The Ethereal Library: Thinking Creatively When You Have No Space To Think

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The Two Spaces of the Library

• In Library as Space Program in 2013 (Michigan Library Association) – I shared the notion that the Library had two spaces:
  • A physical space
  • An ethereal space
• They provide distinct functions and benefits to the communities we serve.
• Both can be critical for the members of the library’s communities.

Physical Space

• Physical space is used for:
  • Study
  • Print Materials
  • Interaction Spaces
  • Walk-in Access
• For many functions – a physical space can be managed just as well by others.
• Print collections might be 2% of the usage – but 50% of the perception of the library

Ethereal Space

• This is where we connect with our community.
• This is where we provide clarity to a complicated information universe.
• This is where we contribute as a “Value-Add.”
• This is where we SHINE!

Ethereal Space

• With nearly 98% of our usage from electronic resources* – librarians and library staff can operate from almost anywhere
• As Gershwin said well – with ethereal space – “They Can’t Take That Away from Me”

* The Business Library Experience
If You Could Have Only One Space?
• Would you elect to save your physical or ethereal space?
• What if the decision was made for you? (Internal vs. external decisions on space).
• Space is a luxury on academic campuses – and with that – we lost ours.
• Some engagement, but no open discussion with the community.
• With a large construction project, we lost both student and collection space...

Kresge Business Administration Library
• Built in mid 1980s to serve the research and curricular needs of the Ross School of Business
• We are open 108 hours during the Fall and Winter Terms.
• Seating for nearly 700 students.
• Very visible, located in the center of the Ross Complex (27K square feet).
• We have a collection of over 140,000 volumes in Ann Arbor and Flint (where they are stored at the University of Michigan-Flint)
• Constant state of “Library Erosion”

Ross Construction Project
• Summer 2013 – Scope of plans shared*
• September 2013 – Gift announced
• Early 2014 – Plans developed
• End of Winter Term – Started vacating the building
• June 2014 – Moved to MOtown
• July 2014 – Print moved out
• Fall 2014 – Rebuilding Kresge Library Services

Establishing Priorities
• Corey’s planning priorities:
  1. Staff
  2. Services
  3. Stuff (and spend)
  4. Space
• Build services based on what you have, not what you had.
• We had no choice but to build an Ethereal Library!

Losing Your Physical Space
• You have to come to grips with what this means
• We are not a student destination any longer for study
• We cannot be format agnostic in collecting
• You cannot dwell on the past – you have to...well...
...And Building for the New

- Parameters of the Ethereal Library – or the 6P Approach
  - Philosophical
  - Patient
  - Positive
  - Proactive
  - Perform
  - Ms. Pirkola’s Rules

6P Approach: Philosophical

- This is an opportunity to also be freed from what worked and did not work from the past.
- With less space – do not try to recapture everything you did – it will not work.
- Don’t be bound by the past – ‘Forget the Alamo’ – Lone Star (John Sayles – 1996)

6P Approach: Patient

- Don’t expect to have everything mapped out on day 1, or day 100 for that matter!
- Things cannot change overnight.
- A “born digital” library is much easier to build that a “becoming digital” library.

6P Approach: Positive

- It is very easy to be mired in self-doubt with this type of contraction.
- The image of loss cannot be your brand or how you are seen.
- Important to not dwell on decisions that do not benefit you in these projects.
6P Approach: Positive

- There are also some actual positives about not having a public space.
- No longer have to worry about evenings and weekends in bad Michigan weather…

6P Approach: Positive

- Positive approach to a situation is about making the best of it – *this takes a while to get to*.
- How can we continue to meet the needs of the school and the number of communities we serve?
- Our work is reflective of us more than our situation.
- Despite everything - rather be happy than angry.

6P Approach: Proactive

- The biggest issue is that we will be out of sight.
- We need to be more proactive about doing outreach and connecting with faculty and students.
- We use all virtual reference systems (chat & email) – need to push them more.
- *Being visible is our biggest need right now.*

6P Approach: Proactive

- I have been a strong proponent of the Reference Desk – even as many libraries are moving away from that.
- We experimented with a reference service point at Tozzi Center, but it was not ideal.
- We were given the front desk in the Ross Modular Offices – flipped it from Welcome Desk to Reference Desk.
- Having visible staff is important – but they need a good place to work from!

6P Approach: Proactive

- Print Coursepack (TEXTPAK) pickup at “Kresge Library Annex” – Legal Research 102 (short walk).
- We are using this time to fundamentally change how we operate.
- Working on communication with the Ross Community.

