The Library
Transforms to Learning Commons

The library is the academic heart of a school, but just as education is changing, so too is the library. With information available online virtually anytime, housing countless books has become of secondary importance. Today's library should be a broader and deeper resource than ever, a place where traditional and new knowledge resources, instructors and students converge in an ongoing process of learning, teaching and discovery. It doesn't require more real estate, but simply rethinking how library space is used.

To better understand the trends, Steelcase Education initiated a major study of libraries at 13 public and private colleges and universities across the U.S. The research revealed that the library is becoming a key location outside the classroom where constructivist pedagogy plays out as students learn to analyze information and create new knowledge, often working in groups. This change represents a transformation from book storage site to center of interactive learning.

The library's dramatic shift to a multi-dimensional space hasn't been easy. For example, in recent decades, growing computer use led libraries to install computer stations, but their haphazard application often placed people in busy corridors with no privacy. Group work areas were often unintentionally placed next to individual study areas, leaving quiet-seeking students frustrated while student teams searched, often fruitlessly, for collaborative spaces and tools to support group projects.

Intentional design, adjacency planning and understanding intended behaviors through research result in a better approach. There is a rhythm to an individual's learning process, and effective learning spaces support this rhythm of learning. Just as the classroom needs to support varied learning and teaching styles across different class periods and courses, library space must be equally adaptable to the changing needs of students and instructors. A reduced emphasis on housing books frees up real estate for individual and group learning. For example, Steelcase research shows that college students tend to work in groups more in the evenings (outside class and work time) and individually or with one other person during mornings and afternoons. Spaces for solo tasks work best early in the day and must be flexible later on for other needs.

Primary and secondary students are increasingly working together in constructivist pedagogies, too. The library remains a key resource for learning how to find and use information efficiently, but it's also a place for peer-to-peer mentoring, small group projects and access to hardware and software.

A palette of place supports the demands on a library today. A variety of settings thoughtfully located throughout the library allow students and instructors to choose the space appropriate to different kinds of learning, whether it's a quiet place for individual study, a space to work on a group project or another location they choose simply to match their need that day for a particular level of quiet or stimulation. Having the choice, and being able to choose, empowers students and teachers and makes them more productive.

In the past, the library was a place where printed materials were used to instill a love of reading and teach research skills. Now both print and digital are used, while students take a more active role in learning. Both instructors and students look to the library as an essential resource to support the changes in education. This transformation drives the need for new, multi-use library spaces, and multiplies the ways the library supports teaching and learning.

WHAT WE OBSERVED
Libraries are becoming the academic heart of the campus, supporting social connections, collaborative needs and team projects, along with events for campus and community activities.

The central role of computer hardware and software has resulted in a demand for more library computer labs.

Anywhere/anytime information access has lessened the need to reference books, so book stacks are being reduced and moved to less prominent locations.

Librarians' roles are changing: they’re instructors, technology advisors, research assistants and collaborators with students and faculty.

WHAT WE HEARD
“...we have to look at our information in the library and rethink the ways we provide it to people.”
Librarian

“It's really hard to focus when you're in an enormous room that has noise going on all over the place and you're trying to read things on a screen. Our library has a state-of-the-art computer area, but the entire floor is open. Everyone who's walking to the other end of the library has to come through.”
Student
media:scape merges furniture and technology to help students collaborate, co-create and share ideas more effectively. media:scape boosts collaboration across the table or around the globe—by transforming classrooms, libraries or social spaces, connecting students and allowing them to share information seamlessly.

Tips for a New Library Ecosystem

Most existing libraries were designed and built for finding books and checking them out. As today’s libraries transcend that limited role, they must evolve as students’ needs expand. As a self-directed learning space, four zones emerge, each supporting different types of behavior and activities. Across these zones, new library spaces must support collaboration and group work, private study space, computing equipment and content-creation tools. Each quadrant represents a set of behaviors that should be intentionally planned for.

Whether a space is new or renovated, adjacencies and planning for technology are crucial in practically every setting, from collaborative spaces and social areas to individual study spaces. Visual and acoustical privacy requires careful consideration.

PRIVATE/ALONE
Individual spaces should support focused work, student wellbeing and the security of worktools.
1. Provide enclosed space for visual privacy.
2. Support the need for extreme focus and concentration by blocking all distractions.
3. Allow temporary ownership of space.
4. Support a range of short- and long-term ownership of space and privacy with assigned, secure spaces.

