**Title:** Reference Services in the Commons Environment

**Authors:**

Diane Dallis, Head, Information Commons Undergraduate Services Department, Indiana University Bloomington Libraries.  ddallis@indiana.edu

Carolyn Walters, Executive Associate Dean and Director of Public Services, Indiana University Bloomington Libraries.  cwalters@indiana.edu

**Abstract:**

**Purpose** – This review describes the services offered in an information commons that primarily serves undergraduate students at a large research university.  This paper provides background information on the implementation of a learning or information commons and describes the effect of the commons environment on reference services and environment and highlights the importance of a strong relationship between libraries and information technology providers in developing successful public services in an information commons.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This article describes the transformation of an Undergraduate Library into the Information Commons and describes the implications for library services in a public services partnership.

**Findings** – The Information Commons environment is one part of a library system that is evolving in response to and in anticipation of user needs.

**Practical implications** – This review documents a successful partnership in creating an information commons that primarily serves undergraduate students at a large research university.

**Originality/value** – The partnering approach in developing an information commons can result in a cohesive suite of services that support students. The implications for reference services provide insight for other libraries that are planning information or learning commons.

**Keywords:** information commons, learning commons, academic libraries, reference services, partnerships, collaborations, library services

**Article Type:** General Review

**Introduction**

"Every April, students find themselves sleep-deprived and overdosed on caffeine as they rush to finish an endless string of final projects. In the past, students worked these 24-hour days in every imaginable location. But this year something is different. Now we have the Information Commons -- a single facility in which students can collectively produce any conceivable type of project. Without a doubt, this one-stop, work-until-you-wilt megaplex of technology is the best use of $1.5 million we have seen in a long time. In today's digital age, it is imperative for students to have access to every piece of hard and software on the market."

*Indiana Daily Student* Editorial, 04/21/04

The enthusiasm exhibited in this editorial is repeated daily by the thousands of students who visit the Information Commons (IC), a unique service point at Indiana University-Bloomington (IUB). They come to experience a vibrant and varied learning environment that has revolutionized the nature of library services at a major Midwestern university. They come to do research, check-out books, finish homework, get IT help, read magazines, and, of course, socialize. All of these activities are taking place in a "one-stop, work-until-you-wilt megaplex of technology."

Indiana University Bloomington (IUB) opened the Information Commons (IC) in August 2003 and since that time thousands of students have visited daily to work on course assignments, do research, read, get IT help, check out books, and socialize. The variety of learning environments and the combination of services and resources provide a vibrant learning environment for students. This successful venture is a result of the strong partnership and shared service ethic between the IUB Libraries and University Information Technology Services (UITS).

The IC is located in the Herman B Wells Library (formerly the Main Library), a 600,000 square foot building, centrally located on campus. The IC occupies more than 36,000 square feet on the first and second floors of the west tower and provides two distinct environments to accommodate the diverse needs of students. The 11 story east tower of the building contains the research level collections, mainly in the social sciences and the humanities. In addition to Wells, there are 15 campus libraries associated with professional schools and academic departments, and the Lilly Library, which contains the rare books and manuscripts.

**Background**

There are approximately 37,000 students and 1,800 faculty on the Bloomington campus.    Over 130 majors are offered at a school that four years ago was named by *Time Magazine* as its "College of the Year" among research institutions. (Barovick, 2001) More recently, IUB was named the "Hottest Big State School" in *Newsweek Magazine's* list of America's 12 Hottest Colleges. "But what stokes increasing interest in Indiana from out-of-staters, who make up a third of freshmen is IU's embrace of the Information Age," writes contributing editor Jay Mathews. Intel ranks it first among U.S. universities for wireless connectivity. (Mathews, 2005)

In 1999, the Wells Library building was an aging facility that had seen little change since its opening in 1969.  The infrastructure was deteriorating as well as the furnishings and the carpet, which were original to the building. Suzanne Thorin, former Dean of Libraries, with campus support, hired the architectural firm of Shepley Bulfinch Richardson and Abbott to develop a master plan for the renovation of the entire library.

