

We Built It and They Came: Client Centered Services in a New Building

Sandra Yee, Rita Bullard, and Morell Boone

In June, 1998 the Bruce T. Halle Library opened to the public with a totally integrated approach to learning resources and technologies. The "Cybrary," the visionary theme developed by Dean Morell D. Boone, provided a design framework to give clients, both internal and external, the best possible space, access to information resources in all formats, leading edge electronic technologies and an enhanced program of services. With that in mind, the 218,000 square foot building was designed to provide a warm and friendly environment with access to over 2250 appropriate study seats, 3700 network connections (1,000 ethernet and 250 ATM currently activated), easy access to the most current and heavily used print resources, multimedia and computer stations and a staff who view the client as our most important resource.

Because we were designing a new building it was possible to create a building which is truly client-centered and which includes such appropriate spaces as: a 100 seat auditorium, fully wired for satellite downlink, large screen projec-

tion, sound and a network connection at every seat; a versatile teleconference room which also receives satellite downlink, has rear screen projection, and is capable of sending and receiving two way video through the ATM network; 30 collaborative study rooms; five conference/meeting rooms with network connections and the use of any one of nine multimedia carts; a multimedia commons and self production area; an open access computing lab; the information commons and a communications commons for easy access to e-mail and Web conferencing. In addition, the client centered philosophy dictated that the space for the collection of print materials be allocated judiciously so that space could be reserved for a useful collection while still maintaining effective learning spaces for clients. In order to do this, an automated storage and retrieval system was installed which allowed us to put in on-site storage those materials which are older and which had not circulated in the five years prior to moving. This automated storage system is tied to the automated library system and materials can be retrieved from it in less

Sandra Yee is an associate dean of Learning Resources and Technologies, e-mail: sandra.yee@emich.edu; Rita Bullard is a systems librarian, e-mail: Rita.Bullard@online.emich.edu; and Morell D. Boone is the dean of Learning Resources and Technologies at Bruce T. Halle Library, Eastern Michigan University; e-mail: morell.boone@emich.edu.

than 10 minutes. In addition, there is a 90 seat Café, providing access to food, beverages, and a well-lighted area for study or conversation with colleagues and friends.

The shift to a client-centered philosophy of service was developed during the planning stages for the new library building. The entire Learning Resources and Technologies department was involved in “process reengineering” for a period of nearly two years. Twenty-nine study teams worked to rethink critical processes with the ultimate goal of improving those processes and enhancing our services. One of these study teams, the Client Services Team, helped to identify basic client services which could be provided in new and more efficient ways. Michael Hammer and James Champy have described the reengineering process for business. They say, “At the heart of reengineering lies the notion of discontinuous thinking—identifying and absorbing the outdated rules and fundamental assumptions that underlie current business operations.” (Hammer and Champy, p. 3) Process reengineering has been used in the corporate world to achieve dramatic improvements in such things as cost, quality, service and speed. It also comes with somewhat of a negative connotation, however, as it seems to have led to serious downsizing in the corporate sector. Our study teams were charged with looking at various functions, making recommendations for changes if needed, and filing a report that a Steering Committee could review and approve. There was no effort to identify areas for downsizing, there were some functional units, which were moved from one reporting relationship to another and significantly reorganized to respond to new technological developments. As Brodie and McLean state, “The end result of a process is always an output—and one that is of value to the customer. If an organizational activity is only of value to the organization itself, it is likely that it is a candidate for obliteration, not improvement.” (Brodie and McLean, p. 42) Our goal was to focus on those processes, which were of value to the clients, and to reorganize to meet their needs.

In the recent library literature there is considerable information regarding the current thinking in “customer service.” This thinking is analogous to our “client centered” philosophy and can be applied to our situation. According to an article in *Managing Service Quality*, “Much of the value in recent business process reengineering projects has been a greater emphasis on linking together processes and activities which contribute to customer value rather than functional expertise and generation of customer focus rather than operational focus.” (Macaulay and Clark, p. 186) This may be difficult to achieve in libraries unless we focus on

developing the “customer service mindset” which permeates the culture of the organization. By looking at the routines and rituals which impact how we deal with our clients, we can get a good look at the perceptions we give. Macaulay and Clark tell us to look at things that send unfriendly and unhelpful messages to our clients and routines that send clients scurrying from one desk to another in order to take care of business. They also suggest we look at the symbols we erect which give messages to our clients. What about the signage we use? Do we give negative messages only (NO FOOD OR DRINK!) or do we try to present information in a positive way (FOOD and DRINK in DESIGNATED AREAS ONLY PLEASE!). (Macaulay and Clark, p. 187) We have tried to focus on positive symbols such as the Welcome Center. In addition to providing a space and basic furnishings when the building opened, shortly after opening a donor was found who provided the funding to make the physical space as attractive, comfortable and functional as possible. It immediately gives our clients the impression that they are welcome in our building.

