

Learning Commons

*Evolution and collaborative
essentials*

EDITED
BY
BARBARA SCHADER

**CHAPTER 10: THE INFORMATION COMMONS
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND;
IMPROVING STUDENT LIFE, LEARNING AND
SUPPORT THROUGH CO-LOCATION,
COLLABORATION, INTEGRATION AND
INNOVATION, BY HESTER MOUNTIFIELD**



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The Information Commons at the University of Auckland; improving student life, learning and support through co-location, collaboration, integration and innovation

Hester Mountifield

This chapter presents a case study of the Information Commons Group at The University of Auckland, focusing on the purpose-built Kate Edger Information Commons. It outlines the strategic and operational planning undertaken to create the large student-centred learning facility that provides proactive integrated learning support in a collaborative, interdisciplinary physical and virtual learning environment. It also discusses the reengineering of the original service model to accommodate changes in learning, technology and student needs.

Introduction

The aim to be ‘student-centred’ has been a strong focus at The University of Auckland over a number of years. The Student

Life Commission and the Curriculum Commission of 2002 were two major initiatives to enhance student learning and life on all campuses. Another was the establishment of the highly successful Kate Edger Information Commons that provides a student-centred infrastructure for integrated learning support and information services. It is the largest of the Information Commons Group of services managed by the University Library in partnership with the University's Information Technology Services (ITS).

The University of Auckland is the largest university in New Zealand and was established in 1883. It is New Zealand's top-ranked tertiary institution based on research quality. Its mission is to be an internationally recognised, research-led university, known for the excellence of its teaching, research, and service to its local, national and international communities. The University is a member of two international university collaborations – Universitas 21 and the Association of Pacific Rim Universities. Teaching and research is conducted in eight faculties – Arts, Business and Economics, National Institute of Creative Arts and Industries (music, sound recording and design, dance, fine and visual arts, architecture, planning and urban design), Education, Engineering, Law, Medical and Health Sciences and Science. There is also a School of Theology, 37 research centres and nine research institutes.

The University has five campuses:

- The City Campus, the largest covering an area of 16 hectares or 39.5 acres, is located in the Auckland central business district. Most faculties and the School of Theology are located on this campus, as well as University Management and central service divisions such as the Centre for Academic Development (CAD), Facilities Management, Finance, ITS, Human Resources

and Student Administration. The large General Library, focusing on Arts, Science, Business and Economics, and five subject libraries are based on the City Campus in close proximity to the associated faculties. The Kate Edger Information Commons is located across the street from the General Library.

- The Grafton Campus for Medical and Health Sciences is near the major Auckland City Hospital. The Philson Library and Grafton Information Commons are located in the centre of this campus and linked via an internal stairwell.
- The Epsom Campus was added after the 2004 amalgamation of The University of Auckland and the former Auckland College of Education. The Epsom Information Commons is located within the Sylvia Ashton-Warner Library.
- The Tai Tokerau Campus for Education and its small subject library is located north of Auckland in Whangarei.
- The Tamaki Campus has a strong focus on population and community health, inter-faculty research and research collaboration with government and industry. The Tamaki Campus Library supports the information needs of the campus.

The University of Auckland has a diverse student body in terms of ethnicity, English language capability and levels of academic preparation. The University experienced a significant growth in student numbers from 14,213 in 1990 to 37,924 in 2005. Most of the students fall into the 17–21 age group and have grown up with technology.

The University Library (<http://www.library.auckland.ac.nz/>) is the largest in New Zealand and ranks with the top five Australian university libraries in terms of expenditure and size. The University Library system comprises decentralised

client services delivered in 12 subject libraries, three Information Commons and centralised units such as Information Commons and Learning Services, Corporate Services, IT Services, Document Delivery, Acquisitions, Serials and Cataloguing, all with system-wide roles and responsibilities.

