COCREATING THE COMMONS

Campus Partnerships at the Heart of Two Library Space Design Projects at the University of Miami

KELLY E. MILLER, ROXANE PICKENS, and KINERET BEN-KNAAN

CITATION:

Miller, Kelly, Roxane Pickens, Kineret Ben-Knaan. "Co-Creating the Commons: Campus Partnerships at the Heart of Two Library Space Design Projects at the University of Miami." *Designing Libraries for the 21st Century*, edited by Tom Hickerson, Joan K. Lippincott, and Leonora Crema. ACRL Press 2022.

Introduction

Over the last six years, the University of Miami Libraries has formed two sets of strategic partnerships with campus units in order to reimagine how it supports the university's learning and research mission. These partnerships have played critical roles in the planning and design of spaces, services, and staffing positions. In the first case, UM Libraries is facilitating partnerships with academic service units in undergraduate education and other areas dedicated to student learning to create a learning commons on the first floor of the Otto G. Richter Library, the University of Miami's flagship library. In the second case, UM Libraries is facilitating a partnership with the Office of Research to create a faculty research commons on the third floor of Richter Library. How have these partnerships been formed? How have partners been involved in the planning processes? What are the benefits and challenges of these partnerships as they relate to space design? And what lessons have been learned?

About the University of Miami

The University of Miami is a private, secular research university in South Florida with approximately 11,000 undergraduate students, 6,000 graduate students, 3,000 faculty members, and 13,000 staff members. The university, located on three separate campuses (Coral Gables, Medical, and Rosenstiel), comprises 11 schools and colleges serving undergraduate and graduate students in more than 180 majors and programs, with libraries on each campus. The Otto G. Richter Library, which first opened in 1962, is located on the Coral Gables campus and serves as the central interdisciplinary library for the university. The learning commons is envisioned as a 21st-century transformation of the first floor, and the faculty research commons as a corresponding transformation of the third floor.

Learning Commons: Partnering to Improve Undergraduate and Graduate Education

LAUNCHING THE PROJECT

In 2014, the idea of developing a learning commons at the University of Miami began in conversation between the dean of the University of Miami (UM) Libraries and the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. One of the drivers was pragmatic: find a new home for certain academic services, such as the Writing Center, which was inconveniently located in a building at the edge of campus; another driver was a sense of opportunity and possibility for renewing the library's space and services in relationship to student learning. The conversation expanded to include both the dean of Undergraduate Education and also the vice provost for Academic Technologies. A steering committee was established to guide the initiative. Composed of representatives from each administrative area, the university architect, and the lead for space management, the committee identified its overall goal: to colocate and coordinate the university's key academic services for students in a single convenient location on the first floor of Richter Library, a space occupied at the time by shelving that housed obsolete periodicals.

IDENTIFYING PARTNERS

Each of the administrative areas represented on the steering committee—College of Arts and Sciences, Undergraduate Education, Academic Technologies, and UM Libraries—is responsible for at least one academic services unit included in the commons: the Camner Center for Academic Resources, a peer-to-peer tutoring service, reporting to Undergraduate Education; the Writing Center and Math Lab, reporting to their respective disciplinary departments, English

and mathematics, in the College of Arts and Sciences; and the Student Technology Help Desk, reporting to Academic Technologies. UM Libraries contributed its own relevant units to the commons, including the Creative Studio (a light makerspace), Digital Scholars' Lab, and a peer-to-peer reference and research consultation service. Importantly, the committee also determined that each unit would retain its unique service identity and existing structures for reporting, budgeting, and staffing. The UM Libraries agreed to provide leadership for hosting, coordinating, and stewarding the initiative.

THIRD-PARTY FACILITATION OF THE PLANNING PROCESS

Because of the complexity of the project and opportunity for innovation, brightspot strategy was enlisted to lead the planning process among relevant stakeholders. The subsequent user research and participatory planning process was conducted over a six-month period in 2015–16 and resulted in two detailed reports that have provided guidance for subsequent piloting and design. The first report, entitled "User Research Report," offers insight into student and faculty opinion.[1] The second report describes the "Service, Space, and Staffing Strategy" developed in sequenced workshops.[2]
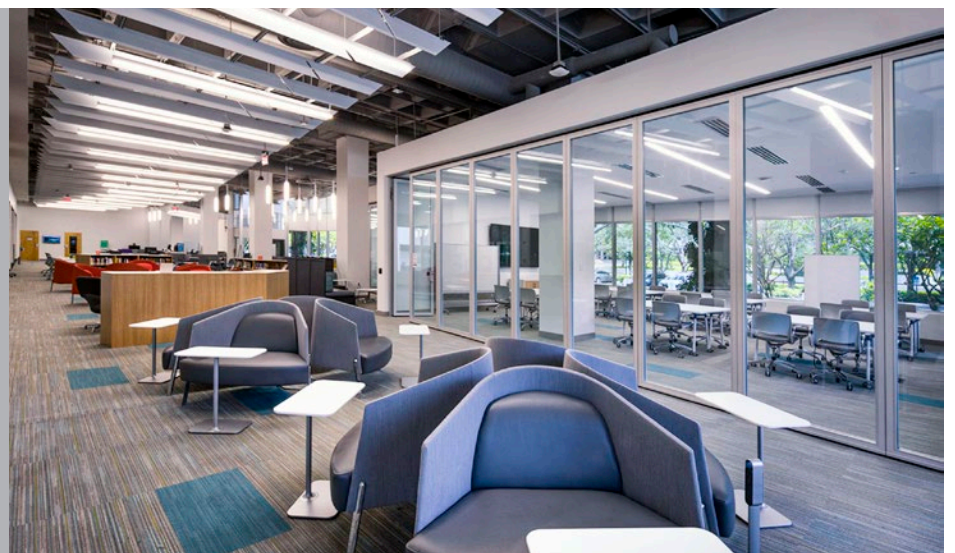
FOSTERING RELATIONSHIPS DURING THE PARTICIPATORY PLANNING PROCESS

