Is the concept of a Learning Commons right for your library?

Abstract: Information Commons date back to the late 80s/early 90s. As a result the concept has changed over the last 20 years. A major change that has taken place is the name change from Information Commons to Learning Commons. The term Commons 2.0 is also known in library research. This presentation will discuss what the major changes have been and the reasoning behind these changes. Ideas of what entities on an academic campus can partner with the library to provide the best suite of services in a Learning Commons will also be discussed. Examples of Information Commons and Learning Commons found in Canada and the United States will be provided.

Libraries have been around for years at Colleges and Universities. However, we have seen the role of a library change, as the students that attend colleges and universities change their habits. In the past students only needed to get information necessary to complete their projects, but now there is a change in how students work on these projects and get the information they need. These students are known as Generation Y (also referred to as Millennial) students. Generation Y students are those that are born between 1982 and 2002.

Kennedy, Vardaman, McCabe, Storck, & Stewart, (2008) note that Generation Y students are "deeply connected to the Internet" (p. 163) and this connection comes in the form of electronic information, social networking, and multi-media experiences and these students bring their use of technology to enhance their assignments. As a result of these increased expectations on students, colleges and universities need to provide a place for students to be able to work on such projects. The ideal place for this to happen is in the academic library as that is where students find the necessary resources for research. There is also an increase of collaboration by today's students.

 As students change, so must libraries in order to be able to continue to meet their needs. For libraries currently being built, this is a very easy thing to do; however, for those that are already built, librarians need to find a way to adapt to these new needs.

In the late 1980s, libraries were already beginning to realize the need for more technology in the library and had begun to create what is known as the information commons. Bailey and Tierney (2008) state that, "In simple terms, information commons bring together content, technology, and services in a physical space in order to support the educational mission of the institution" (p. 18). Initially, Information Commons areas in the library consisted of an area of computers dedicated for searching electronic information resources, as well as working with software such as Microsoft Word. According to Kennedy, Vardaman, McCabe, Storck, & Stewart, 2008), "[t]raditional libraries have clustered their services around a set of transactions that involve users coming to the library and somehow leaving with the information needed" (p.164). This type of Information Commons worked for the students who attended colleges and universities in the 80s, 90s and even the first few years after 2000. But now that generation Y students are getting to college and university age, this type of Information

Commons will no longer work. Traditional libraries need to provide more than just information as information can easily be found through electronic resources. What these libraries need to do is to find ways to provide areas of collaborative group study space, practice presentation rooms and classroom instruction rooms. Traditional libraries also need to find a way to provide wireless access to the internet as well as power supplies for the ever increasing presence of laptop computers.

According to Forrest and Halbert (2009), "New pedagogical approaches to knowledge construction in the classroom and a heightened awareness of the role of social spaces in teaching, learning, and scholarship contribute to academics' willingness to experiment in and contribute to these places" (p. 5). This is where we see the shift towards more group collaboration for students in the classroom. Therefore, students need space in the library where they can work as a group without disrupting other quiet sections of the library. Librarians began to realize that there was a need for these types of group study spaces to be closely linked to the technology areas of the library. This new knowledge led to the transformation of the Information Commons to what has now been coined as the Learning Commons or Commons 2.0.

Learning Commons being designed now are providing different kinds of technology needs. For example, at Canadian University College we are looking at providing a multimedia center within the new learning center where students can produce audio and visual presentations. The new Learning Commons will also include many practice presentations rooms as well as including an instructional classroom. The Learning Commons will also include access to distance learning equipment and a video conference room.

Generation Y students also like to be able to get everything they need in one place. This can be done through the Learning Commons concept. Kennedy (2008) describes the role of a Learning Commons as such, "encourage engagement with information in its various forms, reinforce the value of collaborative inquiry, and create new opportunities for community interaction" (p. 9). The "community interaction" that Kennedy was referring to is with different departments on a university campus. Massis (2010) suggests that some of these departments could include "a writing center, counselling and advising services, tutoring, disability services..." (p. 162). Canadian University College is considering including the following areas within the new Learning Commons: Student Success; Computer Services; Marketing; and the traditional library resources. Including all of these different entities in one building will allow students to meet their needs in one place, thus keeping them coming back again and again.

