

## A Forum on Library Construction

### *James E. Rolfig Memorial Library: Trinity International University, Deerfield, Illinois*

*by Rebekah Hall*

#### PROJECT OVERVIEW

Trinity International University, located in Deerfield, Illinois, is comprised of Trinity College, Trinity Graduate School, and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Rolfig Memorial Library provides library materials and services for Trinity students, faculty, and staff. The core areas we hope to strengthen over the next five years include collecting resources, educating students, communicating and collaborating with departments, implementing effective technologies, and responding to needs produced by globalization.



*Rolfig Library*

In the past few years, students have frequently commented on the condition and appearance of the library building, but we lacked the resources to respond to their concerns. In 2009, TIU welcomed our new University President. He strategically consulted each department on campus to identify its strengths and weaknesses. This was the opportune moment to reemphasize the needs of the library. Once funds became available through the sale of the University's Florida-site radio station, a portion of that money was designated for remodeling the inside entrance of the library. Our President's objective was to improve our students' first impressions of the library.



*Library entry during construction*

Prior to this, the most recent library project was the renovation of the Archer Archives in 2006-07. This involved re-carpeting, repainting, and refurnishing that space, as well as restructuring the rooms to display the growing collections and provide an area for study, research, and discussion.

The majority of this most recent building project transpired between August 2009 and January 2010. Near the start of the academic year, the University President contacted the University Librarian about performing a Phase 1 renovation of the entrance and main floor of the library. This included new carpeting and paint, tile at the entryway, and some structural changes. There was not much time for discussion, but thankfully the library staff was equipped with what we called the Master Plan. The Master Plan was a working document that would philosophically define how we wanted to use our physical library spaces for providing library services. This document was crafted to provide us with principles to guide our decision-making regarding our spaces. On a practical level, we also had to identify which zones we wanted to rearrange.

Discussions over the Master Plan gave rise to library staff discussions about what the physical building should look like, and how to incorporate traditional and contemporary features into the plan. Traditional aspects of the library that we wanted to preserve included spaces and furniture conducive to reading, studying, researching, and writing. We intended to continue offering a physical place near the reference desk where students can search OPACs for library resources, and we also wanted to highlight new items that we

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receive in a physical format (i.e., printed books, BluRay discs, etc). The color and style of our remodeled areas and new furniture needed to blend in with the permanent features of our library, such as the brick walls and maroon shelving.

More contemporary concerns include adding spaces for informal gathering, talking/texting, eating/drinking, and multi-tasking using personal laptops. We also desire to provide display spaces for visual art throughout the library, and to create an environment conducive for hosting campus events.

Once this project was launched, our Head of Technical Services developed an action plan in sequence with the contracted crews, so that our staff could stay a few steps ahead of their schedules. He served as the point person for communication between our library, the University Institutional Services department, and the contracting crews. Prior to the actual renovation work, our staff met with Institutional Services to establish a timeline for the project and troubleshoot potential problems and inconveniences for students throughout the renovation process. The crews began work in mid-December during finals week and wrapped up in early January, right before the spring semester started. I contributed to our library project by assisting the Head of Technical Services with drafting the Master Plan and in partnering with other staff to move shelving and other equipment in the library, all in preparation for the contractors' work.

The entire main floor was repainted (approximately 34,932 square feet). The ceiling light fixture in the front entrance was cut back, and the old metal structure overhead was removed and replaced with "canned lighting." Half of the floor on the main level was re-carpeted. Carpeting in the entryway was replaced by tile. Bamboo laminate flooring was installed in the café area. The divider that separated a large section in the front of the library was removed in order to improve lighting and create a café space. The countertop for our OPACs was removed so that we could offer students both walk-up and sit-down stations. Our designer used color to create a warm atmosphere but kept the color palette in line with stable fixtures in the library, such as maroon shelving, brick walls, and the turquoise and wood laminate front counter. This phase of the project cost \$122,781.

While these changes were underway, our staff also worked on reorganizing our main floor layout. In an effort to create social spaces and increase visibility, we tore down shelving in the front area and relocated the children's and current periodicals collections. Weeding opened up more space for study. Our graduate students prefer using tables over carrels for lengthy studying, so we pulled out the carrels from those areas and moved tables there instead. We decided to make our media collection a focal point and keep it in its current setting, near the front of the library. In contrast, since the usage of those materials is declining, we moved microfilm and microfiche to a less prominent location. We switched the media display units to match the shelving throughout the rest of the library.

## DISCUSSION

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

From my perspective, coordinating with library staff to work on tearing down and rebuilding shelving and relocating smaller collections of the library was the most demanding and challenging part of the renovation. It was physically labor intensive and we had tight deadlines to meet. However, it became a blessing in disguise; we learned a lot about teamwork, collaboration, respect, and harmony. This stretched our skill set and helped us to identify each member's strengths. One of the excellent benefits of physical labor projects is the immediate gratification of visibly being able to step back and see what has been accomplished.

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

Our materials budget was reduced that year, which made it easier to focus so much time and energy on work that fell outside our traditional roles and responsibilities. Looking back, it is amazing to realize that we kept up

on our regular workload. I think part of that recognition belongs to our well-trained part-time staff for stepping up and filling in. Communicating clearly with one another and practicing time-management skills also came into play. Circulation and Reference operations had to be temporarily moved during portions of the renovation. We developed workarounds to continue providing services.

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

Eliciting staff buy-in for library building projects is essential, but each renovation has unique challenges depending upon the variables related to staff concerns, budget, and time constraints. Our timeframe went so fast that we did not achieve full staff agreement on all of the changes proposed in accordance with the Master Plan. Since then, we have had to revisit some decisions and discussions. It is a delicate balance for the project manager who is responsible for keeping things moving ahead while also creating adequate space and time for staff to voice their thoughts and feel heard.

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

For other libraries that will be embarking on construction or renovation projects in the future, the best piece of advice I could offer is to lead by example. Even though this is an exciting adventure, it creates stress for students and staff. So set the tone for being flexible and gracious. Be flexible because things will not always go according to schedule. You will have to make quick judgments and then rally the troops to stay focused on the end result. Extend grace when there are miscommunications and then learn from it and be proactive about improving communication for the future.

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

The work near the entrance of the library created a really dramatic change when patrons walked through the doors. Warm colors from the accent walls breathed life into the atmosphere. Rich textures and patterns from the new tile, carpeting, and laminate flooring gave the spaces definition. Alterations to the light fixture and the removal of the wall provided an open entryway. This transformation created an inviting and striking effect. Students have responded very positively to the new look. Library staff felt renewed hope and inspiration for cultivating an appealing, functional community space for our students.

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

The renovation created an opportunity to work towards providing interactive, multi-purpose spaces near the entrance of the library. Over the past several years, our staff observed that students wanted places to talk on the phone, have a quick bite to eat or a cup of coffee, socialize with friends between classes, and plug in their own laptops. We are dedicating staff time and financial resources to furnishing these areas to accommodate those activities. This communicates to our students that we care about investing in their experience here at our school. We recognize that environment influences educating the whole person well.

### **7. Other observations of interest**

Since the initial renovation, we have set aside funds each year to replace our furniture. We now have a Technology Commons with spacious laptop tables as well as a Social Lounge, which is furnished with reception seating in warm colors and comfortable shapes. This year, we are planning to purchase versatile task chairs for our upstairs study space, in response to the need to offer seating for long-range studying. It is exciting and rewarding to see the gradual transition taking place as we work our way through the library.

