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Recommended Citation

Jack McNeill, Architects? We Don't Need No Stinkin' Architects, AALL Spectrum, May 2008 at 18, <http://digitalcommons.pace.edu/lawfaculty/492/>.

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Architects?

We Don't Need No Stinkin' Architects

*The Pace University Law Library staff
designed its own new library*

by Jack McNeill



Entrance to first floor.

When Pace Law Library first opened in 1978, few imagined how LexisNexis, Westlaw, and the Internet would radically alter the information and legal research environment. Beginning in the 1980s, the information revolution changed everything. Computers became smaller, reduced from room-sized Leviathans to laptops. “Internet” became a household word, and wireless technology freed the computer from its wire tether.

Through all the changes, Pace Law Library facilities were adapted to new technology and new study methods in ad hoc ways; a small computer lab and several group study rooms were squeezed into the existing facility. Serious constraints on improvements were imposed by the library’s physical space.

The library and its services needed to be addressed in a comprehensive manner. The physical plant had always been the library program’s weak point. The original library occupied approximately 25,000 square feet of the Gerber Glass Law Center. As of 2001, this four-story building also housed the following law school functions: the Registrar’s Office, Career Services, the Moot Court Room, classroom space, and a student clinic. The Moot Court Room occupies the ground floor of the building.

Patrons entered the law library from the first floor of Gerber Glass. Upon entering the library stack area, the patron was faced with a building within a building. There are a total of five stack levels spanning the ground floor through the second floor of Gerber Glass. The stack area and library service desks were and are accessible only from the first floor of the building.

In 2001, the law school dean and library director developed a plan to devote the second and third floors to library space. However, due to engineering factors, these floors could provide no patron access to the print collection. Originally, this lack of access was seen as a problem, but soon it became a feature, permitting occasional 24-hour use of these areas.

Renovation plans drafted by outside architects proved either too expensive or woefully inadequate. Rather than live with an inadequate design, the library team decided to take matters into its own hands. It gathered with diagrams of the building and reconfigured the space. Most of the building was open to reconsideration of its purpose and traffic flow.

Library as Place

The organizing philosophy of the redesign was “library as place”—a place to learn, study, discuss, and meet. The library would not be centered on the print collection, which is one library resource among many that patrons might require. The plan created places for each of these conceptual uses—learning, studying, discussing, and meeting.

The library staff created drawings showing where walls could be removed and others erected. These drawings were given to architects who rendered the designs into shop drawings. The library staff was closely involved at each step of the renovation process to ensure that the library would provide a welcoming place for patrons.



Remodeled circulation/
reserve desk.

The third floor was remodeled to provide a 72-seat classroom for legal research instruction, a 12-seat computer training center, and space for casual reading tables and soft seating. The second floor was renovated to provide spacious reference and technical services offices, 11 group study rooms, a conference room, a reading room, and soft seating.

The first-floor stack area, the original library space, was renovated to provide remodeled library service desks, a large reading room, a 12-seat computer lab, a student lounge, a study room for *Scientiae Juridicae Doctor*

students, and places for casual and soft seating. Technology enhancements included upgraded wireless network access and power and network connections to all new seating areas. Throughout the facility, lighting was enhanced dramatically.

Due to limitations in the original design, stack space within Gerber Glass could not be expanded. To accommodate future growth, the library staff developed a plan to place unique print resources in the stack space, replace many resources with online access, and move less frequently accessed resources to microform or remote storage.

Ultimately, the Gerber Glass Law Center was renovated to a state-of-the-art library facility. Library space doubled from 25,000 to 50,051 square feet, and student seating tripled from 187 to 551. The entire facility is open and airy. Patron comments have been uniformly positive. One surprise is the greater popularity of traditional reading-room-style seating over casual and soft-style seating.

The renovation involved every staff member and altered every aspect of the library program. In October 2007, the renovated library, the culmination of years of work by the library staff, was rededicated. The changes in the facility are palpable, and the results in terms of greater use by students have far exceeded expectations. ■

Jack McNeill (jmcneill@law.pace.edu) is the associate director of the Pace Law Library in White Plains, New York.

To see more photos of the new Pace Law Library, visit www.aallnet.org/products/pub_sp0805.asp.



Conference/study room nicknamed the “fishbowl.”