

FROM PROGRAM TO PUNCH LIST: PLANNING A NEW ACADEMIC LIBRARY BUILDING

by Ruth Miller



INTRODUCTION

The original David L. Rice Library was the second structure built on the University of Southern Indiana (USI) campus. Opening in 1971 at a cost of \$2,500,000 for a student body of 2,624, the three-story facility was built to house 150,000 volumes and to provide reading and study areas on the two upper floors. The lower level initially accommodated general purpose classrooms and faculty offices. The library building was long overdue for expansion or replacement by the mid-1990s, and by the time the new library building opened in the fall of 2006, the student population had grown to 10,021 students.

USI started planning for a remodeled, expanded library building in the spring of 1997. William F. Loudon, Library Director at the University of Evansville, served as consultant and directed staff workshops on the topic. The library staff was divided into working groups to determine what was needed in a new building; this process continued into 2000. Following the workshops and workgroup meetings, a needs assessment was prepared in the spring of 2000. In 2000-2001 planning funds for “an expanded building” were approved by the State Budget Committee. Between July and October 2001 student and faculty focus groups



Original library building, opened in 1971

were held to generate ideas about what the USI campus needed in a new or expanded library building; a report was prepared, noting comments from those groups. That report, along with an initial building program statement indicating how many square feet were needed for each designated function, was prepared by November 2001, but it was not until May 2002 that a separate new building was approved, thanks to the vision of one university vice president and the encouragement of architects, teaching faculty, and library staff.

In January of 2002 several architectural firms were invited to make presentations on proposed designs for the University's Rice Library expansion project. They were asked to respond to a list of nine essential characteristics (see below) for this new library building and explain how their firm would address each characteristic. They were also asked to address design areas which required special expertise (acoustics, lighting, technology, interior design, academic library design, etc.) and how they would provide that expertise. They also were asked to discuss how they would involve and communicate with university personnel during the programming and design process.

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LIBRARY BUILDING

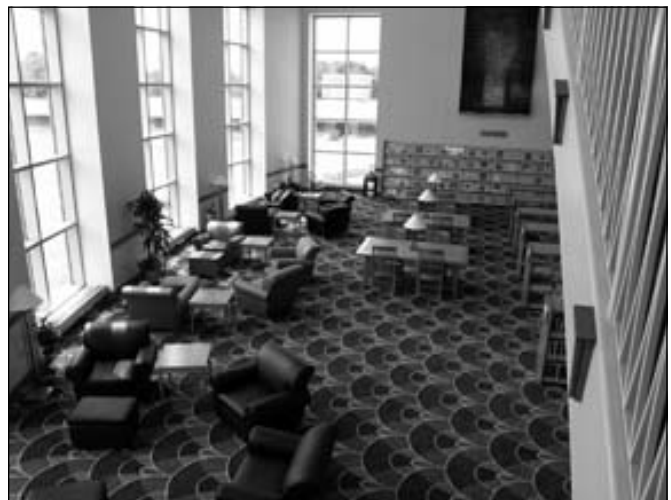
- 1. Campus Master Plan:** Each firm should indicate how they see this building fitting into the campus master plan. How would this building relate to existing buildings as well as to the next decade's building projects; how would it be sited in regard to foot and vehicular traffic patterns.
- 2. The Library as Place:** As technology has changed higher education, so have teaching and learning styles changed and so have the ways in which libraries attempt to meet users' instruction and research needs. The building should reflect this changing concept of libraries, in its combination of print and electronic resources, essential services, different kinds of study space, and variety of functions.