In December, 1998, as part of the process for developing the master plan, students were surveyed to determine what services, resources, and facility changes they would want in a renovated library. A random sample of 3,502 students (10% of the total undergraduate and graduate student population) received an e-mail survey. Of the 400 responses, 66 percent came from undergraduates, 30 percent from graduate students, and four percent didn't indicate class level.

The survey verified that students visited the Wells Library primarily for study, using their own classroom materials and computers. They also utilized library resources. The least important use of the building was as place to meet other students.  Nearly half of all students responding gave "access to computers" a 10, the highest rating, and 80 percent of all students rated it among their top three categories.  Nearly a quarter of all students that responded gave "more group work spaces" a 10 rating.   Student recommendations for improving the Wells Library fell into three main areas: services

(within the context of completing assignments and conducting research), materials (including computers and other equipment) and physical environment.  In response to the open-ended question "What one thing would you like the IUB Libraries to include in their plan for rethinking and updating the Main (now Wells) Library?" two of the most commons suggestions were increasing the number of computers and providing a more comfortable study atmosphere. As a result of the surveys and student input, an "information gateway", much like the current Information Commons, was included in the master plan.

The master plan was completed in late 1999.  Unfortunately, at that time there were no funds available to implement any of the recommendations.  By late 2001, little had been done to address either the aging infrastructure or, more importantly, the changing teaching and learning needs of faculty and students.  The Internet, with its explosive growth in use, and the extensive availability of online databases and other digital resources had dramatically changed the work patterns of both faculty and students.

**Planning Begins for the Information Commons**

In 1999-2000, when plans for Information Commons were underway, little had been written about an "information commons" or about redefining the use of library spaces. The first articles on the concept appeared in the *Journal of Academic Librarianship's* March 1999 issue.  With little to go on, the Libraries' planning was based on observation, a survey of students, and thoughts about the next logical step in their partnership with UITS.  It was over two years between the development of the plan and the beginning of construction, so that by the time the IC opened there, were some things that the project planners would have done differently.  For example, close to the opening

of the IC and after the furniture had been ordered, the use of laptops increased significantly and there were no wired tables for laptop use included in the IC1.  In addition, the configuration selected for group work areas was too large and inefficient, and did not allow for all students in the group to work at the table.

For many years, the IUB Libraries provided space in the Wells Library for non-library units and departments, including a grant writing center, photocopying services, and writing tutors.  A large cafeteria / food court had been in the building since it opened. In the early nineties the IUB Libraries granted space for a 24 hour UITS computing lab in the west tower (formerly the Undergraduate Library).  Over the years, two additional computer labs and technology consultants were added within the west tower.  However, these sites were managed separately from library services

In 2001, a traditional undergraduate library occupied the five floors of the west tower, the home of the Undergraduate Library Services Department (UGLS).  UGLS provided reference services in a busy reference room with a small reference collection, 92 computer workstations, a writing tutoring services outpost , and group workstations. In the years prior to renovation, UGLS saw a steady increase in reference interactions and steadily rising gate counts.  Traditional, hands-on library instruction sessions remained steady and new resources were continually added to its web-based library instructional services.

In order to move the master plan forward, the Dean of Libraries worked with the Vice President of Information Technology to develop a funding plan. The Information Commons would serve as a model for the entire project and demonstrate how monies used for renovation could transform the building and how it is used. With no funds available from the University, the Library and UITS decided the project was important enough to fund. In addition to providing the space for the IC, the Libraries also paid for

close to half of the $1.46 million project. Neither unit received new funding to cover the cost of the project.

In the process of working out the financial details, the partners agreed to formalize their relationship by writing and signing a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) that spelled out the responsibilities and expectations, both financial and operational, of each partner.  The document stipulated what services would be offered, how the facility would be managed and funded, how and who would offer reference and technical support to users, printing protocols, and how the IC would be marketed.  The document also called for the creation of an IC governance group made up of the service providers. The convener of the group would be the Library Head of the Information Commons. Outside of funding, the MOA was the single most important action taken to ensure the smooth operation of, and continued support for, the facility.

