Transforming Albertsons Library into A Student Recruiting & Retention Show Piece
Phase I
July 2016

Executive Summary

Data from the Library's regular customer service surveys show increasing expectations and a widening gap between perceived quality of the Albertsons Library facility and student expectations for the space. The library building as a top area for needed improvements appeared for the first time in the 2014 survey. In the 2016 survey, all 3 of the top 3 areas identified by undergraduates and 2 of the top 3 identified by graduate students for needed improvements were facilities related.

During Spring Semester 2016, Albertsons Library launched a team of campus participants to help answer the question: How can Albertsons Library become a recruiting and retention show piece for Boise State University? Data gathered and analyzed resulted in the following recommendations for physical improvements to better serve students:

- Improve problems with cleanliness in the Library
- Increase availability of electrical outlets, ways to plug-in
- Evaluate and improve HVAC, particularly in study rooms
- Acoustics/Noise: evaluate and improve noise problems in quiet study areas
- Lighting: Evaluate lighting and improve problem areas
- Improve Wayfinding and library interior signage
- Rearrange existing furniture to better reflect use of space & purchase a variety of new furniture
- Create semi private nooks for student study
- Add Whiteboards and writing surfaces
- Evaluate replacement study room reservation systems
- Revise 1st Floor to improve flow, draw people in, make the Library more welcoming
- Revise arrangement on 3rd & 4th Floors to take advantage windows and potential for natural light

Some service improvements were recommended as well. Data gathered was used to create and improve student personas that were then used for an initial

visioning process. Albertsons Library will continue the visioning process in FY17 to further inform long term planning.

Introduction

Boise State University has been in a phase of rapid growth and with each new program, more space is needed. At the same time, higher education is facing increasing competition as universities recruit from a smaller pool of high school graduates and state support funding remains flat or dwindles.

Academic libraries typically have few options for raising revenue for self-support. So, how can academic libraries play a role in recruitment and retention of students to help positively impact university revenues?

Spring Semester 2016, Albertsons Library launched a project to help answer the question: How can Albertsons Library become a recruiting show piece for Boise State University? The place students want to be, that persuades undecided students that Boise State is the place for them and that supports their success. In Phase I of this project, a small group of campus participants reviewed existing spaces, gathered and evaluated existing data, recruited a group of masters' students to conduct a series of student focus groups and developed a series of recommendations leading toward a vision of future library spaces up to and including the library addition proposed in the Campus Master Plan.

Library Relevance

During winter 2016, the Boise State Quad Enhancement Committee undertook a student survey to identify key locations on campus and students' images of these areas (Boise State, 2016). Albertsons Library was at the top of students minds for 50% of the survey questions including: What are your favorite buildings? Where do you hang out? Where do you frequently go to learn, engage in intellectual conversations, study, and to be anonymous? Where do you feel most like a student? A large majority of the students responding did not live on campus. Clearly the building is of importance to Boise State students while they on campus.

This input resonates strongly with a 2014 report on the brand image and value of academic libraries according to alumni and parents of college students (OCLC, 2014). The brand image of libraries is strong and table (books), but perceptions of the relevance of libraries is fading. At the same time, parents and alumni perceived campus libraries as uniquely distinct places that provide the information and the space to get work done. Libraries were perceived most strongly as the place on campus that:

- Allows students to get work done (83%)
- Gives access to technology tools to get work done (78%)

- Provides the ability for students to find information (79%)
- Provides the best access to current, relevant, extensive information (76%)

There is also a growing body of evidence that academic libraries impact student success and learning. In 2013, the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) launched the Assessment in Action (AiA) program to "investigate the library's impact on student learning and academic success" (ACRL, 2016). Evidence gathered through this research supports previous studies and strongly demonstrates the library's positive influence on students' academic success consistently in four areas:

- Students benefit from library instruction in their initial coursework
- Library use increases student success
- Collaborative academic programs and services involving the library enhance student learning
- Information literacy instruction strengthens general education outcomes such as critical thinking, ethical reasoning, global understanding, and civic engagement.

Do libraries impact recruitment and retention of students? Evidence from research shows that academic libraries can impact retention decisions. In a study by Lombard (Lombard, 2012) the quality of an academic library was seen as a sign of the quality of the college, but was not an overwhelming factor in college choice decisions.   However, Lombard found that libraries did impact decisions of students to remain at a school and alumni said they realized that library quality should have been a part of their decision given its place of importance throughout their degree.

