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## Redefining the Service Experience: Forging Collaboration Between Librarians and Students

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# REDEFINING THE SERVICE EXPERIENCE: FORGING COLLABORATION BETWEEN LIBRARIANS AND STUDENTS

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## Abstract

In response to changing pedagogical theory and practice in higher education, library designers have created innovative learning spaces that support informal learning outside the classroom. Informed by social constructivist theory, libraries can be justly proud of their new collaborative learning spaces that support interaction and discussion; social spaces that foster engagement and learning; as well as quiet places for independent study. The University of Melbourne Library is no exception, carrying out a program of works since 2007 to create dynamic and innovative spaces to support contemporary student learning in four successive library refurbishment projects. Although much attention has been paid to redeveloping student spaces in libraries, less attention has been paid to the interrelationship between library spaces and services and how this interrelationship and the pedagogical framework should jointly inform these redevelopments. It seems incongruous to redevelop student spaces to meet new pedagogical imperatives without rethinking the service experience, in particular the relationship between library staff and students, the model of service provision and the physical design of the service area.

This paper focuses on the development of a new service model that is specifically designed to meet the needs of contemporary users at the University of Melbourne Library. In particular, the paper reflects upon the way in which the service desk has been transformed from a forbidding counter-style barrier that formalised the traditional expert/student relationship to a service area where librarians stand side by side with patrons, where the emphasis is on partnering and collaborating with students and researchers. The development of this model represents an attempt to re-define the relationship between librarians and students in line with current pedagogical practice. Underpinning this service model is a complex program of workforce change, professional development and service refinement to ensure that staff at service points are able to deliver quality services that meet students' changing information needs.

## Keywords:

Library services; Library redevelopments; Library buildings; Library reference services

## ***Introduction***

Since 2007 the University of Melbourne Library has undertaken a major program of library space redevelopments. The Eastern Resource Centre Science and Engineering Library (ERC), Brownless Biomedical Library and the flagship Baillieu Library have all undergone significant redevelopment, the new Giblin Eunson Business, Economics and Education Library has been created, the Louise Hanson-Dyer Music Library has had a significant makeover and designs for the new Architecture, Building and Planning Library are almost completed. This succession of major projects has allowed the Library to engage in deep and sustained thought about the major issues that inform library space design so that current and future client needs are met in as farsighted a way as possible. The projects have allowed for probing questions to be developed and asked, for hitherto unquestioned assumptions to be challenged, for ideas to be tried and, most importantly and unexpectedly, for a new service model to evolve.

This paper explores the evolution and implementation of this model. It evolved from three key issues that increasingly converged between 2007-2011 - pedagogical theory and practice for teaching and learning in higher education; the University and Library service model; and library workforce issues. A fourth element, the library space redevelopment projects, was the catalyst that linked these issues, that expedited exploration of the relationship between them and that allowed the new service paradigm to be made real in newly designed service areas. The paper discusses each of these issues and how simultaneously engaging with them led to the development of the new model. The model's evolution is briefly traced through the building projects before particularly focusing upon its design manifestation and implementation in the Baillieu Library.

## ***Setting the stage***

### **Pedagogy**

Pedagogical approaches to higher education have undergone significant change in the last few decades. Approaches to teaching and learning have evolved from the traditional transmission-style of teaching and learning, which were teacher-focused, to a variety of constructivist perspectives which focus on how the learner constructs meaning through active and social learning and personal context (Levy, 2005; Johnson, 2007). The student and their requirements are placed firmly at the centre of the learning experience. This student-centric pedagogy has had significant impact on teaching and learning practices and associated considerations such as the design of teaching and learning spaces (James, Baldwin, 2002, revised 2007; Biggs & Tang, 2007). Whereas the lecture theatre reflected the teacher-led and hierarchical nature of the transmission-style of teaching and learning (Hebdige in Chism, 2002), new flexibly designed teaching spaces allow students to engage in more active and social learning (eg. Appleton, Stevenson, & Boden, 2011; Lin, Chen, & Chang, 2010; Jamieson, Fisher, Gilding, Taylor, & Trevitt, 2000; Black & Roberts, 2007). The role of the teacher evolved from being the 'sage on the stage' to the 'guide by the side' (King, 1993; Sens, 2009).

