

“Information Feud”
CCUMC 2007: Pamela Jureller & Inga Barnello
Introduction by Inga H. Barnello

Finding a succinct definition of “information commons” was an effort that I would not want to trivialize as a word game. From a search of a dozen sources, 15 different words in several combinations come up.

Librarians in the literature describe it this way—in a nutshell: —if I had to keep it short....

- a high-tech collaborative, multimedia group learning space....
- that encourages/enables the incorporation of technology and information resources into the curriculum....
- Whose mission is linked to learning

[MISSION STATEMENT OF U. ALBERTA—read aloud] If there is an ideal common element, it is that it is steeped/mission based in learning.

For over 20 years, higher education, particularly public service librarians, has experimented with a one-stop approach to an integrated service that serves the information and learning needs of students. Upstate NY’ers will be proud to know that RPI in 1985, Pat Molholt made the earliest attempt. This was a “merger” of the computing center and the library.

Academic libraries have searched for a model to enhance the location-bound, format-limiting reference desk. Consultation-based reference model (Virginia Massey-Burzio @ Brandeis and Johns Hopkins) and satellite reference locations are responses to the limitations of the compartmentalized question at hand, and to the limits of location. Virtual reference, email reference, social software are natural evolutions to reach students. Out of the recent “library as place” movement, read social, comes the information commons. Students MIX academic and social activities. Pushing it are the complexities of digital information and new technology. The roles of both librarians and information technology staff are increasingly essential to complete college work. There are other campus constituencies too that collaborate. We see many variations around academe—campus groups participating as constituents are the library, computing, instructional tech, media, writing centers, and even student life.

IC is a location-based service that takes a holistic approach to all the possible information needs that a learner has, that is behind the information commons. They are taking different shapes and approaches at different institutions and there may lie the answer that “no” there is no ideal information commons. Yet, in their experiences, some common elements and truisms come forward. Information commons is not without its challenges. —the biggest of all is that it challenges traditional views of learning and the use of learning spaces—the other biggie is that collaboration takes an intense level of planning, but also subject to wholly different concepts of what one co-professionals do and can offer.

Today we’ll see what the survey respondents (from the CCUMC and college libraries listserv) think about how an information commons should be put together. Our questions and potential answers were culled from the list of articles in the bibliography that is available, save one (more on that later). This audience will vote in its own responses. Let’s see if you agree amongst yourselves and with the initial survey responses.