At the outset, a working committee was formed of representatives from each of the partners that manage their respective services on a day-to-day basis. These representatives included faculty members (both tenure-track and non-tenure-track), librarians (nontenured faculty), and full-time staff members. In several cases, they had not previously met one another, so the planning process helped stimulate new connections and relationships across campus. In other cases, representatives knew one another but had never worked so collaboratively before. The committee gathered in sequenced workshops to develop a vision, service model, and staffing strategy for the commons, as well as sharing detailed information about their units, including missions, goals, and needs. The planning process helped foster a spirit of cooperation and commitment to the overall learning commons initiative, while also exciting interest in the possibilities for improvement and growth in each of the individual services. The committee that formed during the planning process strengthened into an ongoing learning commons partners group that has continued to meet regularly.

fig 16.1

View into the largest of the flexible program spaces, with retractable glass walls, in the UM Libraries' Learning Commons (post-renovation; pre-occupancy).

(Credit: University of Miami Libraries.)

SHARED MISSION AND KEY PRINCIPLES FOR THE DESIGN OF THE LEARNING COMMONS

Led by brightspot and in consultation with the steering committee, the partners developed a shared mission for the learning commons that focused on creating opportunities for students to work individually and collaboratively, learn from both peers and experts, discover and explore resources and ideas, and create and experiment with one another. The partners also agreed on key principles driving the transformation of the first floor, including the need to coordinate services and resources across providers, foster creativity with technology, lead students to more advanced services, and showcase stories of learning, research, and creativity.

SERVICE CATEGORIES FOCUSED ON STUDENT SKILLS

Developed in response to the findings of the user research process and in workshops with the partners, the service model (figure 16.2) provides a unifying concept that focuses on the individual student learning experience. It answers the question "What do students need to be able to do in order to succeed in their studies?" The service model responds to this question by addressing students' needs to

- discover and explore resources;
- access resources and technology;
- conduct research;
- write, create, and communicate;
- publish, present, and promote;
- collaborate and discuss; and
- work with data in all its forms.

fig 16.2

Service categories described by brightspot strategy in the participatory planning process.

(Credit: University of Miami Libraries.)

Each learning commons partner offers services that help students improve their skills in these areas. The physical platform for the service model is the library itself, providing a capacious, convenient, and flexible space for discovery and exploration. The library's core services offer access to collections, technology support, and information and digital literacy education. Other library units make it possible to help students with creative technologies, geospatial mapping, and data. The nonlibrary partners expand the service model by offering students help with writing, languages, disciplinary expertise (tutoring in individual subjects), and math. Working together, the partners provide a comprehensive set of coordinated academic services.