The impact of social constructivism has also flowed on to the role and design of informal teaching spaces on campus (Jamieson, 2009; Lin et al., 2010). In this context, library spaces have been recognized increasingly as informal learning spaces that need to be conceptualized and designed differently from the past in order to best meet student learning needs. This has been a key driver of many library redevelopments, reflected in many innovative projects documented in the literature (eg. Beard & Dale, 2010; Appleton et al., 2011; Kay, 2009; Black & Roberts, 2007). These projects typically focus on the outcomes in library teaching and learning spaces, such as open-space flexible group work, small-group intentional collaborative, individual silent study and formal teaching and learning (Beard & Dale, 2010). Many redevelopments have included a refurbishment of the library

service area, typically resulting in a single service point rather than the traditional lending counter and reference desk. However often the new service point has been essentially a traditional counter or version of it, of course with some notable exceptions (McDonald, 2011; McDonald, 2010; O'Dwyer & Bailin, 2012). While the impact of social constructivism has been obvious in the design of student spaces in libraries, it is less evident that it has been a consideration in the design of service delivery and service point design.

So what implications does the new pedagogy have for frontline service delivery and indeed for the relationship between library staff and student? It seemed incongruous that students would find exciting, new library spaces for their use, but then encounter quite traditional service area design that suggested the very hierarchical relationship that the lecture theatre suggested. Was this the type of relationship that we wanted our staff to have with students and other clientele, and was this the perception that we wanted them to have of library staff? The answer increasingly seemed to be 'no'. The Library had a strategic commitment to fostering increasingly collaborative relationships between library staff and its clientele (O'Brien, Brodsky, & and Ruwoldt, 2008), and this style of desk did not seem congruent with this commitment.

Although front line service delivery had not traditionally been seen as part of the suite of the Library's collaborative opportunities, it seemed very important to make sure that these services did align with this approach and enabled a collaborative relationship to develop between Library staff and clients, particularly as the service point was less and less focused on lending activity and increasingly the first-stop Library information service. Increasingly, a premium was placed on transforming the library staff- client relationship in a way that was consistent with 'the guide on the side' rather than 'the sage on the stage', with less focus on completing the transaction and more on enabling learning to occur and on building a relationship where it is recognized that the staff member and the client both bring important experience, knowledge and goals to the exchange.

## Service model

In 2006 the University of Melbourne transformed its teaching and learning activities through a detailed process of strategic curriculum review, resulting in the adoption of the 'Melbourne Model' which significantly restructured the University's undergraduate and postgraduate curriculum (University of Melbourne. Curriculum Commission, 2006). The University's student service delivery model was transformed and aligned with this new approach to teaching and learning. In early 2007, the following guiding principles for services and programs were endorsed at senior level to support and enrich students' academic experience from first contact to graduation and beyond. Programs and services are to be:

- Student-centric
- Coordinated, seamless and equitable
- Flexible and easily accessed
- Supportive of a sense of belonging and connectedness
- Monitored to ensure consistent high quality

These principles were used as the key-input for the design and delivery of Library services as part of the 2015 vision. The student is placed at the starting point for designing service excellence, instead of the service provider. Although this concept arose mainly from best practice approaches to service provision, this principle is entirely consistent with the student learning experience provided through social constructivist pedagogy. The University student service model was also structured around a tiered service delivery model which identified transactional and process oriented services (planned wherever possible to be online and self service), individual and relationship driven services and 'student life' services.

The Library's service delivery model was developed to be consistent with this approach. The triage-based tiered model identifies several levels of services – Tier 0 (self service), Tier 1 (high volume), Tier 2 (breadth and complexity) and Tier 3 (depth and expertise). The Library's strategy is to enable clients to complete transactions and access commonly required information on a self-service, often online basis. A more detailed front-of-house service delivery model was documented to assist with the library redevelopments. This documented service governance - service owners and service delivery managers for services in the official library service catalogue, examples of each service for each tier level and the job roles that provide each level of service, service delivery channels (eg. face-to-face, email, web) and the goals for each service. In particular, a 95% self checkout target was set for libraries with this technology, subject to format constraints. The service point was envisaged as principally providing Tier 2 information services across a range of services, including lending, traditional information, Student IT, interlibrary loans and information literacy. This service model documentation proved essential for planning the new service areas in the library redevelopments projects and for staff communication.

