

Smith College

Master Plan for the Libraries

Excerpt for September 2011 Faculty Meeting:
Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

Introduction

As a global leader in women's education, Smith College is in a strong position to create a 21st century library that reflects the mission and vision of the institution, positioning the library at the center of intellectual life and linking "the power of the liberal arts to excellence in research and scholarship..."¹ To do so, the college must respond to changes in the role of academic libraries.

In leading liberal arts institutions, the academic library is becoming a dynamic collaborator in advancing the intellectual experience on campus. Propelled by rapid changes in new information technologies and significant shifts in pedagogy and learning, libraries are redefining themselves as vibrant centers of scholarly activity. Libraries are advancing teaching and learning through the integrated delivery of resources, services and support.

The Smith College library facilities today are not able to meet these aspirations. This Master Plan sets forth essential recommendations and strategies so that they can move forward and contribute to the academic mission of the college and be "intellectual crossroads for the Smith College community"².

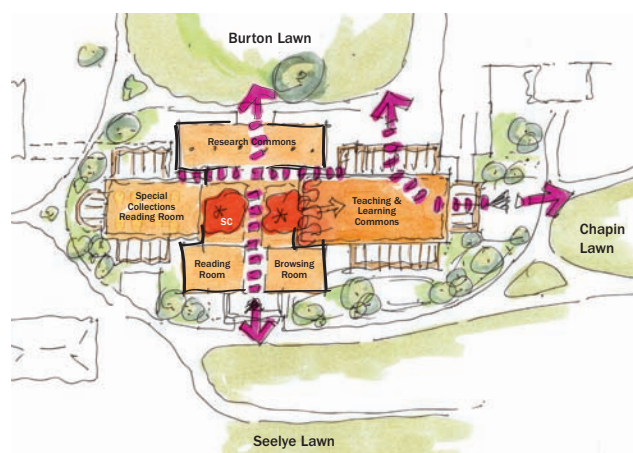


Figure A
Neilson Conceptual Diagram

Notes

- 1 www.smith.edu/collegerelations/mission.php
- 2 www.smith.edu/libraries/info/about/vision.htm

Recommendation

The Smith College Libraries are envisioned as a network of collaborative learning environments distinguished by robust resources, integrated services and high-end technology. To redefine the libraries' contribution to the college as a whole in this way, the college must fundamentally reconceptualize their 20th century infrastructure.

While each of the library facilities will advance the vision, the transformation of the William Allan Neilson Library (Neilson) will be the most significant. Neilson will become a dynamic place for students and faculty from all divisions to connect, study and collaborate. Since Neilson cannot effectively be repurposed to accommodate the environments needed to achieve this vision, the recommendation is to raze the north and south wings and replace them with flexible and light-filled spaces that support scholarship and teaching. Neilson's original core, with its iconic reading rooms, will be revitalized to serve as a focal point and anchor for the new library. A rebuilt and redesigned south wing will house a state-of-the-art special collections space bringing together the Mortimer Rare Book Room, Sophia Smith Collection and College Archives in one visible and accessible location. A new north wing will provide much needed reconfigurable and technologically sophisticated spaces required for collaboration, interaction and discovery. The transformation of Neilson will be a significant architectural statement, connecting Seelye, Burton and Chapin Lawns physically and visually (Figure A) and creating a new intellectual heart for the campus.

In complement to the vision for Neilson, the Anita O'K. and Robert R. Young Science Library (Young), Werner Josten Performing Arts Library (Josten) and Hillyer Art Library (Hillyer) will be repositioned, through a process involving faculty, the library and the administration, as distinctive centers of scholarly activity to serve the whole Smith College community. More specifically, new environments for presentation, performance and interaction will be created by relocating print collections out of Young and Josten and by making smaller spatial changes at Hillyer. As resource-rich centers of expertise, they will support dynamic curricula and pedagogies and provide opportunities for evolving and innovative uses in the future.

