

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Library: Joint-Use Library as an Urban Educational Corridor

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Abstract

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Library is an unique and innovative joint-use library serving the public of the city of San José, California and the students and faculty of San José State University. It is the largest, all-new library west of the Mississippi, with nine public floors and a collection of over 1.5 million books, journals, and other materials. This article describes how this initiative began, how the planning process proceeded over the course of five years, and how participative planning contributed to the development of vision, mission, services, and collection configuration. Under the theme of lifelong learning, it shows how merging library services, collections, staff, and users contribute to the learning trajectory of both public library and academic library patrons. The library opens a door to the campus for parents of future students and secondary students wondering about college. It provides service learning opportunities for college students and faculty. The paper further describes partnership efforts in assessment, nonmerged aspects of the library, and questions for further study.

On August 1, 2003, the Martin Luther King, Jr. Library opened to great fanfare and an estimated 12,000 visitors after five years of intense planning. The one millionth visitor arrived in late November 2003, fewer than four months later. Located at the northwest corner of San José State University (SJSU) campus in downtown San José, the eight-story building is a collaboration of SJSU and San José Public Library (SJPL) and is the largest all-new library west of the Mississippi, with 475,000 square feet of learning space. For the first time in over 22 years, the whole SJSU library research collection is together in one building. This library is about collections and much more: It features four computer classrooms for information competence activities, meeting rooms for library programming and large group events, 39 small group study rooms, an Education Resource Center, 400 public-access computers, the quiet-study designated Grand Reading Room on the eighth floor with a sweeping view of the Santa Clara valley and the campus, personal laptop connections throughout the building, student laptop check-out for in-building use, and the Adaptive Technology Center for students with disabilities. The city of San José is financially committed to public art, and the building is home to an integrated collection of 33 artworks by artist Mel Chin. See <http://www.sjlibrary.org/mlkart/index.htm> for details. Other features include a café,

special collections such as the California Room and Beethoven Center, and collections and service points for specific populations such as teens, children, and users of the extensive international collection of newspapers, periodicals, books, and AV material in 50-plus languages. Each library, SJSU and SJPL, maintains a separate budget and contributes to the whole. Library staff and materials, while working or residing in the King Library, are under the purview of either SJSU or SJPL. Academic librarians remain within the California State University faculty structure. The university owns the SJSU collection.

The King Library is an unique gateway to education and a grand experiment in lifelong learning. Students, faculty, and community members mingle in the merged service areas, engage with the collections, and work side-by-side at clusters of computer workstations. The time is ripe for change in university libraries, and this experiment aptly reflects the commitment to community engagement evidenced by urban campuses.

Changing Academic Libraries

Metropolitan university libraries are in the process of redefining their roles in education and life-long learning. Transformation is universal, precipitated by the widespread availability of web-based technology, by cultural change, and by the economic realities of delivering services and resources to students on campus and at a distance (see Craig Hartman's [2000] provocative paper on evolving roles of libraries). In 2001, Scott Carlson's article "The Deserted Library" in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* described declining numbers of student visits to academic libraries, materials circulated, and queries at reference desks. Carlson postulated that students are finding new spaces to study and search for information—namely dorm rooms, coffee shops, the Internet, and bookstores. Other factors emptying libraries include greater reliance on distance education and the increasing level of noneducational commitment in students' lives, including occupational and family responsibilities. However, since the King Library opened, August to October 2003 circulation of materials to SJSU students and faculty has increased by 177.05 percent compared to the same period in 2002. This library is neither deserted nor unused!

Academic libraries are now envisioning their primary role shifting from being repositories of print knowledge to learning centers and gateways to scholarly electronic literature. This paper explores the vision under which King Library was planned and how it is serving as a lifelong learning center for San José and San José State University.

Literature Review

While the King Library is the most ambitious joint-use library in operation, it shares many of the qualities of other such projects. Economic considerations often head the list of driving forces behind merging public, school, community college, and university

libraries. Shrinking public budgets and the misconception that all information resources are available electronically produce reluctance to finance new traditional library building projects that serve single populations. The power of merging is well described in the several articles in the special issue of *Resource Sharing and Information Networks* (2001). The literature of joint use libraries for multiple communities is growing (Anderson 1999; Braverman 2001; Riggs 2000; Sager 1999; and Schwanz 2000). In particular, early descriptions of administrative vision for the new King Library are available (Breivik 2000; Flagg 1999; and Rockman 1999). Because merged libraries are a relatively new phenomenon, missing from the literature is a description of best practices, standards development, and evaluation of joint use. The King Library will contribute profoundly to this area as assessment studies are published. A growing commentary on the library as a learning center is especially relevant to the King Library (Baker 2000; Kuh 2003; Snavely 2000; and Sutton 2000).