Student Values and Needs

Albertsons Library has run the LibQUAL+ customer service survey every 2 years since 2006. During this time, "library space" has risen in importance to undergraduate students. In spring 2016, undergraduates ranked library space as the most important aspect of the library. While overall perceptions of library space have not changed markedly, the gap between perceived and desired levels of space quality have increased indicating rising expectations. Although library spaces are meeting the minimum level of acceptable service of undergraduates, the 3 areas in which they most want to see improvements were all in library spaces, specifically:

- Quiet space for individual activities
- Library space that inspires study and learning
- Community space for group learning and group study

In the same survey, graduate students rated "library space" as third in importance behind "access to information" (first) and "public service" (second).

However, two of three areas in which graduate students most want to see improvements are in "library spaces":

- Quiet space for individual activities
- A getaway for study, learning, or research

In the 2014 LibQUAL+ survey, requests for longer library hours surfaced in the comments of students. Although the Library receives several requests annually for longer hours, this was the first time it appeared in the survey results. The most common request was for longer weekend hours.

To gather qualitative data from students, a team of masters' degree students were recruited from Dr. Sarah Toevs' Community and Environmental Health class to conduct a needs assessment via focus groups. Focus group student participants were recruited through the Multicultural Students Center, International Student Services, the Gender Equity Center, and ASBSU. Additional participants were recruited from patrons of the library and outreach through classes and library faculty. Although the overall number of participants was small (30), the data gathered was of high quality and reinforced evidence from the library's customer service surveys. Additional data was gathered through a meeting with the Residential Housing Association General Assembly. Student input was analyzed and grouped into three themes:

The Library Environment
- **Noise:** noise complaints were common and often related to the group study rooms - a door gives people "license to be noisy"
- **Custodial Service:** the lack of cleanliness in the library was a common complaint, particularly in heavily used study rooms; students contrasted the library with the MBEB, which they said "feels clean"
- **HVAC Issues:** the study rooms "[don't] smell always that great… sometimes it is an airflow problem"; study rooms are often hot.
- **Furniture:** more variety; comfortable chairs; moveable furniture; "napping areas"
- **Décor:** students felt that the décor in the library was sterile or had an institutional feeling; common suggestions - more color, artwork, and natural light; add light to dark corners
- **Resources:** students requested more electrical outlets, mobile white boards
- **Study Rooms:** more group and individual study rooms; add spaces such as semi-private nooks in the library like in the ILC; add large monitors for collaboration

Services
- **Food:** healthier food choices

- **Technology:** more reliable printers; more tech support; computers with faster processing speeds; a large format printer; areas with multiple computer monitors
- **Resources:** more e-textbooks, more resources on multicultural and gender identity topics; a librarian who specializes in sensitive topics such as gender equity
- **Study Room Reservation System:** needs improvement; would like to see the schedule at each room; the ability to reserve a room online or while standing at the room itself; some suggested all the rooms should be reserve able; Students like the system used to reserve rooms at the ILC

Communication

Many participants expressed frustration with the lack of communication from the library regarding availability of services and resources. Suggested improvements included:

- **Logins Required:** having to log in more than once while looking for journal articles
- **What's New:** Sharing updates or news; a section on the web page or a computer slide show on the 1st floor
- **Improved Wayfinding:** Clearer signage, indications of which areas are quiet vs collaborative or for team work; "the second floor is confusing"; help desks on every floor

Other evidence of student need gives rise to additional considerations for potential changes to library facilities. Boise State students who participated in the ACHA-National College Health Assessment II during fall 2015, reported experiencing more than average stress (47.6%) or tremendous stress (14%) within the last 12 months. Students also reported difficulties getting enough sleep, feeling tired during the day and problems with sleepiness during daytime activities. In addition to negative health effects, stress and lack of sleep can result in lower grades, incompletes or dropped courses, or significant disruptions in thesis, dissertation, research or practicum work. (ACHA, 2015, p.5, 16)

Library Anxiety, documented in 1986 by Constance Mellon, could be unintentionally contributing to student stress. One focus group participant who experiences this succinctly described it, "when I walk into the Library, my heart rate goes up and I start to feel really, really anxious". This phenomenon impacts our most vulnerable students the hardest. Research has documented the unique impact of this anxiety on English language learners, members of the GLBTQ community, non-traditonal students and minority graduate students (see Antell 2004, Katopol 2012, Lee 2011, and Schaller 2011).

