

# The Library and the University College student support services structure: Challenges and opportunities

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**Abstract:** As institutions of higher education seek to boost enrollments and increase retention rates, some libraries are sharing space with other student services in a “University College” model that is ushering in new opportunities and creating distinct challenges.

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As institutions of higher education seek to boost enrollments and increase retention rates, some libraries are sharing space with other student services in a “University College” model that is ushering in new opportunities and creating distinct challenges. In the traditional student service model, entities typically reside at various locations across campus, requiring a student to not only figure out where these services are located, but also to find the time to navigate from one to the next. Here at the University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point (UWSP), the campus recently made the decision to create a fifth college, calling it “University College.” This new structure brings previously separated services under one roof. In this case, that roof happens to be the one covering the library and the space that was previously devoted exclusively to library collections and functions.

### **Space**

Before the proliferation of electronic content, many libraries struggled to find new space to house a growing print collection. Libraries are now trying to find creative ways to repurpose newly claimed square footage created primarily by weeding and deselection of print content. Enter the “one-stop shop” concept, or the “University College” model.

The UWSP library currently shares space across six floors with Disability Services, Academic Advising, Career Services, the Tutoring and Learning Center, the Center for Inclusive Teaching and Learning, and the Technology Help Desk. Additionally, there are plans for the Office of International Education to transition into the building in the coming months, and work is currently underway to transform part of a cafeteria into appropriate space for inclusion of other service entities, including representatives from admissions, the bursar’s office, and financial aid. Now a student can meet with an advisor, take a career aptitude test, get assistance from a tutor, get help finding articles for a paper, and inquire about financial aid issues without ever having to leave the building. This geographic configuration is becoming an increasingly important selling point during campus tours with prospective students and their families. Students appreciate the

convenience afforded by the “one stop” model, and parents feel good knowing that the myriad of student support services are easily accessible. Finally, administrators are hedging their bets and crossing their fingers that this new alignment of services will result in both increased enrollments and increased retention when compared to the decentralized service model.

### **Identity**

Despite the ways in which the “one stop” model more efficiently meets student needs, some librarians might feel that this reallocation of library space is in some ways a direct attack upon their identity. Space is not neutral, and the way in which a campus repurposes it speaks in some ways to their values and priorities. That is, the values and priorities of campus administrators are not always in perfect alignment with those of the librarians who currently inhabit the space. Having said that, the need for space in libraries is changing due to the changing nature of collections. Coming to terms with the fact that the library does not “stand alone,” but rather is just one of a myriad of student support services, is a hard pill to swallow for many in our profession, which has traditionally seen library services and support efforts as distinct from those performed in student service locations elsewhere on campus. Transitioning into this new model can cause identity anxiety, but it also has the potential to improve the ways in which student service entities collaborate with other campus entities to meet student needs. The university college model also provides the library profession with an opportunity to define itself anew. By abandoning the “build it and they will come” approach to serving our communities, we can be proactive and collaborate with our student service colleagues to create more meaningful and holistic student service experiences.

### **Collaboration**

We are already beginning to see the benefits offered to students by bringing services into closer proximity and, thus, closer collaboration. Gretel Stock-Kupperman, Dean of the University College here at UWSP, recently assembled four committees with broad

representation from all of the departments under her leadership to address issues such as curriculum in our various credit-bearing courses, space planning and development, the delivery of integrated services, and University College marketing and communications. The close proximity to other service entities has resulted in opportunities to merge services (e.g. embedding a librarian at the tutoring center when we know students will be doing research, or inviting a representative from career services to a library instruction session of career choice). Moreover, like our neighbors at home, we get to know our fellow student service neighbors more intimately. Not only do we know their names, we also learn their strengths and the particular role that they play. This results in an ability to give richer and more informed advice to students seeking support and services throughout the building.

One last opportunity for the library working in unison with other service entities is to create experiences that are more impactful for prospective high school students. Increasingly, there are programs that enable students to spend part of a day at the library while doing research for a high school paper, an event that allows everybody on campus to work together to build the enrollment pipeline. Instead of focusing exclusively on library resources and search strategies, we can invite our colleagues from advising, career services, tutoring, and other service centers to spend a bit of time educating high school students about our resources, while answering questions that extend beyond the librarians' expertise.

Considering the changing nature of space in libraries, we can assume that the "one stop" concept utilizing library space will continue to be an attractive venue, particularly as institutions continue having conversations about how to increase enrollment and improve retention. Librarians should embrace the University College model. We can no longer afford to see ourselves as an island – yet we are a piece of a puzzle that is incomplete without us. The University College model allows us to realize that when it comes to providing expert and convenient services to students, the whole is really greater than the sum of its parts.

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