The King Library Learning Environment: Planning Considerations

Although the original driving forces behind this joint-use library centered on the economic advantages of facility sharing and the optimum use of downtown space, once the two libraries became fully involved in the planning, other goals emerged as equal factors. These included the development of a lifelong learning environment for students of all ages, the sharing of staff expertise across a spectrum of librarianship, and the complementarity of two types of library collections. Also, speaking strictly financially, the city of San José was able to contribute to building funding at a higher level than could the California State University system.

With these goals and conditions in mind, considerations during the planning phase (from 1998 to 2003) included:

- Services: merged, nonmerged, and new
- Collections: merged and nonmerged
- Staffing
- Synergy

The planning process was broadly-based among library staff including consultation with stakeholders such as faculty, students, community, and governing boards. This distributed planning helped develop collegial relations and buy-in among staff of the two libraries and wide cross-fertilization of ideas, both practical and speculative. End results include:

- Merged print reference collection
- Merged periodicals collection
- Separate circulating collections (academic, public, browsing) on different floors
- Merged service points for reference, periodicals, information, circulation
- Separate service areas for children, teens, popular international language collections, university student laptops

This schema results in protected areas for certain groups and merged areas for general usage. These general spaces range from small group rooms where users meet to develop projects and study collaboratively, open floors designated quiet or silent where individuals engage with materials in the collection, whether they be books, government publications, periodicals, or scholarly Internet-based resources, to computer labs where academic classes learn about using and evaluating library resources for their subject areas as well as public classes on basic Internet use in several languages. The merged service points are jointly staffed so that library personnel are rapidly learning how to work with new types of users.

Merging provides synergistic opportunities in the general spaces and service areas. Secondary students observe their college counterparts and imagine themselves in the academic setting. University students with children who are beginning readers and with grandparents who read newspapers in the language of their country of origin visit the library as a family. Collections from each institution complement each other in comprehension level, language (both in level and origin), media, and purpose, from recreation to scholarly. In particular, the proximity of the curriculum collection of state texts for elementary schools (academic) and children's collection (public) provides more than the sum of parts for SJSU students in education and library science programs and for local teachers and librarians.

The King Library is a self-contained education corridor with gateways to the community and the campus; traffic flows in both directions. The ground floor is designed as a grand foyer with gateways from a downtown San José street and onto the campus. It is San José State University welcoming in the community, and San José beckoning SJSU students and faculty.

Before the Merge

Three entities comprised the partnership that developed the original 1997 library merge concept for San José: San José State University, San José Public Library, and the San José Redevelopment Agency. The idea came out of the offices of the SJSU President, the San José Mayor, and the Head of the San José Redevelopment Agency. Following is a description of the City and SJSU prior to actual merging and occupation of the King Library.

San José State University Library serves the students, faculty, and staff of SJSU and is responsive to the needs of the academic curriculum, with a 2002–2003 operating figure of \$7.8 million. Librarians work in collaboration with classroom faculty to provide a learning environment with appropriate scholarly materials. Present total enrollment is 30,350, with 22,152 undergraduate students, 8,198 graduate students, and 1,598 credential candidates. This is an urban commuter campus with only 1,926 students in residence. Students of color constitute more than 59 percent of the student population, giving SJSU a strongly diverse environment. SJSU is the oldest and one of the largest universities in the 23-campus California State University (CSU) system. Its mission is “to enrich the lives of its students, to transmit knowledge to its students along with the necessary skills for

applying it in the service of our society, and to expand the base of knowledge through research and scholarship. (http://www.sjsu.edu/about_sjsu/mission/index.jsp)”

San José Public Library is the largest public library between San Francisco and Los Angeles, with a budget of \$24.5 million. A multiethnic and culturally diverse community with a population of 917,971 is served by the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Main Library, 17 branches, and a bookmobile. Its mission states that “San José Public Library enriches lives by fostering lifelong learning and by ensuring that every member of the community has access to a vast array of ideas and information.”

The Merge Idea: Challenges

Early on, library staff challenged the merge concept because it was an untested idea resulting from a top-down decision. Objections also arose from a sector of the university faculty, centering on collection integrity and retention of the librarian liaison role wherein each academic department has an assigned librarian specifically to assist majors and faculty, to manage relevant collections, and to offer instruction in the use of scholarly resources and services. One typical issue was the second floor Reference Desk—or desks? The question arose whether there should be one reference desk or two, possibly not in line of sight of each other. SJSU students and faculty would use one desk and the general public would use another. Some felt that this would ensure the most appropriate service for library user groups. Others thought that users would not know how to sort themselves out and choose the inappropriate reference desk. Staffing and other economies would be sacrificed in the two-desk model. This skirmish illustrates several general conflicting principles that needed to be worked out at the outset: the idea of seamless service independent of user identity, the preferable degree of merge, differences in perception of library staff’s ability to work with the users they were used to, and the idea that merging would save operating costs in staffing service points.

