Information Commons Case Studies: Academic and Community College Libraries

Brigham Young University

By Dr. Russ Bailey and Barbara Tierney, ALA Editions, [Winter 2006/2007]

Name of University: Brigham Young University

Name of Library: Harold B. Lee Library

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 26800, Provo, UT, 84602-6800

Library Admin. Phone: (801) 422-2905

Library Admin. Fax: (801) 422-0466

Library Website	http://www.lib.byu.edu/
IC Website	http://www.lib.byu.edu/departs/gen/ic/index.html
Carnegie classification	Doctoral/Research Universities—Extensive
# Undergraduates	30,242 (Full-time: 26,928 Part-time: 3,314)
# Graduate Students	1,484
# Faculty	4,100 (1,600 faculty, 1,300 administrative and 1,200 staff)
Highest Degree Offered	Doctoral
# Volumes	3,538,205
# Titles	3,398,058
# Periodical Titles	27,161
# FTE Librarians	73
# Other FTE Staff	102
Library Annual Budget	24341,029
Annual Circulation	825,744
Annual Gate Entries	3,221,551
IC Opening Date	24 February 2004
IC Name	Harold B. Lee Library Information Commons (a.k.a. No Shhh! Zone)
IC Service Model Type	Integrated services
# Computer Workstations	132 (63 individual, 5 public, 52 group, 4 consultation, 6 multimedia, 2 in study rooms)
What's on Desktop	IE, Firefox, MS Office 2003, Photoshop (Elements)/Omni Page Pro/Adobe Acrobat Pro on some, Class specific, Nero, Multimedia software on those computers, Macromedia Suite on some
IC Architect	None, repurposed existing general reference space
Hours	M-F 7:00 a.m. – 12:00 a.m., Sa. 8:00 a.m. – 12:00 a.m.
IC Square feet	19,250
No. physical service points in IC	Three (Reference, Computer Assistance, Multimedia Assistance)
Average no. of IC users in a typical month	42,596 computer logins (does not include numbers of people using the space to study without logging in)
Print reference materials in the IC?	Yes, but very few. Most have been moved to other subject specific reference areas.

Location of Institution and Campus Description:

Begun in 1875 and first named Brigham Young Academy in 1875 it was renamed Brigham Young University in 1903. The first doctoral program was offered in 1957 and course and degree offerings have continued to grow. The campus sits in the foothills of Provo, Utah about thirty miles south of Salt Lake City. In the 2006 Princeton Review BYU was named the Best Value Private University. Students from BYU consistently compete competitively in every field. The campus now has over 30,000 students from freshmen to post-doctoral. The library, one of the show-pieces of campus, sits in the center of campus and is the central gathering location for study.

Information Commons Description:

The Information Commons in the Harold B. Lee Library on the campus of Brigham Young University is an open space near the entrance of the library on the main (3rd) floor.

The Commons consists of a single area with many types of study spaces offered. There are individual computer stations, collaboration computer stations (wired with extra power and network lines for laptop use), group study rooms with computer and projector, study tables (wired with extra power and network lines for laptop use), individual study carrels, soft chairs, and a multimedia lab for audio and video production. The space includes access to the campus wireless network. Many of the chairs in the Commons have wheels, allowing for easier configurability for group study. In addition, there are two partners who share the space; the Publication Lab where students can get help getting their work published, and the Writing Fellows who provide assistance to students who need help with writing.

Services are provided in three locations by students and full-time librarians and staff with specific expertise. The three areas are reference assistance, computer assistance and multimedia assistance.

Reference assistance is offered at the desk by the entrance. In addition to answering reference questions, other types of questions are answered such as directional and referral to other parts of the Commons or the library. Reference services offered include the traditional and electronic reference, including research using online databases. Those who work on the reference desk are also able to answer some basic computer questions, especially when the computer assistant is busy. The non-student employees of the Commons teach first year writing classes for Library Instruction. And the students are trained for, and occasionally provide support to, those classes as Instruction TA's.