In tandem with development of the service model, there has been increasingly holistic focus on the quality of the customer experience. This aligns with the increased focus on all aspects of the learner experience. The client's experience comprises a range of important factors, each of which needs to be of optimal quality. These factors include the quality, availability and cleanliness of suitable Library spaces; ease of access to services, such as clarity of signage and intuitive design of service areas; wait times and comfort while queuing; quality of the interpersonal exchange between the staff member and the client; and the quality of information and advice provided. The Library has increasingly placed the client experience at the heart of service delivery.

## **Workforce**

Following sector trends, the University Library has experienced considerable change in service demand and its service offering over the past decade, with consequent implications for job and skill requirements. Lending demand has dropped considerably, with items lent decreasing by 31% between 2000-2010. This trend continues, with 2011 seeing the single largest drop in one year (14% fewer loans than 2010). Of course this shift has been paralleled by other changes in client behavior such as huge growth in the use of online resources. At the same time, investment in new technology, namely self-checkout machines, has seen staff-transacted loans in libraries equipped with this technology decrease over the same period (for example, between 2008-2010 staff issued loans at the Baillieu Library dropped by 45%). The Library had a goal to increase this even further, in keeping with the University's strategy for self-service transactional services. The Library redevelopments were seen as a mechanism for promoting client uptake of this technology.

At the same time, and again in line with sector trends, the traditional reference desks had gradually closed. Rather than sitting and waiting for walk-up clients at traditional reference desks, librarians were spending their time and skills working increasingly directly with academics, postgraduates and on specialized activities such as creating online information navigation resources (eg. LibGuides) and information literacy programs. The triage model of service delivery meant that frontline service staff would resolve the majority of queries and refer complex ones to librarians and other specialists. The predicted changes in library service delivery were steadily becoming reality.

What implications did these changes have for the Library's workforce, and how were these responded to? It was apparent that the need for traditional lending job roles was diminishing, and in tandem frontline service staff needed higher levels of professional skills. This is in keeping with sector trends (Lewis, 2010). This posed some challenges, as the University Library had not had a policy of employing qualified library technicians into these roles, although some did have this qualification. In 2008-10 a program of accredited training was offered on a voluntary basis to interested staff, whereby external training providers conducted paraprofessional-level subjects to staff. This strategy was intended to give staff the opportunity to 'future proof' themselves through skill development and to display their interest in a continuing, professional career in the sector.

Finally, the Library had recently dealt with several cases of staff manual handling injuries. It was a priority to ensure that all reasonable opportunities were taken to create a safe and comfortable work environment for our staff and clients, thereby reducing injuries and the risk of them. The University Ergonomist advised that traditional counter-style service point design could have adverse OHS outcomes by necessitating staff and students to awkwardly twist when sharing a monitor across a desk, and that reaching across the desk with heavy books also posed ergonomic risks. Her advice was that a side-by-side model of service delivery would enable far more comfortable and less risky use of the monitor for staff and clients, and would remove the need for reaching across the desk. And so a line of thought was set in motion.

## **Bringing it altogether: library redevelopments**

The Library had been engaging with these three issues - pedagogical changes, preferred service model and changing workforce requirements – in parallel during the early-mid 2000s. In 2007 planning commenced for what became a series of library redevelopments. These projects meshed these issues and expedited engagement with them. All building projects throw up large strategic, philosophical and operational questions. For these redevelopments the Library had to engage with pertinent big questions such as:

- How can social constructivist pedagogical principles be reflected not only in the redeveloped student spaces in the library, but also in the Library's service philosophy, practices and the physical service area? In short, could the service experience be consistent with social constructivist principles? If so, how would this be reflected in the physical design of the service area?
- Who would need to be involved the development of the service approach and the design of the service area, and how should they be involved?
- How would this alter the overall nature of the service experience and particularly practices at the detailed level? Would this be a desirable change and how would our client base respond?
- What implementation issues, especially change issues, could be predicted and planned for in advance, and what issues would be encountered and responded to along the way?
- What implications, and particularly opportunities, would this have for service staff capabilities and indeed job roles?

The redevelopment program acted as a catalyst for realizing change objectives that were previously constrained by outdated physical infrastructure. The five redevelopments have changed the face of the Library, its service delivery and workforce requirements, but the process was iterative as the organisation learned from the experience of working in the new library learning environments and applied this learning to subsequent projects. Eventually, a very different paradigm of frontline service emerged.

