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## STUDY LEAVE REPORT

### Introduction

In 2013 I was granted permission to take a three month study leave from the University of Victoria Libraries.

Graduate students are an essential part of the University of Victoria and will play an even greater role as the university continues its strategic growth. A number of challenges and goals for the future of graduate education are raised in *A Vision for the Future – Building on Excellence*, UVic's renewed strategic plan. Acknowledging the increasingly competitive state of higher education, the plan identifies a goal for UVic to become "nationally and internationally competitive in the recruitment and retention of graduate students of the highest calibre" (p.18). The plan describes a variety of strategies intended to benefit graduate students. They include: provision of training opportunities in teaching and research, professional development across the disciplines, and "developing programs that provide graduate students the necessary skills in both teaching and research as well as general professional development" (*Vision*, p. 18).

The origins of this project lie in the belief that the university library plays a vital role in educating and supporting graduate students. The Strategic Plan describes how well UVic's library system is "positioned for the future" by being flexible and responsive (p. 33). The use of library space is of particular importance. The plan points out how "spaces and services will continue to be customized to meet new challenges and our librarians will create new opportunities for our students and faculty" (p.33).

I used my leave to explore ways that university libraries are supporting graduate student education. During my leave, I made a series of site visits to several research universities that have recently rethought and expanded the physical space and services dedicated to graduate student research. My focus expanded as I visited other institutions and learned of services that librarians organized and hosted for graduate students. I increasingly found that space and services are intertwined in many ways as part of establishing a holistic graduate research experience for students.

## Site Visits

The principal libraries I visited were: The University of British Columbia (UBC), the Burnaby campus of Simon Fraser University (SFU), and New York University (NYU). A scheduled two day visit to the University of Washington in Seattle had to be postponed but will take place in May. During these multi-day visits I arranged extended tours of graduate space and interviewed the librarians and administrators most involved with these spaces and services. I also made briefer visits to several other institutions with growing graduate student support programs: the Belzberg Library at SFU Vancouver, the Lehman Social Sciences Library at Columbia University, the City University of New York (CUNY) Graduate Center, Baruch College (CUNY), and Hunter College (CUNY).

While in New York, I was guest speaker for the class *Academic Libraries and Scholarly Communications* at the School of Information and Library Science at Pratt Institute. I also met with members of the Graduate Services Discussion Group - ACRL/NY.

## Recommendations

Based on my visits I have compiled five broad recommendations for graduate services at UVic.

### 1. Identify and create new graduate space in the library

There are many clear benefits for establishing space that is primarily or exclusively for graduate students. Creating space for graduate students is a trend that has emerged as a way of addressing the increasingly collaborative nature of graduate education and also as a means of creating of establishing an environment that encourages interdisciplinary research. Such a trend is described well in *New Roles for New Times: Research Library Services for Graduate Students*, a recent ACRL report that discusses how the imaginative use of space can also allow for a greater sense of belonging and community for a graduate student population. Ideally any space would allow for maximum flexibility. Rethinking space issues can also allow for opportunities to integrate library services with other units and services.

The graduate planning at **NYU's Bobst library** is especially impressive. The planning team's research identified the need for a wide range of study environments, from quiet and isolated writing space to open, often noisy group work places, to spaces with physical and virtual access to librarians and technologists. They also took into account the role that technology plays in student life, and the need for basic resources such as power outlets at virtually every study spot.

The result includes a wide range of spaces designed to address particular student needs at a variety of stages. The Graduate Exchange is a dynamic, noise-permitted, and food-permitted

space that provides NYU graduate students a place to collaborate and meet. There are small collaborative rooms for graduate students engaged in team-work which feature a mixture of high tech (High-Definition screens that can be connected to laptop) and low-tech (whiteboards). There is also a large and heavily used open space featuring moveable tables, modular furniture, and huddleboards (white boards on wheels) designed to encourage discussion and ideal for students who work amidst the buzz of activity.

