

Digital Conversations — “Our Library Needs to Change...”



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Column Editors’ Note: *Greetings. As we stated at the outset of the Digital Conversations series, this will be an actual conversation — and we want you to join in! To that end, we have started recording our conversations and making them available for your perusal. You can go to our link <http://www.carthage.edu/media/chilsen-kelley-conversation-2.html>, or scan our QR code and watch the full conversation. Once there, we encourage you to join in the conversation as well. — PC & TK*



Todd: Well, if you look at our Website for the library [<http://www.carthage.edu/library/>] you can see some images of the **Bleeke Research Center**. It is a grand space and very inspiring. It goes up two-and-a-half stories and has these huge windows overlooking the Pike River, and it is just so inspiring. When people want to work alone and need really quiet time

Paul Chilsen: Welcome to our next iteration of “**Digital Conversations**.” We’re here to talk about some feedback that we’ve gotten from students here on the **Carthage College** campus: “Our library needs to change.” Todd, could you give us a brief history about where things are at right now with respect to the development of the library from your perspective?

Todd Kelley: The **Hedberg Library** officially opened in January of ’02 and immediately won an award as library of the year for the state of Wisconsin. It is a fabulous facility and the best facility that I have worked in. The students stream in here every day, and the faculty and wider community use it as well. We have classrooms in the library. We have the media theater. We have art on the walls. We have inspiring space as well as books, journals, technology, and lots of librarians. A lot of people come in here, and they say, “Wow, this is just absolutely one of the best libraries we’ve ever seen.” So, you may ask —

Paul: “What’s wrong?”

Todd: “What’s wrong?” And you know it’s not really so much what’s wrong as how can we make sure that nothing goes wrong.

Paul: And how can we continue to improve and stay ahead just as when this library was originally built.

Todd: Right, Paul! It appears that each generation has its expectations and its needs. Part of my job is to make sure we don’t slip into complacency and keep patting ourselves on the back so long that we let the library slip and get too far out of tune with what the students expect, want, and need. One of the things that we did was to set up a diverse group of students, faculty, and staff from across campus. Their charge was to explore what are we doing really well and what could be improved — where might it be out of sync currently — and if we think ten years forward where might we need to go in terms of how the library could change and develop. I’m amazed that people think that once you create a library you...

Paul: ...You’re done.

Todd: You’re done for twenty-five or thirty-five or even fifty years. You can set it and forget it. The library, being in the center of campus and being at the heart of the academic

enterprise, isn’t a facility and suite of services that can remain static.

Paul: Right.

Todd: It’s got to be dynamic. It has to be ever-changing. We can’t let up our foot off the gas in terms of finding out more about the needs, the wants, and the expectations of the incoming students. They are the first people to recognize that there’s a discrepancy between what they expect and what we provide.

Paul: So you got this group together to explore that idea, and you told us a little bit about who was in the group. Tell us about what you were hoping the group would come up with, then about what they actually came up with.

Todd: Actually, your student quote at the beginning of our conversation is the kind of thing I hoped would come out of the conversation. I didn’t think or expect that everyone would just be patting us on the back because they don’t know that the library won an award ten years ago after it opened. To the new students it is a brand new experience when they walk in the door. They look around and think, “Oh, how am I going to navigate this library and how can it help me get smarter, do my work successfully, and graduate from Carthage?” So, basically what we hoped for was for some people to take issue with the library, because the library has such a good rep on campus and historically here at **Carthage** that we’re afraid that everybody might just continue to congratulate themselves and not take a hard look at this. We actually like the fact that people were not thinking this was their ideal library. Specifically, we found that some of the expectations for the library had to do a lot with how we support groups of people working together

Paul: So, what are some of those things the library is doing well, based on the feedback you’ve received?



and want to interact with materials or with their thoughts or just sit there and look out at the Hanisch Garden or the river — that is where they go. When it comes to quiet space and the inspirational space for the individual student, we are doing just about as well as we could hope to do. When it comes to group space and group work — we just don’t have enough of that! We have five group study spaces. They were designed for anywhere from three to up to six or seven

students. We’ve installed the latest technology and flat panel monitors. We’ve tricked out those spaces and the students love them, but there’s just not nearly enough of them. They’re also in an out-of-the-way place behind all the stacks in the back and downstairs, but even so, just about every one has found them, and so they’re being used all the time. What we need in the library is more group space where students can get together and interact with each other as well as with the technology, and five of those rooms aren’t enough. We could easily use another five, and that is something that is starting to come out through these conversations.

