



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



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**Abstract:** This paper identifies approaches, challenges, and best practices related to planning and designing today's academic library learning spaces. As part of the Project Information Literacy (PIL) Practitioner Series, qualitative data is presented from 49 interviews conducted with a sample of academic librarians, architects, and library consultants. These participants were at the forefront of the same 22 recent library learning space projects on college and university campuses in the US and Canada between 2011 and 2016. Most library projects had allocated space for supporting at least one of these four types of academic learning activities: collaborative, individual study, tutoring by campus learning partners, or occasional classes taught by campus instructors. Successful collaboration between the architect and the librarian was fostered by their shared commitment to meeting users' needs, though few stakeholders systematically collected input from users beyond standard usage statistics and gate counts. Most interviewees reported facing some common challenges during their project planning and implementations. One challenge was translating design goals into tangible designs while trying to resolve issues of noise mitigation, shared space allocations, and providing enough electrical power for IT devices. Another challenge was ensuring effective communication practices with planning teams as well as campus-wide constituents throughout projects. Additional challenges included building consensus, compensating for project interruption and inadequate knowledge about both architecture and library IT issues, and having too few a priori evaluation metrics for linking learning outcomes to goals of the library space projects. Taken together, the success of library learning space projects depends upon shared knowledge and understanding of the sweeping learning, pedagogical, and research changes facing the academy. Librarians and architects need to work together to apply that knowledge and understanding to the unique environment and learning and teaching needs of their specific institution.

CODING: Numeric code for name of library project, the interviewee type, your initials, and date of your interview:

\_\_\_\_\_

Question 1.

Let's start with you telling me a little about the library learning space that we're here to discuss today. Can you describe what kind of library space building project that you worked on at \_\_\_\_\_ (name of institution here). Would you say that this library space project was a learning space project? If so, what kind of learning did it support and how?

Probe 1.1: Now, let's shift topics a little bit and talk about your profession. It seems that the people in your field bring a set of values to certain tasks, however big or small those tasks might be.

Can you give me an example of how your field's professional values came into play when you were making decisions for your library space project (as the interviewer, you can mention the name of the library project here)?

Probe 1.2: Would you say there were differences between the professional values that architects vs. librarians brought to this library space project? If so, what would you say are the three biggest differences? How were these differences resolved, if at all?

Question 2.

Let's talk about the planning and design of this library learning space project that you recently worked on. What were your design priorities? What came first, above everything else, when you got down to planning a new space? Can you give me an example?

Probe 2.1: How do users fit into the planning and design process?

Probe 2.2: Did you and your colleagues use any measures of success for evaluating the success of the project?

Probe 2.3: What did these measures tell you? What did you wish you still could learn about the success of the project? Were you satisfied with what you learned from these measures? If there were no measures of success, why not?

Question 3.

Given your experience, were there any best practices that you used on this library learning space project? If so, what was the most important best practice that you used?

Probe 3.1: Is there such a thing as "worst practices?" If a library learning space project is going to go awry, when does it tend to happen and how? Did your project have any "worst practices"?

CONCLUSION AND DEBRIEF

Inform the interview participant of privacy and confidentiality measures. Inform the participant that findings will be reported in a synthesized format, descriptive of the sample as a whole, and posted on the University of Washington Information School's and PIL's website in the fall of 2016. ❖