

COLLOCATION AND COLLABORATION:

Perspectives from Front Line Service Staff

KATIE GUNTHER

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DAVID

Today, Ashley Van Dijk, Katie Gunther, and myself, David Kloepfer, will focus on the collocation of two service points at WAC Bennett library on SFU's Burnaby campus: the Research and Information Desk, and the circulation counter.

Ashley and Katie are Library Assistants with the Information & Instruction division. Ashley has her Library Technician diploma, Katie has her MLIS, and I am a member of Bennett's Access Services, or loans, division. All of us spend significant parts of our workday on this new collaborative space, and previously on the two separated service desks.

We'd like to share with you the positive impacts these renovations, and in particular our new collaborative workspace, have had on the delivery of library services and patron engagement, as well as some of the challenges that have occurred along the way, and how the library has worked to overcome them.

Outline

- *Where we were*
- *What happened*
- *Where we are*



SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
WAC BENNETT LIBRARY

Summary **KATIE**

Today our presentation will cover three different areas. We're going to look at where we were pre-renovations, what happened to make the change, and how these renovations have affected customer service at the library. But before we launch into the whats and hows, I'll briefly discuss *why* SFU chose to employ a collaborative workspace.

Why We Changed: KATIE

The topic of space collaboration is highly relevant today where the public perception of the library is shifting. As patrons now come to the library to utilize e-resources, group space, borrow equipment, and access physical materials and reference help less, the library's space needs to change in order to meet these new demands. And library staff should reexamine their relationship with patrons in order to best serve their changing expectations and needs.

Education, and the library as an institution, have changed significantly in the nearly 50 years since Bennett first opened its doors. Though Bennett's collection and students are evolving with the digital age, much of its physical space remained unflatteringly in the 1960s.

Through evaluation of our patrons wants and needs, gleaned in part by two LibQual surveys conducted in 2010 and 2013, library management discovered Bennett was falling below

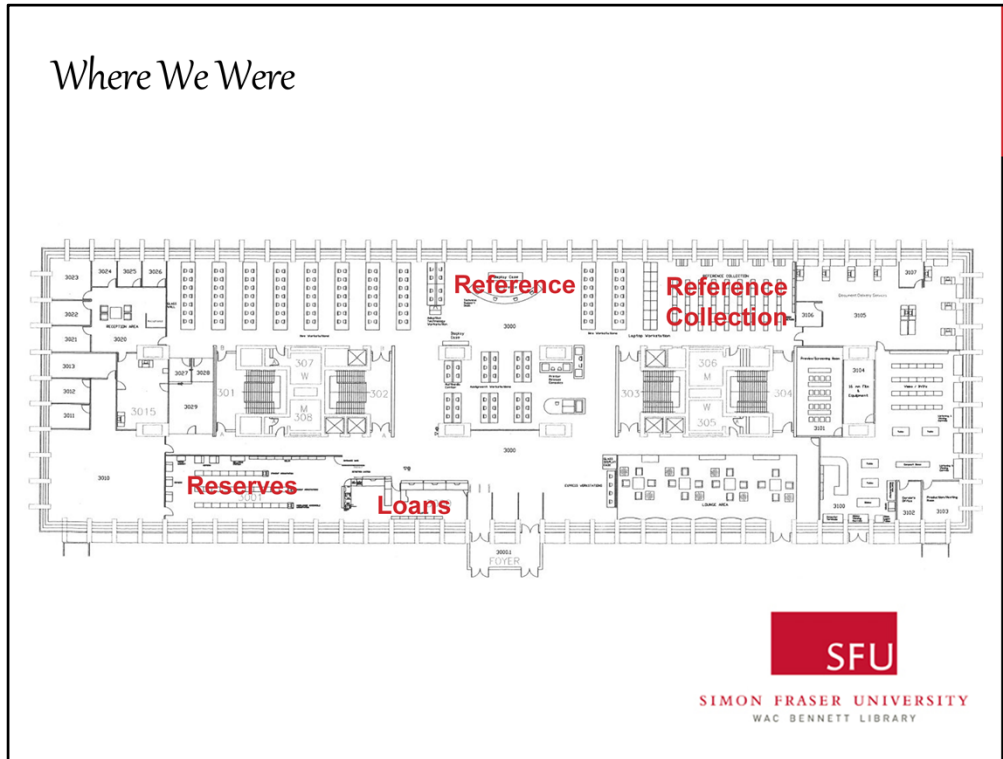
student's expectations of Library as Place, that is, as a community space for group learning and group study. The goal of the new renovations, and particularly the new combined service point, was to create a new, inviting place that "inspires study and learning." From a front line perspective, a new combined service desk as the focal point of our main floor would allow staff to better greet, direct, and inform patrons as they enter the library.