PRIVATE/TOGETHER
Library classrooms should accommodate active learning, computing and distance learning with fluid transitions. Team spaces should support multiple meeting modes and student project teams.
1. Support a fluid switch between activities.
2. Provide a range of blended learning and teaching environments, including online, webinars, etc.
3. Support multiple meeting modes—inform, evaluate and co-create—for small to large groups.
4. Provide tools for visual display, collaborative technology, information and acoustical privacy.
5. Provide highly flexible, customizable furniture to meet collaborative, privacy and ergonomic needs.

PUBLIC/TOGETHER
Library classrooms should accommodate active learning, computing and distance learning with fluid transitions. Team spaces should support multiple meeting modes and student project teams.
1. Support the need for co-existence of focused work and social interactions; allow settings to switch from individual to dyads and triads.
2. Offer highly flexible and self-customizable furnishings and tools.
4. Enable quick, targeted access to computers, online services, printers, etc.
6. Provide access to dedicated computer workstations, specialized technologies and software.

PUBLIC/TOGETHER
Students often do group work in open areas to stay connected to others, requiring flexibility to meet their changing needs. Reference areas should capitalize on librarians’ expertise in mentoring and teaching. The increased use of technology requires just-in-time technical support. The increased use for events requires multi-purpose, adaptable gathering places.
1. Accommodate impromptu teaching and collaborative activities.
2. Remove barriers between students and staff.
3. Provide accessible dedicated spaces for technical services.
4. Create multi-purpose, adaptable spaces to host large functions.
PRIVATE/ALONE
Individually dedicated spaces support a range of focus and concentration and should consider appropriate human scale for individuals and their wellbeing. Plan for short- and long-term security of personal items and the accommodation of new worktools.

PUBLIC/ALONE
Individuals want to study in the company of others to stay socially connected while working alone in a variety of open settings. Support the need for co-existing focused work and social interactions, allowing settings to switch from individual to dyads and triads. Offer highly flexible and self-customizable furnishings and tools while supporting postural changes for short- and long-term use.

PUBLIC/TOGETHER
Support the demand for large, scheduled functions with multi-purpose, highly adaptable gathering places. Accommodate impromptu teaching and collaborative activities by removing barriers between students and staff. Recognize the increased need for just-in-time technical support for questions, support and maintenance.

PRIVATE/TOGETHER
Technology-rich library classrooms should accommodate multiple uses such as active learning, computing and distance learning with fluid transitions. Support multiple meeting modes—inform, evaluate and co-create—for small to large groups.

Consider the entire library floor plan when retrofitting any setting, designing with adjacencies in mind. When planning, be sure to support each quadrant independently and holistically within the entire floor space, acknowledging acoustic and/or visual privacy needs.
Study carrel

Despite the increase in collaborative projects, students still need time to focus. Brody® WorkLounge blocks distractions and maximizes real estate by providing an oasis for focused work anywhere on campus.

The adjustable worksurface brings students’ devices and content to eye level to minimize strain on the back and neck.

The Brody screen minimizes distractions in the peripheral vision to help increase attention.

The Brody footrest supports students in lounge posture.

FEATURED PRODUCTS

Brody……………………………………..141
Learning bench

Even when focused work is required, students often prefer to study in the presence of others. Task lighting gives individuals control over their personal setting. The FrameOne bench provides students with their own workspace while visually available to others. Soft seating supports a longer stay.

First-class cabin

When angled to the outside, this application of the Brody® WorkLounge supports both focused and diffused thinking—allowing students to seek inspiration when they need it and easily get back into flow and get work done. Integrated power allows students to settle in for long study sessions. The alert recline posture of Brody keeps students’ bodies supported and engaged. With shielding that blocks distractions on three sides, the Brody WorkLounge makes it easy to find privacy even among adjacent open settings.

FEATURED PRODUCTS

cobi .......................................................... 138
SOTO LED task light
FrameOne

FEATURED PRODUCTS

Brody ....................................................... 141
Immersive work studio

Groups often meet to complete assignments in libraries. Provide them with privacy from others and tools to collaborate.