3. **Symbolic Significance:** The building should be symbolic for the campus. It should take the campus to the next level of maturity and transform the campus statement of its own value and quality. It should be a marketing and recruitment tool for faculty, students, and the community. As this building becomes the focal point of campus, how would it fit with the rest of the campus? What might be done to achieve the desired attractiveness and reflect quality in this building?
4. **Functionality:** The building should meet the requirements emphasized in the program statement. Each firm should indicate how they would go about giving those basic elements physical form. What processes would they use to clearly understand campus needs and respond effectively to those needs?
5. **Flexibility:** The building must offer flexibility in functionality, for changes due to emerging technology as well as teaching and learning styles and methods. It must serve several non-library functions initially but allow for those areas to be adapted to library functions in uneven stages over time. How might the building be designed to manage those changes, given that one portion might change to library functions within 5 years, another portion in 10 years, and still others later?
6. **Ease of Use:** The building must be clearly organized, allowing individuals and groups to find what they want with ease. This includes an entrance area that allows comfortable circulation in and out of the building (recognizing ADA and other concerns). Signage is important, but if the building is well arranged, major traffic patterns will be intuitive.
7. **Attractive Interior:** The building's interior environment must provide an attractive, pleasing, inviting atmosphere. This includes good lighting, visual interest, comfortable furnishings, and sound control. It should attract users, encouraging them to spend time and offer them a variety of spaces, from soft seating to carrels to group study rooms.
8. **Security:** The building must offer security in the control of people and materials entering and exiting the building itself and designated areas within it. It also must provide a sense of well-being and safety to the people in the building and in its immediate vicinity (good visibility, lighting, adequate level of staffing).
9. **Beyond Minimal Standards:** The building should not only meet but surpass such standards as ADA. The "minimal" is no longer adequate for our needs. Not only security gates for exit security but width of aisles, height and density of shelving, good visibility throughout the building, clear location of restrooms and service points would be affected.

These qualities continued to be discussed as the project progressed. A design board naming some of these elements was placed in the library's conference room as a frequent reminder of our shared goals for this new building. (See illustration at end of article.)

The architects hired for the job—Wollen Molzan and Partners of Indianapolis and Edmund L. Hafer Architect Inc. of Evansville—conducted three two-day workshops in February, March, and April of 2002 to clarify the building project. In May 2002 the university trustees approved planning for a new library building with the old library building to be remodeled as an extension of the University Center. At this time, the first half of funding was approved by the state. Through 2002-2003 there were ongoing meetings with the architects and touring of new libraries in the region. The second half of funding was approved by the state that year. A groundbreaking ceremony was held in June 2004. During August 2004 a training workshop for the move was held for key library, physical plant, and computer personnel. A topping off ceremony occurred on March 3, 2005, followed by a cornerstone setting ceremony on September 15, 2005. These ceremonial events generated campus and community interest in the new building.

Building construction was completed as scheduled, on time and within budget, in April 2006. From April through June, shelving was installed and furniture and equipment were brought into the building. Staff moved into the new building during the first week of June 2006. A satellite library was opened in the *Shield* (student newspaper) Office in the University Center from June 5 through June 15 to provide basic library services, enabling library staff to provide reserve materials, retrieve books, answer questions, and maintain contact with students during the summer session. A company specializing in moving library collections was hired to move the collections between



1st floor reading room (shot from stairway to 2nd floor) in new library.

June 5 and June 13. The new building was open to the public by June 16 with the formal open house held on July 23, 2006.

PLANNING

The focus groups held for students and faculty were designed to provide a reality check and to give feedback. The planning process was a strongly collaborative one from the beginning, which is not to say that we were always in agreement or that there were not many compromises. The two architectural firms used for this project consisted of one that specializes in libraries and a local firm that knew the campus and the community well. No doubt we got some things wrong because during the two year period from planning to construction and another two years until completion, many things changed. Because we cannot see into the future, we probably failed to fully appreciate the significance or the beginning of one or more of the next big trends. However, we did read and talk about “the library as space and place” and the library as an example of the “third place.” Kevin Huse of Woollen Molzan has spent many years working with libraries and churches, units that tend to develop communities. We also followed a common current choice of having a “multi-purpose” building with a café, in this case Starbucks, and an open seating area at the front of the building with sixteen classrooms plus a 125 person auditorium on the lower level (both technically “outside” the library space as such but inside the building).