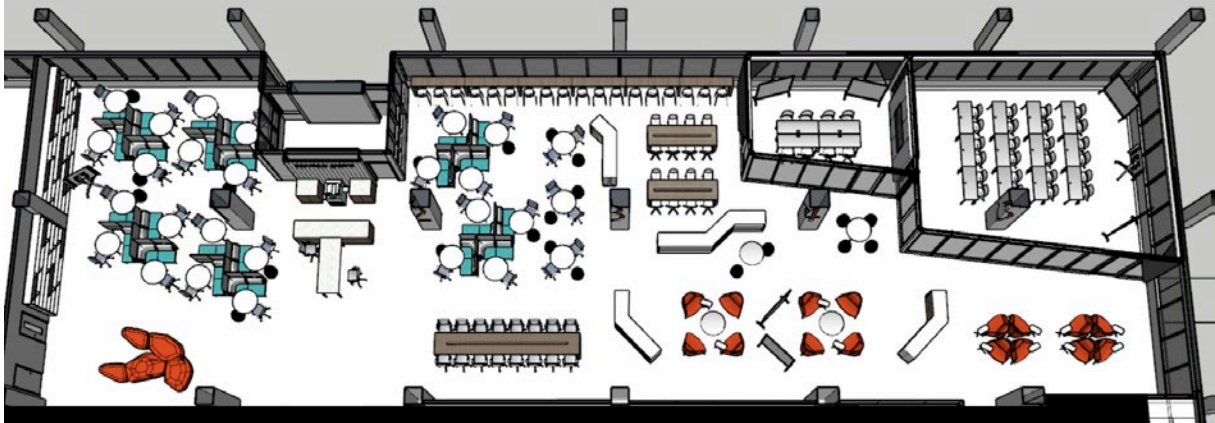## KEY SPACE TYPES SUPPORTING INQUIRY AND DIALOGUE

The planning process identified a set of key space types deemed essential to achieving the mission in the first phase of renovation:

1. a consultation zone providing small-group settings for appointments with staff and student experts from at least five participating academic service partners;
2. a service point for the consultation zone, where students can check in for appointments;
3. two flexible program spaces with retractable walls that can host scheduled programs and events, such as workshops and training;
4. an open study area featuring a variety of seating options and browsable shelving with new books; and
5. an office space for the new position of learning commons director (see figure 16.3).

fig 16.3

Floor plan design by G Alvarez Studio, Inc.

(Credit: University of Miami Libraries.)

The signature space of the learning commons is the consultation zone (figure 16.4), where the academic service partners offer opportunities for students to meet with trained peers or experts for academic support. A staffed, facilitated space, the consultation zone has 24 "consultation stations," which are deployed for booked sessions during service hours and for open study after appointments have concluded. Ideal for conversations between two to four

individuals, these stations are flexibly allocated for use by the partners based on usage trends and service needs. From semester to semester, as demand for services change, the stations can be reassigned to different partners.
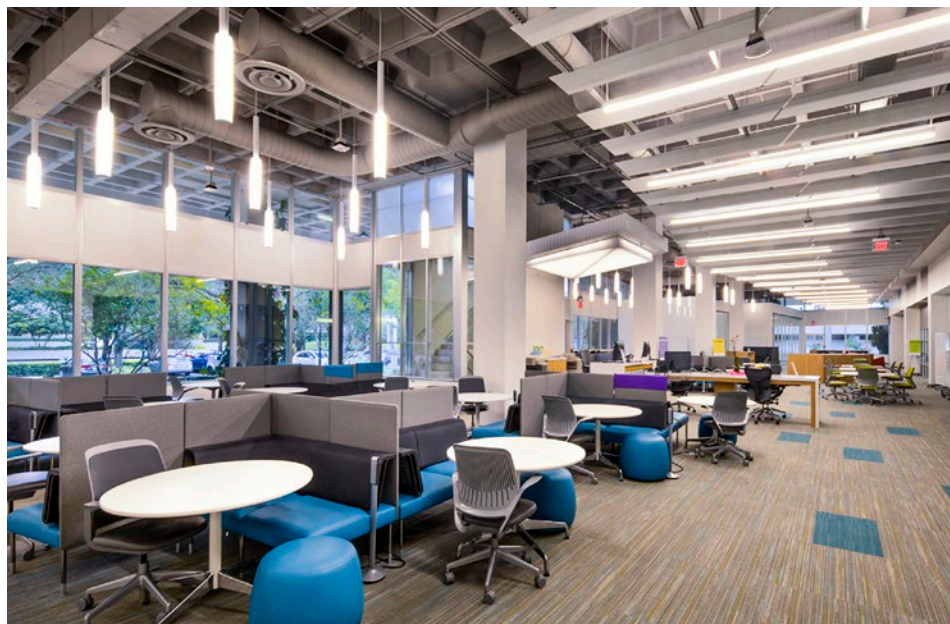

fig 16.4

View of UM Libraries' Learning Commons' consultation zone and service point (post-renovation, pre-occupancy, wayfinding not yet installed).
(Credit: University of Miami Libraries.)

Designed by Miami architect G. Alvarez Studio, Inc., the learning commons offers a flexible environment that has made it possible to onboard new partners and thus expand the range of services provided for students. For example, following the renovation, the Modern Language Lab was invited to participate in the learning commons to offer opportunities for students to practice communication skills in languages other than English.

TYPES OF PARTNERSHIPS: HEADQUARTERED, SATELLITE, VISITING, AND SUPPORTING

Partners participate in the commons in a variety of ways. *Headquartered* partners deliver their full portfolio of services in the commons, which serves as their only location. *Satellite* partners deliver a selection of services in the commons but are headquartered elsewhere. *Visiting* partners offer services on a part-time basis: offering office hours, for instance. *Supporting* partners, such as Library Facilities and IT, provide behind-the-scenes support. These categories have helped define and frame the relationships that are facilitated by the UM Libraries. Importantly, the partnership framework is inclusive, valuing the contributions of each of the units.