Introduction DAVID

And this is our W.A.C. Bennett Library. It was one of the original buildings constructed at Simon Fraser University's Burnaby campus in 1965. Designed by famed Brutalist architect and concrete fetishist Arthur Erickson, Bennett conjures a Cold War super-villain's secret lair, or perhaps the Capital Building for a totalitarian regime in some YA dystopia. But it is also the heart of SFU's main campus, a place for students to learn and create. In 2013, nearly 1.7 million visitors passed through the doors of Bennett Library.

As Katie mentioned, much of our mainfloor hadn't changed a lot in decades and really left something to be desired visually. And aesthetics aside, the dated layout was limiting our ability to serve patrons to the best of our abilities.

Where We Were



Previous Floor Plan: DAVID

And here is the interior floor plan of our old space. The beloved return chute is gone. :(

Points of discussion:

- Old desks
- Reserves
- Reference collection
- The chute
- Single way doors?
- Move to e-collections, decreasing our reserves & reference collections

Where Are We?



Workplace Interactions / Communication: ASHLEY

Bennett is quite a large library, with seven floors and many divisions & staff. It was quite common for staff not to know each other well, or to not even know each others names. As shown in the previous slide, our workstations were on opposite sides of the main floor. Neither do we share office space or a lunch room. As a result, our two divisions – Access Services and I & I - felt very separate, and there wasn't a feeling that we were all part of the same community. Without this familiarity or sense of community, approaching different divisions with requests for assistance, or sharing valuable common knowledge was unfortunately an *uncommon* experience.

This lack of communication fed into a lack of a cohesive sense of community. Having offices on different floors, and no common area for breaks means that we had little opportunity to get to know one another. As a newly hired staff member, it made any potential interactions awkward; bringing a student to the Loans counter and not be able to greet my colleague by name was embarrassing. Not knowing the policies or procedures of each division could be frustrating. Yes, they are available on the staff webpage but finding things with ease while answering a patron question, is sometimes easier said than done. Often it feels like while we are great at organizing the library's material, we are less than great at organizing our own material.

While I wouldn't say that Bennett was an unhappy, unproductive workplace prior to construction, there is a sense of unity that comes from knowing colleagues. I think that it

also makes coming to the library a welcoming experience for our patrons, having the front line staff greet each other by name and a smile. Since our desk is the first point of contact for students, having friendly staff may provide a good first impression. Having a good working relationship with your colleagues and peers can raise staff morale, making work more enjoyable.

I'd like to now share with you some areas of inter-divisional communication that were affected by this separation. Having service points at opposite ends of the main floor meant that was that it was necessary for each division to have their own phone number. While this might seem like an obvious practice within workplaces, it actually created more confusion for patrons. Students often aren't aware of the differences between the two divisions, nor should we expect them to. By having two phone numbers we were doing students a disservice since they weren't guaranteed to be calling the correct one. Plus there are some questions need a staff member from both divisions to answer, and we would be transferring the call back and forth. In a situation like that, there is always the possibility that the call gets lost in space or the person originally helping the patron is unavailable, helping another patron. When you're transferring phones calls without seeing or talking with your colleagues you can't be sure whether or not they've received the call. Sometimes the person would call one division back because their call wasn't picked up. Not being able to brief each other on the patron's issue or concern was another challenge we faced with having separate phone lines. This meant that caller had to explain their situation or question twice. Not exactly a user friendly system.

The lack of communication between the two divisions also prevented us from sharing information about problems that would come up. Yes, it happens. Usually the problems were with the printers, such as the time the entire printing system went down, but occasionally there would be a problem with a patron, and each division would need to know what was happening. It's important to feel comfortable with colleagues in other divisions to relay what's going on in the library, and if you don't even know your colleague's names it can be intimidating to walk up and start a conversation. Plus, we didn't have a good idea what happened day to day at each desk. Who knew that laptops were such a hot Loan item? Or that citation questions could be so complicated?

Having the service points and staff separate on the floor unfortunately created an unintentional barrier between our divisions.

