Planning Your New Library Facility

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ABSTRACT

This paper relates, using the example of the Library at the new NOAA campus at Sand Point in Seattle, the processes and problems of planning and furnishing a new library facility. Requirements are considered from the standpoint of space to house the collection and accommodate users in study areas. Adjacencies are important in that the library be accessible to the users. Space is to be laid out for efficient utilization. Furnishings must be durable and attractive. Your greatest asset is the support of local managers.

INTRODUCTION

This presentation is a summary of the author's experience in establishing the Library at the new NOAA Campus at Sand Point in Seattle. This is not a scientific paper, but a sharing of some observations.

Some of what happened was the result of our own effort and some was just watching it happen. There are things we can all learn by looking at what went into planning and how the final product functions.

You only get to plan a facility once. It looks as though I may get to plan another, but I won't have a second shot at this one. It's a good idea to go in with as much prior knowledge as possible. The references and reading list with this paper can give you a good start. Look at the references and study the applicable ones. Browse the current journals for recent articles.

Visit as many libraries as you can and pay attention to arrangement and furnishings. Talk to people in old and new facilities and find out what they like and what they would change if they could. If we talk to each other, only a few of us have to make the mistakes.

If you're planning a new facility in conjunction with a new building, as we did, get on the Building Committee. Since I was a latecomer to the project and the Library was only a small part of the total facility, they made me an associate member. I attended the meetings, but didn't get to vote. This kept me informed of progress and allowed me my "day in court" whenever the library was affected.
PLANNING YOUR LIBRARY

Requirements

In requirements planning you need to think ahead. What are your anticipated needs? How far ahead may have to be a management decision. Twenty years is ideal, but circumstances may say only five.

Since most of you are librarians, you know that the collection is growing all the time. The mail comes in each day and it has to go somewhere. This is why looking ahead 5, 10, or 20 years is important. There are numerous formulas for determining how much shelf space is needed if you know the size of the collection. (1,2,3,4) Lieberfeld(3) discusses how much space to allow. He figures seven volumes to the linear foot. Metcalf(4) had previously said six. From this you can multiply out to determine your requirements. You will want to have some growth rate figures to project. Metcalf suggests that the working capacity of the shelf if 84% of the absolute capacity. Lieberfield says 80%. I tend to agree with the latter.

Building the library to hold the collection 10 years downstream isn’t easy to sell. It’s especially difficult to defend in the early stages. You continually get questions like: What are you doing with all this space? Where are you going to fill it? When are you going to get the rest of your books? Too many people are used to seeing space problems. The other alternative is to throw something away every time the mail comes or live with the philosophy of “develop the collection until the facility is full and then quit buying.” Get some input from your users as to what they think should be in the collection in the new facility.

Floor loading needs to be considered. Most office building floors are inadequate to handle full book stacks. The requirements differ with the state codes. Your architect needs to figure this in to the plans. Ellsworth(5) discusses this in the university contact. I recommend, that the floor of the entire library be strong enough to hold stacks. Sooner or later, stacks will be placed where they weren’t originally intended.

The as yet unpublished NOAA doctrine says that a Fisheries Laboratory Library should be a minimum of 3500 square feet. Now, if your facility is serving a larger population, your library should be proportionally larger.

How much user seating is needed? Formulas abound in the literature based on population (3,4,6). Probably the best way to ascertain your needs is to visit a library of similar size and purpose. How much user seating do they have? Is it adequate?

Adjacencies

The primary consideration is that the library be near the users. This was considered from the beginning. In our case we knew from the start that the research laboratory people would be the primary users, so we were placed in among them. Adjacencies can be a very political issue, but the decision makers agreed we should be where we are now. We were very fortunate to have had the support of all of the local managers throughout the project. The next most use comes from the pollution assessment people and the cartographers. Both groups are in the building, but farther away. Other users include the weather forecasters, editors, attorneys, and administrative personnel. They are one building away.
The library entrance is right across the main hall from the main building entrance. This gives the library high visibility. Researchers also go by the library on their way to the seminar room. Passing by (and hopefully into the library) is part of their routine. In a two-level building, the library should be on the upper level with the chemistry labs below. One major west-coast university has the library under the labs. The water problem has never been solved.

