

UNE learning commons and external revamp

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education Julia Gillard officially opened the Learning Commons in the Dixon Library at the University of New England on July 22nd 2008.

Building work to create the Commons involved major renovation and retasking of the Library's ground floor, and followed exterior painting of the library and entrance remodelling in 2007.

Commonwealth Capital Development Pool (CDP) funds financed the development of both the physical Learning Commons—which became operational in March this year—and the e-Learning Commons of virtual library services to both on campus and off campus students.

In her speech to launch the Commons, Ms Gillard said she was impressed by its 'sense of space and light' (in contrast to the law libraries of her own university days), and the opportunities for students to use 'the best of technology' and work together in groups. She said the Government believed it was 'important for students to have access to the learning tools of the 21st century'. Introducing Ms Gillard, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic Services) Eve Woodberry said the Learning Commons represented 'a change in philosophy'—a recognition of the more 'social' way of learning of today's students.



Deputy Prime Minister, Julia Gillard

The Commons brings together services critical to student success in one central and accessible campus location: Library, IT Help Desk, Student Assist and the Academic Skills Office. It provides an integrated service desk for Reference services, loans and ITD queries. The Commons also offers

bookable meeting rooms and informal group discussion areas, electronic media booths, problem-based learning (PBL) rooms and a Medical Reserve, as well as social spaces including lounge areas and a coffee and snack facility.

Most popular with students is the expanded and upgraded computer hub—again in a central campus location, well lit and air-conditioned, with a large number of well maintained workstations, flexible printing and copying options, professional assistance, and the security of being in a popular location with many other people. For these reasons, the Commons has become the University's principal computer lab for student use day and night.

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A new beginning at Macquarie University

Back in 2006, Macquarie University Library faced a tricky problem—to develop a new library within a predetermined budget and in a space only marginally larger than that already in use that would remain relevant through rapid technological change, while allowing for growth in both the student population and the physical collection.

Since its establishment in the 1960s, Macquarie University has had one central library servicing the whole institution. The library was placed deliberately at the centre of the University and has remained there, more or less undiluted, ever since.

With continued growth in electronic resources, it was decided the new library would focus less on the physical collection and more on the provision of dynamic learning spaces where students can connect with each other and the resources they require.



Macquarie's current library building is a classic example of 1960's late Brutalism.

A 21st century learning environment

The successful design by architects Francis-Jones Morehen Thorp (fjmt), was described by the judging panel as "an elegant and timeless design concept that responded to a 'new beginning' at Macquarie". Certainly the new design contrasts to the current library building which, with bold, grey concrete blocks, sits brooding and emphatic in the centre of the campus.

The new library will be located on what will become the University Common. The front of the building will reach invitingly onto the Common and the long glass facade will connect it to the natural environment while providing an uninterrupted view of college life from both inside and out.

Inside, the new building will seat 3000 students compared to the current seating of just over 1200. A mix of quiet study areas, learning lounges, dedicated postgraduate and research areas will be provided. All areas will have wireless connectivity allowing for personal electronic devices to be flexibly used. Learning lounges in the new Library will be open 24 hours a day and a café will be incorporated into the entrance of the building.

Robots to the rescue

Having given over all this space to study areas, the problem remained of what to do with the vast physical collection—a collection of 1.8 million items that is projected to grow to 2.3 million over the 40 year life of the building.

Research showed that just 20% of the collection satisfied 80% of loans so it was decided to locate the lesser used 80% of the collection in an automated storage and retrieval system (ASRS), the first of its type in Australia.

The ASRS allows for high density storage, with material held in just one seventh the floor space taken up by open access collections. This far smaller footprint frees up needed space for people within the Library. The Library catalogue