Recommendations

So, how can we transition Albertsons Library into a recruiting and retention show piece for Boise State University? The following recommendations are grouped into immediate, intermediate and long term recommendations.

Improvements – Within Library's Influence
- **Rearrange Furniture:** Mix of study carrels and large tables in same spaces sends mixed messages; clarify use of space by rearranging furniture - individual study carrels in quiet areas, large tables in group, active spaces (target date: Aug 2016)
- **Wayfinding:** Clarify wayfinding and purposes of spaces with color, graphics, floor banners and maps (target date: Aug 2016)
- **Create Nooks:** Identify areas that could become semi-private nooks and methods for developing them
- **Repurpose Room 402:** Large room with study carrels; underutilized
- **Writing Surfaces:** Add Whiteboards and writing surfaces
- **Study Room Reservation System:** Evaluate campus options for study room reservations; develop cost quote; identify options for implementation (target date: Aug 2016)
- **Resources:** Identify solutions within budget to increase resources on multicultural and gender identity topics; better promote librarians with assignments in gender equity, multicultural studies, etc.
- **Multiple Required Logins:** Investigate issues; work with OIT to resolve
- **Updates & News:** Identify options for more widely sharing updates and news

Improvements – Require Funding and/or Campus Partners

Custodial Service:
- **Cleanliness:** Work with Custodial Services to resolve problems with cleanliness

FO&M
- **Plug ins:** Increase availability of electrical outlets, ways to plug-in, emergency charging stations
- **HVAC:** Evaluate HVAC needs in study rooms; identify potential solutions for problem areas
- **Acoustics/Noise:** Map building acoustics; identify distracting noises vs white noise; identify potential solutions for problem areas; Resolve study room noise on Quiet floor (3rd)
- **Lighting:** Evaluate lighting at various times of the day; identify dark areas; identify potential solutions for problem areas

A&E
- **New Furniture:** Increase variety: mix comfortable furniture and study tables; long term and short-term "landing" furniture; Mobile furniture;

"reverse carrels" where person's back is protected rather than to the room; study carrels are too small to spread out, too close together which results in a lot of unused single use spaces; gradually replace with small tables that can be group into larger tables

- **1st Floor:** Library 1st floor is a "shoot", a gauntlet of service desks and people which dead ends with furniture at the central atrium; rearrange and remodel to a) enhance sense of welcome and comfort b) draw people in toward the windows; heavy traffic through computer area to elevators may not be optimal
- **3rd & 4th Floors:** take advantage windows and potential for natural light; "a window is a terrible thing to waste"; shift shelving toward the center of the room to maximize space near windows?
- **Roof top** – 2nd floor north: unused potential space, great view

University Communications & Marketing, Sign Shop:
- **New Branded Signage:** Replace outdated signage with new branded signage

Phase II - Visioning

As a part of Phase I of this project, the data gathered was used to develop and refine student personas that were then used in an initial visioning exercise with the Library Leadership Team and some members of the Albertsons Library Building Project Team.   In Phase II more work will be done in this area with a larger group of people to generate additional ideas and tease out themes for the future of Albertsons Library.   The Library will take on this task in FY2017.

Although a clear long term vison of the library has not yet emerged, the Team agrees that any long term plan for the library:

- Will need to carefully balance the following competing interests:
    Traditional library uses vs innovative use
    Student needs vs wants
    Quiet vs Noisy / Action Oriented space
    Group vs Individual Study
- Address/Resolve Building Modularity: Modularity of library building makes access to some locations challenging, stairs and elevator are rather invisible
- Maximize use of the Atrium: How can we take advantage of the Atrium?
- Define the relationship of the Library to the Green Belt. How can we capitalize on the library's proximity to the Green Belt? How can we "bring the outside in" to reflect the wonderful outdoor environment in which we live?

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Appendices

Needs Assessment of Undergraduate & Graduate Students for Albertsons Library, Evaluation Report (Focus Group Final Report)