

A Forum on Library Construction

Corban University Library: Corban University, Salem, Oregon

by Garrett Trott

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Corban University is a small Christian liberal arts university in Salem, Oregon. Its stated mission is “to educate Christians who will make a difference in the world for Jesus Christ.” Two of the three ways this is articulated are

- To foster a transformative learning culture where a sustainable biblical worldview takes shape.
- To build a Christian community that promotes worship, creative expression, and activities that reflect God’s character.



Entry, Corban University Library

The school has gone through many changes, but the primary change in recent years has been geographical: it relocated in 1968 from cramped facilities in El Cerrito, California, into its current facility, a former state tuberculosis hospital, in Salem, Oregon.

Libraries have always been designed for the purpose of providing access to resources, and, in many respects, it always will be so. However, with the competitive marketing happening among educational institutions, it is necessary for universities to have “curb appeal,” or amenities, in order to compete for students, and libraries have not been exempted from this trend. Resources are no less important, but they must be provided with aesthetic appeal in mind.

Not surprisingly, the former tuberculosis hospital did not have a library. The place that the administration chose to house the university’s library was part of the hospital itself. The original hospital was situated in an H-shaped building on a hill. Being built into a hill, there are three floors (floors 1, 2, and 3) on one side of the hill and three more floors (floors 3, 4, and 5) behind it. The third floor is what connects the two parts of the building. The library was placed on floors two and three of the original tuberculosis hospital.

Because of the building’s unusual layout, much of the space was comprised of smaller rooms that were used to house patients. Such a floor plan is not ideal for a library, since large open spaces were so few. For many years, all of the smallish rooms were used to house books and journals.

Stacks were along the walls of these small rooms, with tables and chairs in the middle. One of the few larger spaces had previously been used for reference. However, several factors made this a difficult area for students to work. For structural reasons, support beams had been placed throughout this floor. Several water pipes were also visible, running across the ceiling, not to mention network wiring and other technological upgrades. The support beams, the pipes, and the network cabling were all exposed, making the area unattractive, cluttered, and uncomfortable.

Garrett Trott is Reference/Instruction Librarian at the Corban University Library.

In the summer of 2011, changes were made to Corban University's library. Nothing new was constructed, but there were many internal changes. Corban's collection was spread out in almost every room, both large and small (about twenty rooms). We moved as many of these rooms as possible into one large room, creating a more functional stack area. Sixty percent of our collection is now in one room. The remainder of our collection was moved to some of the larger rooms throughout the building.

DISCUSSION

1. What was hardest and what was most rewarding about this project?

Very honestly, this project was not very hard for me personally. I did not do much of the physical labor. Perhaps the hardest part of it was walking into the library in the middle of the summer and seeing what a mess things were. It was difficult at times, through the mess, to keep the final project results in view.

There were two things that were very rewarding. I came into the library on a Sunday after the new carpet and the new circulation desk had been installed. It was impressive. I was beginning to see what this mess was going to look like. We took staff and faculty through the library for tours before classes started. Seeing their impressions of the changes that happened through the summer was also quite rewarding.

2. How was the rest of your work affected by this challenge?

Very honestly, it was not affected much. There were a few projects that were undertaken in which I played a role, but they were minimal. This project was completed during the summer months, which is typically a fairly quiet time for the library.

3. Is there one single thing you wish you had done differently?

No.

4. What was the single most valuable piece of advice you received for this project?

Although I was not in a leadership role with this project, I still heard much skepticism over this project when it first began. Much of that was simply skepticism that the projected could be completed in such a short time frame. The doubters were wrong. The leadership that initiated this project and saw it through to completion was remarkable.

5. What have people responded most favorably to so far?

Two things: first, the library has always been a part of the H-shaped building known as the "Academic Center." Half of this building comprises the library and the other half of the building houses classrooms and faculty offices. These two halves have always been separated by fire doors. The classrooms and faculty offices are adjacent to three of the five dormitories. It was decided to open these fire doors during regular hours to give more access to the library. Students, faculty, and staff greatly appreciate that increased access.

Second, books were moved out from two of the large rooms that previously had been used as solariums. These two large rooms were made into reading rooms, with couches, nice comfortable chairs, tables, and wired and wireless Internet connections. Students, faculty, and staff enjoy using these rooms.

6. How do you see your library's services being enhanced by this project so far?

More people are using the library. And, since the computer labs are now part of the library, we now have had added an IT component to the services we provide.

7. Other observations of interest.

Corban University's library has always allowed food and drink, but the renovation allowed the library the opportunity to bring food services closer to library services. Within campus space limitations, Corban's food services provider liked the idea of placing a coffee shop in the library. While it added another point of sale for the vendor, it emphasized the change in aesthetics and space made by the transformation of Corban University's library.

