Library Showcase:
Norlin Library, University of Colorado – Interview with John Culshaw

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LOCATION ADDRESS

University Libraries
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PROJECT INTRODUCTION

Norlin Library's most popular spot, The Norlin Commons, features study rooms for groups and individuals, team technology rooms, a technology classroom, and the busiest computer workstations anywhere on campus.

Some project facts:

- The building has always been a challenge, it originally opened in 1940 and additions were done in 1960 and 1974.
- There are two entrances, one on west side near main quad and one on east side near plaza.
- Ten years ago they started planning the renovation.
- The new library is 330,000 gross square feet and cost $110 million.

- **Phased plan:** Doing renovation in phases, first phase was the library commons renovation completed in 2009.
- Norlin Commons reopened on July 6, 2009. Construction began in 2008, whole project took about two and a half years.
- Student computing fee funded $1 million of cost.
- Project was student initiated; campus funded entire cost (no outside funding).
- The University of Colorado at Boulder has approx. 30,000 students.

What was the nature of the design/space planning?
- Design/planning committee consisted of: reference librarians, John Culshaw, IT Staff, Dean, and Associate Director.
- Design/planning team traveled to other academic libraries to get ideas (Emory University's Cox Hall and Emory's Chemistry Library were inspirations). Emory Chemistry library has a garage door inside and the University of Colorado at Boulder took this idea and used a garage door to separate study rooms.
- There were no students on the design team but some student employees had input. John Culshaw, Professor and Senior Associate Dean, feels that they should have had more student input.
- Design committee wanted to integrate indoors and outdoors (since outdoors are so important in Boulder, so much part of life, etc), so they used the plaza to do this, they integrated the plaza into the learning commons, the school renovated the plaza, installed tables at the plaza, even added electricity to the tables in plaza.

How did the learning commons factor into this project?
- A new learning commons is housed in old reference area. They relocated the old reference desk to the 2nd floor (and relocated 50% of print journals/eliminated periodicals room in order to make room for the reference desk); the circulation desk was relocated to the first floor.
- They chose this area for the new learning commons because it has high ceilings, lots of light, and could create a security perimeter so commons could stay open 24 hours, also added new coffee shop (partnered with a local coffee shop in Boulder).
- Norlin Library has 24 hour access in information commons.
- Committee noticed that the busiest place in Boulder in the middle of the night was a Starbucks (with lots of students there); students wanted to have a safe place to study, get some food, get IT help if needed.
- Only the learning commons is open 24 hours, rest of the library closes at midnight.
- IT staff and security were on site 24 hours (no other library staff).
- The coffee shop stays open until 2pm.
- The IT department was a big partner on the design project; they reduced the number of fixed computers (desktops) and added more laptops, laptop check out has really taken off, currently 200 laptops are circulating and can be checked out for 2 hours at a time (was originally 4 hours).
- The campus supports the laptops not the library, most laptop use is browser based.

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