Space Layout

As mentioned above, the library entrance is opposite the main building entrance. One disadvantage of this is that the library is the unofficial "receptionist station" for the campus. We found ourselves directing visitors to meetings. The advantages of accessibility and visibility outweigh the drawbacks, however. We only have one entrance for users. This allows cognizance of who's in the library. Some kind of security check could be easily implemented, should it be found necessary. The other doors are not used, but are available as emergency exits. They set off alarms when opened.

Immediately inside the door is the service area. As the users come in, they face the reference desk, rather than the circulation desk. This should be their first stop when looking for assistance and it is less intimidating. The reference collection is contained here along with user tables, displays, bulletin boards, lounge grouping, and on-line search equipment. The circulation desk is the last station the user passes on leaving. Checkout of the materials in hand becomes part of the departure routine.

The current journals are in the most accessible part of the stacks. They are the transition between the service area and the stack area. The stacks are away from the windows to help avert light damage. They also act as a sound barrier between the service area and the user seating.

The user seating utilizes the window area (windows are for people(2)). The windows overlook Lake Washington. Some say it's the best view in the complex. No phones should be in the user seating area. Many people come to the library to get away from the phone. Also, if phones were there, people would move their offices in to the area.

Make sure the user seating area has plenty of electrical outlets for calculators. Also, you want to have the option of putting lights in the carrels. When you have the opportunity, order more electrical outlets than you think you'll need. It costs very little to put a few more in when they're running the conduit. They will certainly cost more later.

Furnishings

If you can afford it, I strongly recommend wood. It's the best looking. We were able to justify wood, since the library was to be a showplace. Pierce(7) discusses the manufacture of wood furniture and some criteria to keep in mind in its selection. You will have to comply with your local procurement regulations. The contract may have to go out on bids and you would then have to write specifications carefully to get what you want.

To get a better idea of what quality furniture was, I visited several libraries and saw furniture from several manufacturers and how it was being used. I also had an opportunity to visit a furniture factory. It didn't take long to learn that "wood" furniture contains a lot of other materials. This isn't all bad. Sometimes the other materials are more durable and solid wood would be prohibitively expensive.
The most recent journals are displayed on slant shelves. The shelves lift up and previous issues are stored underneath. This is a good way to house and display journals, but we found users had to be educated to lift the shelves.

The user seating area should have carrels for hiders and tables for spreaders. Tables also offer the flexibility needed when two people work together. Seldom, however, do you find more than one person using a table. Cohen(2) discusses this at length. For those who aren’t sure whether they are hiders or spreaders, we purchased a few extra-wide carrels. These turned out to be very popular with the users.

Be sure you buy your tables and chairs from the same manufacturer. Then you can be sure that the chair arms will fit under the tables. Citing another example from west-coast academia, in one library, they had to put blocks of wood under the table legs to allow the chairs to clear.

A smaller library doesn’t need a circulation desk. I don’t know where the break point is for this purpose. The literature is unclear on this point. The circulation desk should be large enough to be functional, but not so large as to be overpowering. You don’t want to intimidate your users. Our circulation desk has nine modules and three sides. The back wall forms the fourth side. We selected a writing desk, typing desk, checkout, book return, automated checkout, two storage cabinets, and two gates. Any library furniture catalog will illustrate these.

CONCLUSION

This has been a quick and dirty trip through library planning. By no means has it been complete. If it helps take some of the mystery out of planning and helps you avoid some of the pitfalls, our time has been well spent.

It’s most important that you read some of the references, visit other facilities, and talk to those who have met the problems before. Get on the good side of management and convince them of the importance of a first rate library facility.

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REFERENCES

SUPPLEMENTARY READING LIST