## ***Making it a reality: major issues and considerations***

### **Early redevelopment projects**

The first project, redevelopment of the ERC Library and Frank Tate Centre, was the product of deep thought about the relationship between libraries and learning. The resulting student spaces are challenging, farsighted and innovative, intentionally designed to support a constructivist model of learning and teaching by providing students with a choice of high quality, technology-rich spaces to support informal learning in collaborative and individual settings.



Fig.1 Frank Tate Centre Reading Room



Fig. 2 ERC student collaborative space

Although the student areas were transformed in response to pedagogical principles, the service desk remained a traditional counter although significantly smaller and less intimidating than its predecessor. In common with sector-wide trends, the lending and reference desks were consolidated into a single service point, giving physical form to the triage model of service outlined in the Library Service Model (Vyhnánek & Zlatos, 2011). This combined service point was supported by a bank of self-service check-outs intended to reduce transactions performed at the service point.

The combined service point in the ERC was short lived, proving to be poorly designed, impractical and raising occupational health and safety concerns. Information and lending staff were co-located at the desk to offer support to each other in the transition to a single service, but it became apparent that in practice, staff persisted with separate service streams, not fully embracing the consolidated model, an experience shared in other academic libraries (Flanagan & Horowitz, 2000). In the final event, the architect-designed desk was removed and replaced with a traditional arrangement that included a separate Reference desk. This was a disappointing outcome, but a valuable learning experience as it served to focus attention firmly on the planning and functionality of service points in future projects.

Within a year of the ERC redevelopment, the Library had the opportunity to refurbish the Brownless Biomedical Library. In this project, a counter design was installed in response to the decision to offer extended hours services - a counter can be easily secured after staffed service hours. However the long barrier-style counter had the unintended effect of confining library staff within the boundaries of the service area in a very passive and traditional model. It became increasingly apparent that a barrier was counter-intuitive to the philosophy espoused for student spaces. In much the same way that "the hierarchical relationship between teacher and taught is inscribed in the very layout of the lecture theater" (Hebdige in Chism, 2002), the traditional service counter seems to similarly signify a hierarchical relationship, and certainly not a collaborative one. The focus is on library staff performing transactions, casting them as the authority figure in that transaction. Further the transaction is quite awkward for both staff and student requiring twisting to view a shared screen, and viewing from an angle.





Fig. 3 Brownless Biomedical Library service counter



Fig. 4 Brownless Biomedical Library service counter

## Principles for design

This realization prompted some serious and sustained thinking about the relationship of the library service area to the learning process. It prompted the question: can social constructivist pedagogical principles be reflected not only in the redeveloped student spaces in the library, but also in the Library's service philosophy, practices and the physical service area? Could a service point foster a collaborative relationship between librarians and students, one that reflected the 'guide on the side' rather than the 'sage on the stage'?

Discussions about the Library's vision for the service experience and the type of relationship envisaged between library staff and library users focused increasingly on enabling collaboration at the service point. Collaboration is commonly aspired to and is an easily used term, although it has no single clear definition or theory (Montiel-Overall, 2005). While collaboration in an academic library context most commonly refers to the deep collaboration that enables librarians to work with researchers, or to work with academics in teaching and learning programs, the new challenge was to foster a collaborative approach to providing information service. In this particular context, it was seen as library service staff and clients working together to achieve common goals, using the expertise of each collaborator, and sharing responsibility for obtaining these goals (Bruner, 1991). It was about enabling library staff and clients to share ideas and expertise, to share a thinking process and fostering joint participation (Montiel-Overall, 2005), all of which are clearly aligned with the social constructivist pedagogical view. Importantly, while collaboration is a means to an end, not an end in itself (Bruner, 1991), it can be seen as a beneficial precondition for an improved service experience and improved learning outcomes for library users, particularly students. Other academic libraries have engaged in the search for innovative models of customer service, and their experience proved useful in formulating the position adopted at the University of Melbourne. Different industries have also produced interesting models, especially in the retail and banking sectors, which have influenced thinking in libraries (Kay, 2009; McDonald, 2010; O'Dwyer & Bailin, 2012). These reinforced the direction of our thought.

