

## **Library Vision report**

### **REPORT OF THE LIBRARY VISION COMMITTEE**

**May 2002**

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### **Introduction**

The Library Vision Committee was formed by President Parrish in November 2001 and charged with creating a vision for the library of the future, keeping in mind the needs of the community, the impact of electronic information, and giving special attention to the needs of group collaborations.<sup>1</sup> The committee reviewed current usage, observed existing conditions and learned about exciting new trends in academic libraries and their impact on use of print and electronic collections and student needs for a different type of library. Clearly a renovation is a compelling and urgent need for several major reasons.

#### **Gordon Library – Why renovation is needed**

Gordon Library was built in 1967 and designed as a traditional library before the WPI Plan was adopted. The building is therefore 35 years old with an infrastructure that has outlived its useful life by many years. The roof, HVAC, lighting, and electrical system need to be replaced. Additionally the interior appearance is extremely unattractive due to 35-year-old furniture throughout the library space, an ancient orange carpet that has received many negative comments, and open ceiling tiles with wiring falling out.

The WPI curriculum requires undergraduate students to work in teams on Interactive Qualifying Projects and Major Qualifying Projects. Many courses are team based as well. This teamwork requires specialized collaboration rooms of various sizes where students can work together and not feel they are disturbing others. Gordon Library has 18 group study rooms with a total of 48 seats on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> floors. However, feedback from students who attended open meetings sponsored by the Vision Committee on March 25-26, 2002, indicated that many of them are too small for more than two people, and too hot to work in comfort for any length of time. There are very few similar group study spaces elsewhere on campus and the library really needs to increase the number we have, make some of them larger, and install collaborative technology in many of them.

The greatest current use of space in Gordon Library is for traditional shelving of books and journals. Data gathered from the library Voyager system shows constantly decreasing use of older print books. The journal use study indicates an even greater decreasing use of print journals. However, approximately three to four thousand print books are purchased annually and there is insufficient shelf space available to accommodate them without constant re-shifting of existing books to make places for new ones. Additionally, the use of electronic journals and databases now accessible to the WPI community is increasing rapidly. It is evident that the focus of Gordon Library is no longer solely as a repository for print. Space in the library building is of great value and is currently not being used well as evidenced by the much lower use of the materials on the shelves, insufficient shelving, and the student need for more collaborative spaces.

Consultancies during the past several years, in particular the work done by Shepley Bulfinch Richardson and Abbot<sup>2</sup> architects have been valuable in suggesting how the building might be reconfigured. The architects evaluated the interior of the building to determine the scope of a renovation project and indicated that needed space could be made available in the building by the use of compact shelving on the ground floor and

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use of remote storage for older journals which have received no use in 10 years. Compact shelving would also alleviate the current overcrowding on the traditional shelves. Engineers reviewing the mechanical systems and roof indicated that they are well beyond their expected life and should be replaced soon.

Gordon Library is already falling behind many other academic libraries in their innovative new and redesigned facilities that already provide the resources and services needed by their campus constituencies now and in the future. At the open meetings students reported that the current unattractive appearance of the library is viewed as a deterrent to studying in the building. Additionally, its unappealing ambience has a negative impact on groups of prospective students and their parents who participate in tours of the campus organized by Admissions. As one of the few buildings on campus that crosses disciplines and attracts visitors, many other institutions are using libraries as showpieces that create a positive image of the University. WPI cannot afford to let Gordon Library fall further behind for the reasons outlined above and also from the competitive advantage that an attractive, up to date library provides. If we don't begin renovation for another five years we will be at least ten years behind others and if we wait ten years to renovate then we will be even further behind.

### **Trends in Academic Libraries**

Electronic publication and digital networking are revolutionizing the scholarly communication process. This innovation is comparable to Gutenberg's invention of movable type that at the time fundamentally altered the process by which knowledge is created and disseminated. Digital publication and networking are today's equivalent of the printing press in the impact they are having both on libraries and individuals.

The national Digital Library Initiative has been underway for many years supported by grants from NSF to "dramatically advance the means to collect, store, and organize information in digital forms, and make it available for searching, retrieval, and processing via communication networks – all in user-friendly ways."<sup>3</sup> In addition to the national initiative, states and regions such as New England are also developing digital initiatives of their own.

Electronic journals and databases are becoming the norm for most academic disciplines in their research and communication. It is inevitable that this trend will continue as more and more journals and databases are published electronically and more and more libraries purchase them. Organizations such as JSTOR the Scholarly Journals Archive<sup>4</sup> are systematically converting print journals published as long ago as the 1800s into web based versions, and scholarly societies such as the American Chemical Society and Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers are publishing their older issues on the web. This is resulting in lower use of print journals as faculty appreciate and enjoy the convenience of accessing journals from their desktops either on campus or remotely.