The computer assistants and multimedia assistants are a part of one core of students and staff. Each is able to work as either a computer assistant or multimedia assistant. Their training is done together and therefore they know all the same things. Computer assistants support all the computers in the Commons and are on call for computer related issues that may come up in the rest of the library. There is also one computer assistant staffed in the periodicals section of the library during the busy hours of the day. Computer assistants are able to answer computer questions regarding all the supported software installed on the computers. Often the computer assistant is working with patrons, mostly students, in the Commons creating the opportunity for the reference students and staff to help answer questions that the computer assistant would normally answer.

Multimedia assistants are required to know how to produce video and audio using both the Windows and Mac operating systems. This requires that the students be hired with many of the skills needed

to perform the tasks asked of them. The Multimedia Lab includes two Windows and four Mac computers for multimedia production and two that have the Macromedia Suite and other high-end production software. There are also two analog-to-digital duplication racks. These facilities are available to all patrons who visit the Information Commons, including patrons from the community.

Information Commons Service Transaction Statistics:

Statistics are kept on a sampling schedule in the entire library and therefore we do not have the exact numbers of contacts. However, using the sample we can estimate the following numbers for 2005 by area served: Computer/multimedia assistance: 14,912; Information Desk: 7,496; Reference assistance: 18,512. This is a total of 40,920 for the year 2005.

Information Commons Staffing and Training:

The Information Commons is staffed all hours the library is opened. Most positions in the Commons were created from personnel working in the General Reference department. The position of Information Commons Section Head was added after the Commons had been opened for some months.

We have two full-time librarians, one ¾ time librarian, two full-time staff and approximately 20 students. One reference assistant and one multimedia/computer assistant are assigned to work during all times the library is open 7:00 a.m. to 12:00 a.m. (midnight). During the hours of 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. there is an additional multimedia/computer assistant assigned to the Multimedia Lab. And between 9:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. an additional computer assistant is assigned to work in the periodicals section of the library. Full-time employees are available from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and one is assigned to work on the reference desk from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday and 6:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. Monday through Thursday.

Formal training happens on a weekly basis in meetings held in a Library Instruction classroom. Informal training is ongoing and forms the foundation of weekly training topics. Training is meant to provide knowledge about current topics of interest for our patrons. We attempt to have our students prepared before the questions come.

Information Commons Special Facilities

Contained in the Information Commons there are other services. We provide space to partners in the Commons. These partners include the Publication Lab, a place where students can consult on how to get their works published; and the Writing Fellows, a space reserved for students to get help on their work for writing classes from other students trained in writing.

Our Multimedia Lab provides access to computers and software for the creation and editing of audio and video productions. This space is staffed all hours the library is open. The Multimedia Lab also has video and still cameras, a slide scanner, and digital voice recorders for checkout. There are also external hard drives available for checkout exclusively for use by those doing multimedia projects. These can be checked out for a maximum of one week and are then re-formatted for use by another patron. We are currently working on a networked storage solution to serve the needs of patrons using the Multimedia Lab.

There are two Collaborative Learning Rooms which are group study rooms equipped with a computer and ceiling-mounted projector. These rooms are used for presentation practice, group study where a computer is needed and for low-tech group study. These study rooms are reserved online along with the other group study rooms in the library.

What's on the desktop in Your Information Commons?

Most computers are based on the same campus-wide image which includes word processing, spreadsheets, and class specific software access. The computers in the Commons can be divided into five different software combinations. The difference between the five combinations depends on function. There are some that just have access to a Web browser and are not authenticated. These are for public or other use less than ten minutes and are right next to the reference desk. Most of the individual and collaboration stations contain the basic campus image and nothing more. The other individual and collaboration stations, in addition to the image, have a scanner attached and the software for scanning. There are a few computers dedicated to web and graphics creation and editing that contain that software in addition to the image. The last group is the multimedia computers which do not have the image installed but have the necessary software for editing audio and video.

