Behind the Scenes at the Helmke Library Refresh

CHERYL TRUESDELL, interviewee
Dean
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Interviewed by RIVKAH COOKE, Indiana University Bloomington

At times it seems that colleges and universities engage in a never-ending series of construction projects—new buildings replace parking lots and existing buildings expand or morph to serve new purposes. Recently the 44-year old Helmke Library at Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne has taken its turn with a renovation that completely reimagines the library’s interior. The library closed in December of 2015 but has continued providing services during the construction by finding new homes for staff, creating pop-up study spaces during finals, and having staff brave the construction to retrieve library materials for patrons. They are also documenting the changes at a dedicated website, ipfw.edu/libraryrefresh.

The changes that the refresh will bring to IPFW are well exemplified by the Communicating Stairs, an open staircase that leads from middle of the first floor to the second floor service desk. The history of these stairs goes back to 2006 when librarians first partnered with others on the IPFW campus to develop a Learning Commons on the second floor of the library that will provide group study spaces, IT services, tutoring and writing consultation, and library research services. The Communicating Stairs fulfill the library’s vision of tying together the service points on the first and second floors.

Space for Communicating Stairs, February 2016; used with permission
Framework for Communicating Stairs, May 2016; used with permission

Communicating Stairs, September 2016; used with permission
Q & A with Dean Cheryl Truesdell

Even amidst the hubbub of the renovation and the end of the semester, Cheryl Truesdell was gracious enough to answer a few questions and provide an inside look at the changes that have been taking place over the last year.

Rivkah Cooke: Have you been through a library renovation before? If so, how does this experience compare to the previous one?

Cheryl Truesdell: I have never been through a library renovation, especially one of this size and magnitude...I have been through some renovation projects at my 90-year old home, but the library renovation has almost been a complete rebuild. The first four months of the renovation were basically a demolition of all of the mechanical, electrical, network, ceilings, floors, rooms, and offices, etc. The library was pretty much gutted down to the studs, and is being rebuilt from the inside shell that was left.

RC: What aspect of the refresh are you the most excited about?

CT: The most exciting piece is that now we have the power grid and updated network and wireless to provide the high-tech services we have been planning for so many years. On the second floor learning commons we have a media wall, a high-end software student computing lab, seven group study rooms with the ability to be used as presentation practice rooms, a combined Concierge desk that will provide library research, tutoring, writing and IT services in one space, checkout of laptops and iPads, and a variety of furniture to promote individual and group interactive study. We were also able to create a quiet study room on the fourth floor for those students who want quiet only!

Sounds a little strange, but we are also excited about our newly renovated bathrooms! We had to fight for that one, but now we have modern bathrooms with baby changing stations in both the men
and women’s bathrooms on all four floors, and on the fourth floor they will be installing a Nursing Mother’s room in the spring semester.

**RC:** Is there anything being changed that you are going to miss?

**CT:** No not really. I love the new clean and bright look of the building. The new LED lighting has given the building a clean, open, and fresh look. No more dingy, dark spaces.

**RC:** Has it been difficult to adjust workflows during the construction?

**CT:** It has certainly been a challenge, but the staff and librarians have tackled the issues with ingenuity, energy, and grace under pressure. We were able to keep the collection onsite and circulation staff were allowed to go up to the stacks twice each day with their hard hats, masks, and vests to reshelve and pull books requested through IUCAT and DDS. Librarians held reference hours in their new offices, and we fully staffed the Library Services Center (a 2,000 sq. ft. extension on the first floor that formerly housed a 24/7 computer and study area) with a reference librarian on duty for walk-ins and referrals.

I have to say the hardest part of the renovation has been communicating to the campus that the library services are still available and where they can find us. It has been a constant communication and PR project and our Helmke Refresh Marketing group has been amazing! We have used every communication tool known to man (except maybe smoke signals) to reach students, faculty, staff and the community.

The hardest part for the students has been losing their library study spaces. We created more study spaces on the sky bridge and around campus, but for many students they just wanted their library back!

Check out the latest news, watch a video of the stacks being moved to accommodate new carpet, and explore images from throughout the process at [http://guides.library.ipfw.edu/libraryrefresh](http://guides.library.ipfw.edu/libraryrefresh)