A new protocol for the design of service points emerged following a series of thought-provoking discussions with a range of Library staff, including two workshops with representatives from all areas of frontline staff. The protocol, documented as an Appendix to the Library Service Model, embodies an important statement about the way in which pedagogical principles were to be reflected in the physical design of service points, deliberately moving away from the authority figure behind the service counter:

'Most service delivery will involve staff standing side-by-side with clients at a computer at the service counter. This will enable staff member and library user to comfortably use the same screen for the purposes of explanation, demonstration and instruction. This reflects a conscious move away from the traditional over-the-desk form of service delivery. Working side-by-side is in keeping with the University's collaborative, student-centric philosophy and the professional trends,... and is ergonomically preferable.

A large shared surface also enables staff to continue to work in a collaborative and supportive way with each other that encourages knowledge sharing and learning. This is compared with an individual pods approach, which is not desirable.' (University of Melbourne Library, 2007, revised 2010)

The other key design principle that has had a marked effect on practice at service points is the following requirement:

'Staff will be primarily standing and moving within the service area in order to deliver Library services and interact with clientele. They should be able to move confidently in a fluid and dynamic way in and around the service area and immediate environs.' (University of Melbourne Library, 2007, revised 2010)

## Design and implementation of the Baillieu Library service point

Aesthetically distinct versions of service points based on these guidelines have now been installed in three libraries at the University of Melbourne, but this paper focuses on the introduction of this concept at the Baillieu Library, the flagship of the University Library system.

The changes described in the Library Service Model are transformative, re-defining the service experience for both library staff and library users. In recognition of this, staff were involved in the planning process from the outset so that issues of concern could be addressed. Working groups were set up and particular attention was paid to staff communication with a regular newsletter and a weekly forum for discussion of key issues.

Expert advisors were enlisted, especially from OHS and HR. The principles underlying the service point design secured the endorsement of OHS advisors - as already noted, the University Ergonomist had already suggested a side-by-side model as it eliminated many of the postural risks inherent in over-the-counter service. A prototype of the service point was constructed and service staff were invited to simulate typical work activities. The OHS Manager conducted a Staff User Trial Survey inviting feedback about the ergonomics of the prototype, leading to several design modifications. Staff feedback was helpful and constructive.

Staff voiced additional concerns of a practical nature during the planning process, offering an opportunity to work through these concerns prior to implementation. The privacy of patron records in an open environment was questioned; fear of customers invading personal space was raised; uncertainty about where to queue became a significant issue. These were sometimes addressed by systems, such as the introduction of a queuing system that directs clients to a comfortable waiting area, or they were addressed through management. Since the desk is in an unstructured, open area, the space around it needs to be more actively managed by staff. As pointed out by the service area supervisor, staff need to take ownership of the space around the desk.

Not all concerns were practical in nature – there was some evidence of an underlying concern with authority and status as indicated in feedback from a staff member during the planning phase:

“by taking away the perceived authority of staff and placing them in a side by side configuration, staff are concerned that this lack of perceived authority will make unacceptable behavior toward them more common, not less common, and that when this does occur, the absence of the barrier will make stepping back and getting “breathing space” more difficult, thus exacerbating the situation and possibly escalating.”

Indeed, the purpose of the design was to foster a more collegial and collaborative relationship, rather than a relationship based upon notions of perceived authority. But the staff member also believed that the side-by-side model would lead to increased incidence of ‘unacceptable behavior’ towards staff, and this became a highly charged and unexpectedly emotional issue. Other staff shared this fear of vulnerability to occupational violence and abuse from aggrieved customers. The Union became involved, and the elected Health & Safety Representative (HSR) called upon the regulatory authority, Worksafe to intervene.

Library management is very conscious of responsibility for staff security. All Library buildings routinely have a high level of security including a 24x7 campus security presence, duress alarms and monitored CCTV coverage. In addition, the plans for the Baillieu Library service area included a safe refuge area, a consultation room for calm discussion and bright lighting. As a further consideration the service desk is in a high traffic and well populated zone, and staff in this library do not work in isolation. Nevertheless a climate of fear prevailed.