Although it is true that public and academic libraries have differing missions based on the needs and objectives of the main clientele they serve, in the planning process it had to be decided how mutually exclusive these missions were. In aid of approaching an answer to that question and coming to a decision on the reference desk(s), a project was implemented whereby reference librarians shadowed each other. Also, research was conducted on the types of questions fielded at each desk (Childers 1999), and a consultant was hired to facilitate a small group of reference people from each library to come to a recommendation of one desk or two. In the end, shadowing showed that reference librarians had more similarities than differences, the Childers research demonstrated that reference questions overlapped on a continuum, and the recommendation was for one reference desk.

As the planning project progressed, this model was repeated, most notably in the merging of the two very different library websites into one. Research based on user behavior, consultants as facilitators, and small working groups of library staff from each institution were used to ease sticky decision-making.

From the onset, community involvement was sought to inform planning decisions and to increase constituent buy-in. Formal groups included the faculty senate, the two library boards, an SJSU Advisory Committee, a Mayor's Advisory Committee, and a Joint Library Advisory Committee. Public hearings and community focus groups were held on campus and at city locations to hear concerns and garner support.

Operating Agreement

In 1998, San José City, the SJ Redevelopment Agency, and SJSU entered into an operating agreement for construction of the library (see MLK Timeline at <http://www.sjlibrary.org/about/history/timeline.htm>). Among the issues addressed are:

- Creation of the partnership
- Ownership of the building and land
- Library name
- Governance
- Library operations
- Collections
- Library staff
- Withdrawal rights

Merge Planning Organization

With a growing level of formal support from the SJSU faculty and the community, planning for services and operations began in earnest. One core team of top administrators and six joint teams were formed, each cochaired by one librarian from each organization. The teams were: Administrative Services, Organizational Design and Development, Collection Management and Technical Services, Policies and Procedures, and User Services. These teams were charged with developing service and operating configurations and promulgating policy recommendations. Team co-chairs had formal training in project management. Two professional project managers were hired. This phase marked a much wider level of library staff participation with resulting broader understanding of service delivery and operations in the two separate buildings. Over 100 policy recommendations were brought to the Core Team for review in open hearings. Policy writing began.

Merged services and operations now include:

- Reference
- Periodicals
- Circulation
- Acquisitions and Technical Services

Separate services include:

- Children's
- Popular language collection (materials in 50+ languages)
- Special Collections—e.g. California Room, Steinbeck Center
- Teen Center

- Literacy services
- Information Competence Program (SJSU)
- Adult Services (SJPL)

Some collections such as reference and periodicals are merged; the circulating collections of each library are separate. All users can check out any circulating item regardless of which library owns the material. Different loan periods apply to designated user groups and materials can be recalled under specific circumstances.

Mid-Project Challenges

By mid-project, each library had a critical mass of staff willing or eager to consider working under a new model. However, the need for extra resources during this intensive phase of planning provided challenges. SJSU Library was almost adequately staffed with librarians, but inadequately staffed with classified staff. At least 60 percent of all SJSU library staff was involved in planning, and library administration set high-level priorities for operations during the following two years of planning before move-in. At the same time, a group of SJSU library staff formed to develop academic priorities for the new library and created a statement affirming the scholarly qualities, services, and approaches that were valued by the university community. They included information competence, library liaison role to academic departments, continued employment of student assistants, and collection oriented to the curriculum. This group embodied the desire to retain an academic identity and service-orientation while merging. The organization and its individuals were challenged to hold both the academic priorities and merge ideas at the same time.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Planning Process: Lessons Learned

Initial workshops in project management for team leaders and the hiring of professional project managers were two critical elements of planning success. Workload adjustments were invaluable for staff heavily involved in teamwork. Increasingly wider participation during planning improved library staff contact with future colleagues and resulted in growing levels of acceptance. Enough library staff were interested in developing the new working model and were dedicated to making that model operate well. The knowledge that this library was going to function as the first of its kind generated excitement, commitment, and anxiety. Planning team success seemed to be defined as promulgation of appropriate policy recommendations. Other measures of success might have been degree of consensus building and increase in congeniality and trust amongst team members. As a matter of fact, an investment in consensus-building training would have been as valuable as were the project management workshops.