The IUB Libraries and UITS believed that integrating their services in the Information Commons would enhance offerings for students.  UGLS was transformed by more than a name change upon the opening of the IC.  The table below provides a comparison of services and resources.

take in Table I

|  | **Undergraduate Library Services Fall 2002** | **Information Commons Undergraduate Services Fall 2003** |
|---|---|---|
| Gate Count | 593,561 | 656083 |
| Reference Interactions | 18,327 | 16,990 |
| Instruction Sessions | 251 | 240 |
| Instruction Classrooms | 2 | 3 |
| Collections | Undergraduate Library: 120,000   Reference Collection:  2,500 | Undergraduate Core Collection: 30,000   Reference Collection:  2,500 |
| Square Footage | 7,000 | 46,000 |
| Computer Workstations | 92 | 360 |
| Software | Microsoft Office | 80+ Software and Applications |

| Printers | 3 | 12 |

Caption: A comparison of services and resources.

The collections in what was the Undergraduate Library were reviewed and reduced to make space for the information commons and accommodate changing use patterns. Of the 120 periodical titles, most were duplicates or available electronically. Periodical titles were cancelled or transferred to more appropriate locations.  The monographs were reviewed, and depending on use, were withdrawn or transferred to the Auxiliary Library Facility or other collections.  The initial collection review reduced the collection to 30,000 volumes.  In fall 2005, a second collection review was conducted which reduced the collection to just under 20,000 volumes.

After the opening of the IC, the trend of increasing gate counts and decreasing reference statistics shown above continued for the fall semester 2004.  The gate count rose by 30% (828,336 people) and the reference interactions declined by 40% (10,146 interactions).  The Information Commons Undergraduate Services Department (formerly UGLS) had to reconsider its role in this new and challenging environment.

Because the Information Commons was a huge success with students, the IC2, located on the second floor of the west tower, opened in spring 2005.  In contrast to the first IC, the second floor was designated a quiet space for individual study. IC2 was equipped with 68 individual workstations, space for 100 laptops, a 20,000 volume core collection, a service point jointly staffed, and additional study space.

**Resources**

Collections

The IC1 offers the reference collection, which includes general, software, and career reference materials.  The collection is housed on short shelving units, close to the reference desk, and is intermingled among workstations and study tables.  The career materials and software manuals receive the highest amount of use.  The Core Collection of circulating, high use materials, with a short loan length of two weeks, is part of the IC2.  This 20,000 volume collection is housed on a combination of short and tall shelving units that also serve to define study and work spaces.

Technology

In addition to the 350 public workstations, the IC offers a total of 12 black and white laser jet printers; two color printers; two high quality graphic color printers; two large-scale color plotters; media editing equipment; circulating digital, still and film cameras; and circulating laptops.  Near the entrance to the IC is a large plasma screen television that broadcasts 24 hour news coverage on one part of the screen, and slides promoting IC services, resources, and workshops on the other. The Adaptive Technology Center is located near the entrance of the IC and offers a wide variety of technologies and services to students, such as; high-speed, scanning, print-to-Braille conversion services; and a software and hardware loan program for students with disabilities.

**Partnership**

During planning for the IC, the Library and UITS partners developed a memorandum of agreement (MOA) describing the partnership and the terms for the operation of the facility.  The MOA also defines the members of the Governance Group that guide the day-to-day operations and advise on changes and plan the future growth

of the IC.  While it is not specifically stated in any document, the IC partners share a strong commitment to student services.  Both parties value the other's expertise and believe that the integration of services has benefited students.  UITS and the Libraries are flexible and willing to change procedures and workflow to accommodate each other's staff and services.  As an example, all public workstations require logging on with a unique username and password.  UITS has adjusted their normal security system to provide a generic username and password on a set of IC workstations for public access to the Library catalog and electronic resources.  The commitment to student services, combined with the trust that the partners share, has made it safe to explore and develop new ways of providing integrated services.