DOCUMENTING AND AFFIRMING RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH MEMORANDA OF UNDERSTANDING

A written memorandum of understanding (MOU) was developed by the UM Libraries to define the parameters of the partnerships with the nonlibrary academic service partners. The introduction to the MOU summarizes the learning commons' purpose, background, vision and mission, and service model and the type of partnership. The core of the document describes library and nonlibrary partner responsibilities related to budget; staffing, orientation, and training; hours of operation; space and utilities; communication and promotion; technology and IT support; and supplies.

PILOTING AS OPPORTUNITY FOR PARTNERS TO LEARN TOGETHER

In 2016–17, prior to the release of any funding for renovation, the learning commons initiative was piloted in its designated space on the first floor of Richter Library that had been cleared of compact shelving and periodicals. The Writing Center, Math Lab, and reference service physically moved into the space using their existing furniture, and an experimental service point was established using repurposed and temporary furniture. Staff members offered coordinated services in the space and collaborated to develop solutions to challenges as they arose. Moreover, the piloting process gave UML's communications team a chance to test various wayfinding and promotional materials and strategies. The results of the piloting phase were encouraging. Students enjoyed having more space to learn on the first floor of Richter Library, and their readiness to use the piloted commons, even with outdated furniture, helped convince key administrators that the initiative could work.

STAFFING STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT AND RECRUITMENT OF NEW POSITIONS

The planning process also included the development of a staffing strategy. The partners were asked, "How should the commons be managed? What roles will be needed to make sure it runs successfully?" Ensuing conversations gave the partners an opportunity to discuss coordination and assessment needs, technology support, and other areas of concern. Importantly, the articulated strategy reflected the partners' willingness to rethink existing positions and adopt shared positions for the service point.

Successful searches were conducted for two new positions that were designated in the staffing strategy: a lead for the learning commons and a lead for assessment. These positions were funded through the UM Libraries by repurposing existing open positions. The new learning commons director guides the evolving relationships between the partners and coordinates expanding services and programs through activities such as holding regular partner meetings, liaising with UM Libraries' Facilities and IT employees, and developing workshops and programming.

SHARED ASSESSMENT STRATEGY

In collaboration with the learning commons director, the new assessment librarian developed an assessment strategy to evaluate the learning commons activities in light of its mission and vision. Assessment activities have involved participatory data gathering and analysis of data collected from all partners composed into reports that are presented annually to the steering committee. Collaborating around data and assessment has pivoted the learning commons partners from being solely concerned with their own unit's achievements to focusing on common overarching outcomes. The partners have agreed on mutual goals and set short- and long-term targets. In addition to data gathered from partners, the learning commons assessment activities include focus groups, feedback surveys, whiteboard polling, evaluation of space utilization, and user behavior observation both in the physical space and online. Insights from multiple data sources have been essential to measure progress, make changes, support ongoing engagement with partners, and communicate value.[3] Guided by data, the learning commons has documented an increase in student engagement with both its services and the libraries overall and demonstrated contribution to the university's teaching and learning efforts (figure 16.5). As a result, new conversations are underway about how the learning commons can contribute even more to university initiatives related to student success, retention, and graduation.

fig 16.5

The learning commons 2019–20 key usage statistics.

(Credit: University of Miami Libraries.)

SHARED SUCCESS IN THE RENOVATED SPACE

Due to the strength of the relationships formed between the partners themselves and skillful facilitation of these relationships by the director, the learning commons has proved to be an effective strategic initiative that fosters student engagement across multiple disciplines. In its first four years, participating academic services experienced increases in demand for consultations and tutoring appointments; new programming enticed both students and faculty to gather in the flexible, multipurpose rooms; and overall library occupancy increased following the renovation. In post-occupancy assessments, students have reported their approval of the space, services, and furniture; in fact, they would now like to see additional renovations that match the success of the 2018 project.

BENEFITS OF PARTNERSHIPS IN THE LEARNING COMMONS

Improved student access to academic services and resources across providers: One location for many academic services within the library provides students with convenient access to the support they need outside of class. Additionally, the learning commons consultation zone has made it possible for some satellite partners, such as the Camner Center, to extend its operating hours so that students have greater access to services than they had previously.

Increased use of the library overall: Student visits to Richter Library have increased with the opening of the learning commons. Use of the first floor has grown, and the variety of work activities among students on the floor has expanded.

Improved referral process: Service providers are more familiar with the other services offered in the commons and able to refer students to other services with greater ease and confidence.

Greater range and visibility of programming: The flexible program spaces adjacent to the consultation zone are frequently used for workshops, training sessions, orientations, and events that are open to the whole university community.

