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People Profile: Jennifer Calvo

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Preserving the Vitality of Learning Commons
Spaces Through Dynamic Programming:
The Learning Commons After Dark Series

by Jennifer Calvo (Former Reference Librarian for the Learning Commons, North Carolina State University Libraries) <jenni4calvo@gmail.com>

Libraries face an interesting challenge when planning and maintaining new learning spaces. Most are heavily used spaces designed to facilitate collaborative learning and social engagement. Attracting students to the space is not as much of a challenge as finding ways to meet the vision of the space, and keep the space both vibrant and relevant to the users. Three key components to keeping learning spaces vibrant will be discussed, as well as programming ideas from the Learning Commons After Dark Series.

The History and Culture of the Commons
In 2007, the NCSU Libraries opened D. H. Hill Library’s Learning Commons, a space designed to meet the rapidly changing needs of today’s students. It is not only a student-centered, but a student-defined space with mobile furniture, soft-seating areas, and collaborative workspaces. The flexible design of the Learning Commons facilitates change by offering students a place that provokes their imagination. I believe the design of the space is effective because it provides a welcoming environment for students to congregate, collaborate, and create.

The Learning Commons was immediately a hit with students. Even after two years the number of students in the space can top 300 at eleven o’clock at night. Students tend to linger in the space because it accommodates both their social and academic needs. I like to think of this type of use of academic library space as a new addition to a college student’s lifestyle—a “Learning Commons Lifestyle.”

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EARLY LIFE: I spent most of my early years hanging out in public libraries after school. I would sit on the floor and page through 1970’s editions of Better Homes and Gardens decorating books. Unfortunately I was never able to convince my mother to go with a chartreuse and purple color scheme in the living room.

EDUCATION: BA: Political Science, University of North Carolina at Greensboro. MSLS: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

FIRST JOB: A junior camp counselor. There is nothing better than arts and crafts in the morning, horseback riding before lunch, and swimming in the afternoon after eating peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: I have worked and volunteered in a variety of library and museum settings, including law firms, public libraries, art museums, and science libraries. For the past six years I have worked for NCSU Libraries. I was originally hired as a graduate assistant, but was promoted to the position of Reference Librarian for the Learning Commons.

IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE TO: In between visiting museums and botanical gardens, I like to encourage Soul Train lines in the library.

FAVORITE BOOKS: Slaughterhouse Five, Kurt Vonnegut, Mr. Summer’s Story, Patrick Suskind, and The Woman in the Dunes, Kobo Abe.

PHILOSOPHY: Only by occupying the “space between” can we allow ourselves the time to recognize the amazing beauty in the simplest things… Cupcakes seem to make everything better as well.

PET PEEVES/WHAT MAKES ME MAD: Libraries that want to be innovative and cutting edge, but do not support the creative talent they hire… Oh, and people who wear eyeliner, but don’t wear mascara.

MOST MEANINGFUL CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: The day a student came back from visiting an art museum and told me a whole new world opened up for him after the talk we had about modern art and reading the books I suggested.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: Hopefully to be in a leadership role at an institution in which I fully support its mission and share its creative vision. Did I mention Proust? I should mention reading Proust as a goal as well…

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guess who were the special guests? Anthony Watkinson <anthony.watkinson@btopenworld.com> and his lovely wife Sara! They had just come from the wedding of their son Charles. You will remember that Charles Watkinson has been a regular attendee at Charleston.

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as existing equipment or behaviors, as well as understanding the barriers to overcome, are part of the planning process. And don’t be isolated; find out what is going on in your community and within your larger organization. True sustainability requires partnership and collaboration.

The entrepreneurial librarian sees crisis as opportunity. The current environmental and economic crisis is motivating people and institutions across the world to rethink traditional processes towards those that are more sustainable. We believe libraries and librarians can serve as progressive exemplars for taking measurable action in a practical, affordable manner. The steps towards sustainability we take in each of our libraries can have a profound positive impact on the environment, public budgets and even the behavior of our patrons.

You can find the panel’s presentation, as well as a plethora of resources for Greening your own Library at: http://greeningyourlibrary.pbworks.com/InspirationInnovation-Celebration.