DECISIONS

There are thousands of decisions, large and small, to be made in planning a new building — from the overall environment and ambience desired to the amount, location, and type of space allocated to staff versus that given to public areas, from shelved collections to public service desks to types and variety of



New building exterior, daytime

seating, as well as decisions on furniture styles, carpet designs, and wall colors. Among the choices made in this case was the decision not to have a large computer commons. We agreed that for this campus, at least at this time, that was not the greatest need. USI already has several large computer labs across campus, especially in the two newest buildings. A more varied kind of space, sometimes called an “information commons,” was also discussed but was not specifically built at this time. Knowing how quickly changes are needed, we did, however, build in as much flexibility as possible so that, for example, the thirty group study rooms can be used in a variety of ways. We chose three two-story reading rooms in lieu of the atrium that the architects preferred. These provide visual space on a grand scale without making the entire building noisy and constricted around a full atrium.

We made a priority of group study rooms because of the popularity of collaborative student projects, but these rooms can also serve other functions. Two computer labs enable librarians to provide instruction in one while keeping the other available as an open student lab; these also could be adjusted in time as other priorities surface. No tables larger than four-person size were selected because we thought these would be used more than larger tables. Most library computers are housed on the first floor, with fewer on the second floor and even fewer on the third and fourth floors (no staff are housed on the fourth floor). Because of heavy use, we are doubling the number of laptops that can be checked out to students for in-building use. There are no faculty study rooms. To provide enough such rooms to make a difference on campus would have required taking substantial space from more essential needs.

CONCERNS

Once the new library opened we expected heavy traffic and that is what occurred. In our first year, for the period from June 16 until the winter break, the building was open 170 days with a daily average of 1,022 individuals, for a total of 173,860. In the absence of accurate data from the old building, we can only guess at the difference; the guess is that we may be serving five times as many library users as we were previously. While that number may not be sustained as other new buildings are added to the campus, it does seem to confirm that there was a need for this building. As we knew ahead of time, we do not have an adequate number of staff to handle the increased traffic and new demands, nor do we have adequate funds to significantly increase collections or other resources as needed. It is, of course, our hope that the building itself, positive public relations, and campus pride will bring in funds that will allow us to expand collections and add staff.

We clearly have a more attractive space, a more comfortable, welcoming environment. Users have more choices, more options for where and how to work. In group study rooms, students can work together on projects and talk without disturbing others; a TV with DVD can be moved on a cart as needed. Laptops can be checked out at the front desk and taken anywhere in the library. There are quiet, out-of-the way areas as well as more public, less quiet areas. Conditions are more conducive to productivity, creativity, thinking, reading, and learning than they were in the old building. An academic library should be a focal point, a center for campus intellectual life. The old library could not be that; the new building offers library users that opportunity.

THINGS THAT WENT WELL

Initially a new building was not considered possible; we would have, instead, an expanded, remodeled library. Among those supporting the idea of a new building, in addition to library staff, were the chair of faculty senate, the architects, and the Vice President for Business Affairs. Fortunately, the idea for a new library prevailed. At an earlier stage it was suggested that the College of Education and Human Services be housed in the library. That proposal did not develop, and they were housed with the College of Science and Engineering in the last building completed prior to the new library.

There was early (from 1997) involvement of library staff, determining what was needed in a new library. This was followed by involvement of others on campus, including focus groups of students and faculty and library representatives had involvement in the selection of architects. Once architects were hired, regularly scheduled coordination meetings (for most of the last year, meetings were held about every two weeks) of architects, construction representatives, physical plant, and library staff were very helpful.

The work that the campus staff architect and construction manager and the construction administrator did to keep things on track, communicate with architects, contractors, library staff, and others was essential. Without those efforts many things would likely have been delayed, more problems could have developed, and things with a fairly simple “fix” could have instead become more serious, longer-term problems.

