

# Fulfilling the Mission of a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Academic Library – The Lingnan University Library Building Projects

*Tommy Yeung*

*Associate Librarian, Lingnan University*

## Abstracts

To meet the new service demands and changing user expectations, libraries need to review and renovate their internal space from time to time. In Hong Kong, the higher education continues to expand in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Universities are now redesigning their libraries to respond to the increasing user population, curriculum change, research and other needs. This paper will use Lingnan University as an example to discuss the planning consideration and goals of library renovation. This paper will also look at some recent projects of other local academic libraries on improving utilization of their building facilities. Land is a scarce resource in Hong Kong. Libraries are now looking beyond their university campuses to satisfy space needs. We are working on a joint storage project to help ease the shelving pressure. After books are moved out and more space becomes available, academic libraries can better fulfill their missions by assuming more responsibilities in future service provision.

## Keywords:

Lingnan University (Hong Kong), Library architecture, Library buildings,  
Space utilization of libraries

## 1. Introduction

*A library is the very heart and substance of a university.*

– Gordon B. Hinckley

The above observation was made at the library addition dedication of Brigham Young University in 2000. It suggested that no building on campus would be as important as the library building. By keeping pace with changes of teaching and learning, the Library of Brigham Young University had been reinventing itself to become a vibrant centre for learning by transforming to an innovative teaching facility, creating an information commons, etc.<sup>1</sup> Libraries were not merely book repositories. Indeed, many academic libraries joined the rally of redefining their roles and lifting new faces in the new century.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Hong Kong committed to expand the post-secondary education in the direction of setting up associate degree and self-financed programmes at various levels. As proposed by the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region in 2000, the target would be that 60% of school leavers could have access to post-secondary education.<sup>2</sup> Since then, the student population had been increasing steadily fast. Academic institutions began to expand and redevelop their libraries to support more users as well as more activities. But only a few libraries had the privilege to construct new buildings. Most were seeking solutions from their existing facilities.

In 2005, the government further announced that the general education system in Hong Kong would change to a new 3+3+4 academic structure in 2012. As stipulated by the government, in anticipation of the increase in undergraduate enrolment under the new structure, tertiary educational institutions would need to increase their campus space to accommodate the additional students and to provide suitable teaching and learning environment.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, local universities were trying to become internationally recognized by putting more effort on research.<sup>4</sup> Academic libraries must give support to scholars by acquiring more books, journals and research materials. Facing the user pressure and research demands, academic libraries started to renovate their premises to meet the new challenges.

This paper will focus on how academic libraries in Hong Kong respond to the needs in the new century in the aspect of space provision. The Library of

Lingnan University, one of the government-funded tertiary institutions, will be used as an example. Notable experience of other academic libraries will also be drawn.

## 2. The Lingnan Profile

The origin of Lingnan University can be traced back to the Christian College in China in 1888. The College grew from strength after building a permanent campus at Kangle Cun, Guangzhou (formerly known as Canton), in 1904. It began to offer university-level programmes in 1918. In the 1920s, its curriculum was expanded from the original arts and science courses to include agriculture, commerce, engineering and medicine. The College changed its name to Lingnan University in 1927. In the developmental process, Lingnan emerged as a key educational institution in southern China. Due to a nationwide higher education reform, the University ceased to operate in 1952. To continue the fine tradition of the University, the alumni re-established a private Lingnan College in Hong Kong in 1967. The campus was situated on the Stubbs Road, Hong Kong Island.<sup>5</sup>

Lingnan College came under the government funding in 1991. Since then, it entered into a period of rapid growth. The College moved to a brand new campus in Tuen Mun, the New Territories, in 1995. The site was about 9 hectares, which was substantially larger than the Stubbs Road Campus. The new campus and building design were inspired by the architectural style of the old campus at Guangzhou. More than a dozen academic, administrative and amenities buildings, and student hostels were built. The Tuen Mun Campus gave a solid base for future development. After a series of academic reviews, in 1998, the College was given the self-accrediting status; and it was renamed to Lingnan University one year later. Today, the University has 2,400 undergraduate and postgraduate students, and another 1,600 associate degree and self-financed students. It pursues a liberal arts mission and adopts a whole-person approach to education.

