BACKGROUND, SCOPE AND PURPOSE

The “small group discussion” on students and library space was held on January 31, 2008, from 1-2 PM, in Doe 303. Its purpose was to provide an open forum for library staff to share and discuss ideas that might inform the New Directions process, broadly, and the renovation of Moffitt Library, specifically. Its purpose was not, per se, to disseminate information or respond to questions about the Moffitt renovation, since events like the January Early Bird will continue to serve this purpose as progress warrants.

Participants were asked to consider the following questions:

What do (or will) students need from library spaces that we are not currently providing? How do we better adapt and design our libraries to meet these needs?

Though the discussion was framed to include library spaces broadly, a significant proportion of the comments people came to share were, in fact, focused on Moffitt.

TURNOUT

With 25 people in attendance, interest in this topic seems high. Doe/Moffitt staff made up 64% of the participants, with representation from Instructional Services, Circulation, and Research & Collections. Three participants, or 12% of the total, were from subject specialty libraries, and one from the Affiliated Libraries. Representatives of Library Administration, Library Development, and Library Graphics, collectively, made up another 20% of the group.

FORMAT

While the size of the turnout strained the limits of the “small group” description and precluded in-depth exploration of individual comments, it lent itself well to brainstorming—a tradeoff that, on the positive side, allowed for gathering a greater number of comments in a short period of time. Several people also sent comments to the facilitator by email; these, too, have been folded into the summary below.
SUMMARY

As a point of departure, the facilitator outlined some of the “givens” of the Moffitt renovation, and suggested that subsequent discussion build on, rather than repeat, ideas that have already been established as part of the research and planning for that project. For those who were unable to attend, givens outlined during the session are repeated here:

- Moffitt will be designed to accommodate the increasingly social nature of learning. Specific plans, in keeping with this principle, include:
  - More group spaces, equipped with technologies to support collaborative learning
  - More comfortable, informal, and inviting spaces and furnishings
  - Expansion of the FSM Café, and an increase in space that’s food and drink friendly

- Group needs will not be accommodated at the expense of individual needs. Individual learners also need space to reflect, read, and write in quiet, and continue to expect libraries to provide these spaces. Ultimately, the new design will incorporate a greater diversity of spaces to accommodate a wider range of learning needs.

- Moffitt will be designed to reflect the view that library users are not just information consumers, empty vessels waiting to be filled by the knowledge of “the experts,” but learners engaged in the construction of their own understanding. Learning is not a passive activity. This idea will be expressed, for example, in spaces that are:
  - Equipped to support “creation” as well as “consumption.” In concrete terms, this implies expanded support for multimedia production and use. It also implies eliminating unproductive compartmentalization—between library database use and productivity applications, for example.
  - Flexible. Library users should have some control over the physical environment, with the ability to adapt a space as fits the purpose at hand.
  - Not “authority centered.” In the case of classroom designs, for example, this implies configurations that are more flexible than the fixed, forward-facing rows that direct all attention to the “sage on the stage.”

Comments from attendees are grouped below into the following categories:
1) “Placemaking” 2) Flexible, Multipurpose Design 3) “Sensemaking” 4) Promoting Collection Use 5) Decentralization 6) Integration 7) Special User Populations 8) Exhibit Space 9) Green Design 10) Planning Advice. The arrangement of themes is not in any order of priority, and no judgment has been made as to the relative merit of comments, the feasibility of ideas, etc.
1. “Placemaking”

Participants seemed engaged by the idea of the Moffitt renovation project as an opportunity for the Library to create a more vibrant, vital sense of place within the campus community. Walljasper’s The Great Neighborhood Book (2007), and more specifically, his “Eleven Principles of Placemaking,” got an enthusiastic endorsement from one staff member who noted the applicability of the author’s advice to library facilities projects: “Remember you’re creating a place, not a design,” and acknowledge that “the community is the expert,” were two of Jasper’s principles that got special mention. Others advised attention to creating a more welcoming atmosphere on the entry level of Moffitt, noting that “what people see when they first come in” plays an important role in establishing a sense of place.