There are multiple Dissertation Writers' Rooms which provide quiet shared office space restricted for PhD students with approved dissertation topics. The rooms offer students a personal mobile storage cabinet that can be moved to the assigned workspace. There is also an abundance of quiet study space that is open to all students at NYU, including four large reading rooms which project a serious scholarly atmosphere and maximize natural light through two-story high windows.

While budget and space limitations make it impossible to recreate many of the best features of Bobst, it does provide some valuable ideas. Ideally, new graduate study spaces should be flexible enough to address the variety of ways students work and adaptable enough to adjust to new technological trends. A successful graduate space can not only make study sessions more comfortable, it can also strengthen the graduate student relationship to the library, creating a stronger sense of belonging to the university community. As the ACRL report states, "whether they are impromptu space conversions or formal renovations, focusing on key aspects of graduate student needs around productivity and community can make a big impact. Functionalizing spaces around tasks, user groups, or service needs can increase their productive value for graduate students, while small changes—such as adding writable surfaces to a hallway or other gathering place—can help enhance community creation." (*New Roles for New Times*, 8).

**The SFU Bennett Library** is in the midst of converting their map library into a Research Commons with a mission to focus on graduate students during all stages of their scholarly and research. The Research Lifecycle for Graduate Researchers expresses the various stages of university-level research:

- Ideas: develop a great research idea through structured activities and serendipity
- Partners: find researchers through formal and informal networks
- Proposal writing: find information on all aspects of effective proposal writing
- Research process: search, simulate, experiment, observe, manage, analyze, and share data
- Publication: share your research with others

The website offers an interactive session that ties these stages to various activities in the library and on campus. (<http://www.lib.sfu.ca/research-commons/research/research-lifecycle>)

The Research Commons will be restricted to graduate students and provides quiet study space, group activity areas, and flexible space that can be used for presentations or social events. In addition, there is office space for consultations with staff to assist with theses formatting and submission, writing support offered by SFU's writing services group, and software support for qualitative data tools. Smaller versions of the Research Commons with some of the same programming are also in place at SFU's Vancouver and Surrey campuses.

The **UBC Research Commons** is located on the second floor of the Koerner Humanities and Social Sciences Library. The Research Commons operates as a collaborative initiative of UBC Library, the Centre for Teaching, Learning and Technology and the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies. It offers graduate support in a variety of areas including Thesis Formatting, Citation Management, Statistical Software Support, and GIS. While it does not offer the element of separate graduate space offered by NYU or UBC, it does provide a wide range of programming aimed specifically at graduate students, including FIREtalks, a series of interdisciplinary research discussions and exchanges. Graduate students play a major role in the selection of topics and speakers. Another interesting undertaking at the Research Commons is the use of graduate students as providers of support for many of the services. This service is most notable in the provision of citation management and thesis submission help, and has created a powerful peer-support element to the Research Commons.

## **2. Create and expand workshops and support services for graduate students**

Many libraries are building more robust programming of workshops that address graduate student needs. Some of these workshops are taught by librarians, but many draw on more specialized knowledge and are taught by tech staff, graduate students, or members of other units such as career services, writing support, or counselling. Establishing such workshops would benefit our students and enrich the library services.

Workshops that offer support for qualitative and quantitative research tools have proven to be very successful. SFU offers workshops such as *Working with Survey and Social Media Data* in NVivo. UBC offers *Basic SPSS, Regression Analysis*). Other research software and tools that are taught include GIS tools (*Using Data and GIS in Research* at UBC, *Introduction to ArcGIS* at NYU). NYU also offers a class on *Introduction to Web Survey Software*.

Support and training on the use of various citation management systems are also common. Many institutions provide in-depth support for Mendeley and Zotero, as well as RefWorks and EndNote. Several institutions offer workshops on understanding scholarly impact and citation analysis.

General and advanced courses are also offered on thesis submission such as *Tips and Tricks for Formatting Your Thesis* at UBC and SFU's online series on using thesis templates and submitting completed theses.