**Integrated Service Points**

> *"The IUB Libraries and UITS each bring a diverse range of expertise to the project; each will contribute its established expertise and responsibility to the development and operations of the Information Commons.  An atmosphere of cooperation between the partner units is expected and allows the Information Commons to meet user needs dynamically and to offer high quality, seamless information and technology services.  Planning and decisions regarding the Information Commons configuration, services, and support will be addressed jointly."*
> Information Commons (IC) Memorandum of Agreement 09/25/01

While many of the services described below were offered in the Wells Library before, they were scattered throughout the west tower.  The following section describes the staffing and the type of questions that each of the three IC service points handle.

IC1 Reference and Technology Consulting

Library reference services and technology support share the large central service desk in the center of the first floor of the IC.  (See figure 1.)  Students ask question such

as "Can you help me find articles about education and the social conditions of Islamic Women?" and "Where can I print a document?"  The sign above the desk reads "Ask Questions Here".  The sign does not help or require the user to distinguish which type of question is appropriate for this or any service point in the IC.  The staff on duty at this desk either responds to the users need or they bring the user to the staff member who is best able to help them.

Librarians, support staff, and School of Library and Information Science (SLIS) graduate student employees of ICULS, (Libraries' Information Commons Undergraduate Library Services Department) provide reference services for 101 hours of the 168 hours that the IC1 is open each week.  A librarian, and a staff member or a graduate student employee answers over 22,000 reference interactions each year.  Other examples of questions recorded by library staff in fall 2005 include "I have to watch American Beauty for a class, can you help me find it?", "What does it mean if there are two dates available on a citation?", "How can I find a book on Reserve?" and "How do I cite an episode of a TV show?"

Upper-level undergraduate student-employees of the UITS Student Technology Centers (STC) provide support 24 hours a day for the more than 180 software applications on the IC workstations.  There are typically one student shift supervisor and one to four technology consultants who handle over 37,000 interactions a year.  They field simple questions such as "How do I print a large color poster?" and "How do I adjust the margins in Word?" to more complex in-depth consulting on using the software program Final Cut Pro to edit film taken with a VHS camera and burning it to DVD.


Library Circulation and IT Support Center

Library circulation services and IT account and hardware support share a service counter at the entrance to the IC1.  (See figure 1.)  Undergraduate student library employees from Customer and Access Services Department and UITS Support Center full-time staff and part-time student employees field questions such as "How can I place a recall on this book?", "I have a problem with my laptop – can you help me?", "Can I check out a laptop?", and "Will you help me connect to the wireless network on my laptop?".  The library staff provides service 121 hours each week and check out about 22,000 books per year from the Core Collections, as well as circulate the 35 laptops and 20 pairs of headphones.  Ninety- two hours each week full-time staff and part-time student employees from the UITS Support Center offer walk-in help with IT accounts (web server accounts, e-mail accounts, username and password issues, etc.), questions related to the IU network, and repair personal computers and laptops for students, faculty, and staff for a fee.

