

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



'Elegant & timeless': the use of glass connects the new Library building to its environment
- Image courtesy of fjmt

will indicate which items are in the ASRS, with clients being able to order items online and collect them from a service point. The retrieval process takes just a few minutes, meaning all of the Library's physical collections are immediately available.

Browsing of the stored collection will be 'virtual' and the Library is exploring ways to augment online descriptions of books and journals to maximise their visibility.

Green

The new Library is aiming to achieve a rare 5 Green Star rating from the Green Building Council of Australia. To qualify, the entire lifecycle of the building needs to be planned beforehand, from the environmental impact of the materials in creation, the impact of the operation of the building during its life, to the disposal of materials after it is dismantled.

The expected completion date is 2010 and the cost is \$77 million. More project details are available at <http://www.lib.mq.edu.au/newlibrary/>

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Building within an established building

In 2007, Curtin University Library was given a budget of nearly \$1 million to develop a bold, creative and innovative learning space to support student-centred learning. The aim was to provide technology-rich, attractive surroundings incorporating different zones for wireless laptops, freestanding express computers, high quality graphics workstations, a presentation space with wall-mounted LCD screens, as well as areas utilising bluetooth and web-camera enabled PCs.



Construction at Curtin

Creating the new iZone required research, planning and preparation because it had to be developed within the Robertson Library building due to its central location on the Bentley campus. The building is an iconic 1970s structure which had last been

extensively renovated twenty years ago. Much of the internal structure cannot be tampered with so adding windows or external doorways was out of the question.

It was decided to gut an area on level two and careful consideration was given to blending the more 'dated' design elements with innovative requirements. Decisions were based on feedback from regular library and university surveys about

clients' opinion of current facilities and the improvements they wanted.

Unlike a new building starting from scratch, the budget had to factor in the costs of demolition and removal of the old infrastructure of offices, such as internal walls. After demolition, work began in earnest in the second half of 2008. What quickly became apparent was that the 40 year old infrastructure had inadequate power points for the today's technology. Inventive ways to overcome this lack included incorporating metal troughs into the concrete floor to allow electrical wiring to be accessible throughout the area and installing power points in the bench seating along the walls for laptop users.

Another consequence of building 'within a building' was that services had to continue even though part of the library had become a construction site. On the plus side, having an established building meant fewer planning permissions were needed and teething problems for the building itself have already been sorted!

Opened at the end of October 2007, the new space now provides flexible facilities that accommodate evolving technologies for a diversity of client use.

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Palace and shed

'Studied informality' was the headline used to describe the Sunshine Coast TAFE Noosa centre at Tewantin when it first opened. (*Architecture Australia* 2005, v94(4)). Around the same time 'Palace and shed' was the headline in the local Weekender magazine. Both are saying the same thing about style and comfort, and low environmental impact.

Designed by Don Watson to suit the energy and water smart sustainability focus of the then Noosa Shire, and built in stylish alternating greys of corrugated iron and louvre panels, it caters for arts, tourism, aged care, language, computing and vocational access programs.

The layout is in a double winged style with central open atrium set in bushland with winding driveway to hide the low level building from the road. Spaces include gallery, pottery and painting studios as well as classrooms and computer rooms. The building won the annual Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA) FDG Stanley Award for Public Architecture prize for its year, as well as the Harry Marks Award for Sustainable Architecture, and several other design awards.

Water is recycled from the roof via a series of short downpipes which become dramatic water features during storms. A dry creek bed of stones channels this runoff to underground and above ground tanks for use as grey water. A local Bushland Study group gathered seeds from the site prior to construction and landscaping was natural revegetation with no exotic planting. Botanical samples of cuttings were collected into three folders (trees, understorey, weeds) then catalogued in the library for reference by local conservation groups and horticulture students.

Library and administration are in a standalone building with cross ventilation and climate friendly design features. The library is a boutique space with full floor to ceiling glass outlook to the adjoining bush, and high sloping ceilings.