This paper examines the connections between academic libraries that have created collaborative learning commons spaces and their partner archives. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with reference librarians and archivists from three large public universities, examining the institutions’ user services, policies, and assessment measures and how they have adapted to changes in their users and their users’ expectations. The study showed that librarians at academic libraries had utilized more assessment measures in order to implement and assess changes to their user services than the archivists at the archives at the same academic institution. These assessment measures used by libraries showed that the shift to a collaborative learning environment had been received positively by users and staff. Archivists were unable to report if this shift had changed their own users’ expectations; however, they felt that user expectations would change, though they were unsure what that meant for the future of their user services.

Headings:

Archives and Libraries

Archives and the user

Collaborative Learning in Higher Education

College and University Libraries—Reference Services

Learning Commons
COLLABORATIVE LEARNING SPACE IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES AND ITS EFFECTS ON REFERENCE SERVICES AND USER EXPECTATIONS IN AN ACADEMIC ARCHIVAL SETTING

by

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A Master’s paper submitted to the faculty of the School of Information and Library Science of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Library Science.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina
April 2012

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Introduction

A common story shared between graduate students of library science is the reaction of their family and friends to their field of choice: “Library science? Doesn’t everyone just use Google now?” Many critics have hailed the Internet as the death knell for libraries as search engines like Google, online resources like Wikipedia, and even increased access to scholarly resources have begun to grant users easy access to almost any kind of information, provided they have a device with an internet connection. However, despite these shifts in the greater population’s information-seeking behavior and deep budget cuts, libraries are thriving, with many libraries even reporting increased traffic in the last few years. This surprising (to some) success of libraries has been attributed to a variety of causes, including a failing economy in which job seekers are taking advantage of the library’s free access to information and job-seeking tools, and people who are adhering to a tighter budget are able to enjoy free access to books and entertainment like DVDs and CDs. However, at the root of libraries’ strength is a willingness to adapt to what users need and have come to expect from libraries: increased access to digital resources; the ability to interact with those materials; and the space, digital or concrete, to work, collaborate, and communicate with other users. Libraries across the country are adapting their services, and even their physical spaces, in order to become approachable, user-friendly spaces where information seekers can meet and work together, in order to improve the users’ experience and increase use of their facilities.
Academic libraries, by which for the purposes of this paper will mean libraries located at large research universities, have been on the forefront of this trend, as they not only generally operate on larger budgets than public libraries, but are often are at the heart of research prized by most universities. As the demand for online access to resources grew, academic libraries began adding computers and creating what became known as an information commons model. These information commons provided students and researchers with computers with internet access, reference services, and technical help all in one location. In recent years, many universities have begun requiring each student to own a laptop, which is making the information commons model increasingly obsolete. However, at the same time, the global economy has become increasingly dependent on collaboration and teamwork, and college curricula have begun to reflect this change in order to prepare their graduates to compete in this workplace; in Nancy Schmidt and Janet Kaufman’s article, “Learning commons: Bridging the academic and student affairs divide to enhance learning across campus,” they note:

…the nature of…learning is changing. This includes new learning pedagogies, a greater emphasis on collaborative learning, and a recognition that advances in technology have a major impact on how students now acquire, organize, and disseminate information.¹

In addition to classroom changes, social media have increasingly connected students to the world around them. In order to respond to these changes in user needs and expectations, academic libraries have begun to shift from an information commons model to what is known as a learning commons model. Learning commons in academic libraries provide spaces in which students can work together comfortably while still

¹ 2007
accessing all of the tools and resources that the library has to offer. Comfortable seating, work areas that accommodate more than one student, the sounds of conversation and collaboration, and sometimes even a coffee shop are some of the hallmarks of a library that has begun the transition to a learning commons model. On the whole, the literature implies that application of the learning commons model has been successful; most case studies show drastic increases in gate counts, circulation, and user satisfaction.

Despite the success of the learning commons model, academic archives have been slow to adapt to the changing demands of their users. For undergraduate students, the archives are still intimidating places to enter because few students have the information literacy necessary to access and use primary materials in an archival setting. Academic archives have been quick to create a digital presence, with more and more collections being digitized every day and Encoded Archival Description, or EAD, encoded finding aids making searching archival collections easier, but there is less evidence of archives attempting to make their physical environments more approachable. While digitization has caused archival holdings to be seen by a wider audience of researchers, it is important for archives that operate in an academic setting to still serve their campus communities and make their physical holdings available to students as well. This is not to say that academic archives actively discourage students from using their physical collections and space. However, the literature in the field contains many calls for user education, user studies, and archival reference curricula for archivists in archival science programs, but only a handful of these articles provide solutions. This study seeks to examine the change in user information needs and expectations in academic archives at

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2 Yakel 2004
large research universities where a collaborative learning commons area in the main has been established, as well as the ways in which those same archives have assessed and adapted their user services and policies to those changes.

