Whereas mid-twentieth century libraries evolved as consummate repositories of print matter and stations for consulting experts on retrieval, the twenty-first century library needs to respond to the fact that the internet has made information ubiquitous.

**Now libraries must become sites where scholars may not only access materials in various forms from print to digital but also hone their ability to evaluate, interpret, analyze, and even create their own materials. Librarians and their teaching spaces and technologies within these sites are crucial to the success of this new mission.**

Teaching is especially important to the mission of the Smith College Libraries. We have one of the most active library instruction programs in the Oberlin Group (our peer group of liberal arts college libraries) and recently received an Association of College & Research Libraries badge as an Information Literacy Best Practices Model Program. Teaching with the library’s unique resources is essential to the Book Studies and Archives Concentrations, as well as numerous other classes that take place in the Sophia Smith Collection, College Archives and Mortimer Rare Book Room. In recent years, however, the library’s teaching efforts have been stalled by inflexible, poorly designed teaching spaces in Neilson Library and Alumnae Gym, and the lack of any space for teaching in Young Science Library.

A survey of teaching librarians and archivists shows an overwhelming desire to move away from rigid lecture-style sessions and towards a more student-centered style of teaching and learning.

The new building gives us an opportunity to enable this change through flexible, technology-rich active learning classrooms, as well as informal multi-purpose teaching spaces. New teaching spaces can also enable new partnerships with our key collaborators on campus, allowing us to merge new technologies with traditional research tools. We hope that teaching will be more visible and transparent in the new library, bringing the Libraries’ teaching mission front and center.

In accomplishing these goals, we will help advance key strategic priorities for Smith. As indicated by several proposals related to classrooms submitted to the Committee on Mission and Priorities, there is significant demand among faculty at Smith for more modern teaching spaces and growing frustration with the rigidity of the lecture hall. As identified by the report of the Strategic Plan working group on Classrooms, keeping up with advances in teaching is vital to a liberal arts college, and Smith is falling behind peers in the availability of classrooms that enable new forms of teaching. Programming the new Neilson gives us an excellent opportunity to jump-start a conversation about classrooms for the college as a whole and test ideas for new teaching spaces.