The University of Auckland operates a federated system for the governance and delivery of IT services. ITS is responsible for implementing the University IT strategic plan, enterprise system operation, IT architecture planning, network services management, lecture theatre management, telephony services, IT procurement coordination, information security strategy and end user support for staff. The Information Commons Group provides student user support. Faculty IT Services provides input into central services and are responsible for local application development and support, as well as end user support.

The Information Commons Group

The Information Commons Group (<http://www.information-commons.auckland.ac.nz/>) consists of the Kate Edger, Grafton and Epsom Information Commons. All three facilities operate within the same IT and service infrastructure (Table 10.1).

The Kate Edger Information Commons

The Kate Edger Information Commons is an integrated learning and social environment located in a purpose-built facility. An assortment of services, environments and

Table 10.1 The Information Commons Group

	Kate Edger	Grafton	Epsom
Established	April 2003	April 2004	1999 as the @Ace Rooms, reviewed and integrated into IC Group – January 2006
Location	Purpose-built facility on the City Campus	Close proximity to Philson Library on the Grafton Campus	Inside Sylvia Ashton-Warner Library (SAW) on the Epsom Campus
Size and layout	6,647 square metres 73,700 sq. ft Five levels: Level 0: collaborative study and computers space Level 1: Short Loan and ELSAC Level 2: IC Helpdesk and collaborative computer space Level 3: quiet computer space Level 4: quiet study space	490 square metres 5,274 sq. ft One level	235 square metres 2,529 sq. ft Three rooms
Client group	Approximately 28,835 students from Arts, Business and Economics, Creative Arts, Music, Architecture, Law Engineering and Science	Approximately 3,670 Medical and Health Sciences students	Approximately 6,250 Education students

Table 10.1 The Information Commons Group (Cont'd)

	Kate Edger	Grafton	Epsom
Computers	443	88	51
Laptops	38	–	13
Group seats (around tables)	236	28	None in the Epsom IC but 42 in the SAW Library
Formal individual seats	185	12	None in the Epsom IC but 160 in the SAW Library
Casual seats	266	18 with computers	None in the Epsom IC but 43 in the SAW Library
Teaching room seats	171 (including 66 computers)	146	10 with computers
Total study spaces	1,339		74
Printers	13	3	2
Photocopiers	17	1	1
Scanners	10	5	1
Software	Operating system Windows XP UoA enterprise systems Cecil Portal nDeva Printing Systems Productivity Endnote Microsoft Access 2003 Microsoft Excel 2003 Microsoft Word 2003 Microsoft PowerPoint 2003	Same as Kate Edger plus: Scope and Chart Image Pro Brain Storm Pharma-CAL-ogy suite	Same as Kate Edger plus: BibleWorks Fonts Geometers' Sketchpad Fathom Tinkerplots Google SketchUp

Table 10.1 The Information Commons Group (Cont'd)

	Kate Edger	Grafton	Epsom
	Microsoft Publisher 2003 Macromedia Studio 8 Adobe 7 Pro Statistics R SPSS Multimedia software QuickTime Player Real One Player Windows Media Player Windows Movie Maker Power DVD Accessories Calculator Notepad Adobe Acrobat Reader Winzip Web page creation Microsoft FrontPage 2002 Web browser Mozilla Firefox 1.5 Microsoft Internet Explorer Library database reader Ebrary Cduser Software development		

Table 10.1 The Information Commons Group (Cont'd)

	Kate Edger	Grafton	Epsom
	Visual Studio net Framework GIS, spatial data and maps ESRI Arcview 8 Built in players (Explorer) Macromedia Authorware Macromedia Flash Macromedia Shockwave Imaging software Microsoft Imaging for Windows Gimp Features Swap mouse buttons Virus Tools Symantec Antivirus Remote console PuTTY Terminal connections Xwin 32 VNC Windows Terminal Server client Citrix ICA client Keyboard inputs Maori keyboard Dvorak keyboard Language inputs		

Table 10.1 The Information Commons Group (Cont'd)