The ensuing investigation was rigorous. The first step was to ascertain the actual level of occupational violence that had been experienced by service staff in the past. Reported Security and

OHS incidents were examined, and the Library OHS Manager also distributed an Occupational Violence Survey to all service staff. A Risk Assessment was prepared that found the risk to be ‘Low’ based upon limited evidence of minor verbal aggression and verbal aggression. The Risk Assessment concluded that the ‘risks of musculoskeletal injury associated with working at the traditional service desk design (repeated and sustained reaching away from the body, twisting, bending the spine etc.) is considerably greater than the risk of injury associated with verbally aggressive patrons ...’

The staff concerns led to increased efforts to remove the causes of customer dissatisfaction that may manifest in anger and abuse. Payment of fines was identified as a major cause of stress and the Library has introduced online payments and extended loan periods to minimize inconvenience to patrons. Training has also been provided to give frontline staff more confidence in dealing with aggressive customers by managing and de-escalating difficult situations.

Following finalization of these OHS issues, the service point was finally built and installed. As predicated in the Library Service Model documentation, it consists of a single large shared table, located just inside the main entry to this busy Library. Four workstations have been installed around the table with line of sight to the entrance; three are set up for Library operations and one for the student interns who provide Student IT Support from the shared space. In this configuration, the librarian stands beside the student, literally placed as the ‘guide on the side’. Both student and staff member operate at standing height, directly facing the screen in a collegial stance, as opposed to a service relationship. The table is generous in proportion, with room to engage in various activities – there is room to spread out books or papers; students can set up their own laptops, and it is easy for both librarian and student to work on documents together.



Fig. 5 Baillieu Library entrance and service area





Fig. 6 Service at the Baillieu Library



Fig. 7 Student IT Support at the Baillieu Library service point

## The service desk and the Library user

Upon entering the Library during a busy period, the over-arching impression is of an active and dynamic space, where interactions are casual and relaxed. There is a much stronger sense of engagement with clients. Librarians observe the behavior of users in the area and actively engage with them as required. They are encouraged to physically greet patrons, to proactively approach those who look bewildered, to move around the table as required, to accompany patrons to the self-check machines. There is an adjacent consultation room where staff can take researchers requiring extended reference queries or research consultations. The model is student-centric, attempting to put the student at the centre of the interaction. In practice the service point evokes the atmosphere of the popular communal table in cafes, with multiple concurrent activities occurring around it.



Fig. 8 The Baillieu service point – a hub of activity

Inevitably, some challenges have emerged in the initial implementation phase. The service point looks quite different to library users who have not always recognized the shared table as the service point. The service zone is distinguished by a large yellow line and has different floor treatment, but this was not sufficient to distinguish the area to some customers, and more effective signage is required. To reduce confusion, 'greeters' often stand at the Library entrance to welcome customers. This task often falls to Student Library Assistants, but it is not unusual to see permanent staff standing in front of the table performing this role. The staff wear name badges and many have also opted to wear University branded clothing so that they are more identifiable to customers.





Fig. 9 Student Library Assistant greeter in the Baillieu Library

## The service desk and service delivery

The redevelopment of the Baillieu Library acted as an enabler for realizing service goals that were difficult to achieve in the old library buildings. As outlined earlier in the paper, the Library Service Model is structured around a tiered service model, with an emphasis on achieving high levels of self-service for transactional and process activities. Thanks to a well placed bank of self check machines and the persistence of staff in demonstrating their use to clients, around 90% of books at the Baillieu Library are now being checked out by patrons. This change in user behaviour took place within months of the opening of the refurbished space at both the Baillieu and the Giblin Eunson libraries, and it indicates the importance of design and staff engagement for effecting behavioural change. At the same time, automated returns sorting has greatly reduced the processing and manual handling of returns.

Automation and self-service initiatives have had implications for the Library workforce. Job roles based upon circulation were no longer in demand. This sector-wide decline in demand for circulation roles had been anticipated for some time, and in the preceding three years the Library provided both accredited and in-house professional development programs to assist staff to build higher level professional skills. Some staff took advantage of these opportunities, and some chose not to do so. As lending staff retired or resigned, they were not replaced. However, with redevelopment of all of our major libraries within just a few years, our job requirements changed suddenly and abruptly and some redundancies occurred in the lending services space as a result.

Broadly-based consolidation of service points became possible as recommended in the Library Service Model. Where there were once five staffed service areas, now there is one - more efficient for the Library and more customer-focused for students in search of services. So, the Student IT support service is provided from the same shared space, as is first tier advice about document

delivery. Since the service point is located close to the entrance, the Library no longer needs to roster a separate staff member to monitor the exit.

