



Book Review

Review of *Designing Libraries for the 21st Century*

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ABSTRACT

A review of the book Hickerson, H. T., Lippencott, J. K., and Crema, L., eds., *Designing libraries for the 21st century*. Chicago, Illinois: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2022.

KEYWORDS

Library space, library design, library transformation, learning commons, collaboration, organizational change, user-centered spaces

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As library user needs evolve, so too do thoughts regarding existing and new library spaces. Whether considering a renovation or completely new construction, *Designing Libraries for the 21st Century* offers insight, lessons learned, and ideas for a multitude of library building projects. Editors Tom Hickerson, Joan Lippincott, and Leonora Crema bring decades of experience spearheading library design programs to this essential compendium that examines the entire design process of ideation and visioning, selection of and cooperation with architects, furniture selection, and the marketing of new spaces. Focused on issues and trends emerging from the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, *Designing Libraries* offers practical advice and solutions for developing libraries that more strategically and deliberately incorporate inclusivity, welcoming, sustainability, and accessibility.

This comprehensive edition offers twenty-eight chapters spread across eight themed sections. Also included are three appendices that provide an interview with Hickerson and two biographical tributes to Lippincott and Susan Nutter, whose influence on library design reverberated throughout the latter part of twentieth-century library design and continues to influence current space planning today. Sections provide detailed explorations of such themes as visioning, cross-campus and community collaborations, staffing and workforce, challenges in balancing collections with user needs, teaching and learning, digital scholarship, and best practices for the application of new technologies.

Section one provides an overview of key issues that anyone planning to assess and address their library spaces ought to consider in order to ensure success. Each chapter provides history and background through examples largely focused on learner-centered spaces, services, and support systems. Each chapter stresses the need to balance opportunities to create and share knowledge alongside libraries' previous guiding principles of collecting and seeking information. Additionally, these chapters reinforce the importance of designing spaces that are welcoming to a wide range of users with diverse personal and academic backgrounds.

The next section focuses on aligning goals with institutional vision. Here, various institutional missions and visions are identified with regards to their impact on the development of new library spaces. Chapter 5, for instance, explores how campuses with legacy buildings can be reflected in new architecture as libraries work to embrace "complex and contested elements" in a way that "embodies the best of the institution's historical identity and that also expresses a dynamic vision for its future" (59). This same chapter considers the university's place within urban environments and the library's responsibility to positively reflect and engage with the community beyond the institution (72). Chapter 6 offers a case study of how campuses might repurpose existing structures by examining how one university developed a complex of buildings dedicated to student success efforts. Chapter 7 denotes strategies for creating new and exciting narratives about the library's focus on research and learning in order to highlight the impact of new library spaces on recruiting prospective students and potential donors (99).

Section three offers insights on how to best work with architects to execute a library's plans. Chapter 8 is short but is authored by an architect with years of experience working with institutions to build and renovate libraries. The author defines architectural terms and provides invaluable advice on how to best partner with firms to ensure a welcoming, sustainable building that fosters inclusion and equity. The other chapters of this section emphasize the roles of design project teams, illustrate potential planning pitfalls, and reinforce the argument that libraries are buildings "rooted in a space," which "belong to a culture and community" (150).

With these ideas in mind, section four turns to key issues in planning library spaces. Chapter 12 starts with perhaps the most pressing issue: addressing the logistics and decision-making surrounding collections, including their storage, ownership, and infrastructure. By focusing on the use of individual institutional usage statistics and trends, this chapter lays out strategies for addressing often-challenging questions regarding how to decide what to do with collections that may need to be relocated in order to free up space to conduct a renovation. Other chapters in this section offer additional support for using metrics and data-informed decision-making. Included in these chapters are discussions of technology, campus information technology, budgets, and financial sustainability related to the addition of new tech supported by very specific examples in Chapter 13. Chapter 15 is of special note as it is the only chapter in the book explicitly devoted to accessibility and Universal Design, which are clearly differentiated from one another by the chapter's author. Included here are numerous examples of tools, spaces, furniture, and technology that both enhance and facilitate accessibility and Universal Design principles, which should be at the forefront of any modern library design plan.