	Kate Edger	Grafton	Epsom
	English (NZ) Japanese Chinese (PRC) Chinese (Taiwan) German (Germany) Russian Italian Spanish (International) Thai Vietnamese Korean French Arabic		
Teaching rooms	2 seminar rooms 1 small group room 4 computer training rooms	1 computer training room, open to students outside teaching times	1 computer training room, open to students outside teaching times
Staff	IC Helpdesk: Weekdays: 6 between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m.; 3 between 7 p.m. and midnight Weekends: 3 between 8 a.m. and 10 p.m. Short Loan: Weekdays: 6 between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m.; 1 between 5 p.m. and 10 p.m. Weekends: 1 between 8 a.m. and 10 p.m.	Weekdays: 1 Weekends: 1	Weekdays: 1 Weekends: 1

Table 10.1 The Information Commons Group (Cont'd)

	Kate Edger	Grafton	Epsom
	ELSAC: 3 between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. weekdays Learning Services: 5 between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. weekdays		
Opening hours	Weekdays 7 a.m. to midnight Weekends 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. Extended weekend hours during examination periods	Monday – Thursday 7.30 a.m. to 10 p.m. Friday 7.30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sunday 12 midday to 8 p.m.	Monday – Thursday 7.30 a.m. to 10 p.m. Friday 7.30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday – Sunday 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

functions interact to create an attractive and popular student-centred hub at the physical centre of the City Campus. The Information Commons building was named after Kate Edger, the first female graduate of the University of New Zealand and the British Empire, who graduated with a BA in 1877 and a MA in 1882.

Physical facility and associated environments

The Kate Edger Information Commons (Figure 10.1) occupies one side of a major building that was constructed between October 2001 and June 2003. Warren and Mahoney were the principal architects for the project. The five-storey building opened in April 2003 and the substantial

Figure 10.1 The Kate Edger Building – the two sides of the building are linked with a glass atrium and walkways



size of the facility (11,442 m²/123,161 sq. ft) allowed for the co-location of related learning support and student services, as well as a range of retail and food suppliers. The other side of the building, the Student Commons, houses Health and Counselling, Student Association offices, Student Accommodation Centre, Postgraduate Lounge, International Student Centre and retailers such as a bank, pharmacy, bookshop, hairdresser, travel agent, IT store, and cafes. The 2002 Student Life Commission pointed out that there was much room for improving the nature, variety and quality of retail and food services on campus. A project team, consisting of staff and students, worked with a retail consultancy service to determine students' preferred retail outlets, design concepts and hours of opening for retail outlets and service agencies in the building.

The Kate Edger Information Commons offers over 1,300 study spaces in flexible configurations matching different learning styles and preferences. Collaborative learning is encouraged on the lower floors with group spaces and a greater tolerance of noise and activity. Provision is made for quiet study on the two top floors with individual study spaces (Figure 10.2a–e).

