

Grinnell College Libraries

Self Study 2008-2009

Appendix 13: Academic Commons and Trends in On-Campus Collaboration

The Academic Commons movement seeks to bring many instructional support services—libraries, writing centers, quantitative literacy centers, IT help desks, media production services—together in one location, creating a one-stop shop for students to get help with all aspects of the learning process. The spaces that house these collaborations are typically referred to as "information commons," "learning commons," or "academic commons."

According to David Lewis,

Until very recently, the study space in most libraries was a mix of carrels, tables, and some soft seating that was designed to serve individual users. Beginning in the mid-1990s, substantial numbers of public computers were deployed, though most often these computers were configured and managed as public computer labs that just happened to be located in the library. In the past several years, there has been a concerted effort in many libraries to rethink and redevelop study spaces to create what are generally referred to as the "Information" or "Academic" Commons. The first commons projects generally focused on bringing technology into the library and often involved collaborations with campus technology organizations. More recent projects have focused on developing spaces that are conducive to group work and involve partnerships with writing centers and other campus groups focused on student success. Multimedia centers and presentation rehearsal rooms are not uncommon, nor are collaborations with centers that provide technological and pedagogical support to faculty. Following the Barnes and Noble model, coffee shops are becoming the norm. The aim is to create comfortable, lively, and active spaces where students can interact with each other, with information and with technology and where support for the use of library resources and technology can be found. Increasingly, these spaces are being thought of as places to create, as well as to access, knowledge. -- David W. Lewis, *A Strategy for Academic Libraries in the First Quarter of the 21st Century*, *College & Research Libraries* Sept. 2007
Preprint available:

https://idea.iupui.edu:8443/dspace/bitstream/1805/953/1/DWLewis_Strategy.pdf

Among liberal arts colleges, Oberlin's "Academic Commons" project is one of the more recent and visible experiments:

The commons would provide centralized and coordinated research, information, technology, and learning assistance for Oberlin students. It would include an adjacent café that provides academic community space designed to encourage faculty-student interaction. It would bring together or coordinate a variety of services that are currently available in separate locations on campus and also introduce some new services. The commons would contribute to two areas of the College's strategic plan – curricular support and community building. Specific components of the commons would include reference and research assistance; technology support; a combined library circulation and reserve service; an electronic classroom; current newspapers and periodicals as well as recent library acquisitions located adjacent to comfortable seating; and campus exhibition and cultural events space. Utilizing primarily peer advisers and consultants, the area would provide support for academic advising, writing, quantitative reasoning, and other learning needs. It would also serve as a central location for information about college offices, services, and events, reducing bureaucratic barriers and enhancing the extent to which students take advantage of College resources.--

<http://www.oberlin.edu/library/ac/>