From Hub to Beacon: evolution and evaluation of spaces in the learning commons

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University of New England

- Formed in 1938
- Australia's oldest regional university
- One of the first universities in Australia to offer courses by distance
- 21,000 current students (80% by distance)
- 3 teaching periods per year (trimesters) – since 2012
University Library

2014 University Library comprises

- Dixson Library (main library)
- Law Library
- Archives and Heritage Centre

Dixson Library

- 9,052 m² over four levels
- Completed in 3 stages in 1961, 1972, 1983
# Learning spaces in academic libraries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information Commons</th>
<th>Network &amp; computer facilities, help services</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning Commons</td>
<td>Enable students to organise own learning, shared learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning Spaces</td>
<td>Network of interconnected spaces on campus for learning, discovery, and discourse Partnerships and communities</td>
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</table>
Evolution of UNE Library Learning Commons

2004 – Information Commons
Evolution of UNE Library Learning Commons

2008 – Learning Commons
Evolution of UNE Library Learning Commons

2013 – Informal Learning Space
Guide to the Learning Commons

- Library Service Desk
  For all library inquiries
- Student Central
  Enrolment & Admission
- Academic Skills & ITD
- Security, Parking & Student ID Cards
  Follow the purple rug!
Evaluation of learning spaces

• Usage and satisfaction
• Pre- and post- occupancy studies
• Assess against objectives of development
• Assessment frameworks as part of planning
• Two Australian frameworks:
  – Pedagogy-Space-Technology (PST) (Powell, 2009)
Evaluation of learning spaces

• Contribution to institution's mission
• Contribution to student learning
• “We should define our success by the success of our users” (Mathews, 2014)
• Student engagement –
  “Person-environment interaction models” can help focus learning space assessment (Hunley & Schaller, 2006)
Visits to the library (gate counts)
21.4% increase in visits to the library in first five weeks of the first teaching period between 2013 and 2014

Client satisfaction surveys
Importance of facilities and equipment has increased yet perceived performance has remained fairly static
Evaluation - UNE Learning Commons

Client satisfaction surveys – sample comments relating to facilities

“Where there is a comfortable place to sit in the library at the moment, it usually attracts people who want to talk, where one just wants to read without being disturbed.”

Client survey, 2009

“Staff need to be aware on how noisy some students are in the library. The Ground Floor Computer Area is the worst! People constantly talking! It is very distracting when trying to do an assignment in a place where it is supposed to be quiet.”

Client survey, 2011

“I love the library, especially since the Learning Commons has been developed and you can talk without being frowned upon.”

Client survey, 2013
Evaluation - UNE Learning Commons

Seating surveys

Level 2 Learning Commons - average % occupancy per week

- Casual seating
- Laptop Use benches/tables
- Computer Workstations

2009: 9%, 25%
2010: 14%, 44%
2012: 19%, 37%
2013: 25%, 38%
2014: 25%, 44%
2015: 25%, 38%
2016: 25%, 38%
**Evaluation - UNE Learning Commons**

Survey during Master Plan development 2012
371 student responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Opinion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>49%</td>
<td>Like hanging out in informal spaces in the library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56%</td>
<td>Regularly use computers in the library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88%</td>
<td>Value having quiet spaces to work or study in the library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73%</td>
<td>Value having a place where they can collaborate with peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38%</td>
<td>Regularly utilise enclosed meeting spaces in the library for group work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36%</td>
<td>Like to meet friends in the library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63%</td>
<td>Regularly go to the library between classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39%</td>
<td>Like studying around other people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45%</td>
<td>Believe there are not enough computers in the library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73%</td>
<td>Can get help in the library when they need it</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Evaluation - UNE Learning Commons

Feedback boards
Congratulations to UNE for their new library learning commons – it’s seriously mad!!! UNE peeps should check it out, really inspiring space to study.

I know hey! I like the movable chairs that look like baby highchairs. It’s a pretty fun set up.

I particularly like the irregular polygons and ufo lights.

Oh and *swoon* you can write on the Library walls now (at least some of them). Awesome!

Anyone else sat in the new egg chairs in the Library? Seriously comfy 😊
The first impressions suggest that the library is attempting to utilize the new approach to innovative learning, by making learning something comfortable and likeable so that students will want to learn …

Colour, my first impression is of all the busy colour that inspires my brain to think and get active, as well as the straight edge design combined with curves for a friendly feel. To explore new ideas with my peers and let my mind relax around a fun and exciting space.

My first impressions were shock. I was shocked at [how] well the library meets the needs of its users. The library really caters for everyone and uses its space well.
Help you do better in class

To what extent does the commons ...

- Very much
- Quite a bit
- Not much

Courtyard and Learning Commons Survey 2014
Learnings …

• Clearly identify goals prior to development or refurbishment

• Changing the nature of spaces does not always result in changes in behaviour and use of space

• Link contribution of learning spaces to student engagement and therefore to student learning
Future ...

• Learning spaces ↔ student engagement ↔ student learning

• Conduct further surveys, seek comments

• Observational studies to gauge nature of use

• Participate in TEALS framework project
Thank you.

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References (continued)