**Literature Review**

**Education Literature**

The first body of literature that was consulted was scholarship on teaching and education that addressed the concept of collaborative learning, which the literature seems to have come to a collective definition of “a learning situation during which students actively contribute to the attainment of a mutual learning goal and try to share the effort to reach this goal”. The body of work in the field on the effects of collaborative learning as a way to adapt to varying learning styles within a classroom improve student performance is vast; as a result, I limited my research to resources published in the last five years. Clearly, scholars of education are concerned with discovering how students learn, and how they can adapt teaching styles and curricula in order to achieve the highest positive level of student achievement. A large part of this discussion has been used to understand different types of students and learners, and how teachers may adapt their classes in order to serve the needs of all of their students, instead of only students who learn best in specific way. While several theories of learning have been posed over the years—behavioral, cognitive, constructivist, humanist—two schools of thought, “Piaget’s constructivist theory and Vygotsky’s sociocultural approach”, seem to be the

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3 Janssen 2010  
4 Grassian 2009  
5 Hämäläinen 2011
grounding for most current research and theoretical scholarship on the subject.

Constructivist theory is based on the concept that learning is based on the learner’s construction of knowledge, building on what they already know. Therefore, the student learns most effectively when he or she takes an active role in the learning experience and applying it to his or her own experiences. Because of its emphasis on learning building on and through the learners’ interaction with the world around them, constructivist theory encourages a social view of the learning experience and knowledge building. Allowing students to work together in groups allows them to share their own knowledge, as well as assimilate the knowledge of fellow students into their own understanding of the topic.

Sociocultural theory, however, “reverses” constructivist theory; instead of learning being a process of building on the learner’s existing knowledge, integrating it into his or her worldview, and then reinforcing this learning by sharing and integrating others experiences, Vygotsky posited that students learn best within a group setting and that by working with a teacher or peer, the student will understand the new material better in order to utilize it later on his or her own. In simplistic terms, “the cognitive operations that the student can complete with the assistance of another today, he or she can accomplish alone tomorrow.”

Both of these theories encourage collaborative learning as a way in which to maximize student understanding, and seem to have been embraced within the education field.

A large number articles I found were research articles on how these collaborative learning strategies and tools, including technology, affect students’ learning outcomes. However, many of these articles focus heavily on younger students, from elementary to

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6 Gredler 2002
middle school; these studies rarely seemed to address larger educational issues that would affect curriculum decisions in a higher learning environment. However, recently, there appears to be growth in the field, studying how collaborative learning and participation affects knowledge building in university courses at the graduate and undergraduate level, not only regarding in-person instruction, but in the construction of online courses. The vast majority of these studies seem to conclude that utilizing collaborative learning tools in the curriculum improves performance outcomes for students, encourages participation, and leads to a greater sense of “ownership” in the learning process on the part of the students.

Beyond research studies, multiple articles have been published touting the benefits of collaborative learning in the classroom. The benefits discussed are not only concerned with academic benefits and learning outcomes, but also ways in which the student as a whole person stands to gain from collaborative learning exercises within a curriculum. Several articles note the ways in which technology and cultural shifts have made cooperation in the workplace imperative, and mention the need for “twenty-first century skills” as students enter the world beyond the classroom walls. Some of these skills include “flexible and novel abilities in share working practices”, “collaboration and divided creative problem solving”\(^7\), and critical thinking skills. Socially, collaborative learning allows students to “develop a social support system”, “build diversity”, establish “a positive atmosphere for modeling and practicing cooperation”, and develop “learning communities”. Finally, collaborative learning increases self-esteem in students, while reducing their anxiety and helping them develop more positive attitudes toward teachers.

\(^7\) Hämäläinen 2011
These findings have been so positive that some universities, such as the University of Alabama, have begun to model themselves as “student-centered research universities,” encouraging an emphasis on collaborative learning in curricula campus-wide.\(^8\) For example, the University of Alabama has found that, in addition to encouraging students’ active learning in the classroom, collaborative learning in the classroom has improved faculty performance in regards to both teaching and research.

**Library Literature**

It would seem only natural, then, that academic libraries would adjust their approach to user services as the academic cultural of campuses shifts from isolated, individual study to one that encourages group work and collaborative learning in an effort to stay relevant in today’s culture; budget cuts and users who are comfortable with, and expect access to, the latest technology. Libraries, and not only ones located on college campuses, find themselves fighting to find ways in which to market themselves and bring users into the library; rarely has an issue of *Library Journal* or *American Libraries* from the past two years lacked an article on staying relevant, or marketing, or how to adapt to a changing information culture in order to keep libraries relevant in the twenty-first century. Part of this push in the literature is due to what has been a failing economy since 2008; many of these articles discuss why libraries are important and still relevant, and how libraries can go about convincing policy makers of their utility, instead of viewing them as a “tax burden”.\(^9\) One compelling article, James LaRue’s “Keeping Our Message Simple” makes a counter-intuitive argument about the ways in which libraries can gain

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\(^8\) Laal 2012

\(^9\) Bonner 2010

\(^10\) LaRue 2011
funding in order to maintain their operations. In the beginning of his article, LaRue argues that

it’s time to face some harsh realities: 1) Use has nothing to do with support…2) Demographics have nothing to do with library support…3) Library performance has nothing to do with library support.  