SFU also provides workshops which address professional skills for graduate students. They include such pragmatic topics as *Managing Up: The Supervisory Relationship for Students* and *Presentation Skills for Graduate Students* and *Research Ethics*.

### **3. Expand information gathering.**

Current information about graduate student needs and an awareness of new trends is essential before making any decisions and plans for the future. Surveys such as LibQUAL and the UVic Libraries User Surveys are valuable in gauging student satisfaction. Online survey data should be augmented with other channels and methods. SFU and UBC both conducted extensive focus groups prior to the introduction of new services and space NYU devoted three years to information gathering before the expansion of its graduate support. The planners drew upon online surveys about library use, printed comment cards placed throughout the library, in-depth interviews about space needs, interviews about service and programming needs, feedback from forms distributed after instructional and outreach activities. SFU has been able to access information from the graduate student exit interviews held by their Faculty of Graduate Studies.

Beyond simply understanding student needs, it is also important to explore needs based on subject areas and the interdisciplinary nature of students. Creating an internal organizational structure for supporting graduate student services and assessing their needs would ensure that ideas are shared and made operational, either on a trial or permanent basis.

### **4. Host graduate student events**

There are many successful models of events held at SFU, UBC, and NYU that UVic could look to in order to develop a greater sense of community for graduate students.

#### ***Thesis boot camp***

Many institutions across the U.S. and Canada have created forums designed to help graduate students with the thesis writing process. At SFU, the Thesis Boot Camp is a three day workshop which provides graduate students with the opportunity to write and focus on their PhD dissertations or Master's theses. SFU libraries host these events several times a year to great success. In addition to a quiet working environment, the event includes support for writing and research, practical workshops, and catered lunches and refreshments. The Thesis Boot Camp

offers students community and motivation in that final push towards the completion of their dissertations or theses.

### ***Research breakfast***

NYU hosts Research Breakfasts/ Brunches which have proven to be very successful at introducing graduate students to subject experts and services within the library. The events, which are drop-in and offered at the beginning of the term and mid-term, provide food and coffee, and allow a opportunity for students to talk with librarians about projects and to learn about services and resources the library has to offer. Subject librarians and other experts participate and can discuss new subject specific resources or general research tools and strategies. The event also allows students from various disciplines the opportunity to meet and share ideas.

### ***Interdisciplinary research talks***

Numerous academic libraries, including UBC (FIREtalks), SFU (Lightning Talks), and the University of Washington (Scholars' Studio series) organize and host forums for graduate students to talk about their research. Many of these events are interdisciplinary in nature and designed to allow students to share their ideas with other graduate students, faculty, and interested community members. They also provide a way for students to practice public speaking. The events are designed to be informal and fast-paced. One recent talk at SFU drew on students from Communications, Health Sciences, History, and Education discussing globalization and health.

## **5. Look for new ways to collaborate**

The need for strong collaboration with other units and departments underlie many of the recommendations. The library should continue to work with and explore new opportunities for events, workshops, and services with the FGS, the GSS, and other units and interest groups on campus. It could be beneficial to establish an advisory panel of units or individuals engaged in graduate student life to explore cross-unit events.

## **Conclusion**

Libraries have traditionally concentrated on graduate student research needs, but the most innovative institutions I visited were all invested to various degrees with the research lifecycle. The graduate student assumes many roles over time: student, researcher, proposal writer, teacher-in-training, field worker, dissertation writer, TAs, instructors, grant applicants, and job seekers (for both academic and non-academic careers). More libraries have come to recognize the graduate student "lifecycle" by supporting their multiple roles over time. Such an approach

allows many existing services and specializations already hosted by the library to become part of the larger picture of graduate student success.

Library initiatives such as instruction programs, institutional repositories, copyright, and scholarly communications programming can be reframed to become part of the training and support for the graduate student lifecycle. Such a perspective is essential for designing long-range services that will benefit graduate students.