The impact of electronic publishing on the book industry has been slower to evolve. The need for electronic reference books has been demonstrated, as has been the continuing need for hardcopy books. Many libraries are purchasing licenses for the groups of titles

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and assessing their value in meeting the needs of their specific communities. Publishers will produce increasing numbers of their new titles electronically, as competition demands, and as new viewing formats with greater appeal to users are developed.

As electronic resources multiply so does the need for instruction from library specialists grow on how to find, analyze, and evaluate these resources both for research and student learning. The American Library Association Presidential Committee on Information Literacy issued a Final Report that defined an information literate individual as one who can “recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information. They are people prepared for lifelong learning, because they can always find the information needed for any task at hand”<sup>5</sup> Information literacy is becoming an increasing focus for libraries as students need to have the tools libraries provide to take with them as part of their educational experience and to use throughout their lives.

In the workforce of the global marketplace, companies want their employees to work collaboratively in teams. As university curricula change to require teamwork among students in order to prepare them for the global environment new and renovated libraries are increasingly including collaboration spaces in their designs. Libraries’ roles are changing to incorporate these types of spaces. These collaboration spaces take a variety of forms in different libraries but most of them are incorporating network connectivity as a minimum requirement. The smaller type are group study rooms for students often equipped with high end technology tools for group interactions. Many are multimedia labs of different sizes and functionality such as experimental technology labs, and labs where students learn how to create multimedia as well as search for it.

Increasing numbers of cafes are being incorporated into library space. Some include PCs and laptop connectivity. These facilities are very popular with both students and faculty as they provide a more informal collaboration environment where light snacks and drinks can help students work through long study periods or take a needed break without having to leave the building.

Other libraries such as the main library at Northeastern University are combining computer center helpdesk functionality within the library building and finding that this is a hugely popular service. Increasing collaboration with computer centers and other departments on campus is also a strong trend in libraries as strict separation of functions blurs with the increasing amount of technology used within the library. Libraries in some instances are centers for assistance to students in all aspects of technology. The Task Force envisioning the new Berry Library at Dartmouth College states “The Task Force envisions the new Berry Library to be a place where the Dartmouth community comes to learn about the availability, access, and use of resources; to gain direct and immediate access to all forms of information and requisite technologies in one facility; to find expert help and advice; and to join in working groups to collaborate with the library staff and others in exploring new ways to process and assimilate scholarly information”.<sup>6</sup> New library designs incorporate the trends outlined above.<sup>7</sup>

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Although librarians continue to be responsible for the acquisition, access to, organization of collections, and assisting and teaching library patrons, the need for technologically literate and knowledgeable staff grows as the technology continues to change and be the basis for delivery of services and resources. All library positions are being impacted by technology as it continues to shape libraries' abilities to provide and distribute information in many multimedia formats. Responsibilities must include more and more technological skills and the ability to use creative new software in managing knowledge databases.

### **Vision**

The Library Vision Committee believes strongly that Gordon Library should be a student centered building that mirrors WPI's mission of "educating men and women for careers of professional practice, civic contribution, leadership, facilitated by active lifelong learning". The Committee envisions the library as a place that will greatly improve the student experience at WPI and as a collaboration center where students and faculty can work together in specialized facilities. This building will be a hub for information retrieval and expert assistance in using technology to locate and evaluate all forms of knowledge as well as a center for the creation of multimedia information.

Gordon Library will continue to be the prime resource for research, scholarship, teaching and learning with an increasing focus on the electronic environment although it will be important to continue to purchase and provide access to print in the foreseeable future.

The committee's vision incorporates an endowment to support the ever increasing costs of resources. This endowment would supplement the Operating and Capital budgets.

### **Recommendations**

#### ***Building Interior***

The following recommendations require use of the entire building space including all the space on the ground floor and the Archives Conference Room.

- The design of the interior must be flexible in anticipation of changing technology and the changing needs of the WPI community.
- Every space will be networked both for wired and wireless access.
- All spaces will be designed to be aesthetically pleasing and welcoming to students, faculty, staff and visitors. New carpeting and lighting and a variety of furniture including lounge furniture, tables, carrels, and comfortable chairs will provide an attractive, inviting environment.
- A greater percent of the interior needs to be devoted to collaborative group rooms of varying sizes to allow for student-student, student-faculty, as well as student-faculty-staff interactions.
  - WPI's project oriented undergraduate curriculum requires students to work in teams and at present there are too few group spaces for teamwork in the library and practically none elsewhere on campus. Some of these spaces should contain AV and video conferencing to connect to faculty and students at a distance. Students at the Open meetings and focus groups commenting on the future library said they need a greater

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availability of technology and connectivity in the library along with videoconferencing facilities, whiteboards and smartboards.

