Library of the Future

The new Lemieux Library and McGoldrick Learning Commons is the university’s biggest investment in academics

By Annie Beckmann

With its opening this fall the Lemieux Library and McGoldrick Learning Commons, Seattle University’s largest investment in academics, creates a bold new mecca for today’s students.

As the Chapel of St. Ignatius is often regarded as the spiritual center of campus, the library and learning commons likely will serve as the intellectual center.

The much-anticipated and reimagined library is expected to become the campus hub for students, faculty and academic activities. The new six-story presence transforms not only the original A.A. Lemieux Library, built in 1966, but also student learning for the 21st century.

At a cost of $55 million, the renovation and new construction increases the square footage by 50 percent to more than 125,000 square feet. But size is just a slim chapter in this library book.

Momentum and excitement about the project increased over the past decade when it became obvious a 1960s library designed primarily to be a warehouse for books could no longer address changes in teaching and learning styles and expectations of technologically savvy students and faculty. And for a university with a vision to be the premier independent university of the Northwest, the need for a new library and collaborative learning space continued to grow.

The learning commons redefines the role of a 21st-century academic library in teaching and learning.

By spring 2008, SU had launched the public phase of its capital fundraising campaign, with facilities--and the library--as a central piece. At the outset of the campaign, Anne Farrell, SU trustee, library campaign committee chair and president
emerita of the Seattle Foundation, remarked, “This project will provide students and faculty with a gathering place and new digital tools for learning and sharing ideas with audiences here or anywhere in the world.”

Long before its June 2009 groundbreaking, President Stephen Sundborg, S.J., described the library as “a centerpiece in the transformation of Seattle University.”

How the library and learning commons would best serve students took shape quickly.

“We knew we wanted technology to be a more forceful presence in the services we offered and in the educational experiences of our students,” says University Librarian John Popko. “But we didn’t want to use technology to show off. We wanted to use it as a means to an educational end.”

Steve De Bruhl, SU’s senior project manager for the library and learning commons, says his appreciation for this new intellectual center only intensifies with time. “Learning in a social setting outside the classroom is a component this building will facilitate,” De Bruhl says. “The environment is conducive to study that’s both collaborative and private. It’s a space where you know technology is there, but it won’t overwhelm the space or the learning experience.”

Read on to learn about some of the features that make SU’s library and learning commons stand out.

**What's Inside**

Transforming the old into the new meant rethinking every aspect of how the space might look and feel, and how its staff could support learning and scholarship in both traditional and contemporary ways.

The result, as John Popko describes it, is a dynamic blend of sanctuary and community square.

“We wanted this building to make us a leader in support of the pedagogy that emphasizes group projects, teamwork, peer consultations- the social dimensions of learning that take place outside the classroom,” Popko says. “We worked hard to create many varied and flexible spaces on all six floors where such interaction could flourish.”

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**Discussion**

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I don't remember the "bucket brigade" move to the new library back in 1966. What I do remember clearly is that myself and one other student were hired at $1.45 per hour to move all of the books from the old library to the new A.A Lemieux library following summer quarter in August 1966. The move took us six weeks working full time and was tough manual labor involving loading the boxed books about four or five boxes high onto hand trucks and then down three flights of stairs and up to the new library. Some of the books were down an additional stairway to basement storage in a building between the libraries. We had no assistance moving the boxes although several people were involved packing an unpacking the boxes. The gorgeous new modern library was not quite complete by the time we finished in September. Jim Klinefelter, class of 1968

(10/5/2010 7:32:25 PM, Jim Klinefelter)
Ah, that was the year that was. That was the year I ended my employment in the university library. That was the year I graduated from Seattle University. That was the year I was drafted into the Army (and eventually sent to Vietnam). I entered SU in the fall of 1962. In the summer of 1963 I began working in the university library on the top floor of the Liberal Arts Building; I think my starting salary was $1.10 an hour. I worked in the bindery, where we bound journals by hand, employing awls, hammers, metal plates, tape, and cardboard. The bindery shared a large room with the serene cataloging department, who suffered through the movement and noise of our wrestling with pounds of periodicals, banging, and a muttered expletive or two. I soon moved to be a student assistant in the periodicals department, working under the direction of librarian Mrs. Henrietta Loudon. We student assistants checked in periodicals, kept records, shelved, and