However, he goes on to say that users and library supporters are an important part of gaining funding when dealing with policy makers. His argument is that, while policy makers may not find value in our metrics of measuring success in libraries, utilizing library users as advocates in the community is an effective strategy. If policy is supposed to be created in order to serve the community, and libraries have enough users that speak out, policy makers have to consider the value of the library in the community.

Other articles encourage “library fitness”\(^\text{12}\), which focuses on bringing in and keeping users. Assessment is a huge part of most of these articles, encouraging libraries to talk to their users and build relationships with them, in order to more fully understand what they need and expect from their library. In addition to these relationships, thorough assessment measures help libraries understand where problems are and fix them. By understanding what users want, libraries can create avid users who can later become the advocates for library services that LaRue mentions. However, these approaches all require a great deal of flexibility and adaptability that libraries have not been known for. Part of these types of articles is about changing perceptions of what a library is, both in the minds of users and, sometimes, in the minds of librarians.

One major shift in the way librarians are beginning to perceive the role of the library is an increased emphasis on education and information literacy. Professional

\(^{11}\) American Libraries May/June 2011
\(^{12}\) Bell 2010
organizations such as the American Library Association (ALA) and the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) have endorsed information literacy competency standards for their users, and many libraries have used the pursuit of meeting these standards as a way in which to reach out to their user communities. Sometimes, these standards are met by exploiting existing trends at a given library. For example, a study was published in 2004 titled “Information Grounds and the use of need-based services by immigrants in Queens, New York: a context-based, outcome evaluation approach.”

This case study showed that the immigrant users of the Queens Borough Public Library utilized the library facility for not only what Fisher dubs “building block gains,” which involves “the confidence, knowledge, and skill to utilize library resources…to help them succeed in their new environment,” but also personal gains, including increased information literacy. Fisher’s study also shows that the immigrant users often became long-term library users. By paying attention to and adapting to the existing information grounds that had emerged at the Queens Borough Public Library for the immigrant community, the staff was able to improve service to those users, and increase resource use as a result.

Academic libraries have similarly begun reaching out to campus communities by using existing information grounds. Many have begun working with academic departments on campus, as well as with non-departmental campus organizations, in order to reach out to students and “promot[e] library services [and] encourag[e] library use.”

This proactive approach includes contacting faculty to schedule their classes to have an

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13 Fisher, Durrance, and Hinton 2004
14 2004
15 Tag 2007
instructional session with a librarian, library workshops focused on a specific topic or discipline, and an active role in new student orientation. Not only does this encourage information literacy in those students that participate, but these classes encourage more students and faculty to participate in such programs. Much like the sharing of information within the immigrant community of the Queens Borough Public Library, faculty members share effective teaching strategies, and students are likely to share positive experiences with their peers. Another benefit of outreach efforts within the campus community is that “people who are most likely to use libraries are the people who already know about them, have visited them, or have received effective assistance while using them.”16 As a result, the students who are encouraged or required by their coursework to visit the library will be the students who are most likely to return the library for future assignments, much as the immigrant users of Fisher’s study were likely to become long-term users of the Queens Borough Public Library. However, as LaRue pointed out in his on garnering library support, having users does not equal having support. However, colleges and universities value the information literacy and critical thinking skills of their students. The impact of a library on campus “occurs where campus needs, goals, and outcomes intersect with library resources and services.”17 Making teaching a priority, coupled with a commitment to developing methods by which to assess student learning, libraries not only place themselves in a position of improving their services by being flexible institutions, they can better advocate to university administration and policy makers why and how the library is an important nexus of

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16 Huwe 2010
17 Oakleaf 2011
learning in the university community that supports the university’s goals, and is therefore worthy of funding.

To further the vision of the library as a teaching institution, many libraries have begun modeling themselves as what has come to be known in the literature as a “learning commons.” Initially, libraries had followed an information commons model, in which the library provided access to computers and technological tools; many libraries also began to move multiple services, such as technical support or writing centers, into the reference space in order to create more of a “one-stop shopping” approach to reference.\(^\text{18}\) This model was hailed as successful, with libraries reporting that students began to use the library “more frequently and for longer periods of time.”\(^\text{19}\) However, as personal technology has grown and students are increasingly tech savvy, the information commons model has begun to change. While computers and access to technology are still needed in the academic library, students today often own laptops that they prefer to work on. In addition to personal computers that can be brought to the library, ever more college curricula involve the assignment of collaborative group projects, which requires more space in which students can talk and work together comfortably. In response to these changes in the academic environment, academic libraries have begun to move from the information commons model to a learning commons model,

\[\ldots a \text{ place that fosters the development of the twenty-first century scholar and practitioner by integrating the library and other campus student support units. It is a multifunctional, flexible space that deeply integrates the library into the lives of students in collaboration with other campus departments and services. It is a neutral space that brings partners together to support learning initiatives. It is a}\]