Level 0 floor plan – group study and computer space

Level 1 floor plan – High demand collection and ELSAC

Level 2 floor plan – IC Helpdesk, computer space and computer training room

Level 3 floor plan – Student Learning Centre and computer space

Level 4 floor plan – silent study space and teaching rooms

Figure 10.2 The Kate Edger Building

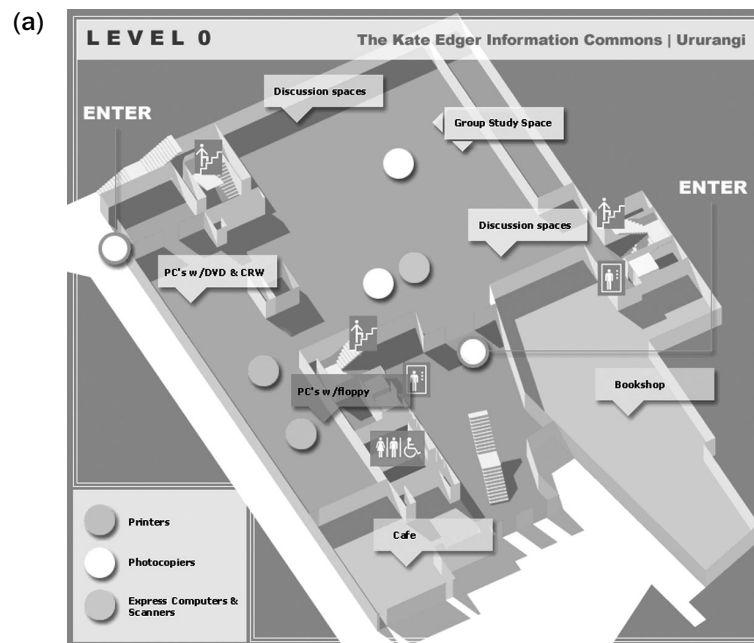


Figure 10.2 (Cont'd)

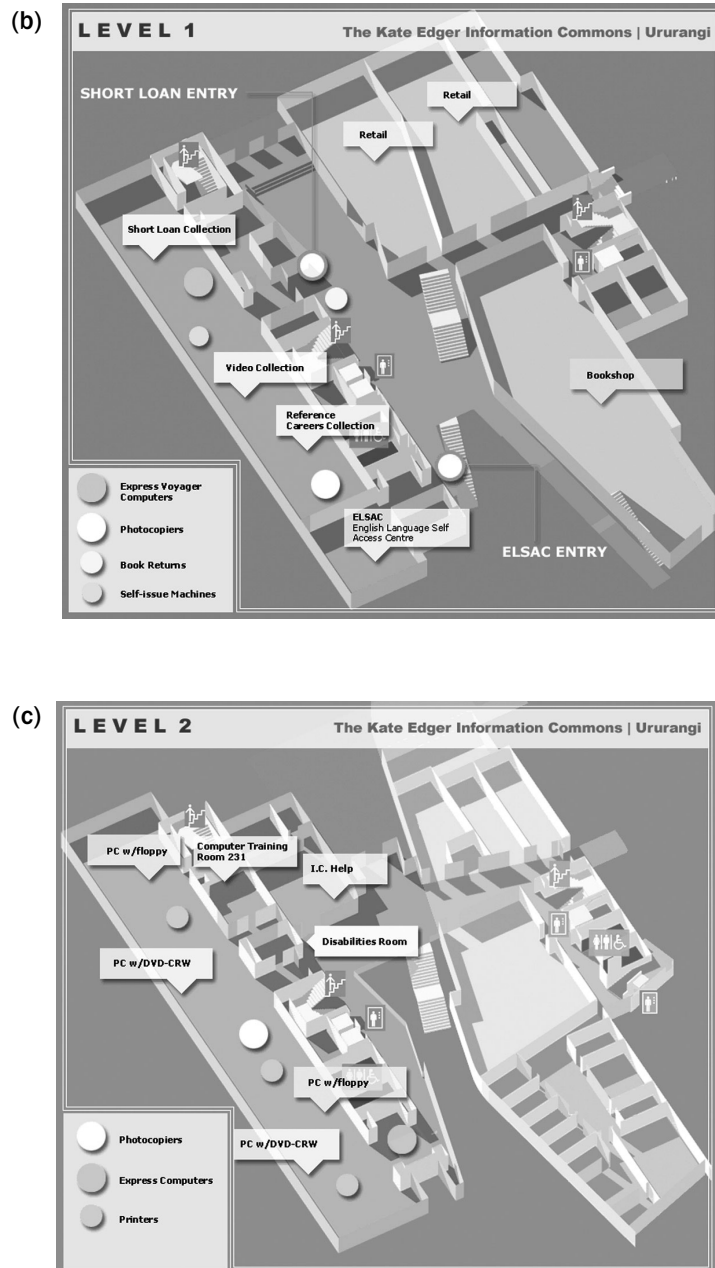
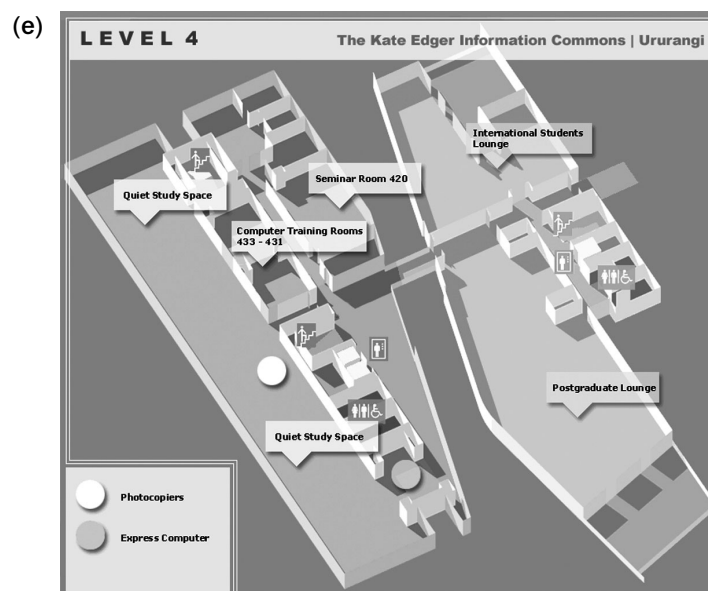
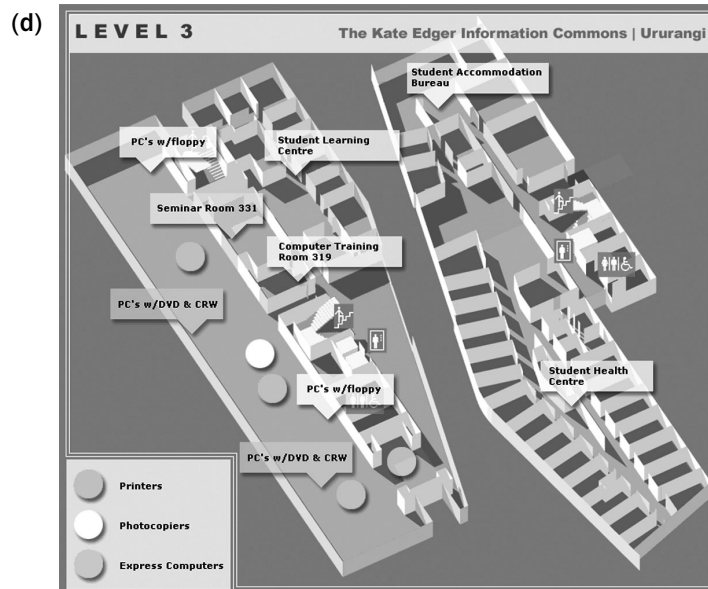