Hiring commercial movers for the collections worked exceedingly well. The library staff had prepared well, having mapped positions for materials, cleaned shelves, marked where sections were to begin, and marked empty shelves, and were in place to assist the movers as needed. The entire collections move took only nine days, if a demanding and exhausting nine days, followed by two hectic days setting up enough

computers, printers, copiers, and other equipment so that the library could open. Without professional movers, this could not have happened nearly so quickly or so successfully.

Working on signage early in the process was wise. This process started about twenty months prior to the move and continued for six months after the move. Believing that it was time for the university to have a more systematic sign system, we worked with the same company and the same general style as was used for the science/ education building (which was also used for the Evansville Vanderburgh Public Library). We are pleased with the results, and the signs are helping library users find their way around the building.

The quality of the furniture selected complements the look, feel, and style of the building. We have a traditional look with some modern touches, and the furniture selection was critical to getting the mix right. All materials needed to be very sturdy with furniture, fabrics, and designs that could take heavy wear for years to come. While some choices will obviously not please everyone, people, generally, seem pleased with the overall effect.

It is already apparent from the comments of people who come into the building that it is a success. The most frequent early comment was “Wow!” Faculty seem thrilled to have a “grown-up library” at last. Students like the natural light, the bright colors, and the variety of spaces and seating arrangements. In the first month the library was open (June 16 – July 14, 2006) nearly 5,000 people came into the library. While some staff and other campus workers come and go via the front door, and this number obviously includes many “repeat customers,” it is, nonetheless, an amazing number compared to the old building, which served perhaps 20% as many users.

THINGS THAT COULD HAVE WORKED BETTER

With a change of Vice President for Business Affairs during the process, there was a period when it was difficult to know who had final say on some matters. While for the most part the parties involved made the effort to work well together, on occasion a question arose for which it was not clear who had final say. Some things that could otherwise have been easily resolved were not addressed early enough or firmly enough.

Despite considerable effort to include all units who needed to be involved as early as possible (the earlier, the better), some delays nonetheless occurred. The computer center and network staff did not become involved in the process early enough, so by the end of construction they had not planned for enough outlets, switches, cabling, etc. In some instances this turned out to be serious; it certainly meant that additional, unplanned work had to be done late in the process (not

the most efficient use of funds or time). Another unit that needed to be involved early in the process, and was, was Instructional Technology Services. We heard some expressions of discontent from custodial services that they were not involved early enough for their concerns to be considered (storage space for their equipment, for example).

While similar specialization may not be relevant for all new campus buildings, for this one it was important to have an architect who really knew libraries, kept up with their changing trends, and had considerable experience building them. Despite the library's request that we retain the architect's services throughout the entire process to oversee the furniture, upholstery, color schemes, as well as the checking and placement of all items, that did not happen. If it had, we almost certainly could have avoided some of the problems in checkout and in technical services (which were not fully functional for weeks). The architects' planned wiring was either ignored or misunderstood by the interior designers who brought in furniture that did not fit well in the space and failed to efficiently use floor plugs or other outlets. In the absence of a knowledgeable hands-on person for this work, library staff have to recognize and record these problems, and some things are at risk of not being noticed or dealt with until it is too late for returns or repairs.

There were communication problems between architectural firms. In a few instances, one firm showed something on a drawing, and the other did not read it as intended. For example, one architect drew built-in shelves in the smaller group study rooms while another read that as a line rather than a shelf so no shelves were put in. At the last minute, tables that fit with the rest of the public furniture had to be purchased for those rooms. Using two architectural firms no doubt has some advantages, but it also expands the challenge for effective communication.

Though we emphasized the importance of an abundance of well placed electrical outlets (beyond code), we are currently scrambling in some instances to find enough outlets and in others having to compensate for some odd placements. We were aiming for future flexibility because the one thing we know is that in a very short time, some things will be moved and then moved again. The simpler that process, the easier and less expensive it is.