Point at the photo and explain how it illustrates the divide between loans and reference.

- Where are the service points? Can be confusing to students
- No easy way to chat between staff > Isolated

DO NOT TALK ABOUT PILLARS

Where we
Were:
The 'old'
service points.



Patron Experience: DAVID

Prior to the renovation, the two divisions, Access Services (Loans) and Information & Instruction (formerly Reference) had desks on opposite sides of the library's main floor. Here you can see the old circulation and reference desks. When patrons first entered the library, no staff member was immediately visible. In the centre of the floor were the computer stations and structural pillars I pointed out a few slides ago. Because of these two features, the desks were invisible to each other. The layout was disjointed, and staff in the two divisions didn't generally know each other, in part because they didn't, and still don't, share a common office area.

How did this affect things? Without a good sight line, it was difficult for students to find the appropriate staff member. Patrons weren't immediately aware of where or to whom they should direct their questions, from research help to simple directional or informational queries.

Patrons would wait in line to ask a question, only to find they were waiting at the wrong desk. Sending them to the appropriate location was frequently more difficult than one would expect due to the awkward, separated layout--as silly as it sounds, it did frequently occur that patrons would wander aimlessly in search of the appropriate desk, sort of like extras from an episode of *The Walking Dead*, with no ultimate destination, wandering the stacks aimlessly for time eternal. In fact, some of them are still probably wandering the library right now.


In all seriousness, I'm sure many of us were once young students nervous to ask a question they thought might be stupid. Not knowing where to ask your question, or being shuffled off to another area before having it answered, did not make new students more likely to approach us for help. I can only assume this feeling is worse in students for whom English is not their first language. Equally frustrating for staff was having confused or annoyed patrons return to the desk with their problem or question still unresolved. Or, for example, if a librarian had stepped away from the desk, a patron might return wondering why I had sent them to an unstaffed area.

Those are just a few of the problems we personally encountered with the layout of our old two separate desks. Of course, many considerations regarding how space was being used in the library as a whole—such as infrastructure concerns and finding the most appropriate locations for various collections--resulted in the decision to renovate Bennett's main floor. Central to *this* discussion, however, is how students and patrons experience the library. Ashley will now describe how problems and concerns like the ones we just mentioned were considered in the planning for our new shared workspace.

Decisions & Communication – What's going on?

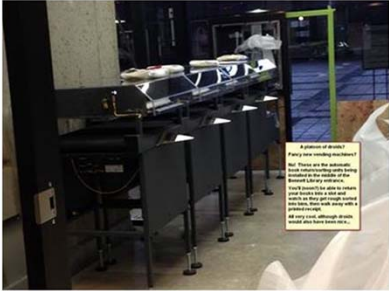
SFU Library
LIBRARY October 10, 2013

Bennett Library (Burnaby) Reno Photos Oct 2013 (3 photos)
The renos continue on at SFU Burnaby's Bennett Library on the main floor. One can see actual and impressive progress.



Like · Comment · Share

Wondering what that strange machine is that we're installing in the middle of our entrance? See the picture below to find out... — at Bennett Library (SFU).



A photograph of a machine that is being installed in the middle of the entrance of the Bennett Library. The machine is a long, dark-colored device, possibly a scanner or a specialized printer, with a series of rollers or trays along its length. The machine is positioned in the middle of the entrance, and a person is visible in the background, possibly operating the machine.

SFU Library – Reference Staff Blog

Integrated service area planning (2013)

Bennett Information Team and I & I team members working to plan for the new integrated service area and service model: Mark Bodnar, Heather De Forest, Jans McKenzie, Ashley Van Dijk, Jenna Walsh

Working with: Natalie Gick, Elaine Fairry, Donna McGee-Thompson, Loans (Scott Mackenzie, Chuk Goodin and others), Rebecca Dowson and other I & I and Information Team members.

Phone procedures: Moving & answering

Meeting with Info and Loans representatives, 25 April 2013

Notes from Information Services chat, April 24, 2013

Notes regarding the new Information Desk April 3, 2013

Notes from consultation space meeting (and service desk update), 25 March 2013

Notes from Information Services transition meeting, 6 March 2013.

Philosophy&ApproachMar6

KnownUnknownsMar6

Notes from Staging meeting, 28 February 2013.