\(^{18}\) Fitzpatrick, Moor, and Lang 2008

\(^{19}\) Halbert 1999
workplace for students that may include formal and informal areas. It is a location for collaborative work, knowledge generation, and innovation.\textsuperscript{20}

These learning commons often include comfortable seating, ample desk and table space, access to technology, and sometimes even cafes. The learning commons model integrates the sociocultural and constructivist theories of learning that have become influential in recent education literature not only to help them live up to information literacy standards, but in order to adapt to the changing expectations of the course work that students are being assigned. There has been some pushback to this transition; Jeffrey T. Gayton claims that “the social model undermines something that is highly valued in academic libraries: the communal nature of quiet serious study.”\textsuperscript{21} However, despite critiques, the learning commons model has proven itself to be successful. Case studies in the literature consistently mention increased gate counts, because, as one study concludes, “when gate counts skyrocket because the space is designed with student needs foremost, it is an easier matter to meet the user where he or she is.”\textsuperscript{22}

**Archives and Special Collections Literature**

While library literature has become increasingly focused on user services and adapting to users’ changing needs in order to stay relevant, literature in the archival field has been slow to catch up. There is very little scholarship on user services in a special collections environment, despite frequent calls in the literature for increased awareness of user needs. There are two main calls to action in archival reference: the need for improved reference and user services coursework in archival education curricula and the

\textsuperscript{20} Weiner, Doan, and Kirkwood 2010  
\textsuperscript{21} 2008  
\textsuperscript{22} Fitzgerald, et. Al. 2008
need for increased studies and assessment on user needs and expectations in an archive. Despite these calls to action, however, I was able to find few articles responding to such a charge. Furthermore, many of the articles on reference in an archival setting have been published in journals that are aimed more at librarians than archivists, which means that it is possible that not many archivists are benefitting from the research. A smaller body of work regarding user services in archives and special collections is user-centered, but even then, very little of it is focused on education and reference services. Elizabeth Yakel has done extensive research on this topic, but many others have focused less on the experience of the user in the archive and helping users reach a level of archival information literacy and more on the technical end of the archival profession, such as how to design finding aids that make more sense from a user perspective. There have been some presentations recently at the Society of American Archivists’ (SAA) Annual Conference that have focused on outreach and user services in archives, such as “Engaged! Innovative Engagement and Outreach and Its Assessment” from the 2011 Chicago meeting, however, that may find their way into the scholarship eventually that have not yet, due to the slow nature of scholarly publishing.

**Methodology**

This study seeks to examine connections between research and instructional services (otherwise known as reference or user services) in university libraries and the user services in the archives at the same institution. These connections are examined by investigate a series of research questions:

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23 Nimer and Danes 2008
Research Question One: What changes are librarians and archivists noticing in their users’ needs?

Research Question Two: How are they adapting to these changes?

Research Question Three: What metrics are being used to discover users’ needs, and the success of any changes?

Research Question Four: With digital resources becoming more common, what are archives doing to encourage new users to conduct research in the physical reading room?

Research Question Five: What are librarians’ and archivists’ perceptions of the trend in academic libraries toward collaborative learning spaces and its effects on user expectations?

A series of semi-structured interviews (see Appendix A for interview questions) were conducted at three public research universities in North Carolina with student populations between 25,000 and 30,000 students. In the interview, participants were asked to identify their primary user community and as any other communities that frequently used their institution’s resources, any outreach programs used to encourage new users to visit the facility, and any strategies used to help alleviate new user anxiety. They were then asked about any changes they had noticed over the past five to ten years in their users in regards to their information needs, the types of reference questions they asked, and their work habits while in the physical space of the library or archive. They were also asked to report changes that had been made at the library or archive in regard to user services policies and the physical space, user and staff reaction to those changes, and
any metrics used to measure those reactions or the success of any changes made. Finally, participants were asked about their opinions on the collaborative learning commons as a trend in the field and if they felt it would change user expectations or how their institution operated.

Two groups were targeted to be interviewed. The first group was archivists at the special collections housed at each institution who are involved in reference and outreach services in the archive. The second was librarians in the research and instructional services department at the main research branch library for each university. Potential participants were primarily identified by searching the staff directory on each institution’s library website, though often participants pointed me to other archivists or librarians whose job titles in the directory had not lead me to contact them directly. Participants were contacted by email (see Appendix B). The email assured contacted parties that all answers were confidential, and that their agreed participation would be viewed as giving consent for their responses to be used in this study. Forty-six people were contacted overall. Thirty-five of those forty-six responded, though only twenty-seven participants were ultimately available to be interviewed, for a 58% participation rate. The number of archivists contacted ended up being significantly smaller than the number of librarians (fourteen archivists contacted, versus thirty-two librarians), due to an overall smaller staff size in the special collections division of all three universities’ library systems. However, the participation rate between the two groups did not vary significantly; archivists had a 57% participation rate, while librarians participated at a rate of 59%. There was also a slight bias in the data toward one university; 52% of participants were employees of University C.
Results were primarily analyzed qualitatively for major themes and attitudes regarding outreach, user education, and institutional change, as well as any latent content that may have been present, such as meaningful pauses or the interviewee’s tone, which would communicate something about the interviewee’s feelings about the topic not expressed explicitly in his or her answers. Some questions that required brief responses with limited possible answers were coded and entered into an Excel spreadsheet in order further analyze the data for any trends.