Figure 10.2 (Cont'd)



The building is at the physical and social centre of the campus effectively connecting the wider campus and creating a vibrant hub where the university community loves to gather. It is a leading-edge building that demonstrates the university's commitment to learning and technology. The virtual learning environment is visible through the glass exterior (Figure 10.3) and mesh screens and looks particularly vibrant after dark through the clever positioning of computers, coloured lighting and artwork.

The information technology infrastructure was designed to provide maximum flexibility to adapt to ongoing changes in teaching and learning technology requirements and

Figure 10.3 The Kate Edger Building exterior – attractive use of glass, colour and light



services. The design is based on conventional wired networking architectures with provision for wireless technology through several wireless access points on all levels. Students have access to over 500 computer workstations (Figure 10.4a,b) for group and individual work as well as 38 wireless laptops available for borrowing via the Voyager library management system. The IT environment provides printing, scanning, photocopying and file storage capabilities.

Student electronic services are managed through the proprietary NetAccount authentication and authorisation system. All students receive a Net login and password when they enrol. NetAccount provides access to the Internet, printing and photocopying on campus and access to enterprise systems such as the Cecil learning management system, the nDeva student enrolment system, Library electronic resources, student email and file storage on and off campus. User charges for Internet, photocopying and printing are levied by direct debit to students' NetAccount. All students receive an annual allocation for Internet access and some departments allocate print credits to their students for printing course-related work and additional credits for Internet access. The Library subsidises staff and student access to electronic resources, including web-based licensed databases, electronic course readings, e-journals and e-books, and some selected Internet resources. Students deposit funds in their NetAccounts in the Information Commons and other points of sale on the different campuses.