- Other purposes for larger group spaces could be comparable to the Movie Lab currently located in the library to assist students in creating multimedia. Other uses such as an emerging technology facility and associated new technology classroom are envisioned. These facilities would exist to support faculty, students and staff in the development, exploration and beta-testing of adaptive cutting-edge tools, and networking that could potentially reshape the way we teach and learn in higher education. The classroom would serve as the primary location on campus where new technologies are incorporated into teaching and learning.
- Student members of the Library Vision Committee as well as students attending the Open meetings and focus groups indicated a very real need for truly quiet study spaces as well as the need for group studies. Quiet spaces should be totally separate from the group spaces and enclosed as appropriate.
- A café located within the building but outside of the general areas would probably be a very popular location for more casual collaborations and as a place to take a break from long study hours without having to leave the building to find snacks.
- Print materials will continue to be purchased and made accessible to the WPI community because there will still be a need to use these materials in the foreseeable future. However, because of the diminishing use of the print collections, a percentage of the book and journal volumes that have received little or no use in the past ten years will be stored on browsable compact shelving on the ground floor. Print materials that have received recent use will continue to be available on traditional shelving. Regional storage will be used for a percentage of old journal volumes. These methods of storing the print collection will free up the space needed urgently for collaboration spaces.
- An expanded, inviting and climate controlled Archives and Special Collections facility should be located close to some compact shelving to accommodate its growing collections. This probably should be located on the ground floor as the ground floor alone is capable of bearing the weight of compact shelving. WPI has a wealth of its history in the archives along with some very distinguished special collections that need to be preserved appropriately.

### ***Building infrastructure and exterior***

- A team of consulting engineers who worked with WPI facilities staff and Shepley Bulfinch Richardson and Abbot in 2000 reported that many of Gordon Library's existing building systems are original and nearing the end of their expected life span. Their recommendations for remedial work to the existing building fabric included the following:
  - Replace the HVAC systems which are original to the building
  - Replace electrical service equipment original to the building
  - Replace light fixtures throughout the building, prompted by extensive scope of HVAC and fire protection work.

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- Provide communication distribution rooms on each floor to address increased technology needs.
- Install automatic sprinkler system.
- Replace original roof and flashing
- Replace existing original windows

### ***Resources, Services and Staff***

- Funding will be necessary to ensure that Gordon Library continues to provide access to the knowledge resources required to support scholarship and research in a wide variety of formats from print to multimedia.
- The rapid changes in technology and transition of scholarly information and communication into the digital arena make it necessary for Gordon Library to keep abreast of and in some cases anticipate changes. However, it is important to strike a careful balance between the need and use of electronic information and the need and use for print materials, particularly books. The Humanities and Arts department in particular currently uses the library as its laboratory and areas of the print collection are needed to support the wide variety of topics incorporated in the Interactive Qualifying Projects and Sufficiencies.
- Collaborations among library staff, faculty, and other Information Technology Division staff will need to be strengthened and stronger roles as educators developed. Librarians need to understand and stay abreast of technology so that a combination of existing and new services can be provided through a group of highly skilled, knowledgeable and friendly staff available to help with a variety of student and faculty needs.
- Constant monitoring of new systems to enhance the ability of library users to locate and use electronic resources will need to be a focus of the library in order to continuously improve the value and quality of services and resources.

### **Conclusion**

Gordon Library in its current configuration is not meeting the needs of its constituencies and is in urgent need of renovation. The building is 35 years old and was designed as a traditional library before the WPI Plan was created. Its infrastructure is worn out and the interior space must be completely reorganized and reconfigured to meet current and future needs. WPI students today and tomorrow need a facility that contains rooms equipped with technology appropriate to accommodate groups of 4-30 students and faculty. The WPI curriculum requires students to work in teams and there are few similar facilities elsewhere on campus. The library is an ideal location for these teams as they can access print, electronic and multimedia resources in one central building.

The greatest current use of space in the building is to house the print collection. However, print is being used less and less so that filling valuable floor space primarily with shelving for print is undesirable. Many print volumes could be housed on compact shelving, reduce the space needed for print, and thus provide areas for collaborative learning facilities instead. Compact shelving will also greatly relieve existing

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overcrowding on traditional shelving and still provide the necessary access to print. Storage of print will continue to be needed in Founders Residence.

The role of Information Technology in the building must grow and provide not only access to the electronic resources required for a library of the 21<sup>st</sup> century but provide the necessary skilled staff support to assist faculty and students in creating as well as locating multimedia resources.

WPI faculty, staff, and students deserve and expect a library facility that is state-of-the-art, comfortable, and aesthetically pleasing. WPI's place as a "pioneer in technological higher education"<sup>8</sup> can be advanced by providing a library that meets current and future library needs and is competitive with its peers.

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