Paul: Of course, there are other things connected to the title of this conversation. There was an even more specific quote about technology, and obviously you want to respond to that or consider it. So can you talk about some of that feedback that you got from students through the Dean of Students Office and what you’re doing with it?

Todd: Students may believe that we’re not technologically sophisticated enough if we don’t use what they’re used to using everyday on their smart phones or what they may see in some of their classrooms, so we’ve got a big focus going on with technology. But every time we focus on that we also risk alienating people on the faculty who are used to the

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printed material and who don't necessarily see the technology as being all that helpful from their perspective. So in this group we had different points of view. We had some faculty who took a very traditional point of view said, "Look, when I come to the library I expect to see books, and I don't know what all this fuss is about technology. I want to find a book on the shelf, I want to take it to a chair, and I want to sit down with it and turn the pages." We have two very different points of view. Our role here is not to look at those two points of view as being mutually exclusive but to figure out how we can help transition the campus by continuing to grow and develop in the use of our technology and adapt to the new students and their perspective, while at the same time respecting the point of view of the faculty who are more attuned to using the traditional print resources. This is no easy task! One of the things that we did this past year was remove the print journals that were duplicative of online journals that we have high confidence in — the **JSTOR** and **Project MUSE** journals — the journals that we know are going to be perpetually supported by the not-for-profit publishing entities. That action freed up a couple thousand square feet of space, and we took out the stacks. We could have put furniture there, but that is an ad hoc response. What we need is a long view. Let's look at this as one big picture — the entire building and our services — and try to come up with a five-to-ten-year plan where whatever we decide to do is as good for the next ten years as the original library was for its first ten years.

Paul: What you're talking about is finding a balance between the ways things continue to change while keeping in touch with the old school. I think you certainly identified a conflict that's happening and playing out at a lot of different places. What's peculiar about libraries, it seems to me, is that they are such a central fixture in so many communities — around the United States, out in the world, on campuses. Can you talk about why the library ought to be a place where digital and media literacy and competency is at home?

Todd: Active learning is very important. Engagement with materials, ideas, and your peers are hallmarks of a sound educational environment. How can we construct those environments in ways that actually promote as much learning engagement as possible and maximize every moment that the students are here in the library? One of the things that we've hoped to do is extend the idea of group work. We could bring some more of that group space front and center where there's lots of visibility, lots of support, technology, and where there's encouragement. We could focus some of it on what people are calling "maker space."

Paul: Is that like...a space to create?

Todd: Yes, spaces to create works using digital audio and video — and images as well as text. Authors can bring together print material and digital resources and we can provide the services and the support that they need to feel encouraged and supported. A lot of our

students are participating in the faculty/student research program here and...

Paul: The SURE Program... [<http://www.carthage.edu/sure/>]

Todd: Yes, the SURE program has expanded to include the arts as well as the sciences, social sciences, and the humanities, so we have students who are involved in every discipline, and they're very interested in how they can turn the resources of the library into something that can help them in their research and course work. If we can do that through remaking the space in some way, we can better meet their needs. So what we've been doing is having conversations with the original architect of the building. His name is **Jack Poling**. He is with **MSR** architects out of Minneapolis, and he's been very very helpful. He has given us images and design ideas, and we've turned those back to him with our reactions and thoughts. Now we're expecting that the next step will be to actually take his drawings and his ideas that he presents back to us yet again and actually fine tune those and turn them into plans for reworking some space that actually builds upon what the students tell us they need.