## 3. The Lingnan Library in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

The Stubbs Road Campus was small with only a few buildings. Library collections and services were scattering in several different locations. Such a setup could not enable the provision of an efficient and effective library service.

The major improvement for the Library after moving to the Tuen Mun Campus was all library collections and services were consolidated under the same roof. The Library was centrally positioned on campus and occupied 2 floors of the Main Building. The total floor area was about 3,000 m<sup>2</sup>. The ceiling was high. The interior and furniture had a strong Chinese character. As the Library was planned and designed in the early 1990s, the primary target was on providing adequate space for the collections and sufficient seats for users.

However, just before we moved to the Tuen Mun Campus, the rapid development of the computer network and proliferation of electronic resources began to revolutionize the provision of library information services. Users were no longer satisfied with a library in the form of a warehouse for books and journals. To respond to user needs, an electronic information area with more than a dozen computer terminals dedicated for database searching was set up in front of the reference collection. The duty reference librarian would assist users to use the databases and the technology.

In 2000, for taking the advantages of long opening hours and manpower support, the University decided to merge the Self Access Language Centre with the Library Media Services Section. A new Multimedia and Language Learning Centre was created on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the Library. New shelving, viewing booths, service counter were installed for housing more diversified learning materials and serving a larger number of users. Clearly, the Library had been active in assigning new usage to existing space in responding to new service demands.

#### 4. Targets of Library Renovation in the New Century

However, the above few modification works just represented piecemeal actions to address new service demands. For meeting the user expectations and requirements in the new century, a thorough identification of different kinds of needs and a comprehensive redesign were deemed necessary. Through observation of user behaviour, analysis of user surveys, discussion with focus groups, sharing the experience of other institutions and reading professional literature, the following targets for future library building projects were established.

##### 4.1 Users' Needs

From the entrance statistics, more than 2,500 users would come to use the Library on a regular weekday. Of these users, about 85% were students. Therefore, the library space must assign a high priority to meet the expectations and requirements of students. From the annual user surveys, most students considered that more and better computing facilities should be available.<sup>6</sup> If possible, the electronic information area should be expanded to cope with such expectations. Moreover, the Library had been providing individual carrels for quiet reading. When the curricula and course assignments were becoming more group oriented and adopting a collaborative approach, students wanted to have some space where they could sit together and talk, and work as a group in the Library.

Most libraries had policy against eating and drinking in their premises.<sup>7</sup> However, after spending a few hours in the library, naturally some users would feel tired, hungry and thirsty. Some students indicated to us that they looked forward to have a place in the Library where they could get relaxed and have some light refreshments. Other than food, the Lingnan Library used to have a strict policy of prohibiting the use of mobile phones. But, when each student carried a mobile phone, it appeared unrealistic to prohibit users from using phones anywhere in the Library. In addition to recognizing users' academic needs, we should also accept and take care of their personal needs if we want to see our users enjoy using the Library. The possible solution would be that some areas should be designated for such non-academic purposes.

As a liberal arts institution, the Library had a departmental liaison programme and actively engaged with academic units to organize exhibitions, seminars and cultural activities that supplemented regular education. For example, each term, the University would invite an artist-in-residence to share his concept and experience of creation with our students. The Library often worked with the artists to organize exhibitions and talks. In addition, the Library had a monthly event called *Celebrating a New Book*. The purpose was to let the authors introduce their recent published works to other staff and students. If the Library was going to renovate, would the new space cater for these events and activities?

## 4.2 Information Needs

When the Internet and electronic information resources began to flourish in the mid-1990s, there was a misconception that libraries would eventually become

virtual so they did not require any space for existence. In fact, the impact on space from new technologies could not be underestimated. Although electronic data did not take up much physical space, computing equipment and peripherals required a lot.<sup>8</sup> On top of hardware setup, the use of IT raised service expectation because when students used software for their assignments and presentations, they expected to have timely support nearby. In many cases, when the reference desk received questions on hardware and software, wireless connection, account login, etc., librarians might not be the best persons to handle and needed to forward them to other units. A stronger technical support in the Library became a consensus.