- Whiteboard surfaces allow teams to brainstorm and collaborate.
- Easily movable, low-height furniture allows students to make the space their own.
- Post and Beam divides open spaces, providing the privacy groups need.
- Room scheduling systems allow groups to reserve a space in advance, avoiding a search for open project space.

Campsite

Students often need ample space to spread out and work together. Provide them with choice and control in an inviting setting to collaborate, co-create and discuss.

- Mounted display of digital information makes it easy for everyone to see and contribute.
- Multiple seating options allow students comfort and choice.
- Ample space allows students to spread out in their own space while still able to easily collaborate.

FEATURED PRODUCTS

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PRIVATE/TOGETHER
Drive thru

The drive thru supports short-term walk-up tasks such as library database searches or printing.

- Storage is available to keep student belongings off the floor.
- Soft seating supports student tasks between classes.
- Stool height posture is ideal for a short stay.

Campsite

This multi-purpose space supports social breaks, collaborative group work and individual study with the ability to spread out materials.

- Monitor can share campus news and other information to keep students connected.
- Soft seating provides comfort and support, even during long study sessions.
- Large worksurface supports multiple users.

FEATURED PRODUCTS

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Campsite

In this application, students can meet socially between classes or shift to work alone or together in the evenings.

Side worksurface supports students’ papers and devices.

Personal storage accommodates personal items.

Storage provides a separation of space in the open plan.

FEATURED PRODUCTS

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Customer Story

Grand Valley State University
Allendale, MI

“We wanted this to be a very different place, to feel different and look different, so that students could act differently.”

Different indeed. As Lee VanOrsdel, dean of Grand Valley State University (GVSU) libraries, suggests, the new Mary Idema Pew Library & Information Commons eschews the traditional college library in favor of a dramatically new approach: an inspired integration of space, furniture and tools for active learning.

GVSU’s new library supports individual and collaborative learning, allows access to content in any form and responds to changing rhythms of learning.

“Up to 90% of learning happens outside the classroom, so this library is an academic hub for learning that reinforces what they learned in the classroom,” says VanOrsdel.

Post-class learning often happens in informal learning spaces in the library, places students choose to support their individual needs. In these self-directed learning spaces, true student discovery often occurs. And as group work and collaboration take hold in classrooms, library spaces are often where team projects are completed.

When GVSU leaders began planning the library five years ago, they wanted to rethink the library’s role in learning and how the process of learning itself was changing. They partnered with Steelcase and SHW Group, an architecture and engineering firm, to conduct on-site research. As part of their work, the team designed and prototyped two types of study spaces: 1) a group space with worktools (portable whiteboards, mobile tables and chairs, storage shelves, power access) and 2) a media:scape setting where people can connect a digital device and share digital content on two integrated flat screens, also with group worktools.

“The study was invaluable to the library planning team, and the most important thing we learned is that there are daily rhythms to the way students work alone or in groups, and seasonal rhythms based on how they complete assignments over the course of a semester,” says VanOrsdel. Student activity increases around mid-term exams and due dates for papers. Each day also has its own rhythm. “Students work pretty much alone during the daytime. But at night, groups come together, pull apart, reform and regroup constantly. They don’t just go to a table or into a room; they consult all night long.”

Research revealed how student postures change through the day. While on task and hurrying between classes, they sit upright in a chair at a table. If they’re waiting for a friend they kick back on a stool or in a lounge chair with a phone or tablet and relax. At night, they look for furniture that’s mobile to accommodate team projects.

The university also discovered that unlike most groups, study groups (students who study difficult subjects together because it produces better outcomes) tend to meet between 10 am and 3 pm.

The vagaries of student study habits presented a design challenge: plan the space for the daytime when students work on their own, or for the evening when they work in groups?

Research showed that the best solution is to create spaces with furniture that’s mobile, reconfigurable, and in a variety of sizes and shapes. So the library has 19 different enclosed group study rooms that hold from two to 12 people, plus dozens of open areas with movable furniture. There are 29 types of seating, plenty of both mobile and wall-mounted whiteboards and media:scape collaborative settings in various places around the library. There are also several outdoor spaces, including an amphitheater, an indoor café, outdoor patio and even a third-floor reading garden.

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Lee VanOrsdel
Dean of University Libraries

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VanOrsdel says “flexible furniture really isn’t an option—it’s a requirement if we want to optimize use of the building. And if we’re wrong about this, we have so much flexibility that whatever students want to do, we can do it.”