When the Information Commons opened in 2003, it offered a new enterprise software environment for all students regardless of which faculty they belonged to. Students have access to standard productivity software, enterprise systems and University and Library web pages

Figure 10.4 High demand computer areas (a) and group study areas with NetGen appeal (b)



and electronic resources. The new student desktop environment was a strategic development at the University of Auckland. It became a driver for change in departmental computer laboratories and for the implementation of

a single sign-on authentication system. Single sign-on to all enterprise systems via NetAccount was introduced in mid-2005. Prior to its implementation students had a separate login for the nDeva student enrolment system and used NetAccount for all other systems. Needless to say it caused confusion and frustration amid students and support staff. With single sign-on, and once logged on, students automatically have seamless access to the Cecil learning management system, the nDeva student enrolment system, WebMail, AFS file storage and Library electronic resources and electronic course material readings on and off campus.

Another significant improvement was made in the area of student file storage. AFS file storage was initially only available in the Information Commons and students were also able to access their faculty or departmental file storage from any computer in the Information Commons. Students soon started to demand an enterprise approach to file storage and now have access to AFS from all libraries and most departmental computer labs and from off campus via web-services.

Planning

There were several key drivers contributing to the development of the facility. These included goals articulated in The University of Auckland strategic documents and many practical issues facing student services. The University of Auckland Academic Plan (2001) articulated the University's commitment to providing 'its students an intellectually stimulating education, which focuses on enquiry, critical thinking, experiential learning, open discussion, and which fosters a lifelong love and enjoyment

of ideas, discovery and learning'. The plan also stated that the University is committed to:

- Developing an information literacy policy and support systems that enable students to locate, evaluate and use information effectively
- Identifying a level of computer skill that all students must acquire and the support systems needed to achieve these levels.

The University of Auckland Graduate Profile (2003; p. 1) points out that graduates should have:

- An ability to recognise when information is needed and a capacity to locate, evaluate and use this information effectively.
- An ability to make appropriate use of advanced information and communication technologies.

Study space was at a premium with the libraries constantly overcrowded. Learning support services for students were located in different buildings on campus. The Student Learning Centre, providing academic learning and performance skills development and some computer skills training, had inadequate teaching facilities and staff offices. ELSAC, the English Language Self-Access Centre, was located approximately 1.5 km from the centre of the City Campus. The Student Union facilities were in an urgent need of upgrading as these were built when student numbers were significantly lower. Student expectations were changing fast. Incoming students are typical of the Net Generation. They are digital natives who are comfortable in a world characterised by fast changing technologies (Prensky, 2001; 1). Oblinger and Oblinger (2005; sections 2.5–2.7)

described them as always connected, digitally literate, able to multitask, comfortable in a visual-rich environment, favouring teamwork and experimental learning, able to move seamlessly between the physical and virtual environments, and expecting excellent and adaptable services. Students arrived at university expecting access to learning facilities, including computers, which provided an integrated suite of tools, resources and services (Figure 10.5a–c).

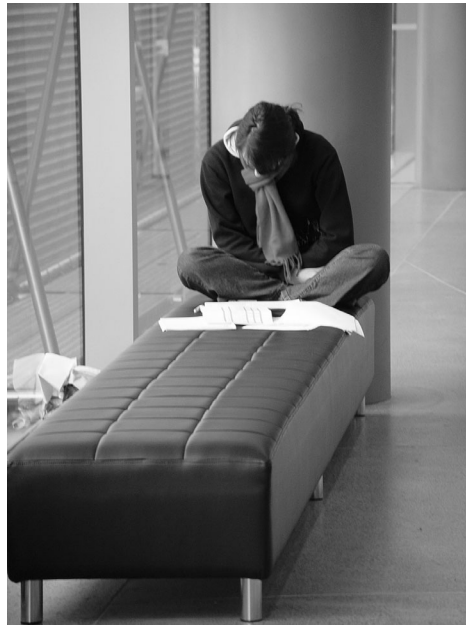
The University Library presented University Management with a discussion document that outlined its vision for enhanced services based on the development of an Information Commons. The proposed concept was complementary to a long-standing university strategy to improve student facilities on the City Campus and as a result