On the other hand, the use of electronic information resources did not necessarily mean that fewer books were acquired. When we moved to the Tuen Mun Campus in 1995, the library collection was still small. The collection grew by an annual rate of 27,000 volumes; and in 2002, the collection had already doubled and exceeded 336,000 volumes.<sup>9</sup> As a result, shelving space started to push out study space as many reading tables were removed for creating space for more book shelves. Collection growth represented a huge pressure on the Lingnan Library. Additional space to accommodate the fast growing collection, especially for AV materials, became an important target when planning new facilities.

#### 4.3 Institutional Needs

Lingnan University is committed to the provision of quality education distinguished by the liberal arts tradition. The Library seeks development in accordance with the general direction of the University. Other than supporting scholarly activities, there are two important institutional goals to be met by the Library.<sup>10</sup> As stipulated in the University's strategic and development plans, the institution requires its graduates to have good language and communication skills to cope with the multilingual environment of Hong Kong. When considering new library facilities, a stronger provision of language learning services in the Multimedia and Language Learning Centre should be strived for.

The second goal is to equip students with life-long learning skills. Information literacy is regarded as an essential component for life-long learning. Each term, the Library will join hand with the Information Technology Services Centre (ITSC) to offer information literacy programmes to students. All new students are required to participate. In the past, the Library would reserve a

teaching lab for conducting training sessions. But it was not always easy to compete with other units for teaching venues. If new space could be added to the Library, a dedicated teaching venue for information literacy training would be particularly welcomed.

## 5. The First Phase (2003-2005): Extension and Renovation

To assist the further development of post-secondary education in Hong Kong, a special government loan had been made available to tertiary institutions for new buildings and improving existing facilities for their associate degree programmes. Making use of this special funding, the Lingnan University constructed a new academic block and improved many other facilities, including the Library. The library extension project began in summer 2003. As there was only one library on campus, we could not afford to close the entire library for a long period of time for extension and renovation purposes. Major building works were carried out during the term break in between the Christmas and Chinese New Year holidays, and in summer when students were on vacation.

Clearly, the existing 3,000 m<sup>2</sup> floor space could not meet all the requirements and expectations as mentioned above. Extra space must be created in order to satisfy all the needs. Therefore, two new floors were put on top of the Main Building. Building extension works were completed in early 2005. The Library was allocated 1,200 m<sup>2</sup> from the new floors. The Library Office was moved from the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor to the new 4<sup>th</sup> floor, with the ITSC as our neighbour. The entire Chinese book collection was transferred from the 1<sup>st</sup> floor to the new 3<sup>rd</sup> floor. The additional space not only eased the shelving pressure, together with the vacated space, it made new service initiatives possible.

To address the acute demand on technology, the electronic information area on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor was upgraded to an information commons (IC) in summer 2005. The IC had 42 PC workstations and 9 multimedia production workstations. Printers, scanners and other IT equipment were readily available. The reference desk was also redesigned to become an integrated helpdesk, staffed by library and IT professionals. Users should find that the new IC could meet all their information and IT needs from regular database searching, word processing, email, scanning, printing, to multimedia production and so on, on the same spot.<sup>11</sup>

As more space was available, 9 collaborative rooms were constructed on

different floors. These collaborative rooms were equipped with audio-visual equipment for group project purpose. One of these rooms was even equipped with high-end video-conferencing equipment so that students could communicate with students of other institutions for special inter-institutional activities. Ten individual rooms for very quiet reading were made available as well. Room usage was divided into three sessions a day. Users could register for an individual or a collaborative room via the digital library online. To better serve the information literacy programmes, a training lab was set up adjacent to the Library. Both the Library and ITSC had the priority to use this lab for teaching activities. For non-teaching hours, the training lab would be released for student use. A 24-hour reading room was also created on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the Main Building.