Findings

As discussed in the literature, users’ information needs are changing rapidly. Nowhere is this probably more true than in an academic setting, where an undergraduate population means that each year brings new students to the library or archives, with an ever-changing perception of information and technology. Librarians and archivists alike have noted an increased expectation of access to digital materials; 70% of interviewees mentioned that patrons expect materials to be available to be online, and complain when they are not. Forty percent of participants also reported that process related questions (“How do I…?”) have become much more common among researchers from all communities, instead of “ready reference” questions (easily found factual information) or questions related to a specific research question; these participants observed that this has indicated a general trend towards users wanting less mediated access to materials, as well as to be more independent in their research.

However, this is where the similarities between librarians’ and archivists’ observations regarding changing user needs and expectations ends. The librarians all
were much more aware of the work habits and information needs of their users in regards to the types of research their users are conducting, the types of reference questions they are asking, and the kinds of work spaces they are requesting. There were two main observations made by the majority of the librarians. The first was that, while users are increasingly tech savvy and familiar with tools like iPods/iPhones, tablets, ereaders, and internet searching, nine of the nineteen librarian participants reported that there has been a decline in the information literacy and the quality of research skills in users. Ten of the nineteen librarians made reference to the “Google-ization”\textsuperscript{24} of the world and the fact that many users do not know how to use the library catalog or databases effectively because they are not intuitive and easily searchable. Secondly, all nineteen of the librarians interviewed expressed having noticed a growing demand from student users for group work space. Sixty-eight percent of participants attributed this growth in demand for group space to an increased number of group projects being assigned by professors and teaching assistants. Thirty-eight of that group of participants expressed a belief that the increased demand for collaborative work spaces is also growing due to students’ increased desire to study with peers due to changes in the world with new technologies like social media, which allow students to be plugged in and connected to their friends at all times.

Archivists, on the other hand, seemed to be less aware of user information needs, user expectations, user work habits, and any assessment tools used to study user experience, though there were multiple assessment tools mentioned to measure collection use, such as registration systems, call slips, and a reference desk tracker. There was frequent reference to increased expectation for digitized materials, with all eight of the archivist

\textsuperscript{24} Interview 3.1.5
participants noting that many users now preferred online access to archival materials, but only five of the eight were able to describe any other changes in their users. Only 33% of archivists mentioned the work habits and expectations of users. That 33% noted, as librarians had, that researchers had an increased desire for the ability to work in groups. Those archivists cited the same reasons as librarians, with the added theory that genealogists want to work with their families in order to cover more material and share their discoveries.

Each institution has also changed its policies and space as they feel best suits their users, or avoided changes, if they feel that their users are best served by the stasis. All of the libraries where interviews were conducted have shifted to a liaison model, in which each librarian is assigned to specific departments. Each of these departmental liaisons are responsible for reaching out to faculty in the department, teaching instructional sessions for classes taught in the department, and in general building relationships with potential users in their assigned discipline. While 47% librarians reported that there was some trepidation on the part of the staff initially, these changes have been considered a success by both librarians and users. By focusing on a few departments, instead of acting as a broad reference for the large number of subjects within the university, librarians are able to specialize in using a number of tools specific to their discipline, becoming more familiar with the important databases and resources within the discipline, focusing on creating more thorough online subject guides and e-resource guides for users, and gaining a greater awareness of the kinds of courses being taught and research being conducted within a smaller sphere. In addition to being better able to help guide users’ research, users have a friendly face that they recognize when they come into the library, because
they at least will be familiar with their subject liaison librarian. Instructional sessions, as well as tours, library scavenger hunts, involvement in student orientations, and, in the case of one library, peer-to-peer workshops, have all been instrumental in the libraries’ outreach efforts.

Similarly, all of the libraries have, to varying degrees, increased the amount of group work space available in the library in the past five years. Two of the libraries, A and B, recently finished large-scale renovations that included adding more group project rooms throughout the library, converting the reference area of the library to a collaborative learning commons environment, and the addition of coffee shops in the library. Both of those institutions, in response to user feedback, have also designated quiet study areas, so that students requiring a more peaceful work environment can also use the library’s resources without being disturbed. Library C had undergone minor cosmetic renovations, including the addition of comfortable furniture and increased space for group work, with an intention to add more collaborative spaces in the next year as part of that university’s growth plan. However, this library did not plan to fully convert their library into a reference commons area due to another library on campus that already fills that role for students; as one librarian phrased it, “We’re perceived as the serious, quiet study library. They’re the library you go to when you don’t mind being interrupted by friends.”