Coordinated assessment: The ability to gather and coordinate usage data from each of the partners on a regular basis has resulted in a clearer understanding of how students are using academic support services on campus and what additional help they need.
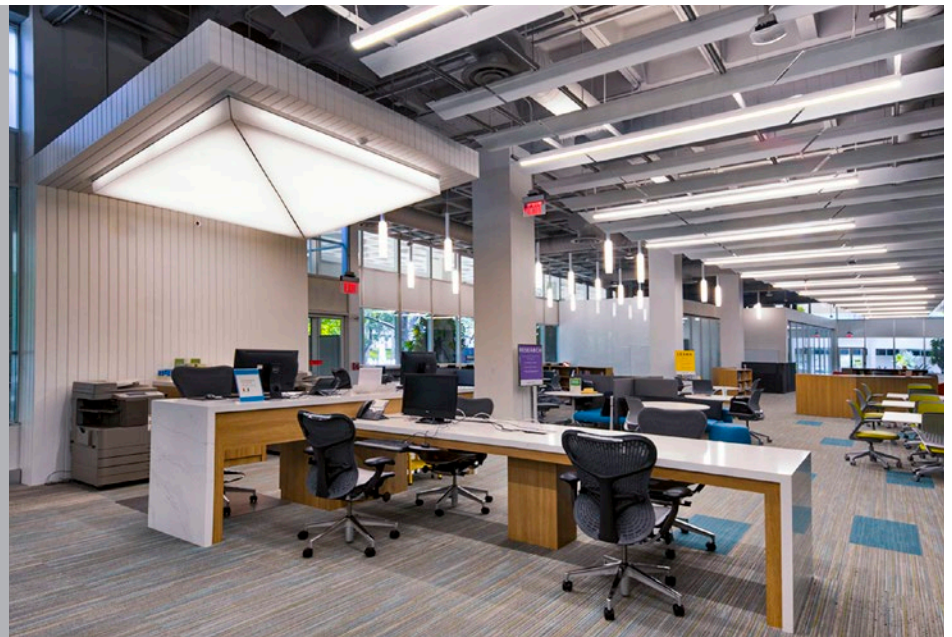
CHALLENGES

Managing flow of students into the commons: The open plan for the consultation zone, designed to be highly accessible and visible to students entering the library, presents challenges with managing the flow of students into the space. Learning commons staff have found it difficult, especially at peak times, to balance student demand for study space with the needs of students arriving for scheduled tutoring appointments across multiple service providers—the primary function of the consultation zone.

Service point design: The service point (figure 16.6), which offers stations for two full-time staff members and four student employees to be working simultaneously, was designed to be highly visible and enticing. However, the design is fixed and inflexible, and staff have identified the need for adjustments. A more flexible service point that would allow for changes and growth in the staffing model is desired.

fig 16.6

UML Learning Commons consultation zone service point.

(Credit: University of Miami Libraries.)

Comfort of expert service providers in consultation zone: The consultation zone was designed primarily with students in mind. As a result, some of the expert service providers, namely faculty members, have found it challenging to provide consultations in the renovated space, especially due to its permeable nature. These employees have identified the need for more visual and acoustical privacy for some consultations in the highly dynamic, collaborative space.

Balancing individual service identities with the skill-based service model: Promotion of the skill-based service model has been somewhat challenging to implement. Most of the participating academic service units already had

well-established names for their services and associated branding that they wished to preserve going forward, and these names do not necessarily align with the service model categories. As a result, advertising for the learning commons includes both the terminology from the service model and the identities of the individual service providers, with the website reflecting this hybrid promotional approach.

Technology integration: multiple systems for appointment booking: One discovery in the planning process was the number of different types of specialized appointment-booking software being used by the various academic services. Students have to familiarize themselves with separate appointment-booking schedules and software for services, rather than using a single shared system. Work on resolving this challenge is ongoing.

LESSONS LEARNED

Mixed results of open, permeable designs: Student use of the space increases, but challenges occur in managing student flow into the space. The design of flexible, adaptable service points becomes especially critical.

Significance of ongoing cross-campus relationships: Strong relationships between service providers formed in the planning process are key to the stability and enduring success of the commons.

Librarians as facilitators of cross-campus partnerships: Librarians are providing leadership roles as connectors and community builders by facilitating relationships between the academic units, ensuring that partnerships are supported over time. This raises the visibility of the library and demonstrates its capacity to be integral in forming collaborative networks on campus.