Management / Staff Relationship: ASHLEY

Of course, the decision to begin a renovation project doesn't come from the front line staff. The Library Management started the project, and of course made the big decisions. They did ask for staff input, which was great. Our divisional supervisors extended invitations to staff to attend meetings about the project. These meetings typically went over the ever changing blue prints, placement of work stations, student spaces, and digital displays. Our input was asked, and suggestions were discussed in the group. There was definitely the feeling of 'this is your space too' and that our opinion was valued. There were in depth conversations about integral pieces of our services points about work stations, supplies, security, and of course where to put the staplers.

While these meetings generally had two or three people from each division attending with the supervisor, obviously not everyone could attend. Division heads worked at keeping everyone up to date through emails, blog posts, and divisional meetings. Any concerns raised this way would then be brought back to library management. Informal meetings happened as people had questions and asked around for answers. Having staff input throughout the process also meant that when students asked us about what was happening, we were able to provide them with answers. The construction and move into an interim space gave us something to talk to students about – at the desk, during orientations, and as part of instruction. Since management kept us up to date on what was happening, like which floor the scanners had been moved to or where the colour printer could be found, getting our students the information was easily done. And we were able to

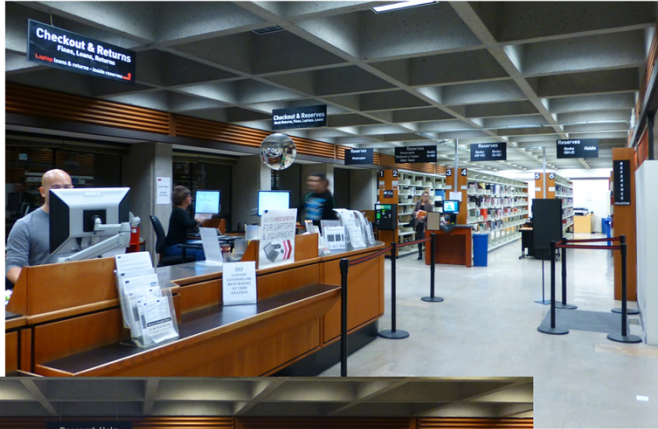
let them know which services and areas were still open.

Of course, with the renovations happening on the main floor of the library it was important to share updates with all students and staff, not just those who came into the building. The Social Media team actively documented the process and shared images on Facebook for our followers. Sometimes these were accompanied by explanations, such as the top right image here which is our new sorting machine and drop box. Providing the images really highlighted the changes, and people could watch the process and hopefully feel included and up to date.

The SFU twitter account was also used to share information. Twitter is a great way for students to ask questions about or comment on the progress, and our account is heavily used. During renovations, it was common to see tweets about patron experiences or concerns, like a conversation in mid December regarding the noise during exams and a tweet from November about how good the renovations were turning out. The Social Media team made a point of responding in a timely way, and sharing changes such as when the colour printers returned to the main floor on September 26 and when the digital signage was installed on January 24. This way we were able to both inform and interact with people regarding the changes.

Having management keep us on the floor up to date and included in conversations about what was happening made, I think, the process less stressful. A big change like this can cause unrest and unneeded stress for all people involved but especially those who are directly affected if they don't know what is going on. Our management worked hard to ensure the moves went as smoothly as possible. The renovation became something that was happening with us, rather than something that was happening to us.