My study leave also reinforced how much can be gained from visiting other research libraries and sharing experiences. Though the graduate community in each institution will have its own, unique characteristics, problems, and opportunities, there are many commonalities and much to be learned. I look forward to continuing to build relationships with the graduate library community and to exploring initiatives at other libraries. I am especially excited about moving forward with many of these ideas at UVic.

### *References*

A Vision for the Future – Building on Excellence: A Strategic Plan for the University of Victoria. Planning and Priorities Committee, February 2012

<http://web.uvic.ca/strategicplan>

New Roles for New Times: Research Library Services for Graduate Students. Report Prepared for the Association of Research Libraries by Lucinda Covert-Vail and Scott Collard, December 2012.

<http://www.arl.org/rtl/plan/nrnt/>

**Libraries visited:**

**University of British Columbia (UBC)**

Research Commons, located in the Walter C. Koerner Library

Contact: Trish Rosseel, Head, Koerner Library

Visit: September, November 2013

Research Commons

<http://koerner.library.ubc.ca/services/research-commons/>

**Simon Fraser University, Burnaby**

Research Commons, located in the Bennett Library

Contact: Nicole White, Head, Research Commons

Visit: September, November 2013

Research Commons: <http://www.lib.sfu.ca/research-commons/>

Research Lifecycle for Graduate Researchers

<http://www.lib.sfu.ca/research-commons/research/research-lifecycle>

**New York University**

Bobst Library

Contact: Scott Collard, Coordinator

Lucinda Covert-Vail, Director, Public Services

