



Library Design

at Shepley Bulfinch



Yale University, Gilmore Music Library



Cornell University, Africana Studies and Research Center



What is a Library?

Introduction

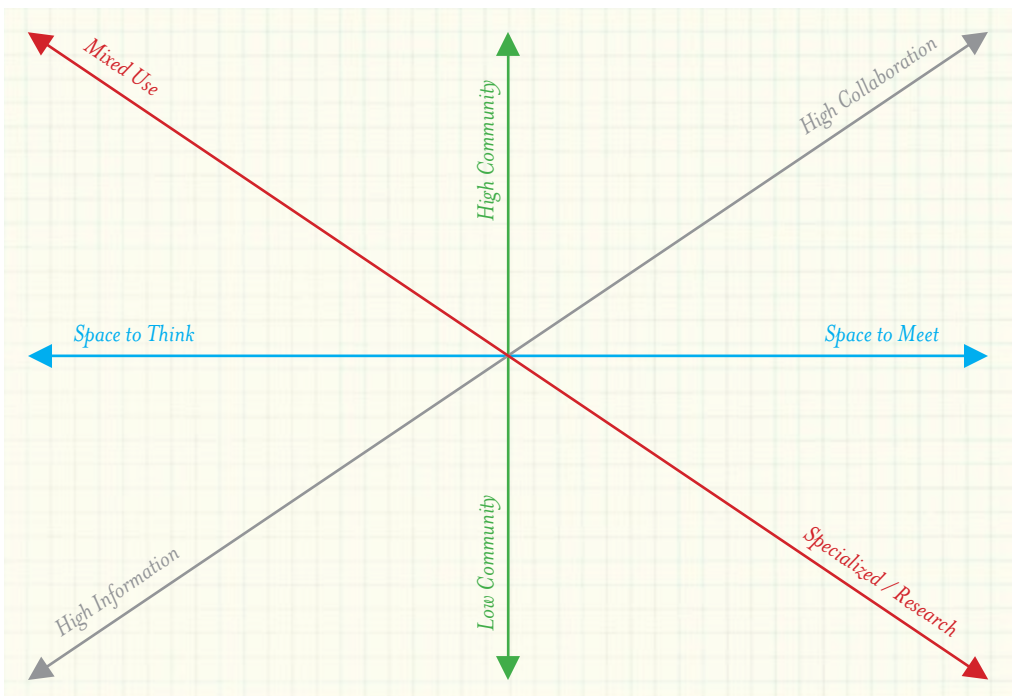
Today's library must reflect the values, mission and goals of the institution or community of which it is a part. In many cases, the core mission of academic and public libraries is changing. As the way we work, learn and access information evolves, libraries face an exciting, challenging and paradigm-shifting transformation to their physical space and operations. When librarians work with their architects and planners to anticipate the full impact of this change, they are better able to meet the needs of their communities. At institutions where such collaborative planning has occurred, renewed library usage speaks for itself: increases in attendance, and demand for services, and access to information are beyond expectation. Helping clients to evaluate existing conditions and think imaginatively about the future is something on which we thrive. With each challenge, we gain fresh insight and valuable experience that inform our planning and design. In this way, we help communities and institutions worldwide to define libraries of today and for the future.



Figure 1.1 Exploring the Spectrum of Library Possibilities

Key:

- Information
- Community
- Contemplation
- Specialization



1. Space for information

Information-based environments

Information, both print based and electronically accessed, is at the core of teaching and learning. The integration of new technology has become the catalyst that transforms the library into a vibrant intellectual center. The library is the central location where new and emerging information technologies are combined with traditional knowledge resources in a user-focused, service-rich environment.

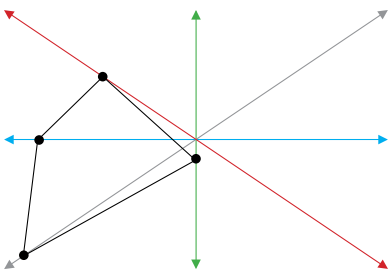


Figure 2.1 Information Space

As a result of electronic access to information, the pace of research has increased exponentially. Researchers tell us that what used to take them two weeks to accomplish, they can now complete in two hours.

Anticipating Change

Space for learning and research in the future must be conceived and delivered today using design and construction techniques in imaginative ways so that these spaces are readily adaptable to reconfiguration. Despite careful planning, rapidly changing technology can render leading-edge spaces obsolete within a year. Planning for flexibility and adaptability is no longer the exception; it's the rule.

2. Space for contemplation

A place to think

Patrons say they want their library to “feel bigger than they are.” They want to experience a sense of place and inspiration. While they are intensely engaged in using new technologies, they also want to enjoy the library as a contemplative oasis. A significant majority still considers the traditional reading room their favorite area of the library. It is estimated that we are bombarded with over 1,500 commercial messages each day. More and more students and creative thinkers are looking for places to contemplate, escape, think, ponder and learn.

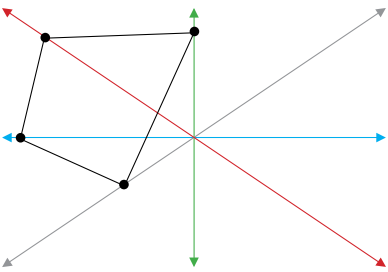


Figure 2.2 Space to Think

As architects and planners, we are engaged with how creative ideas and innovative connections occur, researching how and where great minds work. Did you know that something as elemental as natural light can increase academic achievement by 15 percent?

Library History Lesson

As the intellectual heart of a community, today's library is grounded in its historic past. During the Age of Enlightenment, libraries were richly embellished. With stained glass windows and ornately carved oak and marble statuary, the first libraries exuded an almost palpable sense of spiritual and intellectual contemplation. As a temple of scholarship, the library was usually preeminently sited and often heroic in scale and character.

3. Space for community

A social gathering place

The library is increasingly being identified as a social and community-based space where people can come together in ways that they might not do elsewhere. Upon entering the library, one becomes part of a larger community that endows one with a sense of connection and collective purpose.

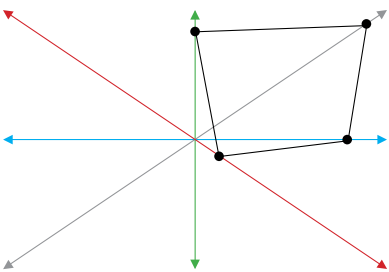


Figure 2.3 Instant Theatre

Library design that allows for flexible space provides places for work and study that can be transformed to reach out to a broader community by accommodating book signings, gaming nights, forums, speaker presentations and events that promote social and intellectual engagement.

What We've Learned

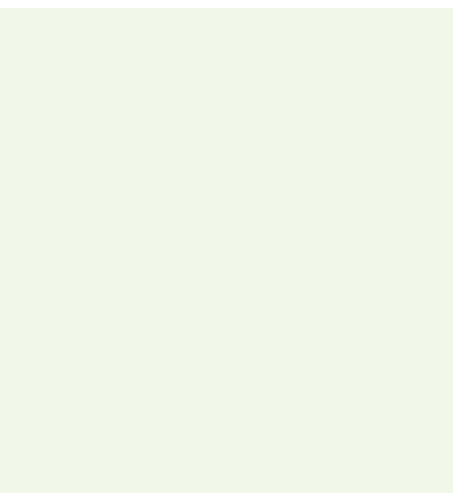
A space should reflect the way a community works and learns. In 2006, we moved into a building and office space of our own design. The shift from a conventional workplace to an open-plan design has enabled us to work, think and collaborate in entirely new ways. Being our own client was a challenge, but the lessons were invaluable.



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