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University for Business and Technology University Libraries and Knowledge Center: A Concept Paper

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Abstract

The most significant innovation enables the realization of far greater human potential. The catalyst of such creativity in higher education is the acquisition of new knowledge and the living of new experiences. Then, within innovation and incubation environments, new thinking enriches knowledge handed down from previous generations, enlivens contemporary lives and informs future growth. Emergent knowledge encourages recognition of the limitations of traditional academic disciplines, exploration of new interdisciplinary frontiers, and, from this, novel transdisciplinary insights that unlock human potential and improve human conditions.

In response, the University for Business and Technology intends to build collaboration environments to enable discovery and access, interpretation and analysis, creation and sharing of knowledge. These aspirations recognize the synergies possible when individual discovery is reinforced by collective inquiry with the shared purpose of using information to learn to create knowledge together. Further, this UBT planning initiative acknowledges that societal progress, whether local or global, ultimately depends on catalyzing, fortifying, and affirming human inquiry. So enabling environments will place humans at the center of the knowledge creation spaces and places that aim to advance participant capabilities to meet the demands of working in a global marketplace and living in a global society.

Keywords: Knowledge center, Systems Thinking, innovation, higher education, co-design

1. A Global Trend

Over the past decade, a worldwide trend has emerged. Budding entrepreneurs, scientists, teachers, engineers, architects and designers – in search of better ways to develop and apply their talents – have been drawn to similar places for similar reasons. They have discovered the need for spaces where they can contemplate and create in isolation and where they can also meet others to share what they have learned, learn what others want to share, and imagine how they might combine their talents to discover and do even more meaningful work [1].

The people who gather in these places are among the most self-directed, creative and constructive of their generation. They consistently demonstrate the willingness to put in long hours and the desire to make a difference in the world. They are developing the attributes that fuel, differentiate and distinguish high-functioning organizations, businesses, communities, nations and societies.

Who are they? They are our most promising college and university students, undergraduate, graduate and professional – and the place they are gathering in greater and greater numbers is their campus library. They are a part of a learning revolution. Through their collective experience and drive, they see the limitations of the traditional classroom and traditional instruction. They perceive learning as constant and eclectic, informed and enriched through a variety of experiences and interactions in and out of the classroom, in real and virtual places, and in different cultures and countries, community collaborations and professional settings. And they are correct. Experience and scholarship have revealed that these are indeed the best way to learn, and to apply learning for the greater good of humanity.

2. University for Business and Technology

Amidst growing recognition that libraries are fundamentally about people – how they learn, how they use information and how they participate in the life of a learning community, universities have begun to design libraries that seek to restore libraries as institutions of learning, culture and intellectual community [1][2]. University for Business and Technology has witnessed this revolution in higher education. It now seeks to advance an intentional campus learning community through 1) reimagining and redesigning the UBT Libraries and 2) co-designing and co-creating a complementary UBT Knowledge Center. Building upon best practices from across the globe, UBT will, throughout, use collaborative design (co-design) to convene students, faculty, alumni and staff to chart these new institutional directions, mindful that engaging participants encourages adoption and adaptation and, thereby, diffusion of innovation [3].

This University for Business and Technology Knowledge Center innovation and incubation concept, under discussion for more than three years, will enable UBT to bring together the functions of libraries, labs, lounges, maker spaces, media production facilities, and seminar spaces in an integrated community gathering ecosystem. Research has shown that higher education institutions that invest in such sophisticated learning environments catalyze and expand cross-disciplinary partnerships. Heightened levels of collaboration encourage students to transfer what they learn in one course to the work that they do for another course. In turn, enhanced knowledge of emerging learning technologies – what it is, where it is going, and why it matters to teaching, learning, and research – accelerates adoption to improve student learning outcomes and revitalize faculty teaching methods. Finally, reinvention of library physical places and virtual spaces – concurrent with co-design and co-creation of the UBT Knowledge Center – recognizes the synergistic potential of ensuring robust discovery and access to both core academic publisher content (in the traditional library) and original institutional intellectual content (in the knowledge center). In addition, these changes in academic libraries reflect worldwide trends to transform traditional libraries into full-service learning, research, and project spaces [1][4].