When asked about user reaction to the renovations, eighteen of the nineteen librarians interviewed said that they felt that the user reaction had been positive. Libraries A and B had done several assessments of their users’ needs prior to the

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25 Interview 3.1.4
renovations, using surveys, focus groups, interviews, and other metrics, as well as using the same assessment measures after the renovations had been completed in order to measure users’ reactions to the changes to the space of the library; the libraries continue to use these assessment measures to adapt any negative feedback they receive. Library C librarians felt that thorough assessment up until now had been lacking and mostly involved with studying “ad hoc projects”, though it was in the library’s plans to work on more rigorous metrics to measure the library’s success in the future. The metrics listed were gate counts, reference desk statistics, circulation statistics, numbers of consultations and instructional sessions requested, head counts, room reservations, surveys distributed before and after instructional sessions, focus groups, user surveys, photo interviews, and Google Analytics to measure the use of online resources. One librarian also mentioned the implementation of a student advisory board for the library in order to garner more user feedback.

Reaction to user needs in archival repositories on campus was much less consistent. While each library had found ways to increase their digitization efforts in order to meet users’ needs for electronic materials, their reactions to other user needs was quite diverse. Archive A, located within Library A, loosened their restrictions on digital cameras and laptops in the reading room and lengthened their reading room service hours two days a week in order to allow researchers greater scheduling flexibility; one division of the archive had also recently implemented chat reference, which was reported to have been successful, despite only having been in use a few months, with one archivist saying,

26 Interview 3.1.3
“We didn’t know how many users we were losing until we started using chat.”

Archive B’s service point had been renovated as part of Library B’s renovation project in 2007; due to space concerns, the archive’s holdings were moved off-site, which has been a challenge and an adjustment. Regular users have not seemed to mind, according to the archivist, but new users are quite put off by the change. However, the interview participant reported that the renovated reading room is much less intimidating for new users. Built as an extension of the quiet study room in Library B, separated from it by only a few bookshelves, she reported the reading room gives a less formal impression than many archival reading rooms, and has tables and seating for group study of archival materials.

Finally, Archive C has probably undergone the most changes, despite being the only archive examined that is housed in an entirely different building from the campus’s research library. Archive C is made up of four separate collections which, until recently, had different service points throughout the building and different policies; in the last year, the policies have been standardized, and they are in the midst of attempting to consolidate service points to reduce user confusion. A new registration system has been put in place in order to help increase security for the archive, as well as allow users to track the materials they have requested, so that they do not waste time requesting materials that they have already seen. The administration has also made it a priority for the building to become more welcoming by adding comfortable furniture to the building’s lobbies, as well as increasing signage. One archivist reported that this was due to hearing tour guides passing the building and telling undergraduate students on the tour, “And this is

27 Interview 1.2.3
[redacted]. You won’t need to go in there, only professors and grad students use it,” which, as the archivist phrased it “really stuck in our craw.”

As far as outreach, the archives interview participants reported very little about reaching out to the campus community. Most outreach, a 62% of participating archivists reported, is done in the surrounding community, through exhibits, lectures, and talks with community groups or historical societies. To campus communities outside of humanities graduate students and faculty, only Archive B reported any outreach efforts, having included departments such as engineering, life sciences, and textiles in its outreach efforts by drawing their attention to collections that would be of interest to their research. All of the archives studied mentioned departmental outreach as a way of reaching new users. However, unlike the liaison model of the libraries’ studied, it was, in general, not a very focused or formalized effort. However, the university curricula at Universities A and C have begun to require archival research as part of their first-year writing courses, which 71% of archivists at those institutions reported as having been an effective form of outreach to new users in the undergraduate campus community. Archive C also has begun to working with the libraries on campus and giving tours during orientation in order to bring in new students.

However, none of the archivists interviewed could provide any much information on the success of these changes or outreach outside of anecdotal evidence. When asked about evidence of the success of the changes aside from anecdotal evidence, only three archivists were able to provide any metrics or measurements used to measure their success; all of the archivists from Archive C at this point in the interview explained that

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28 Interview 3.2.2
there had only recently been a push from administration provide better data on users and that they were in the process of conducting a survey of user services. Archive B had multiple assessment measures, including an iPad app, a database tracker, and a reference desk tracker that had been adapted from Library B’s reference desk tracker, and was currently trying to figure out a way to consolidate their measures in order to gain more meaningful data. Both Archives A and C used desk trackers and statistics their registration systems. However, only Archive C mentioned any current or future plans of assessing the state of user services and user satisfaction within their archive; a survey had just begun in order to focus on user services in Archive C in order to better achieve the university’s goals and mission.

Eighty-nine percent of the librarians interviewed considered undergraduate students of the university as their primary user community, with graduate students, faculty, university staff, and visitors such as community users or visiting scholars as secondary communities who used the libraries resources in much smaller numbers. Meanwhile, 75% of archivists identified professional and pre-professional—that is, faculty and graduate students—as their primary user base, while only 25% of archivists identified undergraduates as one of the main communities who use their resources. With undergraduates making up, approximately, 75%, 72%, and, 63% of the student population at each school, the discrepancies in outreach, user services, and assessment between the institutions at each school become quite obvious.