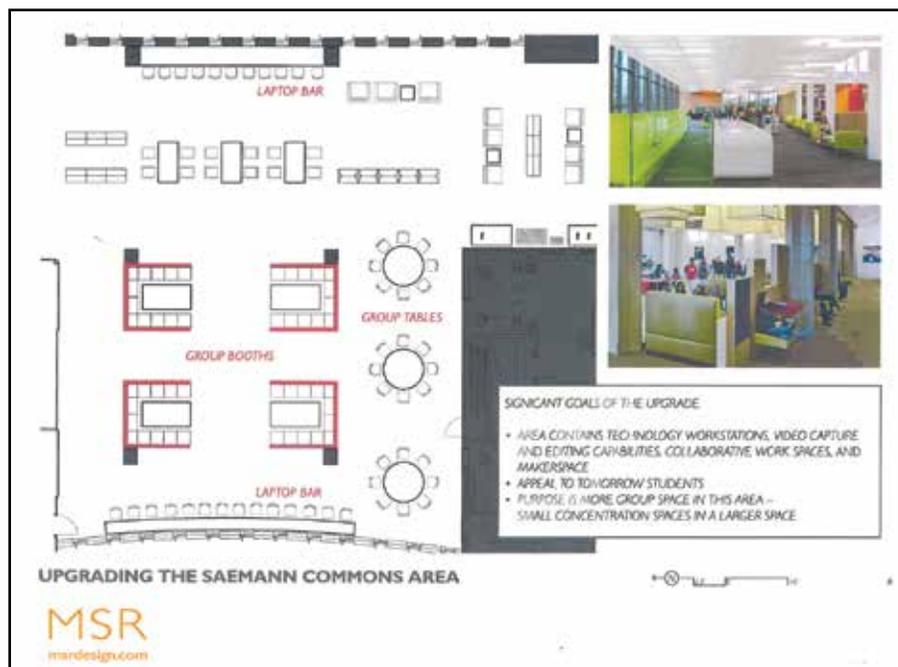
challenge, but we are having great fun with it.

Paul: Great. Let's just dream for a second and think ahead ten years. Can you give us a small glimpse of where that vision might be ten years from now?

Todd: It's a little hard to say exactly what it might be in ten years, but let me give it...let me give it a little try. My hope is that we will have established a culture here where people continuously check the pulse of the students and the rest of the community to make sure that our library is an inspiring, social, and academic learning environment as *they* see it. We would be mindful of staying on top of this issue. If in ten years we've adopted the cultural attitude of staying on top of this issue, then we will have succeeded. If the next generation is taking the same approach that we're taking here today, then we don't have anything to worry about because they'll be even smarter, wiser, and more experienced than we are today.

Paul: And perhaps even better dressed...

Ok, you didn't give us robots and electronic scanning for checkout. You didn't give us those kinds of things. Instead you gave us



Paul: It sounds to me like a very good opportunity for us to jump ahead and think about our commitment in this column to explore our own journey of grappling with this particular situation. Perhaps the next iteration of this conversation might be getting together with the architect and others that are key feedback people and having a round-table with them and seeing where things are going.

Todd: That sounds like a lot of visual fun! We're hoping to do this in a way that's inspiring, flexible, student centered, while also being respectful of ...

Paul: I was going to say respectful of the past, respectful of the print traditions...

Todd: ...and respectful of the architect's original intention. This is a complicated

some very practical and inspirational views — deeply rooted kinds of things, to think about keeping the cutting edge in sight. Again, that is a throwback to our title this time around. Perhaps it could be considered as a mindset of ever-changing and never static.

Todd: Absolutely! I have confidence in people because people are at the heart of teaching and learning. If we give people respect and support and promote a cultural environment that they need to continue doing good work, then they will do it, and we have nothing to worry about.

Paul: Excellent! Well, we should probably leave it there for this iteration of "Digital Conversations."

Todd: Thanks, Paul. It's been fun as always. 🐼