



Please accept the following proposal for an Evergreen Information Commons. We would like to see the remodeling to support this new service area occur in summer of 2001 and hope you find the proposal sufficiently worthy for presentation to Barbara Smith and Ruta Fanning toward that end. Please let us know if you would like to meet with us for discussion or clarification on any aspects of this proposal.

I. Introduction

Due to technological evolution, many of the tools and services provided by the Computer Center, the Library and Media Services now overlap or are difficult to differentiate. In Evergreen's innovative and interdisciplinary curriculum, students are often encouraged or inspired to produce academic projects which combine a wide range of tools such as (to name but a few obvious examples) e-journal research, numerical data manipulation and charting, digital images and web publishing. To accomplish even the most basic such projects, students must navigate a confusing array of offices, staff and facilities, many of whom provide highly distinct, yet interconnected or even duplicate information technology services. Thus, we (The BerlinGroup--Sarah Pedersen, Susan Bustetter, Rich Edwards, Mindy Muzatko, Steve Davis and Caryn Cline) determined to explore sharing our services in order to:

- 1) Identify and reduce unnecessary obstacles to student project work, obstacles that are artifacts of historical, now sometimes irrelevant, distinctions among services;
- 2) Simplify research processes and information seeking and producing activities by consolidating them when appropriate;
- 3) Make the range of specialized services available in each information technology service area more evident and easily understandable for students, faculty and other users;
- 4) Test, on a small scale, shared services in preparation for an extensive remodel now in pre-planning stages;
- 5) By providing service collaboratively, support and facilitate cooperation among information technology staff in general, including existing curricular support services to faculty in the form of instruction and curriculum planning.

We propose a shared service in a shared space which will provide both assistance and access a minimal set of information technology common to the Computer Center, the Library and Media Services. We recommend that the range of services, hours and equipment remain very minimal as a starting point, as we assume almost no new funding for operations at this experimental stage. Depending upon the success of the experiment, we also hope to see the shared services expand over time and lead the way toward extensive blending by the time of a major building remodel.

II. Goals of the Information Commons

- 1) Provide complete, accurate, coordinated information regarding the services of the Computer Center, Library and Media Services;
- 2) Provide a minimum set of technologically based information retrieval and production services (defined below) with staff support from all 3 service areas;
- 3) Provide cooperative services; the staff will act as a team and will blend their knowledge in response to inquiries;
- 4) Provide cross-training through actual service; staff will consider learning about other service areas as a critical goal in their work;

- 5) Provide a welcoming atmosphere which acts as a portal to the services of the separate areas; visual connection will be important;
- 6) Provide spaces for group and individual work, as well as social and (non-quiet) study space;
- 7) Support production functions combined with information gathering functions

II. Facilities

- 1) One shared desk, centrally located
- 2) One telephone
- 3) Three staff computers
- 4) Eight public computers, including one group work setting and several individual stations
(This presumes using computers presently in reference and the Computer Center)
- 5) Scanners
- 6) Printers (color and b/w)
- 7) Two copiers (1 color if possible)
- 8) Whiteboard
- 9) Signs
- 10) 1 additional security gate
- 11) Minimum software set: Web access; MS Office (Word, Excel, Powerpoint); E-mail; Scanning and image manipulation software (perhaps something simpler than photoshop)

III. Staffing

In order to produce a true blending, we recommend that for at least the busiest times of the day three staff be present, one from each area, so that cross-training will occur in the process of giving actual service and solving real problems. This will greatly reduce the need for formal workshops as each member of the team will teach the others from his or her strength. The team will support the minimum software and service set defined above, and will refer other needs to the appropriate area (reference, Media Services, circulation, media loan, Computer Center, government documents, etc.). The team should dedicate itself to learning about the services in all three areas and understanding the service obstacles and synergies made obvious through this shared work. They will not pass questions off to one another but will work together to answer questions, and will, whenever possible follow through with the staff of more specialized areas to determine whether the area was able to respond to referrals adequately.