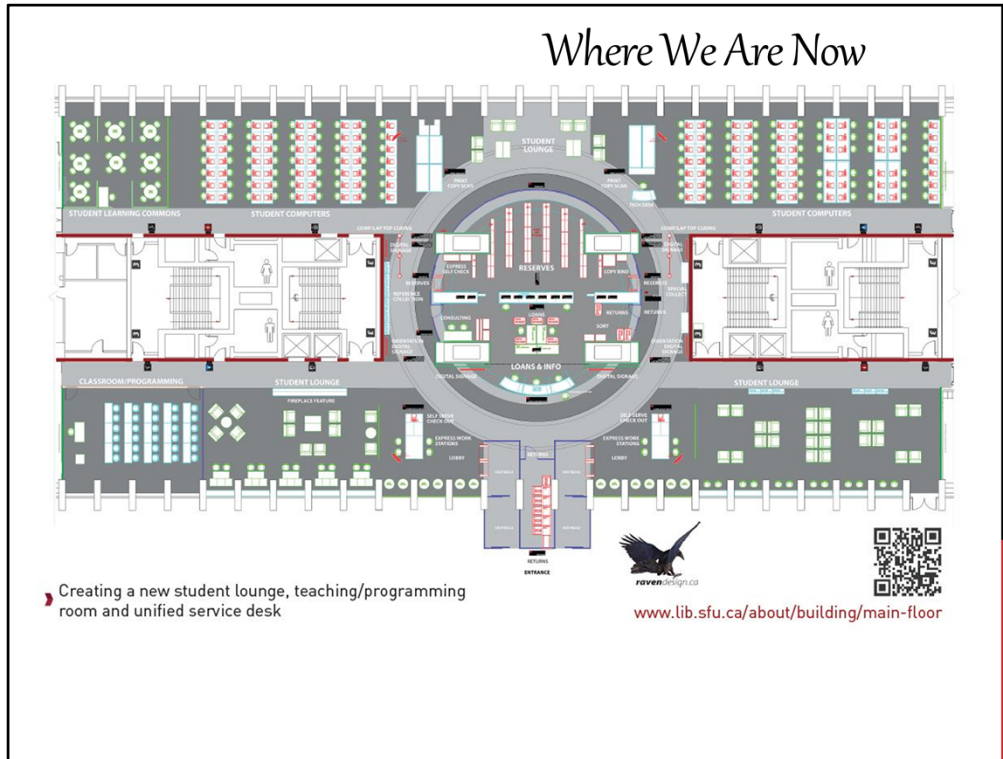
What
Happened:
Our Interim
Space



What Happened - Interim Space: KATIE

The reference staff moved to an interim space during renovations. The old loans desk was shared between the IT help desk, the reference staff, and the loans staff. There were multiple moves or "shuffles" while we tried to get the best set up we could in that interim space. However, while the shuffles were sometimes confusing for patrons, they also inspired conversation between staff and patrons and many of which didn't know we even had tech or research help were made aware of the fact. We were able to really highlight what was happening and how it would improve the services we offer.

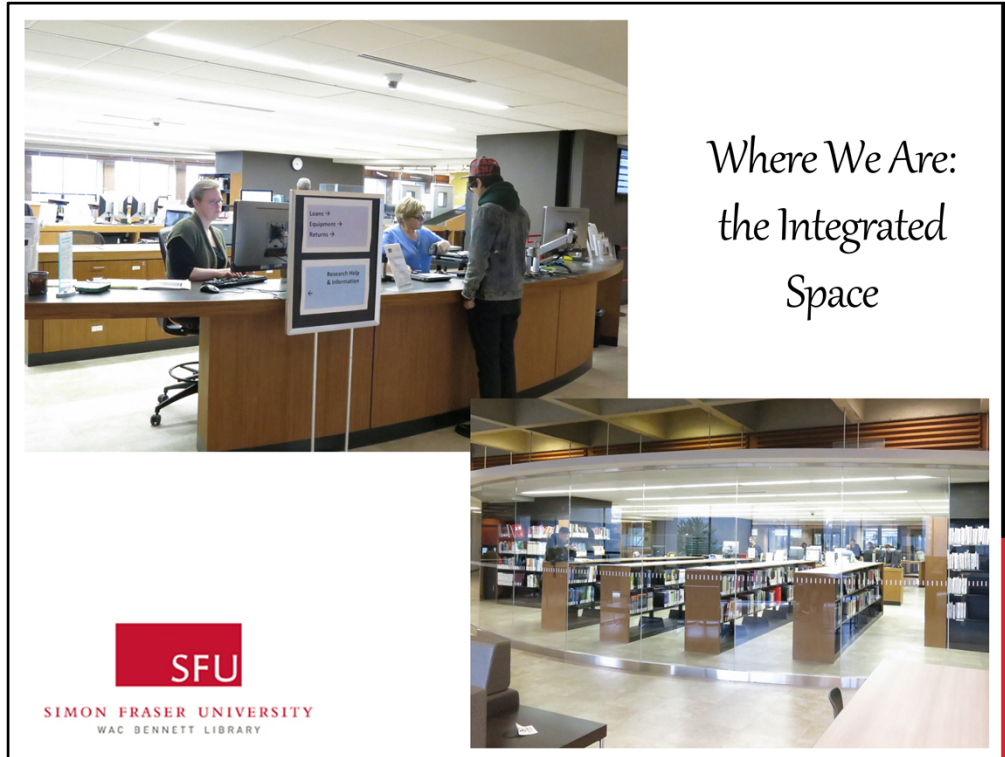
During this time, it was also a great testing ground for figuring out how we would work together in the new space and to troubleshoot together. A "counter committee" was established with staff from both loans and reference services to discuss any issues that arose and work on fixing them. Such collaborative efforts helped us learn how to work together to provide one great services as well as helped us break down some of the previous communication barriers. Overall, the shuffling required staff to be flexible, to interact and discuss to discover the best configuration, and finally we were able to bond over the awkwardness of the move.