6P Approach: Perform

- In this change, there was never an issue about Kresge Library as a service point.
- That was what *kept us going*.
- That has to be what *keeps us going*.
6P Approach: Perform

- Kresge Library has been the Service ‘champs’ at Ross.
- Great source of internal pride and motivation.
- This is the reason why our work (and staff) are separated out from the space.

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- Since we have lost our space — it is all about service.
- We need to be creative in how we deliver services to our community.
- Pay close attention to what they need.
- Experiment and change are critical elements.

6P Approach: Ms. Pirkola’s Rules

- Flexibility!
  - It has to work in all directions.
  - We also need to be flexible with staff as they learn to work with these new confines.
  - New Service points need time to develop.

- Balance is critical
  - Empathy for patrons and staff need to be balanced against each other.
    - The more we provide for patrons, the more we lean on staff.
    - The more we provide for the staff, the less we provide for patrons.

The Big Changes

- Assess what you can do with your new space.
- Give up traditional services if you cannot manage or run them effectively.
- You are playing with house money with these contractions — take risks & be entrepreneurial.
The Big Changes – Existing Programs

- Embedded Librarian program for MAP and Action-Learning continues at Kresge.
- New embedded librarians for entry core class for all BBA Sophomores (500). Librarians are assigned to every section (14) to support their research on a company & response to a social issue. (MERGE)
  - Faculty Research Service
  - Continue to support other student research (coursework, clubs, careers, case competitions & curiosity)

The Big Changes – New Programs

- Exam/Assignment Program
  - Many faculty do not want to hand back assignments in class.
  - Some faculty also do not let students keep completed exams.
  - This service ran as a pilot in Winter Term and went to the Library in the Fall 2014.
  - Will Continue with Kresge into the new building.

The Big Changes

Most things (even those that moved) eventually bloom again!

Providing Value With New Constraints

- Great deal of discussion about the “value” of the academic library.
- The need for this discussion could be an indication that we’ve reached a “tipping point.”
Providing Value With New Constraints

• There is the appearance of endless information availability from wherever you are – this we know is not truly accurate
• If we think about the changes to other industries (automotives, pharmaceuticals, journalism, etc.), few are operating as they’d like.

Providing Value With New Constraints

• Our “old” value proposition:
  • Space for students to study
  • Space for physical collections (in all formats)
  • Strong historical collection
  • Strong electronic collections

Providing Value With New Constraints

• Our “new” value proposition:
  • Live within the restrictions of virtually no collection space.
  • Figure out new collaboration mechanisms to serve our community.
  • Move away from the model where we provided student study space.
  • Focus on what we can do vs. what we have done.

Providing Value With New Constraints

• Our “new” value proposition remains:
  • Using the resources at our disposal, we will support the curricular and research needs of the Ross Community.
  • We will acquire resources only where we have the means to store or manage them.
  • Seek out new opportunities to provide services for the school & campus.
  • Embrace our new reality.

Providing Value With New Constraints

• “Kresge Value Proposition” Meetings
• Winter 2015 – with Faculty, Students and Staff
• Will continue moving forward
• New ideas to come from these meetings:
  • New subject and journal alerting services
  • Need to bring back course reserves to Kresge
  • Managing communication with Ross communities (faculty, staff, students, alumni)
  • Grow the exam and assignment program
  • Explore opportunities with Exec Education & other departments

Closing Thoughts & Questions

• Big Win on Staffing
• What does the future hold?
• Where is the Long Tail?
• What’s in a Name?
• Are we the Canary in the coal Mine?
Big Win on Staffing
• The premise with this reduction has been space and space alone.
• We have been able to move forward with redeployed staff.
• No full-time staff losses related to this move.
• Temporary Staff counts way down (no need for full evening staff).

What does the future hold?
• Fewer certainties for academic libraries now and especially 20 years in the future.
• I believe that most libraries will continue to lose space until it is mostly gone.
• We need to be nimble and flexible to meet the needs of the school – this secures the future of the library.
• We need to be focused on the end-user of the library resources.

Where is the Long Tail?
• Print collections are built on needs both now and down the road.
• Many items are used in 10 or 20 years – but will libraries have space to see that materialize?
• Long-term ROI appears to contract in an electronic-only Information environment.

What’s in a Name?
• Changing our name to Kresge Library Services
• We are no longer a “destination” or a library in the traditional sense.
• The print holdings were 2% of our use, but 50% of our perception.
• Even though “Kresge” will belong to the building – “Kresge Library” has great brand recognition at Ross.

The Canary in the Coal Mine
• Are departmental/branch libraries the “canary in the coal mine”?
• Is the canary just sleeping?
• Our space contraction appears to be the future of libraries everywhere – we just had it happen all at once.
• We were saved by service!
• Should we just be happy with what we have left…like a squirrel with a churro.

Thank You
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