

Learning Commons for the New Millennium: Emerging Models and Synthetic Possibilities

Ray Uzwyshyn, Ph.D. MLIS

Texas State University Libraries

Research Study Proposal for Institute for Research Design

Texas State University

601 University Drive, San Marcos, TX 78666

ruzwyshyn@txstate.edu, (512) 245-5687

Abstract

The research study analyzes data from library learning commons and other sources to prescriptively create a new general model and tool for building learning commons. Drawing on quantitative and qualitative data-gathering methodologies, the study seeks to better understand emerging learning commons components, innovative technological possibilities and undergirding rationales. The study population includes academic library university websites and surveys the current literature on learning commons and technology seeking to unify fragmented perspectives and provide pragmatic suggestion for future learning commons. Pragmatically, outcomes tie in with Texas State University's Library multi-year aspirations to build a new learning commons infrastructure.

I. Section 1 – Introduction to the Problem

a. Background Information (The Academic Library Learning Commons)

Currently, academic libraries are being transformed from book warehouses to technology-rich learning spaces. Academic library learning commons are being developed as the next natural step from an earlier paradigm of information commons. Typically, learning commons build on an earlier basic 'computer lab' paradigm extending library technological areas for learning with areas such as makerspaces, instant theatres, GIS infrastructures, multimedia lab and visualization walls and technologies, 3D printer labs and a variety of technologically-enhanced spaces for student learning. If an academic library does not yet possess a learning commons, these are being planned.

b. **Statement of the Research Problem**

Currently, there are few 'best practice' guidelines or general agreed-upon models for building a learning commons. While various libraries have built learning commons by cobbling together various pieces, is it possible to generate a general model through surveying and analyzing various academic learning commons websites to summarize and synthesize data and prescriptively suggest a fundamental model and well-delineated components for a learning commons?

c. **Research Questions**

What is the appropriate larger base model for pursuing a library learning commons and what essential associated components should this contain? What new areas of innovation should a learning commons encompass and what should be the ranking priority for area creation and architecture? Do the general group of libraries possessing learning commons adhere to common or disparate models? What are the common and disparate components? Beyond physical infrastructures, are there undergirding learning models that should be utilized in setting up technological infrastructures that should guide human resource and infrastructure considerations?

II. **Literature Review**

- a. **From Information Commons to Learning Commons.** Currently, the LIS and popular literature regarding learning commons, technology and undergirding models is sparse and fragmented. Because the area is relatively new (2010 +) and in a state of dynamic flux, not a lot of theoretical or pragmatic research has yet been devoted to the study of learning commons. The models that do exist largely build on previous information commons' work (Lippincott, 2010:2013).

- b. **Case Studies.** Prescriptive studies that exist are mostly devoted to pragmatically-oriented case studies (Chudolinska, 2014) or how particular learning commons were put together (Van Horne et al., 2015). This literature is more proof-of-concept or population segment oriented (Yoo-Lee, Millennials, 2013) rather than looking at areas in terms of a larger integrated academic library whole.
- c. **Parallel Models.** The more important parallel studies which do exist suggest models such as the communicative commons, (Birdsall, 2010; Browndorf, 2014) or simply review trends (Welch and Reynolds, 2013). A more general analysis of academic library learning commons websites synthesizing data has not been carried out. Holistic studies synthesizing present website data on learning commons with empirically verifiable generalizations and larger conclusions do not yet exist.
- d. **Qualitative Survey Data.** While a recent ARL spec kit with a survey devoted to learning commons helpfully has appeared (Brown et al., November 2014), synthesis of this raw survey data and comments remains to be carried out.
- e. **Evaluative Tools.** While it is possible to find helpful evaluative learning commons tools (Brightspot et al., 2014) and 'learning space' rating systems (Educause, 2014), these are weighted towards academic technology 'learning spaces' rather than library-centered learning commons or areas centrally integrated with academic library trajectories and mission.

This study hopes to fill this gap in the literature with pragmatic qualitative and quantitative data gathering practices. The hope is that the model developed can be used as a base for the future.

III. Statement of Methodology and Analytic Techniques

This research makes use of existing academic library learning commons websites and a combination of quantitative and qualitative data methods to gather measurable data to summarize, synthesize and draw conclusions.

a. Study Population

The study population will most likely comprise university academic library learning commons' websites on a North American scale. This could be university or research libraries (ARL), college libraries, or a combination of all three. It is yet to be determined whether one segment of this learning commons' website grouping will be utilized, or a combination of groupings.

b. Sampling Design

Currently, three sampling methods are being considered:

- i. **Simple Random Sampling:** A random sample of university learning commons' websites. Ancillary data associated with these websites will be taken to define a confidence interval around a sample mean.
- ii. **Stratified Sampling:** Academic learning commons' websites would be divided into three separate groups: 1) university research libraries (ARL) 2) university learning commons 3) college learning commons. Data would be gathered from each group separately.
- iii. **Cluster Sampling:** The population would be divided into clustered samples around various components parts of a learning commons (i.e. 3D printing lab, visualization centers, multimedia) examining data available regarding these areas in depth.