We believed that the Library not only had the responsibility of taking care of users' academic needs, but also their personal needs after staying in the Library for a few hours. A new facility, the café, was set up. The café was about 25 m<sup>2</sup>. A television, vending machines, sofa and comfortable chairs, popular magazines were available in the café. Students could relax on cosy sofa chairs, have refreshments and use mobile phones. At the beginning, some library staff had reservation on providing coffee and snacks inside the Library. As time passed, we found that the situation was manageable as most students would confine drinking and eating in the café area.

In the first phase, an additional 40% of land had been allocated to the Library for many new initiatives. It should be noted that strict building codes and safety requirements were practised in Hong Kong. Since additional floors would be built, the structural plans needed to submit to relevant authorities for approval. Furthermore, fire gates must be installed in between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> floors so that in case of fire, fire and smoke would not be spreading from the original floors to the new floors.

## 6. The Second Phase (2007-2009): Further Renovation

The first phase of library extension and renovation had just provided some answers to our users' demands and expectations. To address the remaining issues, the Library began its second phase of renovation in 2007. In the second phase, the Library Lobby was re-built for better accommodating exhibition activities. Our interior designing consultant advised us to explore a different interior style.

The new look that offered an elegant modern image would depart from the former Chinese style. The circulation counter right behind the lobby area was also re-built in the same style.

To cope with the collection growth, the old mechanical compact shelving system on 2<sup>nd</sup> floor was replaced by two new electronic compact shelving systems. One large system was installed for the bound journals and a smaller system for AV materials. The new systems came with automatic safety devices. Special instructions were posted on the side panels to guide users on operating these new shelving facilities. As the total collection would be reaching half a million items in 2008, the target was to optimize the shelving capacity for another 5 years.

The Multimedia and Language Learning Centre was refurbished in 2008 for enhancing the language and media services. As mentioned, a set of electronic compact shelving was installed for meeting the collection growth. The viewing area was enlarged for serving more number of users with privacy. Two new collaborative rooms were constructed for the special projects of writing tutorial service and discussion groups offered by the English Language Education and Assessment Centre. The mini-theatre was sealed up in glass so that noise would be confined to this area when activities were held. Moreover, the theatre was highly flexible as the furniture there could be moved and organized in different ways. When the examination approached and the demand for reading space was high, it could be changed to a quiet reading room.

In the past when the Library had only two floors, moving up from the first to the second floor was not a major concern. However, when more floors were added, users could feel exhausted to walk up three floors. To facilitate access to different floors, a new entrance was provided on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor. New passages were also created on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor to enable users to move to the IC or other areas more quickly. The Library also took the opportunity as offered by these building projects to upgrade its infrastructure that included air-conditioning, lighting, surveillance system, computer and wireless networks, sanitary facilities, etc.

In spite of the fact that two extra floors had been added and two compact shelving systems were installed, the Lingnan Library continued to run out of space and the number of seating kept on decreasing. To compensate for the loss of reading space, the rooftop terrace on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, formerly inaccessible by users, will be renovated for providing two new reading rooms in summer 2009.

## 7. Responses to Library Renovation

The popularity of the new facilities confirms that the building extension and renovation projects at Lingnan are well received. Most PC workstations at the IC are occupied by students during daytime. The group project rooms and individual rooms are in good demand. The café enables students to have a place where they can hide away from study for a short while. Academic departments like to work with the Library to organize activities because events taking place in the lobby or the mini-theatre are highly visible. We trust that the reason for success is not entirely from the hardware and infrastructure. Meeting the genuine needs of users is the more important factor. For example, the integrated helpdesk at the IC staffing by both Library and ITSC personnel represents a one-stop shop to users where all technical and information problems can get solved.

However, the new setup does come with a couple of negative feedback. After the IC was built, noise becomes a concern.<sup>12</sup> Noise is generated from equipment and conversation. Although library staff regard the current noise level as acceptable, there are users who expect libraries to be as quiet as the sea. After taking necessary action on noise complaint, we would suggest those users who feel upset to consider reserving an individual room for quiet reading. In the future, we shall put effort on telling users that libraries are now taking up many new responsibilities. Instead of offering an absolutely quiet library, a balance should be struck between noise and quietness. Furthermore, some users are not happy with the compact shelving systems because if they want to open a new aisle, they must wait until the previous user finishes.