The west side of the library invites conversation in various collaborative workspaces, with piped-in, programmed sound so users feel comfortable speaking in normal tones of voice. The east side is for quiet, contemplative work, with white noise to help mask sounds and reduce distractions.

“In the classroom, students are involved in hands-on learning but the instructor still leads. In the library, students take control of their learning as they discover, analyze and share information, and in the process become comfortable working individually and with others. It’s a major shift from a reading and storage site to a center for active learning,” says Elise Valoe, senior design researcher with Steelcase, and part of a team that studied libraries at private and public colleges and universities across the country.

About 150,000 books are in open stacks, and another 600,000 are available through an automated storage system located beneath the library. This reduces the building’s book footprint by 90% and frees up space where students, faculty and staff can work however and whenever they desire. These workspaces range from reflective, contemplative places, what VanOrsdel calls “almost cell-like spaces where a student can find refuge,” to group spaces for active content sharing and creation.

The library is extremely busy. Traffic is much higher than at GVSU’s old library, and student reaction has been overwhelmingly positive. The university also is working with Steelcase and professional education associations to design ways to more effectively measure the impact the new library has on the learning experience.

“Ultimately, we’ll be able to tell if our programs and tools and spaces correlate with higher grades, with more persistence to graduation and faster times to graduation. I’m really optimistic that this is a model for other universities in how a library can have a greater impact on student learning.”
Customer Story
Immaculata-LaSalle High School
Miami, FL

What is the form and function of a 21st century library? Every administrator has to answer the question at some point. But when your student population is growing, teachers are using more collaborative, constructivist pedagogies, and your library is a traditional book warehouse in a large footprint without supporting active learning, finding the answer takes on some urgency.

Immaculata-LaSalle High School, a private, Catholic high school in Miami, had limited resources and no room to expand, but their progressive approach led to a clear answer: reinvent the library as an interactive student learning center.

With a new layout, furniture and integrated technology, the center has become a multi-purpose learning environment used for classes, student study sessions, social settings with glass wall surrounds were installed on one side of the library. Each space accommodates 26 people, the largest average class size at the school. Four courses are taught in the rooms; the rest of the time they’re available for other uses.

Teaching in a “fishbowl”
Garcia was at first leery of teaching “in a fishbowl.” I thought it was going to be odd being enclosed in glass, thought it was going to be odd being enclosed in glass, but it’s so silent in the room that once you’re here, you’re not aware of everything that’s out there. And yet you don’t feel isolated because it is glass.

“With mediascape, students can put something together and immediately show the class what it is that they found. So there’s immediate feedback, there’s immediate inspiration for other students. There is immediate connection. And I really think that is what 21st century learning is about.”

The library as hub, heartbeat, catalyst
The central area of the learning center, with mobile tables and chairs, is used for occasional classes, workshops and staff meetings, and is used daily by students studying, working on projects, doing research and meeting with peers.

Personal whiteboards at each table support student collaboration and double as tabletop dividers to provide privacy during test taking.

Opposite the glass walled classrooms are stools with high tables for students who need to do focused work. Near a crescent-shaped lounge, a round table and short stools create a casual place for project teams or students who want to hang out. The layout of the furniture helps define which groups are interacting and which students are working on their own.

When they’re at the lounge, it’s more social. When someone is at the higher table with a laptop and papers, you know they want to work alone,” says Garcia.

“I love the room because you can have eight computers or tablets hooked up to a screen. Putting information up and down is as easy as touching a puck. This is what I’ve been waiting for in the classroom.”

Ana Garcia, English teacher
Common Core coordinator

Developing the new learning center signaled to students, faculty, staff, parents and visitors that the school was changing. “One day the library was one way: traditional, heavy wood, immobile. Now it’s all about mobility, changeability, adaptability, thinking a different way,” Garcia says.

Next they rethought the classrooms, switching to mobile tables and desks, integrating technology and ensuring flexible layouts that support different teaching and learning styles. By 2018, the school will have renovated all of their learning spaces.

But it all started in the library, says Padovan. “No matter how many times I go in there, I stop and appreciate the difference this space makes. It’s a statement. It stops you. This is our hub. This is our school’s heartbeat.”