Goals and Recommended Strategies

A diversity of environments is needed to meet the teaching and learning needs of students and faculty in a changing technological and pedagogical environment. The following strategies have been developed to meet this challenge:

Establish diverse and desirable places for study

- Offer a variety of quality study environments to satisfy a range of research styles

Provide efficient and effective staff and support spaces to foster collaborative services

- Locate staff and services for visibility and provide a variety of interactive consultation spaces
- Create flexible staff spaces with adjacencies that foster collaboration
- Provide integrated service delivery through partnerships with other academic support services

Accommodate a robust and accessible collection on campus

- Centralize the majority of core collections in accessible shelving in the new north and south wings of Neilson

Promote implementation and use of evolving information technologies

- Create technology-rich spaces in each facility to promote exploration and use of resources in all formats
- Provide effective instructional space for teaching with technology
- Foster partnerships with other academic support services that support new technologies

The study includes a series of specific goals for each of the individual facilities, as follows:

Neilson

Revitalize Neilson as the intellectual heart of Smith College

Numerous additions and low floor-to-floor heights in Neilson have resulted in spaces that are neither easy to navigate nor conducive to research and discovery. The complex structures are inflexible and spaces are difficult to repurpose.

- Restore the splendour of the 1909 building to focus on its iconic reading rooms
- Rebuild the north and south additions to provide flexible, light-filled space that can meet current programmatic needs and can evolve over the next 50-75 years

Design Neilson to connect key open spaces and leverage opportunities to improve connections across campus

Despite its central location, Neilson lacks connectivity and is a physical barrier that blocks access from the upper to lower campus and turns its back on the science quad.

- Maintain primary access to Neilson on Seelye Lawn while reopening the Burton Lawn entrance and developing a new entry to the proposed north wing on the Chapin Lawn
- Support all entrances with appropriate services and library teaching and learning programs, thus making Neilson a physical and intellectual crossroads for the campus core
- Develop a signature south facade facing a new lawn that opens to Green Street and the campus buildings beyond

Highlight the college's unique and distinctive special collections

The Mortimer Rare Book Room, the Sophia Smith Collection and the College Archives are not easily visible to the community and are not located to facilitate integrated access to the college's special collections

- Create an integrated Special Collections in the new south wing that is accessible from the first floor and visible from both the interior and exterior of the building
- Provide capacity for the rapidly growing manuscript collections and rare books in Neilson to facilitate access to these extraordinary holdings

Young

Create a dynamic crossroads for the campus that will connect the areas north and south of Green Street

- Provide a new entry at the south side of Young towards Green Street
- Activate level 1 with a cafe and science forum/presentation space
- Provide technology-rich and varied teaching and study environments
- Integrate the majority of the physical collections into the general collections in Neilson

Josten

Leverage Josten as an interactive partner in the performing arts curriculum

- Relocate and integrate the book collection with the general collection in Neilson, freeing space for research and scholarship while retaining more specialized collections, including scores and recordings
- Create opportunities for robust use of the full range of the library's resources by creating a performance/exhibition laboratory, housing experimental teaching and learning spaces with new technologies

Hillyer

Increase visibility to the library and its activity and broaden accessibility of services

- Open the library to the adjacent interior street connecting Seelye Lawn with Elm Street, making activities in the library more visible
- Increase accessibility to a range of services through partnerships with other campus organizations and academic support services

Implementation Strategies

The sequence set forth below is flexible, and does not address the projects in order of importance. This approach builds upon the renovation and early success of one or two of the smaller library facilities to create momentum and support for the most impactful and financially substantial project: Neilson Library.

Phasing Strategy Option

As a first step to realizing the four core opportunities (Neilson, Young, Josten and Hillyer) an initial study must be undertaken to evaluate space needs for collection accommodation. The implementation sequence will evolve and continue to be refined as conceptual designs and cost models are explored. An initial vision for implementation is as follows:

- Redesign Young to serve the entire campus while meeting the needs of the science and engineering communities
- Transform Josten to provide a range of services and engage students and faculty with resources in new ways
- Rebuild and restore Neilson in phases to allow the library to remain in operation throughout
- Realize opportunities for incremental changes in Hillyer to integrate new technologies, enhance study environments and improve visibility of integrated services

(Page 41 of the Master Plan provides further details regarding the implementation strategy and collection impact.)

Conclusion

The Master Plan for the Libraries provides a framework and common language to position the library facilities in support of the fulfillment of the college's overall vision.

By making connections across the campus and between divisions and departments, the reinvisioned Smith College Library facilities will embody the collaborative and exploratory nature of a Smith education, placing the library at the center of the intellectual life of the institution and strengthening Smith's position as a leader among its peers.