All of the computers have the ability to print to a central library queue which allows jobs to be printed to any printer in the building.

Information Commons Assessment

LibQual+, WOREP and Project SAILS have recently been completed in the library. These provide an assessment of the library as a whole.

Statistics are kept on a sampling schedule at all reference desks, including in the Information Commons. The Commons statistics also include questions asked of the computer and multimedia assistants. Recently a question arose about how the Commons is being used and whether it is being used by groups or individuals. Beginning in June 2005 statistics have been kept on how many groups are using the commons every hour. These statistics continue to be kept and analyzed.

There are plans to implement a more formalized assessment program in the Information Commons in the future.

Information Commons Governance

The Information Commons at Brigham Young University is contained within the Public Services Division of the library. The Commons is managed by a librarian who has three full-time employees reporting to him. Each supervises different areas of responsibility within the Commons; desk reference assistance, online reference and computer/multimedia assistance. The Information Commons Section Head reports to the General Information Services Department Chair who in turn reports to the Assistant University Librarian (AUL) for Public Services.

Decisions regarding the Commons generally go from the bottom up. Library administrators understand that those working on the front lines are those who understand the needs and desires of

patrons using the Commons. Major decisions or changes are approved first by the Department Chair and then, if necessary, by the AUL for Public Services. All changes and decisions are made with the mission and aims of the university and library in mind.

## History of the Harold B. Lee Library Information Commons

In February 2003 the Information Commons Project Team was formed by the University Librarian and charged to recommend "various services, resources, and facilities that would be appropriate and necessary for the Lee Library to operate and sustain a state-of-the-art Information Commons {{91 Harold B. Lee Library 2003; }}." After visits to several existing Commons the project team proposed three options, depending on the level of funding available. They were: 1) Upgrade to a Commons Proposal; 2) State-of-the-art Commons Proposal; and 3) Blue Sky Proposal. The decision made was that the Commons would be implemented in a phased process until ending somewhere between the "State-of-the-art" and "Blue Sky".

It was determined that the Information Commons would be implemented in the area formerly known as General Reference. The space would continue to be used as the general reference area but would also include computer help and multimedia help. This would accomplish the goal of the Commons to have the students able to begin and complete a project in one space, be it a paper or multimedia project, or any other form of end product.

The space in the Commons has been offered to campus partners to be used to accomplish their goals. We currently partner with the Publication Lab, a place where students can get help achieving publication of a paper or project. We also have a table reserved for use by the Writing Fellows who are assigned to a writing class to tutor those that need such help with their papers.

We continue to approach other potential partners. We want the Commons to become the place where students can find help on any issue they may have in completion of a class project.

The Commons began with 50 individual computers, 26 collaboration (group) stations, 4 multimedia stations and two Macromedia stations. In January 2005 12 more collaboration stations were added. August 2005 brought two more multimedia stations. In January 2006 we added 20 more collaboration and ten more individual stations to the Commons.
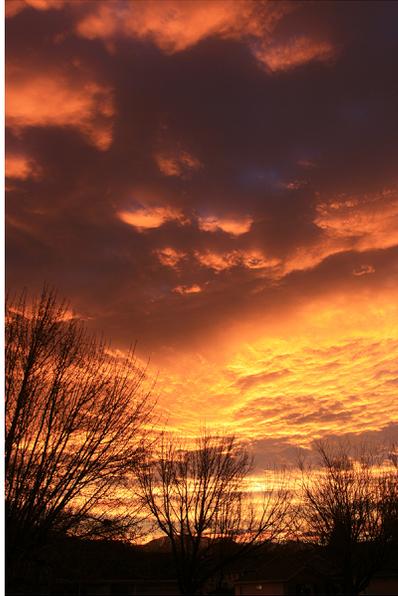
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