Where we are now– space: KATIE

Highlight:

- Smaller reference collection that is closer to the desk
- Consultation Space
- Single desk
- More student lounge space with computer hookups
- added classroom space where the reserves were
- Reserves now behind the desk (still accessible) but easy for both Loans and Reference to direct patrons to



Workplace Interactions: DAVID

Here's a little bit of our new home, which we moved to in November of 2013.

A new classroom, as well as a new lounge and common study spaces were added to the main floor. The new area also includes reserves, patron holds, and an Information & Instruction consultation space, occupied by a second librarian or library assistant during the day.

The new service point has two areas that patrons can approach staff at for assistance, one facing the entrance, and another facing the reserves area behind the circulation and reference desks. Staff are now the first people students and other patrons encounter when they enter the library. We act kind of like library greeters, except we don't have to stand by the doors, or wear smocks.

Most relevant to our discussion is that both Access Services and Information & Instruction are represented in the new set up.

So, how has the renovation changed our workplace interactions? The physical proximity has eased communication between staff, as colleagues are now able to casually exchange information and partner in assisting patrons.

Working side by side with colleagues from another division has a lot of benefits, both for

staff and for our patrons. Through simply working side-by-side, staff from each division are obtaining cross-over policy knowledge, which is proving invaluable in assisting the consistently heavy patron traffic at the desk. Directing patrons to the appropriate staff member is much easier, and we feel patrons are better served in the new set up.

We are now able to quickly solve common questions that involve knowledge from both divisions.

For example, the other day a patron approached me at the desk requesting a journal article. It turned out they were mistaken about which journal the article appeared in. They stepped aside and were helped by Katie, who found the journal and article they needed, which we happened to have in paper. However, the journal in question was in our locked storage collection, and a circulation staff member, being me, was needed to retrieve it. This simple problem was handled much more quickly because of our new proximity at the desk.

While that patron thought they knew what they were looking for, they did require a little assistance to get it. On the other hand, many a patron has no idea what they're looking for from the get-go, and so are unsure of where to direct their inquiry. With us now side by side, discovering what the patron is looking for, and then telling them how to get it, is much more efficient. For example, if after a librarian discovers what a patron needs, but then finds out the book is checked out to another patron, or that the patron has issues with their card they need to resolve, a loans staff member is within arms reach to finish the transaction.

Beyond helping patrons, staff now have the opportunity to talk about important stuff like movie, book, and vacation recommendations, as well as sharing general campus knowledge, like who has the shortest line up for coffee. We have the opportunity to learn who has kids and who is taking classes, and what each other's background are. Being able to create and maintain good workplace relationships has begun to remove any un-intentional barriers that previously existed.

Communication: ASHLEY

Obviously working side by side is much better than being across the floor! Being next to your colleagues definitely makes communication smoother. Each division can ask questions about the other's policies or for clarification without having to leave the workstation, and phone calls aren't lost in the abyss. I believe that this is providing better service for patrons, as staff for each division are increasing more comfortable approaching each other for help.

EXAMPLE:

I had a patron one day come in looking for a journal article. No problem, right? It turned out that we didn't have an electronic version of the volume in question but we did have the print version. I explain to the patron how to find the older, bound copies of journals and he went on his way. A few minutes later he was back; he didn't have time to read it right then, and

wanted to know if he could borrow it? I didn't know; could he? Being next to the Loans staff, I was able to check right away and find out the answer quickly rather than wade through the staff FAQs or send the student to another counter and another line up. In this case the Loans staff member was able to help the student with the procedure of checking out a bound journal right away; a process that would have previously need the student to line up at both desks and explain the situation twice was handled smoother when the Loans staff member and I could talk about the transaction.