c. **Data Collection Instruments/Description of Existing Data**

- i. **Data Collection Instruments.** Currently, a set of survey questions will be developed from an examination of current academic library learning commons' websites and the existing literature. The idea is to build a survey instrument organically to be able to account for the variety of measurable qualitative and quantitative data from the existing learning commons' websites. Parallel evaluative tools (Educause, Brightspot, 2014) will also be reviewed.
- ii. **Description of Existing Data.** Most libraries with learning commons and learning commons components have extensive publically accessible websites describing the learning commons and technological components. Some of these websites are extensive and comprehensive while others simply delineate core equipment, functions and user services. Comment results from the ARL September 2014 SPEC survey on Next Gen Learning Spaces provide a good existing base for analyzing existing thought on learning commons at ARL libraries. Currently, this data exists as a SPEC kit (#342, 2014), largely unanalyzed and in raw format.

d. **Data Analysis Techniques**

I would like to use the summer seminar to develop a set of data analysis techniques to analyze metrics and textual statements to later categorize and synthesize from the various learning commons' websites. Ideally, this would consist of a variety of quantitative and qualitative methodologies. I would also like to spend time looking at the previously gathered SPEC data and evaluative tools (Educause, Brightspot, 2014) noted above and reflect on: 1) whether these tools and 'comment' data set is worth

pursuing for further adaptation and analysis and 2) if not, develop methods to focus, rank and evaluate the associated metrics gathered from learning commons websites. Ideally, I would like to develop a set of analytic techniques and meaningful metrics that would be synergistic and productively yield a general model for learning commons.

IV. Tentative Project Schedule (Estimated Year Timeline)

a. **Two Months**

Finalize Learning Commons Websites Environmental Scans & Develop Measurement Instruments

b. **Three Months**

Website Data Collection and Formalization of Data

c. **Three Months**

Data Analysis: Summarize and Analyze Results

d. **Two Months**

Rough Drafts of Research Report, Article, Conference Presentation

e. **Two Months**

Final Draft of Report, Article and/or Presentation and Submission

V. Significance of the Work

This work is oriented towards academic university and college libraries interested in building learning commons. It will directly benefit library directors/deans, technologists and architects involved in putting together learning commons and should also be of use to those working in partnership with the university or academic library (administrators, university IT and facilities).

On a wider scale, it will benefit those from other types of libraries and research institutions interested in mapping academic learning commons models for their own institutions.

Summary

To establish best practice guidelines and a general model for library learning commons, this research project uses a number of data analysis techniques and combination of quantitative and qualitative data-gathering methods. By analyzing a spectrum of academic library learning commons' websites, the study codifies similarities and differences and creates a general model and set of benchmarks for stakeholders interested in creating technologically-enhanced learning commons. The research surveys the current literature regarding learning commons using case studies and ARL spec kits to build a series of questions. From currently existing library learning commons' websites, it summarizes, synthesizes data and draws conclusions to define common features, metrics and components of learning commons. The study prescriptively speculates on what components should comprise a learning commons. The research also creates an 'instrument' for focusing information from learning commons' websites. Hopefully, this study will be able to help libraries interested in creating learning commons and act as a baseline tool for further research regarding emergent library learning commons development.

References

- Birdsall, W.F. (2010) Learning Commons to Communicative Commons: Transforming the Academic Library. *College & Undergraduate Libraries*, 17(2/3), 234-47.
- Brown, S., Bennett, C., Henson, B. and Valk, (2014). *Next-gen learning spaces: SPEC kit 342*. Washington DC: Association of Research Libraries.
- Browndorf, M. (2014). Student Library Ownership and Building the Communicative Commons. *Journal of Library Administration*, 54(2), 77-93.
- Chudolinska, M (2014). Community-Based Learning Environments: Looking Back on Five Years in the OCAD University Learning Zone. *Canadian Journal of Library & Information Practice & Research*, 9 (2), 1-5.
- Colegrove, T. (2015). Thoughts on the Rise of the Innovation Commons. *Information Technology & Libraries*, 34(3), 2-5.
- Dryden, N. and Goldstein, S. (2013). Regional Campus Learning Commons: Assessing to Meet Student Needs. *Journal of Library Administration* 53(5/6), 293-48.
- Lippincott, J. K. (2010). Information Commons: Meeting Millennials' Needs. *Journal of Library Administration*, (50)1, 27-37.
- Lippincott, J and Duckett, K (2013). Library Space Assessment: Focusing on Learning. *Research Library Issues*, 284, 12-21.
- Mathews, B and Soistmann, L.A. (2016). *Encoding Space: Shaping Learning Environments that Unlock Human Potential*. Chicago: ACRL, 176.
- N.A. Learning Space Rating System (2014). *Educause Learning Initiative*. Retrieved January 7, 2016 from <http://www.educause.edu/ili/initiatives/learning-space-rating-system> and <http://www.educause.edu/visuals/shared/eli/programs/LSRSv1.pdf>

N.A. Learning Space Toolkit (2014). North Carolina State University. Bright spot, AECOM Strategy Plus.

Retrieved January 7, 2016 from: <http://learningspacetoolkit.org/>

Thomas, B., & Van Horne, S. et al. (2015). The design and assessment of the learning commons at the

University of Iowa. *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 41(6), 804 - 813.

Turner, A, Welch, B and Reynolds, S (2013). Learning Spaces in Academic Libraries – A Review of the

Evolving Trends. *Australian Academic & Research Libraries*, 44(40), 226-34.

Watson, L. ed. (2013). *Better library and learning spaces: Projects, trends and ideas*. London: Facet.

Yoo-Lee, E. et al (2013). Planning Library Spaces and Services for Millennials: An Evidence Based

Approach. *Library Management*, 34(6/7), 498-511.