Visit: October 2013

Graduate Student Services

<http://nyu.libguides.com/grads>

**Simon Fraser University, Vancouver**

Belzberg Library

Contact: Karen Marotz, Head,

Visit: November 2013

<http://www.lib.sfu.ca/belzberg>

Research Commons Services at SFU Vancouver

<http://www.lib.sfu.ca/research-commons/services/vancouver>

**The Graduate Center City, City University of New York (CUNY)**

Mina Rees Library

Contact: Polly Thistlethwaite, Chief Librarian

Visit: October 2013

<http://library.gc.cuny.edu/>

**Baruch College (CUNY)**

Newman Library

<http://www.baruch.cuny.edu/library/>

Contact: Arthur Downing, Chief Librarian and CIO,

Linda Rath, and Graduate Services Librarian

Visit: October 2013

Graduate Student Services

<http://guides.newman.baruch.cuny.edu/gradstudents>

**Hunter College (CUNY)**

Cooperman Library

<http://library.hunter.cuny.edu/>

Contact: Clay Williams, Deputy Chief Librarian

Visit: October 2013

**Columbia University**

Lehman Social Sciences Library

<http://library.columbia.edu/locations/lehman.html>

Mary Giunta, Director

Visit: October 2013

Digital Social Science Center

<http://library.columbia.edu/locations/dssc.html>

## Research Commons portfolio of spaces

**Research Hub:** Services, technology, interactions with experts, help spot

**Graduate Exchange:** Informal “water cooler,” decompress, exchange ideas, serendipity, interdisciplinary

**Dissertation Writers Rooms:** Subscribed spaces for intense concentration, shared workspace, mobile storage

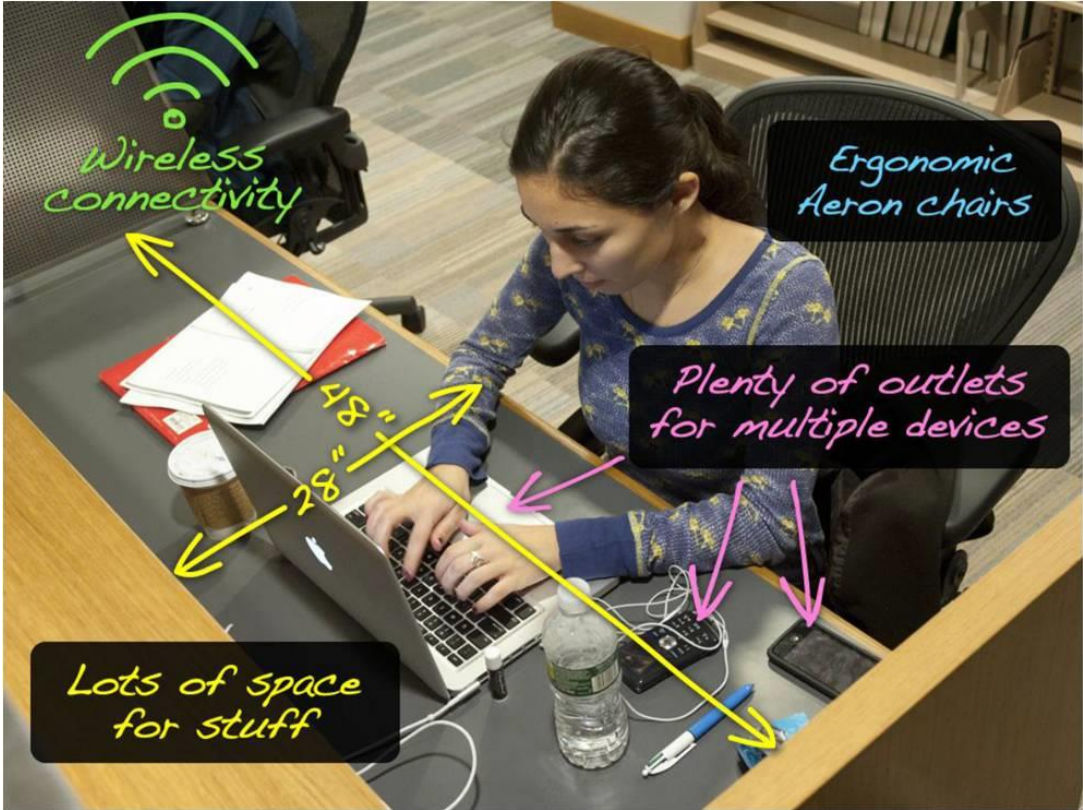
Bobst Renovation Phase II



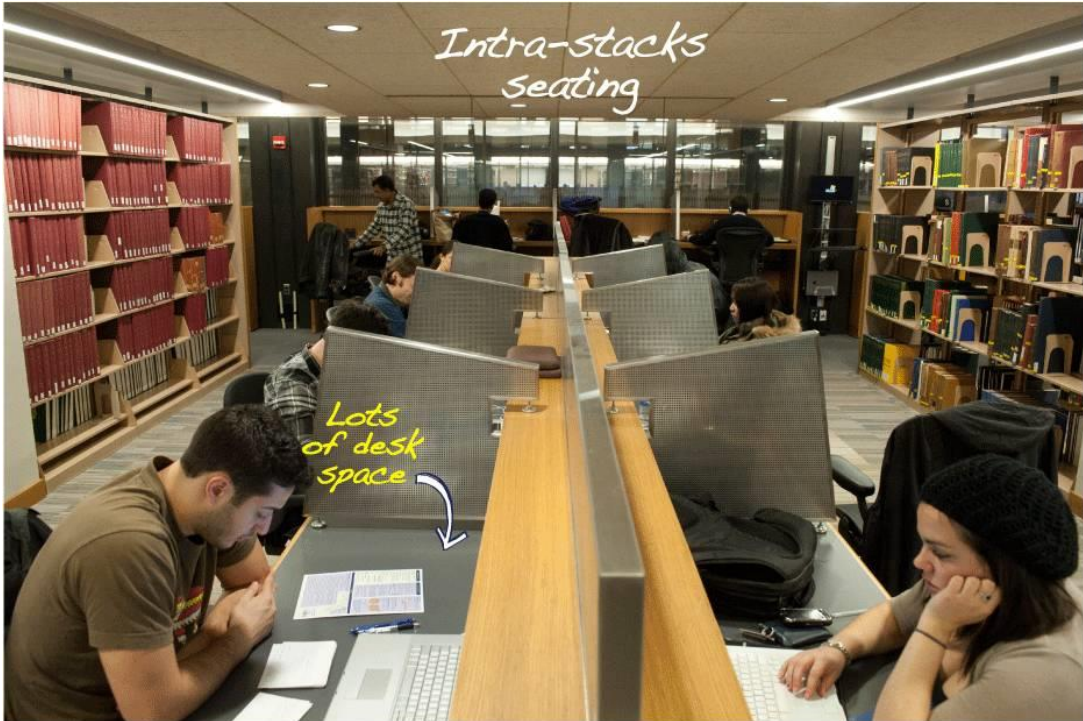
### 21st Century Research Commons Space Portfolio