Katie's Example:

Another example happened just a few weeks ago. I was sitting next to a loans staff member when a student came up and asked if they could see our business librarian. The staff member was on the verge of giving his office number when I asked if the patron had an appointment. They did not. At SFU, the librarians do not hold open office hours and often are not in their offices. I gave the librarian a call, and he wasn't in his office. The student would need to make an appointment. The floor our librarian's offices are on has a bit of a confusing layout and, had the student been sent to it, it would have been possible that they'd have wandered for awhile without even finding the office or eventually found it empty. A simple fact like this that was common knowledge to the reference staff was something assumed by the loans—not unrightly so, but because we previously shared no common workspace or training—we didn't share this knowledge before.

BACK TO ASHLEY

The collocated service point makes answering questions like these much easier: staff from both divisions can work together to answer a patron inquiry in one visit to the desk, rather than sending the poor patron bouncing back and forth.

A workplace community is also developing. Sharing a service point means that we interact with our colleagues on a daily basis whereas before we rarely did. These interactions range from waving as we walk past or asking how each other's weekend was. Our presentation today is a result of working at a single service point, as Katie and myself have a different shift than David and didn't know each other before coming together to share our experiences with the renovations.

The New Patron Experience

- *Less emphasis on the patron to figure things out for themselves*
- *Ease of transferability of questions makes the experience less time consuming and frustrating*
- *New consultation space provides a quiet area to answer research questions*



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Where We Are - Patron Experience: KATIE

We now have a new, customized service point that was made with the modern-day patron in mind. For example, while the old model required patrons to come into the library and kind of figure things out for themselves such as where to find a staff member, which desk to go to, with our desk now in the front and center of the library and all services located at a single point there is less stress on the patron to discern who they should be speaking to. This works well, as a number of our patrons don't necessarily know what a librarian does or the difference between a librarian and a loans staff member. The two divisions now share a common phone line, and since we are physically present with each other, we can ask callers to wait or take their information so their call can be returned at a later time if staff members are already occupied. Again, patrons no longer have to try and figure out who to call – we do that for them 😊

Similarly, many students who did not previously know there was research help available to them at the library are now aware as the research help desk is no longer hidden but very visible and at a point where there is high traffic.

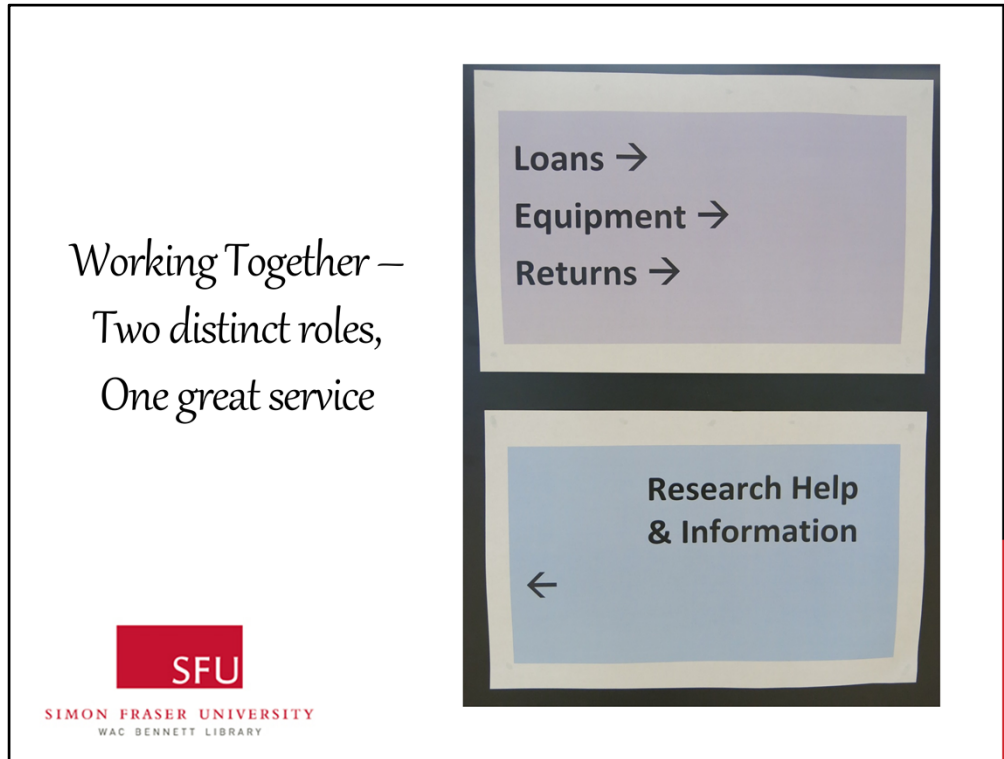
In this sense, our public face has changed as well. Before we were separate, providing distinct services, whereas now we work together to serve the patron regardless of their question. There is such an ease in communication and in transferring one patron to another staff member, that the patron doesn't have to worry to whom they are asking the question. For example, I recently had a patron who was looking for a book that couldn't be found on