Architects or designers made selections, usually with at least some input from library staff, though sometimes things changed after those meetings and feedback was at times limited or late. When, for example, paint was chosen, it would have been helpful if a four foot square had been painted and then several individuals (from the library, physical plant, etc.) had been allowed to assess the color in relation to carpet

and other elements before the job was completed. As things developed, we have some less than satisfactory wall paint that could easily have been changed if several key staff had seen it before the job was completed and became too costly to change. Similar problems developed from the architects' use of carpets with one pattern placed under shelving and a coordinating one elsewhere on each floor. These placements did not always turn out satisfactorily, and we now have twice as many separate carpets patterns and colors to be concerned about when repair or replacement is required. In most cases, simple definitely is better.

Since this is a "multi-purpose" building, some things were difficult to resolve, such as who provides access and security for the lower level classrooms. Library staff do not have keys to those rooms, nor should they since one cannot get to the rooms through the library (also there are not enough library staff to provide such services). We have signs to indicate how to reach the classrooms, but we expect to train and re-train students on this each semester. Security has concerns about those rooms as does Instructional Technology Services for its fixed equipment located in this area. Starbucks also has its own policies over which university staff have little control. These matters can no doubt be worked through, but issues remain about access, security, and smoothness of the operations for library staff and patrons.

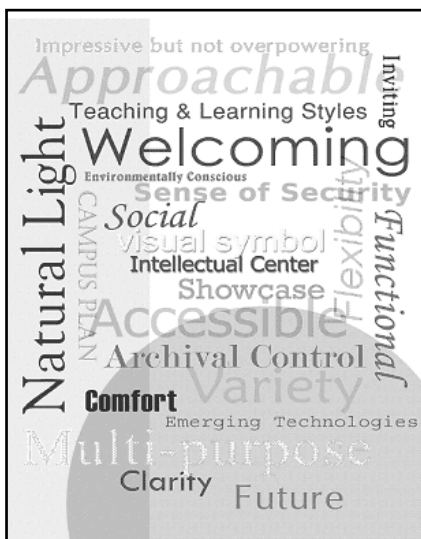
The complexity of the purchasing process for so large a job meant that this process did not always go smoothly. For example, after a month in the building we still did not have shades on some windows, some furniture was still absent (or possibly not ordered), no lamps were on tables, etc. Multiple vendors must be used (not only for political reasons but also to insure that things don't fall apart or get greatly delayed if one vendor suddenly has supply problems). However, it can be difficult to identify who to contact to repair or replace a given item, and for future "add-ons" it will be difficult to know from whom to order a specific item. Purchasing staff worked diligently to provide good service and quality products, but this job was more complex than previous campus building projects.

Funding is always complicated. Had the librarians known more about the amounts available for purchases such as furniture, equipment, etc., some choices might have been made differently. Striking the right balance among quality, attractiveness, and sturdiness in furniture, for example, is not easy. At the end of the process, as funds were committed, anything caught by delays, misunderstandings, or backorders risked having to be covered by other funds. Examples include a small number of additional signs, shades for some windows, and a few other small items such as tables that weren't specifically identified or secured early enough. Some of

these were not identifiable until after we were in the building and functioning there on a daily basis.

CONCLUSION

This young university is still working toward developing a good process for building campus structures. Future buildings will no doubt have a smoother construction process as staff develop more specific expertise, as a campus consensus develops about standards, and as the process becomes more clearly defined. Most of the present library staff are unlikely to still be working here in twenty years if the lower level becomes part of the library, but some remodeling will be needed before then as campus needs and library programs change. Library staff have developed some expertise in signage and in thinking about the uses of space. The variety of needs, demands, and options that academic libraries face can be formidable, but if the space that library staff and their constituents work in is pleasant, comfortable, welcoming, and supportive of their work, productivity and accomplishments will be enhanced.



Design board listing shared goals for the new building.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ruth Miller has been library director at the David L. Rice Library at USI since 1996. Previously she served as Collection Development Librarian, University of Evansville; Collection Development & Preservation Department Head, Indiana State University; and Associate University Librarian, Collections and Information Services, Hong Kong University of Science & Technology. She may be contacted at rhmillier@usi.edu. The library's website is <http://www.usi.edu/library/index.asp>.