Reflections Post-2020: The Learning Commons and DEAI Initiatives

With flexibility as one of its chief design principles, the learning commons has been successful in creating a platform for learning that complements the classroom and reaches beyond it. Additionally, flexibility allows it to be responsive to educational needs that arise from changing social contexts, as occurred with the increased attention to racial justice in the US during the summer of 2020. With outreach and engagement efforts that have centered diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion (DEAI) interests, the learning commons has become an important site for racial justice education and activity.
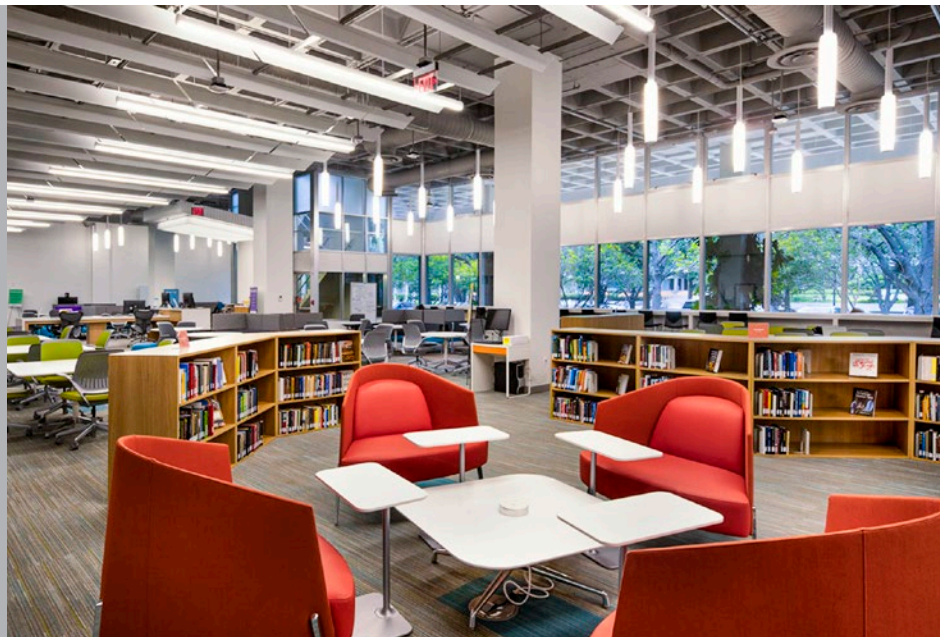
One example of creating avenues for community learning and growth in areas of social justice is the Spotlight Collection program, which connects themes from current events and culture, such as Black history and women's history, with selections from library collections (figure 16.7). Typically, these are physical displays of circulating materials located on browsable shelves in the learning commons consultation zone, a high-traffic area among students. With the shift to remote programming during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Spotlight Collection program began to feature digital collections. An example is the *Malaika* handbooks, a series of digitized campus guides for the University of Miami created and published in the 1970s and 1980s by the United Black Students organization.[4]

A second initiative central to the learning commons' DEAI work is its collaboration with the campus-wide common read program, One Book, One U, designed to build dialogue and community among students, faculty, staff, and alumni using texts centered in diversity and inclusion.[5] Its coordinators invited the libraries into collaboration soon after its spring 2018 launch. For three years, the learning commons has been an important partner with One Book, One U, hosting events like student-author conversations and book giveaways. In the fall of 2020, the learning commons became the administrative home for the program. Because One Book, One U centers on readings that speak directly to diversity and inclusion, such as the 2020–21 selection, Ijeoma Oluo's book *So You Want to Talk about Race*, the learning commons serves as a critical site for learning and exchange.[6]

fig 16.7

Learning commons includes browsing collections with adjacent comfortable seating. Spotlight Collections can be featured on the top surface of the shelves.

(Credit: University of Miami Libraries.)

The UM Libraries' exhibitions program has also provided the learning commons with an opportunity to engage students within a DEAI context. Because the entrance to the learning commons consultation zone is adjacent to a gallery space, it becomes possible to pique student interest by placing compelling materials on display. When the materials highlight and promote social justice themes, the potential for learning and civic engagement is amplified. This was the case in the summer of 2021, when two exhibitions, entitled *Hostile Terrain 94* and *Separated*, focused on the decades-long humanitarian crisis at the border of the United States and Mexico.

Faculty Research Commons: Partnering to Support Faculty Interdisciplinary Research

Thanks to the success of the learning commons, an idea emerged in 2018 to create a similar library environment addressing faculty needs to be housed in a reimagined, renovated third floor of Richter Library. The faculty research commons initiative has developed as a partnership between the UM Libraries and the Office of Research with the goal of providing improved spaces and services to support faculty research, particularly interdisciplinary, collaborative efforts. In early 2019, brightspot strategy was enlisted once again to lead a participatory planning process that included visioning exercises and the development of a space and service strategy.[7] This process drew upon data gathered from an Ithaka S+R Faculty Survey conducted at the University of Miami in the fall of 2018. At the conclusion of the planning process, brightspot produced a compelling report that offers guidance for how the third floor of Richter Library might be designed and outlines ideas for piloting key concepts.

The planning process engaged participants for several committees, including a working group consisting of representatives from the UM Libraries, the Office of Research, the University Architect's Office, the Faculty Senate, Faculty Affairs, Academic Technologies, the Graduate School, and others; a faculty advisory group with representative researchers from the 11 schools and colleges; and a set of interview participants that included the president of the university and other key campus leaders. Other participants included potential partners, such as the Center for Humanities, which may be headquartered within the commons or immediately adjacent to it. Together, these groups and individuals offered opinions and insights that helped shape the vision, service, and space strategy.