More than one person related successful “placemaking” to users’ identification with and sense of ownership in a place, and advocated a view of the libraries as the campus “front porch” or “living room.” Several people proposed strategies for either broadening the sense of ownership in Moffitt or engendering the good will and support of the larger campus community. One (via email) suggested a student-maintained rooftop/outdoor garden project. Two others were in favor of providing space that could be booked for special events or “leased” to “worthy campus learning and teaching initiatives.”

2. Flexible, Multipurpose Design

A number of people expressed interest in “flexibility” as an overarching goal of new library space design, with individual comments aimed at distinct facets of the concept.

Calling for “broader” thinking about our notion of “teaching space,” one participant noted the current inflexibility of library classrooms, which are off-limits to students and unused during the cyclic downturns in instructional demand. With the need to secure classroom equipment the chief obstacle to flexibility, several advocated replacing desktop computers with laptops—which can be locked away after a class, freeing the space for other uses. Current classroom designs are also inflexible in their accommodation of different class sizes, someone noted, a problem that might be remedied by “mobile walls,” curtains, or accordion doors that make adjustments in size and level of privacy possible. Still another person suggested that developing alternatives to face-to-face instruction (online tutorials, podcasts, video) would reduce the need for physical space dedicated to instruction.

One staff member recommended consideration of experimental corporate workspace models that incorporate flexibility and personalization by providing individuals with the materials (like mobile “pods” and “curtains”) to create their own space, both indoors and out. Such models, she noted, required expanding our conception of “space” beyond four-walls-and-a-roof.
Others suggested that a more flexible approach to design would take into account the time-related aspect of space use, and that we should create space for “quick stop” convenience needs as well as for longer-term study, which we already accommodate relatively well. Ideas for amenities in these quick stop locations included laptop recharging stations, wireless printing (when the paper is “due in 5 minutes”), “standing” terminals dedicated to checking email, lockers for personal belongings, and good old-fashioned water fountains and public telephones.

One participant urged a vision that encompasses more than just students’ immediate needs for study, research and computing, noting that performance and exhibition spaces also promote learning, and that “donor stroking” showcase spaces support fund-raising—which serves students in the long term. Ideally, we should aim for “layered” spaces that accommodate multipurpose use: a study space that can be transformed, as needed and with minimal effort, into a performance space, for example.

Alluding to the expanding role of new media in teaching and learning, one person stressed the need for spaces wired and outfitted to enable student use of their own portable media. In a similar vein, another staff member (via email) emphasized “infrastructure, infrastructure, infrastructure” to be the core requirement of flexible learning space. “The most important thing we can do,” this staff member continued, “is construct a robust, attractive, and modular space with plenty of reliable power outlets, fast hi-bandwidth wiring, and excellent lighting (both natural and artificial). In the future, teaching and learning are going to take place in ways we cannot even imagine. It’s not about buying laptops and software right now; it’s about providing a state of the art infrastructure that can accommodate those technologies 10, 20, 30 years down the road.”

3. “SENSEMAKING”

One staff member suggested the concept of “sensemaking” as a useful way of referring to the array of strategies employed in space design that helps users make sense of the environment. Several staff comments might be associated with this concept. One person emphasized the importance of paying attention to the intuitive “flow” of library spaces, suggesting that users shouldn’t have to puzzle, as many do now, over which of a number of service points will provide an answer to a particular question. Another had more specific advice to improve sensemaking in Moffitt, in particular: Relocate the restrooms on the 4th and 5th floors, which currently block views of the collection and floor plan and inhibit users’ ability to orient themselves. Still another proposed we apply the concept of sensemaking to rethinking the traditional arrangement of our print collections, emphasizing the need to make the collections more visible and intuitively navigable than they are now. Finally, the same person who offered the concept of sensemaking suggested it be extended to consideration of the library’s virtual, as well as physical, space: Noting that a high proportion of users position themselves in front of a library computer screen within minutes of entering the building, he advocated exploring ways
in which desktop real estate, for example, might be better used to augment the role of traditional signage.

4. **PROMOTING COLLECTION USE**

Several people expressed thoughts about the relationship between space and collection use. As noted above, some staff implied that the obscuring of collections on the 4th and 5th floors of Moffitt, and the nature of the stack arrangement, had a negative impact on discovery. The same was suggested about the current placement of Moffitt’s print reference collection, with more than one participant asserting that ready accessibility is an important factor in overcoming users’ increasing reluctance to use print. Others noted the importance of prominently placed new books displays (featuring the books themselves, not just the dust jacket) in connecting users to the collection.