Conclusions
Due to a changing information landscape and a poor economy, both libraries and archives have found themselves with a sizeable marketing and public relations problem. The omnipresence of the Internet, as well as the proliferation of information available through it, has considerably changed how users want to access and interact with information. However, the findings of my study suggest that the approaches taken by libraries and archives, even on the same university campus, may be quite different. Both have increased their efforts to supply access to digital materials. However, reference librarians have also shifted from merely being the purveyors of a print collection and facts to placing an “emphasis on [the reference desk] as a service point.”\(^\text{29}\) and allowing the library to be used as a flexible work space for users. However, archivists also share a responsibility to both their users and the materials themselves, which makes their “stewardship to the materials a tricky balancing act.”\(^\text{30}\) Archivists have always had this stewardship to the materials, and mediated access to the materials is a fact of archival research. As such, the literature of the field reflects a much stronger focus on description and the materials themselves.

In one way, this difference is hardly surprising. While library materials have been mass produced and can be replaced, or at least accessed elsewhere, should the materials be damaged or go missing, archives deal in materials that are more likely to be old, fragile, and unique. A careless user tearing a page in an archival collection is damaging an irrereplaceable piece of history. If a patron walks away from the archive with an original photograph tucked into his or her notebook, no other researcher will ever benefit from having seen that photograph. As such, archivists walk a fine line between a

\(^{29}\) Interview 3.1.4  
\(^{30}\) Interview 3.2.2
responsibility to the user and responsibility to the materials. They cannot merely cater to the desires of the users, because they must also protect their materials. While libraries can allow food and drink, and build cafes in their buildings, it is understandable that archives may never implement such policies; the battle against mold and pests is difficult enough already without supplying the other side ammunition. Archives must have secure reading rooms with some measure of surveillance, even if it may make the users feel as though they are in a panopticon, and check users’ laptops and notebooks before they leave because they have to prevent security breaches of their collections. And while comfortable furniture and sofas are great tools in libraries, they are not a feasible solution for archival settings. As one archivist noted “…a little bit of discomfort in here [is] probably a good thing. You don’t want people relaxing too much around 200 year-old documents”  

What is surprising about the findings of this study, however, is the differences in culture and attitude surrounding user services in academic archives versus academic libraries. Of the librarians I spoke with, 74% of them reported that the staff reaction they witnessed in reaction to changes to their user service models and library renovations were positive, and the remaining 26% did not report negative staff reactions, but that staff reaction was “mixed.”  

When asked about the staff reaction to her library’s shift to a collaborative learning commons model, one librarian replied:

   Everybody loves it; everybody loves it because the users love it. So the staff loves it, and it’s a fun place to work and we attract some really smart people to work here…I love my job more right now than I ever have before because of the

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31 Interview 3.2.2  
32 Interview 2.1.6
smart people who work here…and the good atmosphere. You know, it’s just a fun place to come work. It’s really rewarding to sit down and help someone.\textsuperscript{33}

At Library C, the organizational culture differs from the other two libraries studied; another library on campus provides collaborative learning spaces. However, the librarians at Library C had positive reactions to changes that have been implemented to better serve the users, such as food policies or shifting to a liaison model, in which they would have to take on more work as bibliographers in addition to reference services. This desire to respond to user needs and make changes that will best serve them has led to a number of assessment measures that academic libraries use to touch base with patrons to find out what changes they need.

However, the archivists had less knowledge of what users expect from their archive; when asked if collaborative learning environments in the library on their campus would affect what users would expect of them, 37\% of archivists reported that they did not think it would because archival research is so new to most users that they did not know what to expect to begin with, while another 37\% simply expressed that they did not think that changes in the information landscape would change what users would expect from visiting an archive. However, while the libraries studied were able to cite assessment measures to back up their sense that user expectations were changing, the archivists interviewed did not have the same user data to back up their impressions on their users’ expectations. This is not to say that the archivists interviewed were not passionate about users having access to their collections. One archivist expressed his feelings on the matter clearly:

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{33} Interview 1.1.1
\end{flushright}
A special collection is only as valuable as the access you have to it. If nobody’s looking at it, it’s just a pile of crap in a corner. Unless it’s at least vaguely organized and discoverable through means that most library patrons are able to understand, it’s just going to sit there, and then we’re just a warehouse, which, in my opinion, entirely defeats the purpose of it.  

Despite this recognized need for archival collections to be easily accessed by the public, the archives interview participants reported very few changes that had been made to user services in the physical space of the archive. While digitization was a big push for all three of the archives studied, very little is being done to make archives a place easily accessible for the novice user aside from bibliographic instructional classes done for classes taught by professors who requested instruction. This may be due to what archivists’ perceive to be what is best for their users; when asked about user reaction to any changes that had been made to the archive aside from extended hours, five of the eight archivists interviewed expressed that the changes to user services had been met with some push back, due to their, as one archivist phrased it, “change-averse” regular users.