Section five then examines collaborations across campus and academic services. The chapters in this section focus on renewing existing spaces and how to revitalize approaches to building and fostering partnerships within newly designed learning spaces, including a focused integration and application of the values of diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion in a post-2020 world. Within these transformations is an inquiry into how libraries can balance and update the skills of existing and new library staff working in refreshed spaces that may now include new services, technology, or service models.

This spotlight on the library workforce leads smoothly into section six, which addresses library leadership, change management, staffing, and institutional culture and values. This section offers insight into strategic planning and transformational change while considering learning as an organizational asset, with individual library staff serving as an invaluable component of the success of a new space (274-275). Interdisciplinary teams, guiding philosophies, and innovative processes provide opportunities to create conditions that allow for an improved and high-performing culture. Additionally, a comprehensive list of values provides the foundation for developing a philosophy for designing user-focused services within newly designed library spaces (288-289). Chapter 21 provides a stark and important examination of the current library workforce, specifically using data that consistently indicates a critical lack of

diversity (298). This chapter's author emphasizes the crucial need to provide potential library school students and job candidates with practical opportunities for building highly sought skills and competencies. While some of these challenges may be addressed by library schools, the author also notes that it is incumbent upon libraries to provide opportunities for its workforce to advance and participate in skill building, emphasizing that not including everyone in discussions of organizational values will inevitably result in a failure to accomplish lasting organizational culture changes (301-303).

Section seven's theme of programming for research, learning, and community offers the most chapters as the authors here provide case studies that address various aspects of library space not significantly considered elsewhere in the book. Digital humanities, digital scholarship, data services, special collections, and specific initiatives to involve and include non-academic community users compile the bulk of this section. The last chapters of the book explore non-academic library spaces, offering close investigations of the Calgary Public Library and the Qatar National Library, both of which illustrate unique design challenges that are of use to anyone planning library spaces.

The final sections include a brief conclusion that sums up current and future trends and questions of library space use and design, including enhanced attention on collaboration, knowledge creation, environmental sustainability, and responses to social inequities while emphasizing the need for diversity, welcoming, and inclusion among staffing and users. Following this final note are three appendices. The first includes an interview of Hickerson conducted by Lippincott regarding Hickerson's involvement and reflections on the design and creation of Calgary University's Taylor Family Digital Library, which features prominently throughout the book. The second appendix offers a professional biographical sketch of Lippincott's work, particularly with the Coalition for Networked Information. The final section serves as a tribute to Susan Nutter, the former dean of North Carolina State University, who led the design of the groundbreaking Hunt Library, which also features prominently as an effective design example throughout this book. Nutter's methodology for approaching the decision-making and implementation of the Hunt Library resulted in various innovations for a new era of library space design, including groundbreaking approaches in library assessment and the impact of library user needs on determining future academic library space trends.

This 463-page compendium provides an exhaustive overview of library space planning. Of particular importance are the many lists and images of various library spaces that may serve as both inspiration and roadmap for future renovation or construction projects. Although exhaustive in scope, perhaps the most significant omission is the lack of a comprehensive bibliography, leaving readers to check each chapter for resources leading to additional reading. Despite this singular criticism, this book is an invaluable resource for anyone interested in embarking upon a renovation or construction project at their library. Additionally, librarians seeking ways to refresh existing services, staffing models, or institutional visions may find this

book helpful in considering new approaches or perspectives. *Designing Libraries for the 21st Century* offers such a wide range of topics and ideas that it is ultimately recommended for any librarian who seeks to revisit old standards of practice and revitalize their commitment to user-focused services with a renewed infusion of inclusion, sustainability, and collaboration.