- **Grad-only rooms:** Quiet, community standards for intense work
- **Grad-only collaborative rooms:** Group “study” rooms, equipped with technology for sharing project work
- **Intra-stacks and contemplative seating for all users:** traditional, with sensitivity to light, acoustics, comfort, electric outlets

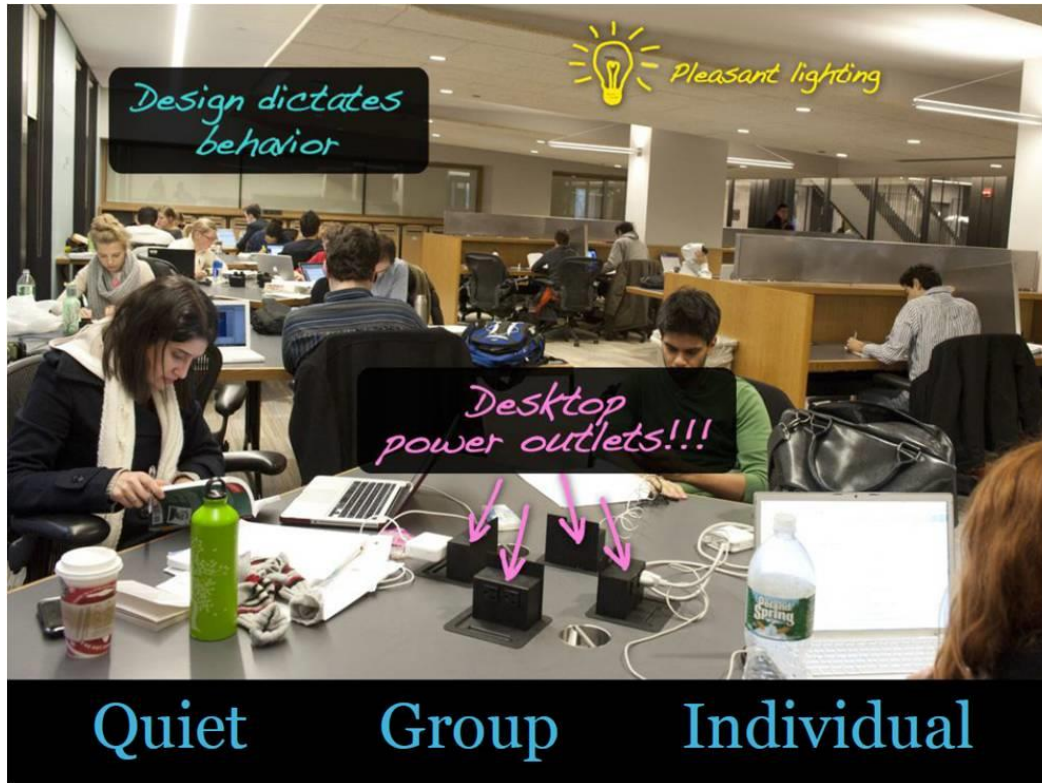
Grad student workspace features



Grad student study space amidst stacks



Open grad study space



Dissertation Room and mobile storage cabinets



Grad Quiet Study Space



The Grad Exchange



Grad student seminar room