Librarians operating in this environment need to be confident in their professional knowledge if they are to partner with students and researchers and meet their needs in a timely manner. It is anticipated that staff will possess the skills and knowledge to enable them to answer all Tier 1 and Tier 2 queries that present at the desk. This ensures good customer service, minimizing the inconvenience of referral. The job role has been framed as a professional role for graduate librarians or paraprofessionals, as a stepping stone to a career in LIS. Professional development is strongly encouraged to equip staff with the skills and knowledge for promotion. The design of the service point is intended to facilitate learning and knowledge sharing for staff as well as students, since it encourages ready collaboration and mentoring with other staff in the shared space.

When working in this new environment, library staff need to assume a much more active role in engaging clients it is no longer desirable to passively wait at a service desk. Interpersonal skills, personal confidence and the ability to relate to a range of library users are of paramount importance. Librarians without these qualities may be less comfortable with a proactive approach to customers and are less likely to take advantage of the opportunity to move from the safety of their workstations. Role modeling and coaching by supervisors and experienced peers is critical in changing practice. To help staff make these adjustments, the Library has committed to an intensive customer service training program this year. When taken in conjunction with ongoing professional development, the Library is attempting to offer staff the best possible preparation for challenging frontline service roles.

## ***Conclusion***

The next step for the Library will be to rigorously evaluate the service point, a project that is planned for the second half of 2012. By this time, the new service point will have been in operation for a full year and should be functioning smoothly. This will give quantitative and qualitative data about the success of the desk in meeting the expectations of staff and clients. A key focus of the evaluation will be on the nature of the collaborations that occur in the service area, between staff and users, and also among the staff that share the space.

The design of the service point should be seen as a brave attempt to align library services with contemporary learning theory, to foster collaboration between library staff and students in an environment where knowledge is shared in a supported environment. Within the University of Melbourne Library, there has been much reflection on learner-centred pedagogy, on a preferred service model and on associated workforce requirements. Although progress had been made in all of these areas, the opportunity to physically re-shape the Library service area was the enabler that allowed these issues to converge. The experience of successive redevelopment projects encouraged a more holistic view, where key elements of service delivery were examined through the lens of a learner-centred pedagogical approach. Decision-making was based upon learners, instead of being driven by Library functions and the result is a dramatic change of direction, a less hierarchical configuration and an approach that places emphasis on collaboration and engagement.





Fig. 10 Student IT services at the Giblin Eunson Library

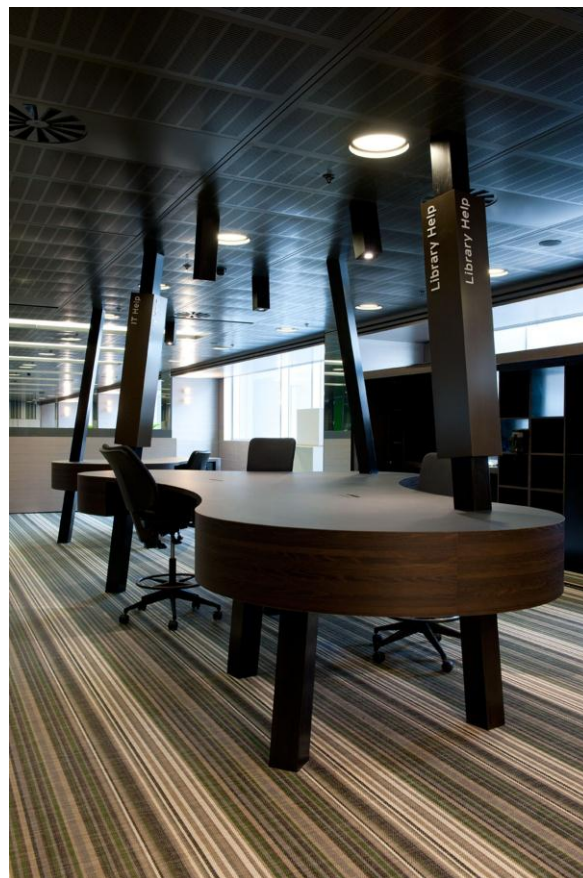


Fig. 11 The service point at the new Giblin Eunson Library – same principles, different aesthetic

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