## 8. Experience of Other Academic Libraries

Not only the Lingnan University Library, but also other academic libraries in Hong Kong are actively responding to users' needs.<sup>13</sup> As an information commons can well integrate information with technology, several libraries have constructed their information commons for service enhancement in recent years. For example, the University of Science and Technology Library set up an information commons in 2006 and improvements will be carried out soon.<sup>14</sup> Today, university libraries are planning for the forthcoming new academic structure and the concept of learning commons draws a great deal of attention. The learning commons represents a further step from information commons since

librarians, technology experts and experts of other academic skills will be available for meeting students' learning needs by integrating information, reference, technical and learning supports. The City University of Hong Kong Library set up a learning commons in late 2007.<sup>15</sup> The University of Hong Kong embraces the same concept in building its centennial campus.<sup>16</sup>

Space on campus is extremely precious. Some academic libraries, e.g. the University of Hong Kong Libraries and City University of Hong Kong Library, have remote storage facilities to accommodate their expanding collections. Remote storage facilities enable the less-used books and journals to move out of campus and save the land for more important activities. Besides moving the collections out, moving the *non-core* business out of the library buildings can be another option. For instance, in 2007, the University of Hong Kong Libraries moved its technical services unit to a commercial building off campus for enabling more library space to users.<sup>17</sup>

Local libraries have been trying hard to save some more space for services and collections. At the same time, we like to see the facilities can be used for a longer period of time. In Hong Kong, most academic libraries have long opening hours and generally close after 11 p.m. To serve the goal of a 24×7 library, the Hong Kong Institute of Education Library renovated a small section of the library for providing over-night research and studying support for students in 2007.<sup>18</sup>

## 9. Joint University Research Archive

Academic libraries in Hong Kong invest heavily on information resources for supporting research. Collection growth gives tremendous pressure on library space. In 2002, the Joint University Librarians' Advisory Committee (JULAC), comprising of the eight government-funded academic libraries, started to search for a long-term solution. After several consultancies and thorough investigation, in 2007, JULAC submitted a proposal to build a large joint storage facility with an automated retrieval system to the University Grants Committee, i.e. the committee that advised the government on higher education funding, via the parent institutions.<sup>19</sup>

The facility is now formally named the Joint University Research Archive (JURA). It will be owned by all eight member libraries. The estimated storage capacity will be 7.4 million items. To add a greater value to the facility, a joint

digitization centre and a preservation centre will be included in JURA. A location site has been identified. Should necessary funding be approved this year, the completion date will be 2013.<sup>20</sup> After the JURA is built and part of the collection removed to the storage, more space will be freed up for future new mission and activities for each member library.

## 10. Looking Ahead

To meet the variety of needs from the future academic structure, the Lingnan University will build a new integrated building on opposite side of the road off campus in 2010. This new building will provide academic and administrative space, and serve as a student hostel. In the design plan, there will be a small library in the premises. From the Library's point of view, we welcome more space that will enable us to further develop our services. However, we also recognize that an additional site will bring forth challenging management issues that we had faced before.

The Lingnan University has a fine tradition of more than one century. Although many materials of historical value are being held by various institutions in China or the United States, the Library is actively tracking and collecting materials and information related to Lingnan. Due to the increasing number of archival materials, the Library is in the process of organizing a separate Lingnan Archive. Although the Archive will put pressure on space, it will function as the hub for preserving Lingnan materials and attracting personal collections of memorabilia from alumni all over the world.

## 11. Conclusion

At Lingnan University, the Library is more than a repository of information resources. Space has been reassigned and redesigned for meeting new service and learning demands. The process is dynamic and interactive. After a series of extension and renovation works, the Library is now capable of supporting many more activities than before. To function as the heart of the University, the Lingnan Library is always eager to meet the present and future needs our users and enthusiastic in serving the mission and goals of the institution by providing the relevant space and facilities. We will continue to renovate the library space in order to become the most important place for the Lingnan community in the new century.

