

Chapter 15

Making Noise in the Library: Designing a Student Learning Environment to Support a Liberal Education

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this case study, the authors describe the library's physical and programmatic designs, focusing in particular on the Knowledge Market as the heart of student-centered learning in this new environment. They tie the library's design and Knowledge Market programming to the Association of American Colleges and University's (AAC&U) Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) Goals, which form the basis of Grand Valley State University's general education program. By describing the Knowledge Market's space and the collaborative programming offered within it by the University Libraries, Writing Center, Speech Communication Center, and other student support services, they will show how the Knowledge Market disrupts the traditional notion of the library and traditional methods of learning.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-2673-7.ch015

INTRODUCTION

At Grand Valley State University (GVSU) a collaborative experiment is underway that could influence the future design of academic libraries, as well as the way universities approach learning support for students. GVSU's Mary Idema Pew Library Learning and Information Commons, opening in the summer of 2013, is designed to upend traditional library buildings that no longer support the way students learn. The new library will accommodate the mix of social and academic learning that students prefer but in an enriched environment that will challenge their thinking, accommodate their needs for comfort and community, and provide seamless support services for their assignments.

At the heart of the building's design is a place called the Knowledge Market. Modeled after the kiosks in a shopping mall, the Knowledge Market will occupy a large space on the main floor of the new library. In this space, highly trained student peer coaches will staff the space, assisting students with writing, oral presentations, research, and multimedia projects for their classes.

The new library building as a whole, and the Knowledge Market in particular, was conceived out of a conviction that universities are not doing enough to prepare students for the kinds of skills that many professors and virtually all employers expect: to think critically; to find and then discern differences in the quality of information; to write coherently and persuasively; to speak with poise and effectiveness; to be conversant in basic and specialized technologies that are used in their particular discipline; and to be able to work with others in a team environment. The Knowledge Market will support the teaching and learning on our campus in two interrelated ways:

- Students can seek support in writing, speaking, research, technology, and collaboration from the peer coaches available in the space itself. As such, the library becomes a central student support unit on campus; it is a "sponsor of literacy" (Brandt, 1989) that is collaborative and technology-rich in its approach. It is a place where students can get tutoring support when they need it.
- As a peer coaching program, the Knowledge Market is an intersection of technology, information, and collaboration for students as they engage in research, writing, and speaking tasks. In other words, the peer coaches model best practices in and creative strategies for technology-rich, multimedia collaboration in research, writing, and presentation for students, faculty, and staff across campus.

As such, the library and the Knowledge Market's peer coaching program are leading, not just facilitating, change on our campus.

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