Eight Characteristics of the Modern Academic Library

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Key Elements of the Modern Academic Library

1. Student centered
2. Optimized for learning
3. Makes learning visible
4. Flexible and permissive
5. Focuses on peer-to-peer interaction
6. Exemplifies an inclusive scholarly community
7. Inspires, surprises and delights
8. Helps define your university
1. Student centered
1. *(radically)* Student centered
Being radically student centered means changing our perception of who owns the public spaces in our libraries, and forces us to come to the conclusion that those spaces belong to students rather than to us.
Radically student centered

Think for the user
Radically student centered

Collect and use data
Radically student centered
Radically student centered

“This library is so big it gives me room to think big thoughts”

Student talking to someone at the Service Point
Radically student centered

create capacity for ongoing attention & response
2. Optimized for learning
Choice of settings, furnishings and digital and analog tools allows users to create their preferred learning environments.
Optimized for learning

comfortable, flexible furniture
useful, accessible technologies

smart classrooms
large video displays
teamwork-enabling shared displays
MACs & PCs
scanners
tech assistance on site
recharging stations .....
Optimized for learning
Optimized for learning
Optimized for learning
3. Makes learning visible
Makes learning visible

*Learning requires skill and energy; seeing other students in the process of learning is both helpful and energizing*
Makes learning visible
Makes learning visible
Makes learning visible
4. Flexible & Permissive
Flexible & permissive

*Choice and control empower users.*
Flexible & permissive

**Offer flexible amenities to accommodate changing needs....**

- time of day: morning, afternoon, evening
- time during semester
- privacy or smack in the middle of things
- quiet or company
- formal or informal posture
- working alone, working together
Give them permission to “own” the space:

- few posted rules
- communicate in their language
- minimize adult intrusion
- don’t rearrange the furniture
Over time, let the library find its natural order

Flexible & permissive
5. Focuses on peer-to-peer interaction
Peer-to-peer interactions

Student workers can serve as peer consultants, concierges, coaches, digital designers, tech tour guides, data collectors/observers, etc. In these enhanced roles, they both earn and learn.
Peer-to-peer interactions
Peer-to-peer interactions
Peer-to-peer interactions
6. Exemplifies an inclusive scholarly community
More than any other place on campus, the library sets the stage for all students to engage in academic fellowship with their peers.
Exemplifies inclusive scholarly community

The Great Good Place
by Ray Oldenburg

...third places are important for civil society, democracy, civic engagement, and establishing feelings of a sense of place

Variations on Oldenburg’s ‘Third place’:

Neutral ground (little or no obligation to be there)
Leveler (no importance on social status of occupants)
Conversation is main activity
Accessible and accommodating
   (all feel their needs have been fulfilled)
The regulars give the space its tone
Homey feel
Mood is playful
Home away from home

Exemplifies inclusive scholarly community

Based on other scholar’s interpretations of Ray Oldenburg’s *The Great Good Place*
Exemplifies inclusive scholarly community
Exemplifies inclusive scholarly community
Exemplifies inclusive scholarly community
7. Inspires, surprises & delights
A library is a place of creativity, discovery and growth; it should inspire those who have come to learn, surprise those who think learning is boring, and delight all who pass through, for here the very heart of the university is on full view.
Inspires, surprises & delights
Inspires, surprises & delights
Inspires, surprises & delights

“Stayed up all night to see this. Completely worth it.”
Inspires, surprises & delights
Inspires, surprises & delights
Inspires, surprises & delights

“Think the view is better up here. Good to see our new library being used.”
8. Helps define your University
My president refers to our new library as an “academic game changer.” I think he means, by that, that the library has become a place he can point out to legislators, donors, parents and prospective students (including star athletes!) and say, “This is how we are educating our students. Here is important evidence that we are truly learning oriented and student centered.”
Helps define its university

...defines, and may help market it!

Cain, D. and Reynolds, G. The Impact of Facilities on Recruitment and Retention of Students. Facilities Manager 2006 (March/April), 58.
The Eight Characteristics

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Do you find value in this element? Should this element be a goal of your project? Discuss why or why not.

2. In your project, how might you ensure that this element was realized in your design from a practical standpoint (for example use of space, equipment, technology, furniture, orientation of staff, etc.)?

3. What barriers would have to be removed to achieve this goal in your institution?

4. If you see value in this element, what next steps might you take to work this concept into your design?
Key Characteristics

Select a characteristic
Gather and discuss
10 minute rounds

You will have a chance to discuss two characteristics in the session