A unique approach to customer service has been demonstrated at Wright State University Libraries. They have developed and published a “Customer Service Pledge” which outlines for their clients exactly what they can expect in the way of service. In their article, “Saying What we Will Do and Doing What We Say” authors Wehmeyer, Auchter and Hirshorn describe the philosophy behind the creation of the pledge and the mechanism for its development. They remind us that, “Good service adds value to library resources . . . Academic libraries face challenges from both internal and external competitors as the information industry expands. A good customer service plan will help position the library as the supplier of choice for information services.” (Wehmeyer, Auchter and Hirshorn, p. 173) They believe that the University library must establish its reputation among its clients as being responsive, user friendly and efficient. Whether using a customer service pledge or another mechanism such as the Client Services Office at EMU, it is imperative that these goals remain at the forefront of our service missions.

In the Spring 2000 issue of *Reference and User Services Quarterly* Jerry Campbell, CIO and Dean of University Libraries at USC, asks reference librarians to consider why their service has not improved since the early 90's, and in fact, seems to be getting worse. The author points to the fact that there is a success rate of only 55% when answering reference questions. He goes on to say that the second factor that indicates things are not improving is the decline in

business at most reference desks. Campbell describes reference service as "yet another library service on our terms and our conditions." In this article, Campbell clearly reinforces EMU's decision to create a unique service center for our students. In addition to encouraging reference librarians to further develop their services for the virtual library, he encourages us to look at the needs of the current generation of college students. They have lived their whole lives with the web, and while they need our help to find, evaluate and appropriately use the resources available, they are not likely to seek it in traditional ways. (Campbell, p. 227)

Even though the Client Services Study Team did an admirable job of defining what was required for the new library to fully meet its client centered potential, specific operational elements were missing. As often happens, unplanned events can open the door to new thinking. In our case, the Dean had two separate incidents which helped to identify the missing pieces. Approximately three months before the building was scheduled to open the Dean gave a private tour of the unfinished building to the Provost. As they made their way around the huge facility, the Provost noted that students would surely feel lost in such a building, not only because of its size, but because it was arranged so differently than the old library building. He asked the Dean how the students would find what they needed!! In a separate incident, the telephone service people asked where the building PBX switchboard would be located. Realizing that there were two critical needs that needed immediate attention, the Dean took the problem to the Steering Committee for discussion. Out of a series of intense discussions just prior to the opening of the building, the Welcome Center and the Client Services Office were born.. It was apparent that the two operational omissions would have had a negative impact on the client centered design goal. In order to create these areas, other activities were relocated and existing spaces were easily converted to these activities. With the development of the Welcome Center clients would have a place to receive orientation and instruction in the use of the building services and resources. The Client Services Office provides a one-stop location for all central business functions such as the telephone switchboard, cash handling and building security. The Welcome Center and the Client Services Office have proven to be a good investment of space and staff!

The Welcome Center, located on the First Level near the entrance of the Bruce T. Halle Library, serves as an orientation and information center for clients using the library and its many services. The goal of the Welcome Center pro-

gramming is to address the information needs of all Halle clients by providing direction, instruction, and reference assistance on an as needed basis. Two librarians' offices are located in the Center and one Learning Technologies Computer professional provides assistance and programming ideas. In the Fall of 2000, a librarian vacancy in the Welcome Center allowed us to re-write the position description for one of the Librarian positions. In addition to providing programming support, we added the responsibility for Public Relations to the job description. "We cannot introduce new services without the promotion and publicity to properly advise people of what is available, and how they can use it." (Wilson, p. 81) By adding a public relations/marketing dimension to the Welcome Center, we are not only able to develop programs but have designated responsibility for making certain the word gets out. The Welcome Center Librarians work closely with the Instructional Services Librarian and the Outreach Services Librarian. They have formed an alliance, along with the Learning Technologies computer professional, to develop programming and to share the news with the campus community.

