

A Forum on Library Construction

Murphy Memorial Library, Baptist Bible College and Seminary, Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania

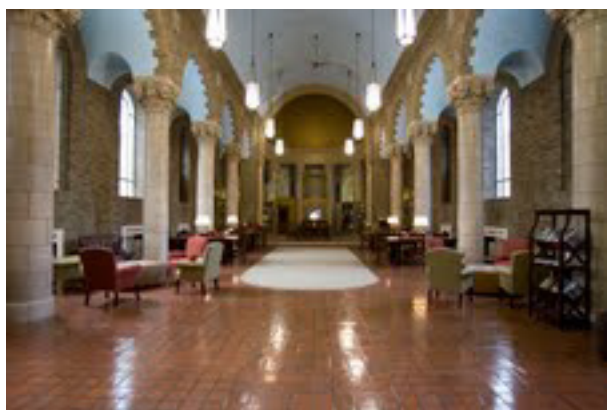
by Joshua Michael

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Murphy Memorial Library undertook a modest renovation project during the 2007-2008 school year. The library serves Baptist Bible College and Seminary in Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania. The library occupies part of the lower two floors in the main academic building. The first-floor library holds most of the library's volumes, staff space, and circulation counter. The second floor contains the reference collection, quiet study space, and periodicals. Space in the library was originally configured for individual study. While some tables for group work were present, the library's space on the second floor was dominated by thirty-six study carrels.



Second floor before renovation



Second floor after renovation

Attendance data indicated a declining level of usage of the library's facilities over the years 1998-2007, with the second floor in particular showing very little usage in the most recent years. In addition, the overall appearance of the second floor library was compromised by old, faded carpet and dated light fixtures. No major renovation had previously been undertaken in the library. Some minor modifications, such as addition of doorways, rearrangement of equipment, etc. had occurred as the library absorbed additional spaces in the main academic building, but no significant projects were completed since the institution moved to its current campus in 1968.

The second-floor library encompasses about 4,500 square feet, and approximately 3,000 square feet were remodeled as part of this project. Study carrels and old carpet and light fixtures were removed and replaced with six new group-study tables and thirty-six chairs. The chairs were built out of cherry wood by a woodworker in the campus maintenance department. New informal reading spaces were also added through the addition of contemporary furniture. The old circulation desk was replaced with a newer one with one-third of the space footprint. Old carpet was removed in order to utilize the original tile floor underneath. The overall effect was to make the room brighter, more open, and more inviting. The room was originally constructed as a chapel and features a 25-foot-high ceiling, large pillars, and a stately

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Overhead view

atmosphere; the renovation re-emphasized those aspects by creating a more open appearance.

The original vision for the project was inspired by the president of Baptist Bible College and Seminary, Jim Jeffery. He believed that replacing the carrels on the second floor with study tables designed for group work would prove more agreeable to contemporary students and their academic habits. I developed a comprehensive plan for updating the entire library.

The project took longer than anticipated to complete. The initial proposal for renovation was drafted at the beginning of September 2007 after several conversations with the president.

The draft proposal was then reviewed by the administration

and communicated to other relevant parties, such as the maintenance department, during September and October. By the end of October, a final renovation plan was in place. Shortly thereafter, maintenance began work on the six tables, which were completed the following spring. During the summer of 2008, the current furniture in the second floor was disassembled and, along with the carpet, removed. Using volunteer labor, and eventually a contractor, the tile underneath the carpet was cleaned. This part of the process took about six weeks to complete – five weeks more than anticipated. By the middle of September 2008, the floor was finished, the tables were installed, and the old lights removed. New lights for the tables and updated furniture were installed later that semester. Installation of a new, smaller circulation counter was finished in the spring of 2009.

One concern that I had through this process was maintaining continuity of services in the library. Having worked for the former director, I wanted to ensure that any remodeling was undertaken not as a way of breaking from the past but as a way of continuing the library's purpose of providing suitable facilities for students to engage in academic and educational pursuits. I attempted to emphasize this in project descriptions and in conversations with key persons as well as any other interested parties. The support of the former director was important in this process.

The project was funded by donor funds, and the total cost was approximately \$40,000. President Jeffery had a relationship with the donor who provided the funds for the project. The donor was the daughter of the college's first president in 1932, for whom the library was named. The president's involvement in the project was key in two areas: the initial vision and securing the funds from the donor. The president did not seek to involve himself in the specific details of the project, allowing the library director to oversee and implement the project.

Another key relationship was that of the library director with the maintenance department. Rather than buy tables, the library opted to have the maintenance department craft tables in-house. The library allowed the maintenance department to select the wood (cherry) and develop some sketches for tables, which were then approved by the library director. Once the tables were built, chairs that featured the same design elements were purchased.

The renovation project has been a striking success. Attendance at the second-floor library is up conspicuously since the remodeling. The second-floor library is the most attractive space on campus now, and is featured during prospective student visits. As a sought-after space, the second-floor library has been used for classes, employee prayer meetings, concerts, alumni events, and a number of other purposes since it has been remodeled. The renovation plan for the library envisions additional projects to advance the remodeling process, which depend upon donations for funding and availability of manpower to complete the projects.

DISCUSSION

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

The most rewarding part has been seeing the second-floor library occupied by students engaged in reading, studying, researching, and collaborative work. The hardest part was during August of 2008 when it seemed that no progress was being made on completing the project, with the fall semester beginning in a few days.

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

It didn't take as much time from my schedule as one might think. Once the plan was in place, there was only occasional involvement in a decision or to resolve a problem. Having effective relationships was key to this process.

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

I wish that we had remodeled the remaining second-floor library spaces at the same time as we did the main room.

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

I can't recall any advice that was valuable, but the most valuable component in retrospect was the close relationship with the maintenance staff and being responsive to the input of the administration. The president has remarked on several occasions since then how much he appreciated that, and I think this has made a good impression in forming his view of the library.

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

The change in appearance has been universally commended—as I noted, the space is now the most attractive space on campus and it gets a lot of attention because of that.

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

I think we have created an environment that is more agreeable and friendly to students. It is now a place that they are eager to use. This contributes to our purpose of enabling students to accomplish their academic and educational objectives by providing space that is conducive to such pursuits.

7. Other observations of interest

I had the opportunity to talk to many people during the renovation process about what we were doing and why we were doing it. It allowed me many occasions to communicate my vision for the library and to make and develop new relationships with other institutional staff. It also drew people who otherwise had not shown any interest in the library to the library to see what was going on.