take in Figure I
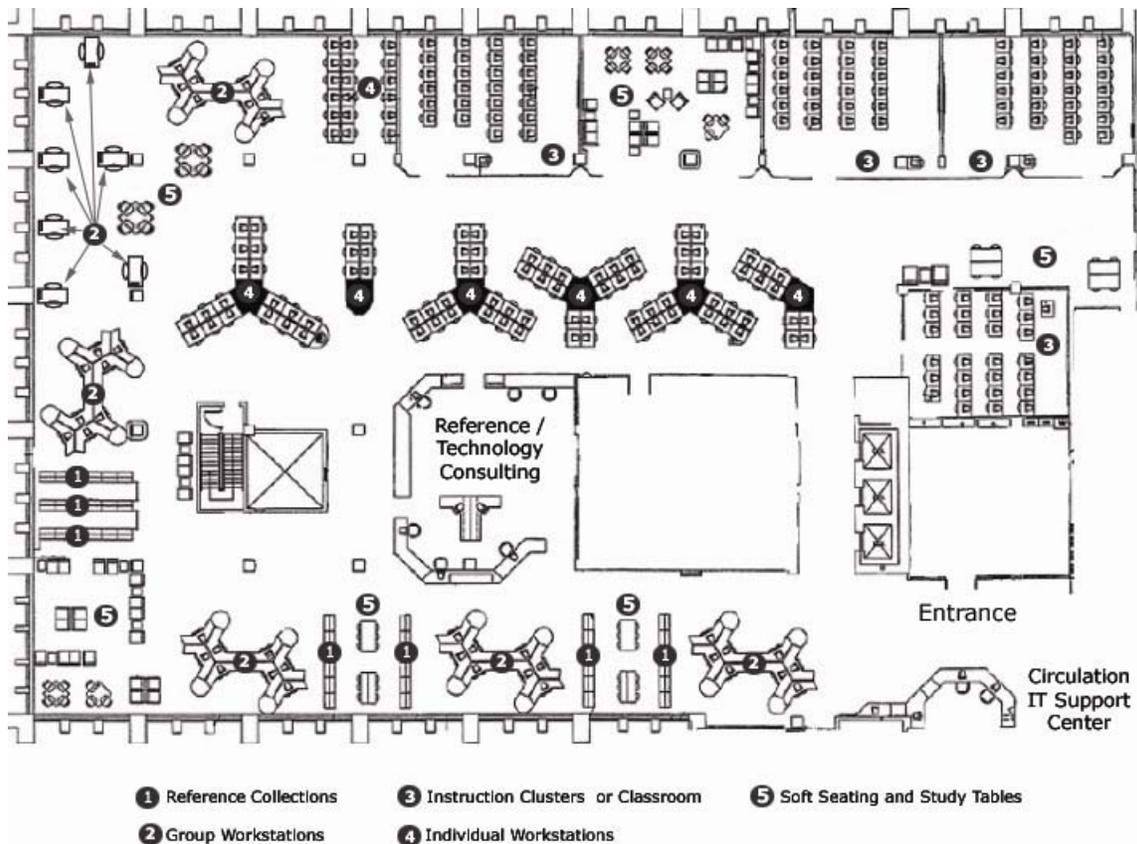
Caption: Indiana University Bloomington's Information Commons 1

IC2 Information and Technology Support

The IC2 opened in March 2005. The same STC undergraduate student employees who work in the IC1 provide software support for 68 workstations for all 117 hours per week that the IC2 is open. (See figure 2.) In addition to software support they respond to printer and general directional questions. Undergraduate student employees (of the ICULS Department) shelve and shelf-read the Core Collection while staffing the desk 58 hours per week. These "Library Assistants" answer questions like "Can you help me find this call number?" and provide general directional assistance. Because the IC2 has been open less than a year annual numbers for interactions at this

desk are unavailable.  However, monthly reports show an average of 40 directional interactions and 60 technology consultations each month at this service desk.