The vision for the faculty research commons emphasizes the cultivation of community among faculty members. During interviews and workshops with faculty members from the university's 11 disciplinary schools and colleges,

one pressing need that faculty consistently identified was for more opportunities to connect to other researchers. Faculty members were particularly interested in ways to meet across different disciplines and the university's three campuses. They also expressed desires to be exposed to new ideas and technologies, share knowledge, and form new collaborations. Consequently, the faculty research commons began to be imagined as a library space where new relationships between faculty members could develop with the potential to catalyze innovative cross-disciplinary research questions and projects.

With this vision in mind, brightspot offered a "theory of engagement" based on the work of Mark Granovetter to help guide the service and space strategy development. This network theory posits that human relationships exist as "ties" and can be characterized as "strong" or "weak," both of which have advantages and disadvantages when it comes to sharing existing information and creating new knowledge. Brightspot argued that the design of services, programs, and events in the commons could be informed by careful consideration of what types of ties need to be cultivated between faculty, depending on the desired outcomes. This theory helped inform subsequent consideration of service design and space types.

Unlike the learning commons, with its focus on colocation and coordination of expert and peer service providers offering consultations, the faculty research commons concentrates on fostering connections between faculty members themselves. One articulated strategy to achieve this is to offer programs for faculty networking, matchmaking, sharing skills, and presenting and showcasing research. Another service model proposal is to facilitate connections with partner units responsible for research and grants administration on campus. Instead of having a fixed set of service partners operating within the commons, experts might be invited in for office hours with availability advertised ahead of time, thus encouraging a sense of faculty ownership of the space. Experts could include digital scholarship librarians and subject librarians, whose offices will be located adjacent to the commons; as members of the faculty themselves, librarians would also be participating actively in the life of the commons. Nonlibrary entities would operate as satellite partners offering services from time to time in the commons, but be headquartered elsewhere. Potential partners in this category included Government Relations, Corporate and Foundation Relations, and Business Intelligence.

Faculty envision the commons overall as having a "distinct and elevated atmosphere" that would both be inspirational and afford a sense of privacy for those seeking advice and help with research ideas and projects. In discussions, faculty also emphasized the importance of natural light, comfort, quiet, and personal control in the space design. Space types critical for supporting the vision and services in Richter include a welcoming entrance service point; enclosed meeting rooms and informal collaboration spaces for consultations and team meetings; a tech sandbox for emerging technologies and media production; a large flexible event space for presentations, lectures, and other programs; and a café and outdoor balcony space. Furthermore, the faculty expressed interest in the addition of places for rest and reflection, such as a meditation room.

Importantly, this new service and space model for the faculty research commons would require the UM Libraries to hire new staff members to achieve the innovative plan. Key areas of responsibility would include leadership, programming and event planning, reception, navigation and referral, communications and outreach, facilities operations, and technology support. Some of these could be accomplished by expanding roles of existing staff members; in other cases, such as leadership, new positions would need to be created. Just as in the learning commons, the role of the faculty research commons director in nurturing the development of partnerships is expected to be vital to the success of the overall program.

Over the last two years, since the release of brightspot's report in spring 2019, UM Libraries has begun experimenting with pilots of different services and space types using existing spaces, furniture, and resources. Piloting for the faculty research commons will continue until the project receives approval for design and renovation. Service pilots include the U-LINK Librarian Program, an embedded librarian program for university-funded interdisciplinary research team projects focused on societal problems; Research Sprints for U-LINK, involving targeted support for teams facing specific research obstacles or challenges; and networking events that match researchers interested in applying for U-LINK grants. Space pilots include the faculty exploratory, a meeting space for research teams; a renovated faculty reading room for individual study; and an XR/AR/VR lab, a collaboration with the Provost's

Office, for experimentation with spatial computing. Future design and renovation of the faculty research commons are anticipated, but currently on hold due to budget mitigation efforts resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

BENEFITS

Opportunity to check assumptions about faculty needs: The planning process revealed that faculty would like to have agency in the space and invite in services as needed, rather than have services colocated and coordinated in the space at all times. This shift in emphasis has important implications for the design of partner relationships.

   Engaging with university leaders in conversations about the future of research and the role of the library: Interviews with key leaders helped inspire dialogue about the library's current and potential contributions to the university's research environment. The library is viewed as a key partner for the Office of Research and Provost's Office in strategic work to support interdisciplinary research, experiment with innovative technologies, and create a platform for connection making and collaboration on campus.

   Learning from piloting experimental services: Creating programs like the U-LINK Librarian initiative has given the library the chance to explore new roles for librarians in the research process and gain insights into research needs of the faculty, especially as they relate to interdisciplinary research on pressing societal problems, such as racial justice and climate change.

