Planning and Designing Academic Library Learning Spaces: Expert Perspectives of Architects, Librarians, and Library Consultants

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Best Practices

FIGURE 11: BEST PRACTICES FOR ACADEMIC LIBRARY LEARNING SPACE PROJECTS	As stated by stakeholders we interviewed:		
	LIBRARIANS	ARCHITECTS	CONSULTANTS
1. Talk to librarians, staff, student, and faculty so the design process is inclusive and there is a large amount of user input.	✔	✔	✔
2. Ask lots of questions during design discussions to make sure the opportunity for giving input is not missed.	✔	✔	✔
3. Hire experts to advise where there is a lack of expertise on a project (e.g., project managers, IT specialists, library consultants, civil engineers, and landscape architects).	✔	✔	
4. Be sure to document the planning and design process, so that decisions and outcomes can be revisited and verified.	✔	✔	
5. Develop and document the scope for a project early on; one that has goals that are realistic, affordable, and achievable.		✔	✔
6. Ensure there is a shared vision for a design across all library units before renovation or building of a new structure begins.	✔		✔
7. Hold frequent check-in meetings with individual library units (e.g., circulation or reference) and also bring everyone together in library-wide meetings.	✔		
8. Tour other campus libraries (and new learning spaces) to find out what design worked well, and what did not.	✔		
9. Find champions within the faculty to communicate the value of project, since faculty often needs to be convinced how new spaces will impact their research and teaching.	✔		✔
10. Have continuous communication with campus constituents about the project's progress. Use different channels (e.g., web, social media, in person presentations given at request of departments).	✔		
11. Trust the architectural design process; it's intentionally slow so there is a greater sense of ownership for a project as it develops.		✔	
12. Conduct continual user assessments of what needs are (and are not) being met. Modify design goals to resolve problems.	✔		
13. Create and sign a Memo of Understanding (MOU) between the library and learning partners, especially when partners are contributing funds for space in the library.	✔		
14. Make sure the architectural firm and the construction company has an integrated process for the construction phase of library spaces.	✔		
15. Provide a translation session between librarians and architects to define architectural vocabulary to help manage expectations.	✔		
16. Good lighting and the proper acoustic treatment are necessary to the success of library projects.		✔	
17. Anticipate change 10 years from now, so that spaces can expand and contract as needed. Plan for flexible designs.		✔	✔

Ordered from most to least mentioned best practices in interviewees' discussions about their projects. N= 49 stakeholders, N = 22 academic library learning space projects. Some of the best practices listed may be additional to the themes discussed in the Detailed Findings section of this report.

Worst Practices

FIGURE 12: WORST PRACTICES FOR ACADEMIC LIBRARY LEARNING SPACE PROJECTS	As stated by stakeholders we interviewed:		
	LIBRARIANS	ARCHITECTS	CONSULTANTS
1. Working as a small insular group that creates a plan and design without including input from anyone else on campus.	✔	✔	✔
2. Getting embroiled in territorial battles and clashes with library learning space partners over shared space needs and furnishings.	✔		
3. Having poor communication with faculty (e.g., when trying to make decisions about downsizing the collection, or visioning active learning classroom spaces).	✔		
4. Losing sight of the "big picture" for a project due to drawn out timelines, lack of funding, or planning before the money is secured.	✔		✔
5. Working from a timetable that is unrealistic, such as weeding of the collection goes too fast and the construction goes too slow.	✔		
6. Forgetting to pilot test new services and arrangements with new partners prior to construction to see how, and if, they will work.	✔		✔
7. Leaving out maintenance staff in early discussions to figure out what is needed to maintain spaces that are being built.	✔	✔	
8. Having no transparency with staff about the design process, especially about upper level decisions made without staff buy-in.	✔		
9. Being at the whim of a slow approval process when seeking administrative level buy-in for design plans.	✔		
10. Hiring architects that do not "walk a space" they intend to design, but rely on design discussions to understand space usage.	✔		
11. Hiring architects that assume they know what's best for clients.		✔	
12. Allowing stakeholders to approach a project with their own agendas and resistance to collaboration.	✔		✔
13. Allowing oneself to be seduced by the organizational chart can result in losing important input – and the "pulse" – for the project.		✔	
14. Suffering from project fatigue, especially at the end of a project, and not doing a continual and careful review of design and solicit final reviews by multiple stakeholders.	✔		
15. Not limiting the formation of "too large" design committees, which result in some people showing up at one meeting, and not the next, which, in the end, makes consensus nearly impossible.		✔	
16. Choosing built-in furniture that can't be easily changed, or letting architects dictate custom-made furniture that is not easily replaced.	✔		
17. Ignoring, or not listening to, what clients want and need from library learning space design at the initial information-gathering stage.		✔	

Ordered from most to least mentioned worst practices in interviewees' discussions about their projects. N= 49 stakeholders, N = 22 academic library learning space projects. Some of the worst practices listed may be additional to the themes discussed in the Detailed Findings section of this report.