Examining the changes in students helps librarians understand how their services need to change to continue to provide for students. This is how the concept of the Information Commons changed into the Learning Commons. The best way to learn what needs to

be included in a Learning Commons is to look at examples of learning commons already in place.

An example of a Learning Commons is The Learning Commons of the University of Guelph (http://www.learningcommons.uoguelph.ca). The University of Guelph used the partnership model to develop their Learning Commons. The following entities on campus are included in the Learning Commons: library, computing and communications services, office of open learning, student affairs and teaching support services. By combining these entities the Learning Commons can provide the following services to undergraduates, graduates and faculty: Data Resource center, IT Help, Learning Services, Library Accessibility Services, Research & Information Literacy, Supported Learning Groups Program and Writing Services.

The University of British Columbia also has a Learning Commons called the Chapman Learning Commons (http://learningcommons.ubc.ca). The Learning Commons has a program advisory committee made up of the following departments: Student Development, Centre for Teaching and Academic Growth, UBC Office of Learning Technology, Library and a professor. The Learning Commons provides research and information literacy instruction, writing assistance, writing assistance, tutoring, learning skills programs and technology through one-to-one help, workshops, peer mentoring and virtual resources and services.

The last case in Canada to look at is the Queen's Learning Commons (http://library.queensu.ca/learningcommons/). The learning commons at Queen's has the following departments involved: Adaptive Technology, ITServices, Library, learning Strategies, Development, Library services for Students with Disabilities and The Writing Centre. Quoting from the Learning Common's website this is what their mission is:

> "We, the Queen's Learning Commons (QLC), offer an inviting, collaborative learning space where students can pursue and share ideas. Together with our partners, we are centrally located in Stauffer Library as an enriched learning environment which provides a comprehensive, integrated set of academic support services and resources." (http://www.queensu.ca/qlc/about.html)

The first Learning Commons to look at in the United Sates is the Harold B. Lee Library at the University of Brigham Young University in Utah (http://lib.byu.edu/sites/informationcommons). The following resources are located in the Learning Commons: creative learning rooms, writing fellows, writing and research lab and an area for mentoring freshman. The Learning Commons also provides the following services: library information, research assistance and computer assistance.

The UMasss Amherst Learning Commons includes (http://www.umass.edu/learningcommons/) the following services: information, library,

reference, writing, tutoring, academic advising, field internships and study abroad. There are 25 group study rooms available and 400 seats of differing combinations available. The Learning Commons also has a designated multimedia area. 200 workstations (with printing services) are included in the Learning Commons and the Learning Commons provides access to the Library's collection.

The next Learning Commons to look at is the Robert E. Kennedy Learning Commons. (http://lib.calpoly.edu/learningcommons/) This Learning Commons does not partner with any other California State University groups. The Learning Commons provides access to collaborative and silent study rooms, labs and classrooms, laptop and AV checkout, Kindle checkout, printing, satellite TV and support at the desk. The Learning commons also provides access to a gallery and Science Cafe.

The last U.S. example is the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (http://www.library.illinois.edu/ugl/lc/). The Learning Commons includes both silent and collaborative study space. The Learning Commons provides access to PCs, Macs, and laptops as well as items such as MP3 players, GPS and graphic calculators. The Learning Commons has also included a media and game collection. Their campus partners are: the writer's workshop, McKinley Health Services, CITES, Division of General Studies Academic Advising, The career Center, Office of Study Abroad, Illini Union Bookstore, Unite 1/Allen Hall, Residence Hall Library System, Division of Intercollegiate Athletics and The University Library.

Is the concept of a Learning Commons right for your library? Kennedy (2008) states it best, "The library/LRC is in a unique position to provide this level of creative and information-rich learning environment" (p. 169). All libraries should be trying to reach Generation Y students on their level. The traditional Information Commons style of computers and research does not quite reach that level and may not inspiring students to return. However, the Learning Commons concept of integrating many departments into the Library setting does work to keeping bringing students back. Universities need to decide which departments are able to partner with the library and then start planning on how to bring the idea into play.

References

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