-level research collections that, in turn, support various forms of undergraduate research and scholarship. At the same time, due to the shrinkage of the footprint of traditional print collections, college libraries can now explore different ways in which teaching and learning can take place within the physical spaces of the library.

1. How do college libraries begin to plan for the future, given the hybrid nature of the monographic and journal literature now available to its students and faculty?
2. What is the role of the teaching faculty in helping to determine priorities for space planning in the near and mid-term future?
3. How do college libraries begin to collaborate effectively with other units (such as IT and the Centers for Teaching and Learning), so that library space is reallocated wisely and well?

4. What is the role of Special Collections and the study of primary texts in both the residual and emerging forms of critical literacy that are now having such an impact on the teaching and learning processes of liberal arts institutions?
5. How do liberal arts institutions with diverse and unique histories that are often represented in traditional collections begin to cooperate with other institutions in the provision of resources and the coordination of budgets?
6. How do college libraries and their collaborators (on campus and extra-institutional) forge flexible, ongoing relationships, to deal with changes in physical space, collection diversity, cooperative acquisition, budgets, and access as **processes**, rather than one-time events?
7. With increased access to research-level collections, what is the impact on college library space planning and curricular support?
8. In short, how can college libraries take advantage of their unique strengths and histories without undermining their unique role in the higher education system?

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