IV. Location

For this service to become effective, it is essential that it be foregrounded, obvious, central and welcoming. Otherwise, it will simply appear to be another among all the other possible desks one must choose to find what one wants (computer consultants, media loan, circulation desk, reference). The space should also visually link to the related services as clearly as possible. The current gallery space is the only obvious site to match these criteria. We therefore propose relocating the gallery. If there is no suitable option for the gallery outside the Library, we propose a location near the rear of the current reference collection within clear, direct and unrestricted view of the front doors and with an open wall facing the doors so that the public will immediately become aware of displays as soon as they enter the library. The Library has always appreciated the presence of the gallery, and would welcome this even more central location despite the few logistical problems this location would incur.

We propose removing the walls around the gallery and reorienting all the services surrounding the resulting space so that they are close to and facing the proposed Commons. In addition, we propose knocking down the wall between Media Loan and the entrance lobby to the computing wing. This will eradicate some service areas in media loan. We propose enlarging Media Loan in the rear, into the current reference office in order to provide the needed flexibility to make up the lost space. We further propose creating a work room in the back section of the current law collection to replace the reference office space. In addition, some wiring would obviously be necessary for even the minimal number of computers we are recommending for the area and we would need at least one additional security gate plus several door alarms. We should plan on wiring for up to 18 terminals plus

plug-ins for those with lap tops. We would need some kind of gate system for shutting off parts of the now open areas when those areas are closed but the Commons are open (Media Loan, for example).

Finally, a major concern will be finding ways to visually connect the Commons to the Computer Center. The most desirable option would be to move the GCC to the current open area in the Computer Center. That would open the general access, non-classroom area to the Commons and bring the consultants visually and physically near the Commons. We recognize that this is probably a very expensive proposal which may not be feasible at this time. At a minimum, we would like to see some really effective, large signage.

V. Concerns

The biggest question is whether the Commons can be done without simply diluting current services, exhausting ourselves, or providing yet another gate before patrons get to what they really want. This is one reason we are not proposing any new computers for now. As for staffing the desk, the assumption must be that those staffing the Commons will see this service as another location for their existing service. For example, when a reference librarian works the Commons, s/he has not stopped providing reference, s/he is simply doing reference's work elsewhere (with some excellent new help at hand). Similarly, there are many directional questions and basic services provided at Circulation simply because that is the first place patrons see where they can ask for help. The Commons should relieve much of that role. Thus, there may be fewer staff at the original location, but the work will move to the Commons with the staff member who will meanwhile be able to improve service by learning from others. Another issue will be making sure that those who serve the Commons do so for sufficient hours per week and for long enough periods to gain the depth of knowledge required for good service in such a wonderfully complex environment. Working out hours, coverage, service expectations, who will work where and how to manage the area will require complex and interesting planning. It will also take considerable flexibility in implementation and practice. This is clearly an experiment and a risky one. It will certainly help us ascertain some of the issues to address in the a major long-term remodel that presumes even more substantial blending of our services.

VI. Before and Beyond the Commons

In planning this space, we identified several steps that can be taken to accomplish some of our service goals before or even without remodelling. We recommend that the appropriate areas and staff explore implementation of the following steps as soon as possible. It may be advisable to develop small teams for these steps:

--We suggest that greater coordination of curricular support be pursued by the program liaisons in reference and academic computing and the appropriate media services staff beginning immediately. We discussed several programs in next year's curriculum which we know are likely to work with computing, a library liaison and media services. The staff providing support to such programs should work as a team.

--We suggest that the web pages of each area have obvious links to the other areas immediately and that we explore creation of a single home page for the areas.

--We suggest that the various public service areas which use forms for their services begin to review their forms together and work to put them on-line in formats that are visually similar and in ways that reduce the need to duplicate input.

--The areas should consider implementing more consistent minimum software and services across all area computers. The Library, for instance, should add e-mail and the basic MSOffice suite. The Computer Center should add color printing. We should consider whether to provide a simpler image manipulation package than Photoshop to install more globally.

VII. Enthusiasms

It has been gratifying to note how much interest and enthusiasm these plans have generated. A significant number of staff from all areas have indicated a willingness, indeed, a strong wish, to work in the Commons. The opportunity to learn from one another, to broaden our expertise AND to provide better service appeals strongly to our better selves. This will be a fun place to work!

VIII. Next steps

- 1) proposal goes to Vice Presidents for consideration for summer 2002 implementation
- 2) if supported by VP's, Facilities works out rough budget estimate
- 3) Facilities and Administration determine budget request process
- 4) small staff team works on refining physical design
- 5) small staff team begins staffing and management planning