take in Figure II
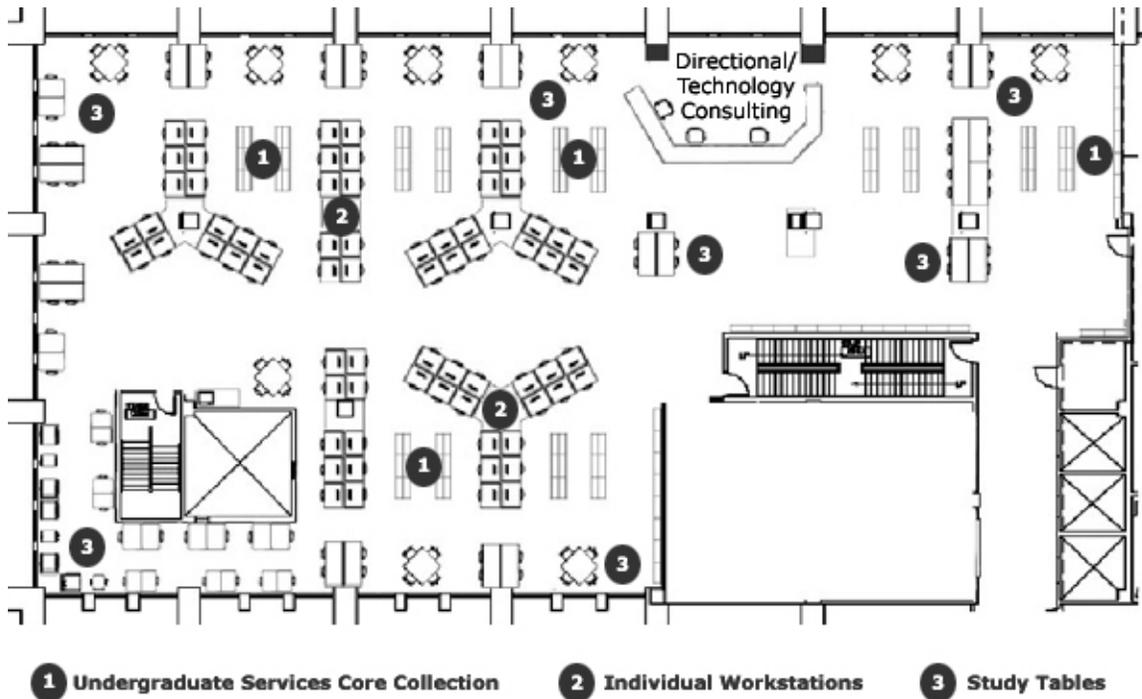


Caption: Indiana University Bloomington's Information Commons 2

So what happens when a user asks for help with their laptop at the IC reference desk?  What do the student employees at the IC2 desk tell users who ask for help finding an article?  What desk are people supposed to go to and ask where the staplers are or where the bathroom is located?   Also, consider that the IC only represents 36,000 square feet in a building of 600,000 square feet with multiple collections, resources, and service points.  The IC services are broader than a traditional library or campus computer lab.   It is likely that inexperienced students and library users may

have difficulty comprehending the wide range of IC services and ask for a specific type of help from a non-expert. The IC offers specialized help on demand and cross-training can only address the most basic level of questions. The key factor in helping students successfully navigate the suite of services of the IC is the atmosphere of cooperation cited in the IC Memorandum of Agreement. The IC partners are required to communicate frequently, trust each other, and have patience with new staff across all service desks. This atmosphere ultimately creates a positive user experiences and promotes high quality customer service.

**Instruction and Workshops**

Annual requests for traditional library instruction have been stable over the years while reference interactions have declined. Each year, librarians and SLIS graduate student employees (of the Libraries' ICULS Department) teach over 400 hands-on, course-integrated, library-instruction sessions in the three instruction clusters in the IC. All sessions are tailored to meet the needs of a specific class or class assignment. Since the IC has opened, ICULS has offered a series of well-timed drop-in workshops on research for assignments in required undergraduate core courses during the academic year. Attendance at these workshops is low and sporadic. The workshop series is still being reviewed and tweaked in attempt to find the right topics and timing that draw more students.

While the IC has not significantly affected library instructional services or increased the demand, the IC library staff have observed an increase in the level of one-on-one instruction provided at the reference desk. This trend is mirrored in the level of help requested of the technology consultants. The consultants are being asked to assist with more advanced software applications for multimedia work.

The IT Training and Education unit of UITS teaches a series of workshops in the IC for IUB students, staff, and faculty. These workshops range from software basics to advanced programming. IT Training and Education will be adjusting their workshop offerings in the coming year and reducing the number of basic workshops in favor of offering more advanced workshops. This change is in response to their observations that students arrive with a higher level of IT competency than in previous years. UITS' observations match the findings of the *ECAR Study of Students and Information Technology.* The study reported that students are comfortable with core technologies such as word processing and presentation software and self-reported as skilled to very skilled users. (Caruso 2005)

**Reference Services in the Commons Environment**

Before the opening of the Information Commons, the librarians provided reference services in a busy room with 90-plus workstations, reference collections, three printers, two computer labs with over 50 workstations, and areas for group work. Reference was offered from a small service desk by a librarian and one to two library graduate student employees. During the academic year there were between 6,000 and 7,000 interactions per month and the reference desk staff served as the primary contact for technology support.

Since the IC opened, the library staff handle between 2,000 and 2,700 questions per month. With the integration of student technology consultants and their hourly shift supervisors at the reference desk, library staff are no longer required to repair printers or crawl under tables to reconnect cables. Giving up the technology support was welcome but other changes were not as comfortable.