the shelves; I looked it up and, yes, it should be in the library. However, loans staff would have to place a trace on it and alert the student when the book was found. Before, the student would have just been sent to loans, loans would have gone through a few clarifying questions, looked up the book again, and finally concluded the same thing. However, now that we were located beside each other I was able to turn to the loans staff member next to me and say 'this student needs a trace on this book. I did look it up, and it is saying it's "in the library" '. The entire interaction went more smoothly and efficiently.

We can also better help our patrons as, when we do transfer the patron, we can tell the other staff member what their question was - often in a more succinct manner and using "library lingo" that the staff member will understand but the patron did not know to communicate. Previously, a patron would have had to repeat the question at another desk, and the staff member would have had to repeat the follow up questions to try and get at what the patron really wanted.

Furthermore, there was always a problem with lineups at the loans desk. Often patrons would not know where to lineup or would wait in one long line up only to be sent to the reference desk. Now, being immediately beside each other, reference staff can approach individuals in the lineups and ask them if they have a question. More often than not, there is at least one patron in a long lineup that actually needs to see a librarian. Now they no longer have to wait in multiple lineups or wait at all only to be transferred elsewhere.

Finally, the reference desk was also designed with a consultation space in behind it. This space gives librarians a quieter area to help students. Without this space, it may have been intimidating for students to stand at the front of the library going over longer research questions, but now we have an area that is free of distractions and designed to facilitate these research interactions.



Workplace Unions / Divisions: KATIE

So we thought we would briefly just touch on how two divisions, with two distinct roles, and two different unions or contracts can work together without stepping on each other's toes.

Librarians are under APSA whereas library assistants and loans staff are CUPE members.

Initially, there was some unease from staff about job descriptions and job loss. However, for the most part, that is gone. As we've already highlighted, the two divisions are working well together to provide service for patrons. Overall we have learnt to transfer students easily, refer to each other's knowledge when necessary, and to stick within our job descriptions. The great benefit of the collocated space is not that we can do each other's jobs, but that we are working together to help students.



DAVID

Information & Instruction, Circulation, and Course Reserves are now the focal point of our main floor and an apparent first point of contact for all library visitors. Overall, the change has generally been an aesthetic and functional improvement over the previous layout.

We feel the new collaborative space provides a superior experience for our patrons. Newly shared knowledge of common problems and the more efficient redirection of patrons to the appropriate staff member have helped speed answering the many questions that approach our desk, and have made the answers we provide patrons far more complete.

Though there are still a few kinks to work out, we believe the new arrangement has created a sense of community between the two divisions that did not previously exist. We've better come to understand the roles of our colleagues, and the policies and practices of both divisions, all while remaining respectful of defined duties within a unionized working environment.

It is our hope that you leave this presentation with a renewed sense of optimism regarding inter-divisional collaboration, particularly if some of the pre-renovation problems we described are familiar to you and your libraries.

PHOTO RAMBLE: As a final note, above you can see just a few pictures of some of the other spaces that were renovated. At the top there is a lounge that is now located where the old

loans desk was, and at the bottom is another seating area where the old reference desk was. To the right of the lounge area here, more computer workstations have replaced the former reference collection. Collocating also helped increase student study space!

Questions, Comments, Experiences

How are the service points set up in your own library? Are they separated or combined, and is there a way you could increase collaboration between divisions?



ASHLEY

It's been our intention to share with you what has been happening at our library. However this is only one model of an integrated space and as we worked on this presentation we started to wonder about other layouts or methods that are being tried out. We're curious about patron experiences and workplace interactions in libraries with different models.

We'd like to invite you to chat with your neighbours about innovative service points you've worked with or seen; how did they facilitate interaction, or what barriers did they create? How does the library's physical space affect customer service, staff relationships, or your patrons?

After five minutes or until room quiets

As a closing, we invite questions and comments regarding what we've talked about today, and are interested in hearing other's experiences with an integrated workspace.

Thank you, and have a great rest of Conference.