Beyond the issue of physical space but relevant to the larger project of reconceptualizing Moffitt’s programs and services, one participant also noted the importance of revisiting policies, such as lending periods, that have an impact on collection use.

Email comments from another staff person focused on the potential of the Moffitt renovation to simultaneously expand accessibility of our media collections while improving the facility as a learning space. He suggested UCLA and the Museum of Television and Radio in Beverly Hills as models where film is piped to remote viewing stations, and promoted the expansion of viewing spaces throughout the building, most notably to classrooms and “screening rooms” of various sizes.

5. **DECENTRALIZATION**

Echoing recommendations in the 2007 *Gardner Stacks Survey Task Force Report*, one attendee observed that the “single service point” model neither serves users where they are, nor meets their expectations of convenience. Decentralization, he argued, is a solution. Examples of decentralization might include providing a reference presence in the stacks—using a combination of kiosk, rovers, and dedicated phone-texting question lines (the latter suggested by another staff member via email)—and self-checkout options.

6. **INTEGRATION**

Alluding to the growth in popularity of the “information commons” model and pointing to Georgia Tech Library’s IC as an example, one participant suggested investigation of more “integrated” service models as part of the project of rethinking Moffitt Library. Such models collocate services, staff, and resources that are physically separate in the traditional library—e.g., e.g., the separation of reference assistance from technical support—though their specific
features vary considerably from institution to institution (the Georgia Tech IC includes a space for developing and polishing presentations). Regardless of the model, this person argued, visible service points where users can get face-to-face assistance are still a necessity.

7. Special User Populations

One staff member observed in an email the need for better accommodation of student parents, noting the frequency of children accompanying parents to the library “outside of normal childcare center hours.” Minimal accommodations should include changing stations in restrooms. On the model of Oregon State University (Corvalis)—featured in a December 2007 article in Library Journal—the Library might also consider, according to this staff person, “a short-term childcare space to student parents using the library.”

8. Exhibit Space

At least two people expressed an interest in seeing Moffitt expand exhibits, and several had suggestions about the nature of the exhibits themselves. One thought that using exhibit space to showcase undergraduate student work was paramount, pointing to the Library Prize exhibit in Doe as an example. Another suggested in an email that the library incorporate displays created by students and GSIs. Perhaps as part of a more conscious effort to connect Moffitt to the life of the larger community, another recommended mounting flat screen monitors to advertise lectures and other campus events, and to display them prominently in places where students congregate. Finally, suggesting we adopt more creative, innovative approaches to the design of exhibit spaces themselves, one person imagined the possibility of built-in, donor-funded exhibits in a wall separating the FSM Café from the rest of Moffitt, following the path of stairways, in elevators, and “transecting multiple levels of the building.”

9. Green Design

One participant, in an email, advocated sustainability as both a design and educational issue—suggesting that Moffitt not only incorporate green energy systems that capitalize on its abundant natural light, but also highlight these features to educate visitors about “the importance of being green.”

10. Planning Advice

Drawing on experience and historical perspective, several attendees ventured advice on the Moffitt renovation planning process itself, as follows:
1. Include the user community in planning; the foundation of “placemaking” is acknowledging and acting upon the principle, noted earlier, that “the community is the expert.”

2. “Don’t reinvent the wheel”: Tap the collective expertise of librarians on staff who have experience both with facilities projects, and with recent classroom redesigns, e.g., Moffitt 550C.

3. Consider the broader context of campus space needs, and provide amenities that meet those needs (e.g., secured carrels for graduate students who lack adequate office space).

4. Before committing to new spaces, services and resources, consider all the associated costs (e.g., staffing, maintenance, technology upgrades)—and implement only what we can sustain.

5. During the construction phase, maintain a blog to keep users updated on progress, changes in building and collections access, etc.

6. Recognize another foundational principle of “placemaking”—that “you’re never finished.” The notion of “permanent beta,” in other words, applies to physical space, too.

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