Working relationships have changed.  Before the IC, librarians worked only with SLIS graduate student-staff.  Because UITS hires primarily undergraduates, librarians work with younger, less experienced student employees, many of whom are unfamiliar with library services and the expertise of librarians.  Because the service desk is much larger, librarians no longer work as closely with SLIS students.  Effective and comprehensive communication has become critical.  The library staff rely heavily on an online desk log within a homegrown web portal to communicate and share timely information on the most recent assignment users are struggling with or the latest policy enforcement issue.  Communication lines among the different units who share service desks have been established and continue to be developed.  Librarians have meetings each semester with the technology consultant shift supervisors with the goal of team building and educating both parties.  The Reference Services Librarian meets weekly with the professional staff full-time supervisor of the student technology consultants to address all the issues that arise in a public service space with over 5,000 daily visitors. The Reference Services Librarian also participates in technology consultant training at the beginning of each semester. The staff at all three service points in the IC share a common online knowledgebase that staff consult to answer user questions.

The nature of reference has also changed.  Librarians have seen a trend that students have become more skilled at navigating library resources.  The ICULS librarians concur that they encounter more students who have independently had success with an online library resource and who are requesting help with the next level of research.  For example, students request help verifying appropriate citation format or help finding more articles of a scholarly nature.  In addition, more frequently students request help interpreting catalog records rather than asking "How do I find books?" While interactions have decreased, the total time involved has not.  Librarians and library

staff find that they are spending more time than they had just three years ago on questions because they are more advanced and require more discussion. The IU Libraries have not collected qualitative data on reference services in the past, therefore, there is only anecdotal evidence that reference interactions are more complex and take longer.

It is possible that changes implemented at the same time the IC opened have been responsible for these trends. The IU Libraries launched linking software in fall 2003 and the Libraries' web interface was re-designed in fall 2002. These factors may have contributed to student's improved ability to navigate library resources. Other indicators demonstrate that actual use of library resources has increased. In the last year the number of searches in the IU Libraries' most popular online subscription database has increased 23%. In addition, the circulation statistics for the Core Collection have continued to rise. While students are relying on Google for a significant amount of their information needs they also still seem to find the library an important part of their academic lives.

Student Feedback

Twice each academic year students are surveyed online at the time they log into workstations. The optional survey remains visible on the IC workstations for approximately a week, or long enough to receive at least 500 responses. In addition to the surveys, the IC Governance group conducts focused discussions with students who use the IC. In a spring 2004 survey, 23% (130 people) responded that they were conducting library research and 9 % (52) users responded that they were using books in the IC. Only 6% (33) responded that they were using the IC because of the various types of help available (computing assistance, research help, etc.) Considering that the level of expert research and technology assistance is one of the highlights on any tour of

the IC or the Wells library, it can be discouraging to see the low percentage of students taking advantage of the help available.  However, this does reflect the trends identified in the literature about today's generation of students who prefer personalized, self-service models of consumption.  A recent article in *Adweek* describes the current time as a media era where consumers are in control of content. "We're consuming it, retransmitting it, creating it," says Rishad Tobaccowala, chief innovation officer at Publicis Groupe Media, who credits the shift to "plummeting hardware prices, elegant software that's become easy to use, and access to an incredible amount of information." (O'Leary, 2005)  The fact that users are more independent might influence the way libraries staff service desks in the future but it appears that expert assistance is still needed and valued by users.

take in Plate I



Caption: Students working on a group-workstation in the IC1

**The "Commons" Thing: Just a big computer lab?**

Increasingly students are using technology to complete coursework, communicate, socialize, use and purchase services, and be entertained. A key finding of the recent *ECAR Study of Students and Information Technology* is that in the higher education experience, information technology adds "convenience, connection, and control" for students. (Caruso, 2005) As a central location on campus with 24 hour access, it makes sense to have an environment in the library that allows access to the technology and support, for all types of learning activities needed to provide these three benefits. The report also finds that, among students surveyed, ownership levels of laptops and cells phones increased from 2004 and that the use of media-intensive applications increased, even though reported skill levels remained unchanged. (Caruso, 2005)