## Further Reading and References

- [1] Olsen, R. J. (2006, Summer). The heart of the university. *BYU Magazine*. Retrieved from <http://magazine.byu.edu/?act=view&a=1834>
- [2] Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. (2000, October 11). *2000 policy address*. Retrieved from <http://www.policyaddress.gov.hk/pa00/p66e.htm>
- [3] University Grants Committee. (2005). *Preparation for the extension of the normative length of undergraduate programmes (the “3+3+4” reform)*. Retrieved from <http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/ugc/publication/report/figure2005/09.htm>
- [4] Hvistendahl, M. (2009, April 3). They’re hiring in Hong Kong: universities recruit professors worldwide in ambitious overhaul. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 55(30), p. A1. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/free/v55/i30/30a00101.htm>
- [5] Lingnan University. (2009a). *History and development*. Retrieved from <http://www.ln.edu.hk/info-about/history>
- [6] Lingnan University Library. (2006). *Lingnan University library user satisfaction survey 2001*. Retrieved from [http://www.library.ln.edu.hk/usr\\_survey/2001/2001\\_feedback.html](http://www.library.ln.edu.hk/usr_survey/2001/2001_feedback.html)
- [7] Soete, G. J. (1998). *Managing food and drink in ARL libraries. SPEC kit 237*. Washington, DC: Association of Research Libraries (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED424871)
- [8] Barney, A. (1996, June). The impact of technology on library space requirements. *LIBRES: Library and Information Science Research*, 6(1/2). Retrieved from <http://libres.curtin.edu.au/libre6n1/barney.htm>
- [9] Lingnan University Library. (2009a). *Library statistics and surveys*. Retrieved from <http://www.library.ln.edu.hk/libinfo/libstat.html>
- [10] Lingnan University. (2009b). *Vision and mission statement*. Retrieved from <http://www.ln.edu.hk/info-about/vision-mission>
- [11] Lingnan University Library. (2009b). *Chiang Chen information commons*. Retrieved from <http://www.library.ln.edu.hk/IC/>
- [12] Lingnan University Library. (2009c). Noise. Message posted to library replies to user suggestions at <http://www.library.ln.edu.hk/feedback/replies/archives/tag/noise>
- [13] Hu, Y. (2005, April). The development special features of the libraries at hongkong universities. *Library Tribune*, 25(2), 218-221 [in Chinese]. Retrieved from China Journals Full-text Database.

- [14] The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology Library. (2009). *Information commons improvement project*. Retrieved from <http://library.ust.hk/info/ic-improvement.html>
- [15] City University of Hong Kong Library. (2008, May). Library forum: 'learning commons – a closer look'. *Library Newsletter*, (15), 6-7. Retrieved from <http://www.cityu.edu.hk/lib/about/newsletter/newsletter200805.pdf>
- [16] The University of Hong Kong. (2008, November 11). *The University of Hong Kong - centennial campus: learning commons design record 11th Nov, 2008* [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from <http://www.hku.hk/spuweb/u21forum/LCdesign.ppt>
- [17] The University of Hong Kong Libraries. (2007, September). Make space for you. *Focus*, 7(1), 9. Retrieved from <http://lib.hku.hk/general/focus/sep07/2007Sept.pdf>
- [18] The Hong Kong Institution of Education Library. (2007, October 22). Opening of the library 7×24 learning resource centre. Message posted to library blog at <http://www.lib.ied.edu.hk/liblog/?p=87>
- [19] Nesta, F. (2007, September 14). *JULAC annual report 2006-2007*. Retrieved from [http://www.julac.org/intranet/julac/julac\\_annrep\\_2006-07.pdf](http://www.julac.org/intranet/julac/julac_annrep_2006-07.pdf) [Restricted access].
- [20] Ferguson, A. (2009). *Introduction to the Joint University Research Archive (JURA)* [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from [http://www.julac.org/events/forum\\_2009/Introduction%20to%20JURA.ppt](http://www.julac.org/events/forum_2009/Introduction%20to%20JURA.ppt)