3. University Libraries and Knowledge Center Aspirations

The University for Business and Technology library facilities were originally designed as book repository where research and study occurred in defined spaces. Today's students, however, work differently, and today's professors teach differently [3]. As a result, the libraries need to provide flexible, future-oriented services, resources, and expertise in remodeled spaces enabled by ubiquitous technology and wireless internet to permit accessing academic content and research consultation anyplace, anytime. These reimagined spaces will be further enlivened by redesigned systems and reinvented services to enable discovery and access, interpretation and analysis, creation and sharing of knowledge.

The University is also experiencing growing demand for more flexible and collaborative spaces, reflective of 21st century teaching methods that engage students in active learning and group work. Student work suffers without flexible spaces to accommodate their technology device-intensive work styles. So reimagined campus facilities will offer state-of-the-art production facilities to catalyze innovative co-creation of digital content, intentionally crossing disciplinary boundaries and forging multidisciplinary collaborations, e.g. [5].

Finally, the Knowledge Center will support collection and visibility of faculty and student scholarship so that these distinctive and unique intellectual contributions persist for future generations. State-of-the-art technology for creation and display will further production and awareness of the university's research and creative endeavors. Curated digital collections will advance worldwide discovery and access to UBT's intellectual corpus.

In these ways, UBT will advance the potential of thoughtful integration of 21st century information, technology, and learning elements to transform student learning experiences and faculty teaching and research accomplishments [6][7]. To achieve these transformational aspirations, participatory design will ensure inclusive visioning and planning for facility, service, and system improvements that will heighten student learning experiences. This approach recognizes that it takes a community to revision and revitalize a university ecosystem as a learning destination.

4. University of Business and Technology Participatory Design (Co-Design) Approach

To activate physical library facilities, amplify (print and virtual) library resources, and catalyze virtual Knowledge Center services for one university with four campuses, the multi-year project would engage multiple disciplines in a shared focus with practical institutional outcomes through collaborative design of the systems, services, places, and spaces [8]. The planning process includes:

1. Design a process that engages a broad campus community in shaping the future of libraries' space utilization on campus.
2. Initiate conversations about the dynamic potential of libraries in the world of shifting teaching/learning and research modalities.
3. Collaborate with campus partners to develop library use scenarios and projects that further the university's institutional priorities.

Of special significance, inclusive and participatory co-design activities will initiate and sustain professional relationships with UBT faculty and students as planning progresses from concept to design to implementation and transformation.

Project planning commenced in April 2017, when professors Anita Mirijamdotter and Sadaf Salavati (Linnaeus University, Sweden) and professor Mary Somerville (University of the Pacific, United States) were in residence for one week at the invitation of UBT President, Rector, and Professor Edmond Hajrizi. This international teaching team introduced fundamentals of systems design [8] and participatory design [9][10] to students enrolled in a graduate course on system analysis and design processes. The “Information Systems Analysis, Design, and Modeling” course outcomes explored critical elements of the libraries’ re-invention and produced baseline information on UBT aspirational teaching and learning requirements. Initial visioning activities produced a systems model of the UBT ecosystem, which will evolve through future engagement with campus representatives from Information Science, Knowledge Management, Information Systems, Library Science, Interior Design, Furniture Design, and Architectural Design who will advance a shared vision, phased approach, and next steps for University Libraries and the Knowledge Center systems, services and facilities.

5. University of Business and Technology Planning Reflections

For centuries, the academic library was the sole provider for the information that students needed for papers, graduate students needed for theses, and faculty needed for articles and books. Over the last twenty years, that model has changed dramatically in the digital information age [11].

The University for Business and Technology will co-create forward looking libraries that anticipate the teaching, learning, and research aspirations of the campus community. Accomplishing this vision for a revitalized library requires repurposing and redesigning facilities for collaborative learning, multimedia production, research support, and other – to be identified - resources. It also requires furthering the embryonic conception of a Knowledge Center, which will be guided by best practices in higher education that emphasize the tremendous advantages to be realized by advancing instructional design and curriculum

renewal to further animate the creativity and innovation that enriches experience and amplifies knowledge.

No longer a mere repository of licensed and owned content published by academic publishers, the libraries' collection will be enlivened by curated original UBT content, produced by professors and students. Discovery and access to these digital collections will occur within synergistic environments that enable interpretation and analysis, creation and sharing, of UBT-generated academic knowledge. State-of-the-art production facilities will catalyze innovative co-creation of digital content, intentionally crossing disciplinary boundaries and forging multidisciplinary collaborations, viewable on visually prominent digital walls, which ensure the persistent presence of knowledge creation in students' lives and professors' work, now and in the future.

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