The librarians and a small staff of student ambassadors provide tours of the facility and individualized instruction on the library catalog and databases, assistance with retrieval of items from the automated retrieval collection (the ARC), the online assignment of e-mail accounts, the use of e-mail and Web caucus, and internet training. Programs of interest to the campus community are also being offered on a regular basis. At the beginning of each semester tours are offered on a regularly scheduled basis. Throughout the semester, however, tours are always offered by appointment. The Librarians have discovered that clients who schedule tours are usually seeking assistance in a specific area but don't volunteer this information until during the tour. This gives the librarian or student ambassador the opportunity to discover the individual's real need, and to focus the tour and other assistance toward that need. Handouts are available and are created instantly depending on the needs of the client. In the Fall of 2,000 the Welcome Center played a vital role in the University's Freshmen Year Experience Initiatives. Halle Library staff and student ambassadors were actively involved in each of the Freshmen Interest Groups and the Orientation course, as well as providing innovative programming for the Freshmen Orientation weekend. Over 30 orientation tours were offered with more than 1,000 freshmen coming through the building. These initiatives will be expanded in the coming year as the Freshman Program is more fully developed.

The Welcome Center and the team of Librarians and students are proving to be the type of reference service that Jerry Campbell advocates in his article. (Campbell) It is the place where innovative types of reference are provided and where students who need more specific help than can be given at the reference desk can be directed. They don't need an appointment and can be helped on the spot. Or, they can be given assistance with making an appointment with a subject specialist for more in-depth reference help. However, given the large commuter population at Eastern Michigan University, it helps to be able to offer on-the-spot individual reference counseling without asking the client to make another trip to campus.

The Client Services Office is the business office for the building and is also located on the main level of the Halle Library, situated close to both the reference desk and the Reception (circulation) desk. All client business services are provided here including photocopy services, cash receipts, fax and document delivery services, room scheduling and equipment needs, and the telephone switchboard. This office has proven to be extremely important to the smooth functioning of a large, complex building. All facility needs including room schedules, equipment requests, and custodial requests are directed to this office. In addition, there is a full time staff person on duty until the building closes each night to provide building security. Because the office is located on the main level it is a focal point for servicing the needs of many clients. Staff is able to direct inquiries and requests for assistance to this office and receive an immediate response.

A Client Services brochure was distributed to all departments and is available at several stations throughout the Halle Library. The brochure gives details of each room that is available for reservation, equipment that can be requested, and guidelines for smooth requests. The brochure has helped reduce ambiguity on the part of those needing certain types of rooms or equipment. Room scheduling and confirmations are computerized and we are investigating the usefulness of combining our system with that used by our Student Center.

To tie the two functions together, and to provide stellar services to clients, a Client Services Team was created as one of the Learning Resources and Technologies operational teams. This team is comprised of members from each of the areas who deal directly with our clients including Materials Access, Information Services, Multimedia Services, Computing Services, the Welcome Center, Client Services

and Periodicals. The goal of the team is to facilitate communication about client issues across various functional areas, and to identify areas where pitfalls for clients may exist. The Team provides an excellent avenue of communication among units, which helps to relay information and answer questions. The team has been an active advocate for increasing access to resources and services for the physically challenged, and recently recommended the addition of software which would allow clients with disabilities to better use the computer workstations. That software is now available in the Multimedia Computer Commons.

The Welcome Center and the Client Services office are unique in that they allow our clients "one stop shopping." Rather than running from one office to another, or one staff person to another, clients are able to have needs met in one location. This is purposeful. We are not here to set up roadblocks, but to provide the best avenue for learning. As Brodie and McLean say in their article, "Process Reengineering in Academic Libraries: Shifting to Client-centered Resource Provision," "To design a new service paradigm we need a new way of thinking—a new framework that is truly client-centered." The staff of the Bruce T. Halle Library has been successful in shifting this paradigm.

Literature Cited

- Brodie, Maxine and Neil McLean. "Process Reengineering in Academic Libraries, Shifting to Client-centered Resource Provision." *CAUSE/EFFECT* 18 (No. 2, summer, 1995): 40–46.
- Campbell, Jerry Dean. "Clinging to Traditional Reference Services: an Open Invitation to Libref.com." *Reference and User Services Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (spring, 2000): 223–27.
- Hammer, Michael and James Champy. *Reengineering the Corporation: A Manifesto for Business Revolution*. New York: HarperCollins Pub., 1993.
- Macaulay, Steve and Graham Clark. "Creating a Customer-focused Culture: Some Practical Frameworks and Tools." *Managing Service Quality* 8, no. 3 (1998): 183–88.
- Wehmeyer, Susan, Dorothy Aughter and Arnold, Hirshorn. "Saying What We Will Do and Doing What We Say: Implementing a Customer Service Plan." *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 22 (May, 1996): 173–80.
- Wilson, Marion. "Understanding the Needs of Tomorrow's Library User: Rethinking Library Services for the New Age." *Australian Public Libraries and Information Services* 13, no. 2 (June, 2000): 81–86.