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High Yield from Small Change: Evolution in Response to User Need

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Introduction

The Agricultural Information Center (AIC) was originally designed to hold a large print collection. When the "main" library, W.T. Young, opened in 1998, most of the physical agriculture collection was relocated there. With continuing expansion of electronic resources and reduction of print purchasing, large areas formerly used for books were left with old furniture and empty shelves.

Careful consideration was given to appropriate use of the space. There was a need for flexible multipurpose areas. The original plan hinged on the creation of a collaborative learning room with modular furniture and presentation equipment.

First Steps

Success of the project depended on willingness to adapt plans to fit the circumstances. HVAC issues and budget constraints had been obstacles to previous attempts to renovate the AIC with funding from the College of Agriculture, Food and Environment (CAFE). A more cost-effective solution emerged: moving the desired collaborative learning space from the back of the computer lab area to the quiet study room in the front of the AIC. This would also allow the creation of two collaborative spaces, rather than one.

The outdated lobby area still presented a major problem to the look and functionality of the AIC. Funds were requested from UK Libraries for Phase II of the renovation.

A Dual Approach

With funding from CAFE, two collaborative learning spaces were constructed in place of what was once one large study room and collection space. In partnership and in appreciation of CAFE's support, UK Libraries agreed to fund a new service desk and renovation of the main lobby area of the AIC. Phase I renovations began in June 2014 and Phase II renovations began in December 2014.

Timeline of Progress

Over the course of the past year, the alterations made to our space have been numerous. Many of these changes were minor, but when viewed collectively a big impact can be seen.

Phase I

First, new carpet tiles replaced old carpeting. Wheeled modular furniture was brought in and heavy wooden tables, chairs, and collection furniture were removed. Presentation equipment and an instructor station were installed. Finally, one wall was painted bright green.



Phase II

Old mismatched desks were replaced with a new modular service desk. New vinyl composition tile flooring was installed in place of decades-old linoleum and carpet. All walls were freshened with new paint, and the accent wall behind the desk was painted bright green, then a sign was added to the accent wall.

The lobby was arranged with café style seating, laptop stations, and new soft seating with built-in power for a more inviting and useable multipurpose space. Some pieces were purchased new, but others were repurposed campus surplus items.

Lessons Learned

- Drastic changes can happen slowly. By focusing on individual items we wanted to change, we were able to incrementally improve the space.
- Campus surplus can be a great way to acquire new-to-you furniture at zero cost.
- It is important to maintain good working relationships with project managers and vendors. With open channels of communication, several overlooked issues were caught in time for correction.
- Consultations with as many patrons and staff as possible help make sure needs are addressed. Extra eyes help to avoid overlooking important details.
- Modular spaces with vibrant colors are attractive. Since the renovation, room use has increased significantly.
- We are fortunate to be supported by both our Libraries system and the college in which we are embedded.

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