CHALLENGES

Transitions in university leadership: Since the faculty research commons initiative began, changes in senior university leadership roles have necessitated new relationship building and adjustments to pilots in response to shifting priorities.

   Need for greater attention to inclusivity: A challenge of the network model used in the faculty research commons planning process is that it did not sufficiently address the networking needs of underrepresented, marginalized members of the faculty given structural, systemic racism. Moving forward, the initiative must center engagement with BIPOC faculty members to ensure an inclusive environment. Additional partnerships need to be cultivated with administrative units that are working to support these communities and academic centers advancing relevant research agendas, such as the developing Center for Global Black Studies and the emerging Native American and Global Indigenous Studies program.

Designing Libraries in a Way That Fosters Community and Resilience

For the UM Libraries, the learning commons and faculty research commons initiatives are ambitious attempts to create more inviting, relevant, and supportive environments for students and faculty where they can engage in conversation with one another around questions of shared interest and with access to needed services and resources. In his book *Palaces for the People: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life*, Eric Klinenberg writes that "despite—or maybe precisely because of—the fact that we spend so much time on screens and the Internet, we desperately need common places where people can come together, participate in civil society, and build stronger social bonds."[8] Klinenberg describes libraries as "among the most critical forms of social infrastructure" needed for building community.[9] In this 21st-century environment, libraries are serving an important function of connecting people not just to crucial information, but also, importantly, to one another. Located at the heart of the Coral Gables campus of the University of Miami, Richter Library—where both of these

commons projects have taken shape over the last six years—now serves as a location for intentionally nurturing "stronger social bonds" among members of its diverse community.[10]

The UM Libraries has learned that the success of these community-building efforts depends a great deal on the quality of the relationships between employees themselves—the faculty and staff members who teach, research, and provide services in different administrative and academic areas across the university. Through active engagement in the participatory planning process for new library spaces, these employees have grown closer and more collaborative, more aware of one another's services and more attuned to the larger campus community. The result of these relationships has been the development of cocreated service models and pilots that would not otherwise have been possible.

The relationships established between employees have also strengthened the ability of the commons initiatives to transition effectively to online environments during the pandemic. Envisioned initially as primarily physical spaces for learning and research, the commons have evolved digitally, becoming virtual platforms for connection making, sustainability, and support in a time of crisis. As at many libraries, in the spring semester of 2020, the learning commons partners quickly shifted their consultations and tutoring appointments online. Students have appreciated the ability to meet with trained peers and experts remotely and hope that these options continue after the pandemic concludes. Online programs have also allowed for a broader range of participants than ever before, including alumni and community members in other states and countries, at a time when connection making is particularly vital for health and well-being. The partnerships developed prior to the pandemic have been critical to making this transition to online service delivery possible; the social infrastructure they embody ensures that the common places can thrive both in person and online.

As these initiatives demonstrate, designing new spaces and services in libraries provides extraordinary opportunities for fostering new collaborative relationships on campus or developing existing ones. Through participatory design processes, participants from multiple campus units can deepen understanding of one another's services and develop a stronger sense of shared mission. Such processes lead to cocreated spaces that enable ongoing relationships with students and faculty—beyond transactional encounters—and ensure that insights and innovations continue after initial planning has concluded. The communities of service providers that emerge are sources of expertise and resilience for the university as a whole, particularly in times of crisis.

Notes

1. Brightspot strategy, "University of Miami Learning Commons: User Research Report," October 2015, https://miami.app.box.com/s/v15bz6pm49eagcwlzsmad9ka1dt3m8dv.
2. Brightspot strategy, "University of Miami Learning Commons: Service, Space, and Staffing Strategy," February 2016, https://miami.app.box.com/s/clajg2i15344f9r82fgo5weq1ykpx7p7.
3. Association of College and Research Libraries, *Academic Library Impact: Improving Practice and Essential Areas to Research*, white paper, prepared by Lynn Silipigni Connaway,William Harvey, Vanessa Kitzie, and Stephanie Mikitish (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2017), https://www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org.acrl/files/content/publications/whitepapers/academiclib.pdf.
4. United Black Students of the University of Miami, Malaika Handbooks, digital collection, University of Miami, 1971–1985, https://cdm17191.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/asu0161.
5. "One Book, One U," University of Miami Libraries, https://culture.miami.edu/programs/one-book/index.html.
6. Ijeomo Oluo, *So You Want to Talk about Race* (New York: Seal Press, 2018).
7. Brightspot strategy, University of Miami Faculty Research Commons Final Report, March 2019. https://miami.app.box.com/s/6dl8xr5126d2iuczmcswz0sng1brgk94.
8. Eric Klinenberg, *Palaces for the People: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life* (New York: Crown, 2018), 217.
9. Klinenberg, *Palaces for the People*, 32.
10. Klinenberg, *Palaces for the People*, 217.