

SMALL OUTLAY, BIG RESULTS

The University of Southern Queensland and the Hervey Bay City Council formed a joint-use library in 1997. But, 10 years later, both organisations had outgrown the building. It would be another six years, however, before the USQ Fraser Coast Library was opened in the same building but across the foyer in the newly vacated art gallery space. At the beginning of 2016, the Fraser Coast campus was purchased by the University of the Sunshine Coast. The names have changed, but the library remains the same inspiring environment that encourages learning.

We transitioned from a joint-use library with the local public library to a purpose-designed university library in 2013 by moving across the foyer – a large shared space that runs between the two libraries – now affectionately known as the DMZ. Our student and staff needs influenced the planning. Envisioning nothing more than a basic library, as funds and space were limited, we got so much more than we expected.

By redesigning and refurbishing the former art gallery space and working closely with an interior designer, we achieved a library environment that is inspiring and a work of art. I like to refer to it as 'the Baz Luhrmann of libraries' – because of its use of colour on walls, floors and furnishings.

The usual suspects were included in the design: quiet space, collaborative space, social space, 24/7 access, a lockable collection and flexible training space – all configured for students. Our mantra of 'it must be flexible and it must be wired' resulted in spaces that are constantly being redefined by the students.

The integrated help desk is situated in the middle



(Top) Social area with study pod on right
(Above) Group study area
(Right) Social area and kitchenette



of the library. There is no barrier; anyone can walk around it. Staff stand near or sit at the desk, and students do the same. The staff are now more approachable and easily engage students as they walk through the entrance. Our desk interactions increased by 30 per cent because of the new design.

Our students love the library. They want to study here, meet friends, create, play and do group work here. And sometimes even sleep here (20 per cent of our student visits take place after hours). This is some of the feedback we've received: 'I love this space. It makes me want to come to the library.' 'If only you had this when I was studying.' 'I come here late at night to escape the family. It makes me want to study.'

Once students came to the library only to borrow books or use the 24/7 computer lab, but now they are engaging in student life, researching, studying and collaborating. With a student population of 600, we had 10,000 visits to the library in March this year. The library is now so popular that often all available spaces are in use. We may have to encroach into the DMZ; Kim Jong-un, we need your advice. ✳

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