Workshop 5

Critical Issues in Art Library Space Planning

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Moderators:

Susan Moon, University of California, Santa Barbara
Carol Terry, Rhode Island School of Design

Recorder: Carol Terry

Sponsor: Space Planners Round Table

Speaker: Jay Lucker, consultant, Simmons, formerly MIT

The presenter for this day-long workshop was Jay K. Lucker, Director of Libraries at MIT from 1975 to 1995. Since 1960 he has served as a library building and management consultant to numerous universities, colleges, public libraries, museums, and research organizations involving campus-wide planning, new library buildings, additions, and renovations. He holds the Helen F. Childs Lectureship at the Graduate School of Library and Information Science, Simmons College, where he teaches courses in academic libraries and library architecture.

Among Mr. Lucker's current and recent projects involving art and architecture libraries are: Clark Art Institute; Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities; Rotch Library, MIT; Metropolitan Museum of Art; Nelson-Atkins Museum; Rhode Island School of Design; Smith College; and Yale University.

The workshop was fully subscribed, with 37 eager participants willing to forego sun and tours to learn more about space planning in art libraries. The speaker began with an overview of those factors affecting space planning, for example:

- exponential growth in both print and electronic publishing
- explosion in the number of formats being used
- unknown life expectancy of electronic data
- patron use of laptops in the library
- patron access to electronic resources from outside of the library
- need for teaching space
- changes in curriculum, particularly interdisciplinary courses
- collaborative learning, requiring group studies
- need for staff to handle computer and networking issues

Space planning was presented as a process that begins with the case statement, and must include a complete understanding of the original space, what has happened to it over the years, what has been done to accommodate lack of space and where the library is in the present in terms of quality and quantity. Both the present shortfall and the needs for the next 10 - 20 years need to be identified. With thoughtfulness and creativity, options and alternatives should be explored to extend the life of the project.

Participants were urged to make a case for space, fully understanding the framework of institutional priorities and projecting a clear vision for the library.

Detailed advice was presented on shelving, ADA compliance, and user spaces. Art librarians were vocal in explaining the difficulties in using compact shelving and off-site storage for what need to be browsable collections, including even older bound periodicals and little-used exhibition catalogs. A user survey is a good tool to use to gauge what mix of seating should be provided.
Elements important in the organization of the space are logical, self-directing arrangement and good signage. The library itself should be easy to find and the layout should be obvious upon entering the space. Issues of space organization for the small staff were discussed, as well as options for centralizing services and limiting service points.

Roles of the librarian, the architect and the consultant were described. This workshop was an excellent step for librarians whose job includes educating the architect to see that the building meets the library’s needs, both current and future. The workshop concluded with a question and answer period. Responses on the workshop evaluation showed that the day met participants’ expectations. The Space Planners Round Table plans to propose another such workshop in two years.