The Vision of Lifelong Learning

“The Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library, Silicon Valley’s unique collaboration between San José State University and the City of San José, provides excellence in information resources and services for a lifetime of learning.” So states the King Library mission statement. Its vision is to:

- Enrich lives by fostering lifelong learning and ensuring that every member of the community has access to a vast array of ideas and information.
- Provide students, instructors, and the community access to the information they need for educational and personal growth throughout their lives.
- Support the San José State University educational mission in expanding the base of knowledge through research and scholarship.

King Library provides opportunities for increased campus-community engagement, enhanced interaction between learners of all ages, and the testing of college attendance by secondary school students. As a physical manifestation of core values and activities of academic life, the King Library welcomes younger students to use materials and services designed for them while inviting them to explore the more sophisticated collections and opportunities of a university library. The library as not only a gateway to knowledge, but also a safe haven on a large metropolitan campus, is documented for students of color (Kuh 2003), and as such is particularly relevant for the San José metropolitan area. And when potential students make decisions about college attendance, high on the list of most helpful resources is the campus visit (Matthay 1989). Parental advice is also of strong importance (Thompson 2003). King Library naturally provides campus visit time and allows parents to become familiar with the university and its programs. Recruitment of students is an underlying concept for library service provision. On the other end of the continuum, graduates of SJSU will continue to use the professional, scholarly, and popular collections to enhance their work and personal lives.

Assessment

Broad-level benchmarking studies by consultant Tom Childers on library facilities and services were conducted in 2002 and 2003 while the libraries were in two separate buildings; these will be repeated two more times for the new building. These benchmarking studies consist of exit surveys of a variety of library users, including questions on how well and quickly users found what they were seeking, helpfulness and courtesy of library staff, knowledge of key library services, and the effectiveness of the building in providing a welcoming, comfortable, and scholarly space in which to conduct library work. In addition, a wide-ranging qualitative and quantitative study on staff perceptions of the benefits and problems of the merged environment and the planning process is underway by SJSU faculty and librarian researchers. Lastly, academic librarians are benchmarking areas of importance in retaining the university identity within the joint-use facility. These include demonstrated manifestations of an environment conducive to learning and engagement with library materials and fellow students (e.g., appropriate noise levels, adequate space for group and individual study);

continuation of information competence activities at service points on the library Web site and in learning labs; and time for nurturing campus relationships (with academic departments, the Academic Senate, student outreach groups, etc.). Data collection on numbers, types, and referral of reference questions is in early stages. Other evaluation will examine the retention of the Library's academic role on campus. With only one academic year of operating experience since opening day, broad conclusions as to how well the King Library is serving its users are still being drawn. One measure of success is evidenced in the addition of a ground floor space for campus tours. All tours for prospective and newly admitted students and their families will originate in the King Library. In the future, assessment will generate literature of evaluation, best practices, and standards development for joint-use libraries.

Remaining Challenges

Funding during poor state and city budget times remains a challenge. When this project was conceived, the dot-com bubble had not burst. At present, both the City of San José and the California State University system are struggling with hard financial choices. Both remain committed to provide staffing levels within the building, but some projects originally intended to proceed right after the first year of operation will be held back. Other challenges include improvement of communication between library departments and resources for continuing staff development.

Advice

At present, the following points will be helpful for other colleges and universities pursuing a joint-use library.

- Be able to articulate a clear understanding of mutual and separate goals and responsibilities: What are the most important goals of service (teaching or providing answers)? Who will pay for what (e.g., custodial services, security)? What will remain separate responsibilities (e.g., human resources, collections) and what will be shared (e.g., service point staffing)? In other words, identify to what extent each broad aspect of running the library and providing services will be merged.
- Write a memorandum of understanding that outlines these responsibilities and the conditions under which one party can pull out (e.g., buy-out guidelines and financial burden).
- Identify stakeholders for both institutions early. This is necessary to nurture buy-in and active support and to work with groups resistant to the merger.
- Make the planning process participative. Involve stakeholders, especially library staff, who know most about how the libraries are currently run and what might make that process better, and campus faculty who motivate students to make use of the library.
- Bring in objective assistance. Hire a project manager with a neutral outlook to keep the process moving within its timeframe. Hire consultants for particularly sensitive merge issues, for instance in developing a new Web site for the library to replace the old Web sites.

- Set priorities for running the two separate facilities during the planning stage for the joint library. Realize that this effort doubles workload and more than doubles normal work-life stresses. Refrain from innovation in other areas while planning; this is enough innovation!
- Take advantage of campus and library research expertise and document the process. Merging in the public sector is not well enough reported in the research literature and your documentation will contribute to others' success.
- Plan for synergistic outcomes such as the merging of functions, collections, or staffing.
- Plan for review of library functioning, user satisfaction, and staff adjustment.

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