Twenty years ago, archives may not have had to worry about bringing in new users. Archives held the monopoly on their collections, with the only way of accessing them being to travel to the archive, sit in the reading room, and go through the boxes. However, increased digitization efforts not only democratize access to archival collections, it means that users do not have to come to the archive. In the case of undergraduates, who make up the majority of the people on campus in an academic institution, many see the archive as a “grad student ghetto”. While 75% of the archivists reported that professors required their students to complete projects that

34 Interview 1.2.2
35 Interview 3.2.2
36 Interview 3.2.1
involved primary source research, if students can make due from their dorm rooms accessing digitized archival materials, there does not seem to be a pressing need for them to visit the physical archive.

This means that, firstly, archives are not performing in a way that can best support student learning on campus and, secondly, something must change in archives in order to reach out to the immediate on-campus community. While instruction and exhibits are wonderful ways to bring in users, the way to keep users is by making the space in the archive work for the user as well as for the archivists. As an archive whose parent institution is a research university, academic archives must support student learning and what is happening in the classroom; as the literature has shown, what is happening in the classroom is collaborative learning. For archives, collaborative learning could be a scary and complicated task. The arrangement of collections could be disturbed; materials could be lost or damaged. As reported by six of the eight archivists, their regular users are quite change-averse; if the archives’ mission is to promote the use of their archival collections and research, alienating regular users does not help support the archives’ mission. However, even archivists seem to know that this trend is changing the face of libraries all over the country, and that soon it will begin to change what their users expect from them, with 62% of the archivists interviewed acknowledging that the trend in academic libraries will change user expectations, and 88% of the archivists reported that they felt that, eventually, the collaborative learning trend on campus would change how their organization operated, though none of them were sure how.

There is no silver bullet solution to the problem of how academic archives can adjust to the trend of collaborative learning and the demand for more group work space
on university campuses. However, archives could learn from the libraries on their campuses that have embraced the trend. Some lessons seem to be fairly uniform across campuses and curricula, like the need to account for all kinds of learners, not just those that want to be able to collaborate with their peers, and develop separate spaces for those two learning styles. However, many changes will depend on the on campus culture and communities that the archives serve, especially given the difference in their holdings and the types of users that make up those communities. This means that archives should heed the call for increased assessment of archival user services, which has been made in the literature for at least twenty years, as well as the development of assessment measures with which to measure the success of the services developed. These metrics could allow for improved outreach and user services, as well as provide archives with data that can be presented to their stake holders in order to justify further support.

**Opportunities for Further Study**

This study was limited by geographical and time constraints, as well as the fact that more librarians were available to be interviewed than archivists. I also learned that some archives required all of their staff members to work on the reference desk, even though only a few staff members had reference as part of their job title or description. My sample is also biased, due to the opportunistic way in which I selected participants; as a result, these findings may not be representative of the larger population. As a result, a larger study, both in terms of geographic area and number of participants, would be needed for further study. Furthermore, a study of archives’ assessment measures would
be useful in understanding the kinds of data, if any, that archives are collecting on their users, or why they have not utilized assessment measures if none exist.

Most important, however, would be in-depth study of the users of academic archives. By utilizing measures such as focus groups, surveys, or interviews, archivists can begin to understand not just what documents are being used or how many people are coming into the archives, but what they need and want from an archival institution on a university campus. While the user communities at each archive are different and have distinct needs and expectations, by talking to users about their needs, archives can better adapt and provide improved service. It may also be useful, in an academic setting, to reach out to potential users, such as students attending instructional sessions, in order to find out not only their level of archival information literacy, but what leads them to, or keeps them away from, the archives. By having a better view of what users expect from us and adapting our services to serve our patrons, archives in academic settings will be able to better support the learning and research missions of their parent institutions, thus encouraging institutional support.
Works Consulted


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doi:10.1016/j.hitech.2009.10.001


Appendix A

Interview Questions for Participants

1. What kinds of users does the library/archive serve? What communities?

2. What does the library/archive do to encourage other groups to use your resources?

3. What kind of outreach does the library/archive do to bring in new users?

4. How does the library/archive handle and help alleviate new user anxiety?

5. What changes have you noticed in users in the last five to ten years? Needs? Reference questions? Work and study habits?

6. What changes have the archive/library undergone in the last five to ten years? To user services? Space? Policies?

7. What changes have been implemented to bring in new users?

8. Have any of these changes been successful?

9. By what metric, if any, has the success been measured?

10. What has been the user reaction to these changes? Staff reaction?

11. What are your thoughts on the trend in academic libraries toward collaborative learning spaces?

12. Do you see this trend changing user expectations?

13. Do you see the trend as being useful in your archive/library?
Appendix B

Email Soliciting Participation

Mr./Ms. _______,

Hello! My name is Camille Tyndall, and I am a MLS candidate in the School of Information Science at UNC-Chapel Hill. I am currently conducting a study examining user services and reference in academic libraries and special collections for my master’s thesis, conducting interviews with librarians and archivists who work in user services at their libraries.

I was wondering if you would be willing to allow me to interview you at a time convenient for you. The interview should only take 30 to 45 minutes, and all of your answers will be kept confidential.

Thank you so much for your time,

Camille Tyndall