Collaborative or group space, once an impossible thought for quiet, individually-focused libraries, is almost always a part of the information commons concept. Much has been written recently about the "library as place." Lougee notes in *Diffuse Libraries* that libraries are still serving as places for collections while increasingly looking for ways to serve as places for learning and collaboration. (Lougee, 2005) More recently, Lippincott writes in *Library Journal* that by creating new services that leverage the social nature of learning, libraries can combine their online services with their physical spaces and be the "place where learners go". (Lippincott, 2005)

By all accounts, the Information Commons at IU Bloomington is making it easy and convenient for students to connect. Gate counts are up, student surveys reflect satisfaction with the facility, and the *Indiana Daily Student* calls the IC a "one-stop, work-until-you-wilt megaplex of technology". More than 5,000 people, mostly students, enter

the IC daily during the academic year. The 45 computer labs managed by the Student Technology Centers (the IC partners who provide the public workstations, peripherals, and printers) on the IUB campus recorded 1,403,568 logins during fall 2005. Of those, 368,860, or 26%, came from within the IC. Add to this that over 98% of students have their own computers and it becomes apparent that students value the environment, resources, and services at the IC.

Write-in responses from surveys and unsolicited e-mail comments show that students request quiet, reflective space in the library as often as they request more technology. The popularity of the IC and the successful partnership between the IUB Libraries and UITS may lead to other collaborations. The IC has also helped the Libraries envision other new spaces, resources, and services for graduate students and faculty. The IUB Libraries hope that the IC is just the first step in creating a wide range of environments, resources, and services for all students and faculty.

**Beyond the IC**

The Wells Library has always been a popular place on the IU Bloomington campus and the IC has clearly reinforced its status as a hub of student activity. However, the IU Libraries have also continued to reach out to users virtually. IUB Librarians have created "Class Pages" for course assignments (both on demand and in anticipation of a course assignment requiring library research) using the IUB Libraries' Content Management (CM) system. The CM and implementation of a federated search tool are creating more opportunities for librarians to re-package library resources and push online instruction and selected library resources to students and faculty.

take in Plate II

Caption: Class Pages are created using a database-driven Web Content Management System

It could be argued that the increasing use of the class pages reduces the number of reference questions. Using the content management system librarians can tell how many times a class page has been accessed. For example, the class page for Z302, a business management class with four sections and over 700 students in spring 2005, was accessed 1064 times between April 1 and May 1, 2005 when the group project was due. Similarly, the class page for W131, the basic composition class, had 1620 hits during the period of March 1 to May 1, 2005. The IUB Libraries need to study the relationship between the use of the class pages and questions asked at the reference desk.

In fall 2005, the "Ask a Librarian" icon was included on the desktop of computers in all of the Student Technology Center computer labs.  This icon takes students to the e-mail and chat reference options on  workstations in over 80 labs on campus.  Since the icon has been placed on the desktops the average number of daily visits to this web page has increased by 40% (an average of 100 hits per day).

**Next Steps**

In order to continue to meet the needs of students and faculty, staff in the IC must explore new ways of delivering services. The IUB Libraries will look at ways to push library resources to their users through Oncourse, the IU course-management system, and OneStart, the university portal. During fall semester 2005 they will be revising the "Ask a Librarian" web page to include instant messenger (AIM) and a form to request research consultations.

The Library Action Plan for 2005-2008 emphasizes the need for assessment and sets goals for implementing a comprehensive assessment plan. As part of the plan, students will be surveyed and focus groups will be established. There is a need to include questions about the Information Commons and its services in the comprehensive survey sent to students and faculty by UITS every spring. In order to accurately reflect activity in reference the IUB Libraries need to develop new measures of how librarians spend their time.  The IUB Libraries need to move away from counting questions to new ways of measuring web site use and development.

Continued success will depend on the IUB Libraries' ability to meet the needs of users, which means anticipating what those needs will be. To paraphrase John D. Rockefeller, the secret of success is to do the "commons" thing uncommonly well, (Washington Post, 1901)

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