Figure 10.5 Seating and study areas



Figure 10.5 (Cont'd)

(b)



(c)



the Student Commons and Information Commons Project was given priority status early in 2001. A project team, consisting of the University Library, ITS, Student Administration and student representatives, developed a design brief for the Information Commons and Student Commons. The project team was later divided into the Information Commons and the Student Commons groups for the detailed planning of the different areas. Both had very specific but different goals and requirements. For the purpose of this chapter, the discussion will concentrate on the Information Commons. There was, however, ongoing consultation and collaboration between the groups to ensure a strategic fit.

The Information Commons was a collaborative project between the University Library and ITS. It was an innovative new service that crossed departmental boundaries. An IC Steering Group was established in 2002 to facilitate planning for the new IT and customer services. Staff members from the University Library and ITS worked on projects such as: networking, layout and furniture, disability requirements, hardware and software environment, student support services, student access and billing, desktop implementation and support, and IT security. Detailed project plans were developed by the teams and gradually implemented after approval by the IC Steering Group. The position of Library Manager – Learning Services was established to manage the facility and develop the associated customer services. This position also acted as the senior Library project manager and was a key member of all project planning groups. It was critical to the success of the development that one person had detailed knowledge of all aspects of planning in order to provide continuity between projects. The position title later changed to Assistant

University Librarian (Information Commons and Learning Services).

For the purpose of the strategic and tactical planning of the integrated learning support service, information on various distributed support services in the Libraries, Student Computer Laboratories and other Enquiry and Resources Centres on campus was gathered and analysed. Several official student surveys undertaken by the University in preceding years provided useful information. Negative comments about specific services and support were carefully considered in the planning process.

The initial broad vision for the Information Commons was that it would be a modern student-centred facility that provided a variety of easily identified and conveniently located spaces, computer workstations and access to information resources, technologies and expert staff that supported different learning needs in one physical location. It was refined during the planning process and the documented vision for the Kate Edger Information Commons is to:

Provide a highly visible, modern and unique facility which will inspire students to acquire new skills so that they can participate more actively in the learning process. <http://www.information-commons.auckland.ac.nz/?page=vision>

Four desired outcomes, based on the vision, underpin the service design and delivery; skills development, effective information access, access to quality facilities and improved support. Developing students' information literacy and IT skills is the pedagogical intent common to the outcomes (Mountifield, 2006; p. 178).

Desired outcome one – skills development

Assist students to acquire skills to locate, retrieve, evaluate and use information effectively through:

- Courses in computer, information and learning skills presented in flexible teaching spaces that include state of the art equipment.
- Individualised instruction provided in consultation spaces throughout the building and during user transactions.
- Several layers of instruction, catering for different needs and preferences, in a wide-ranging collection of guides and self-paced tutorials in both print and electronic format.

Desired outcome two – effective information access

Students are able to access information to facilitate learning through:

- Searching and use of all databases to which the University Library has established access.
- Searching for and use of information available on the Internet and the University's website.
- Availability of the University Library's high demand print and audiovisual collection.
- Expert staff providing support.

Desired outcome three – access to quality facilities

IT and a mixture of spaces in the Information Commons facilitate student learning through access to:

- Flexible computer workstation and study areas designed for both group and individual work.
- Group study spaces that are fully wired and equipped.
- Spaces for laptop users and laptops for loan.
- Printing, downloading, file transfer and storage, scanning, and photocopying capabilities.
- Audiovisual equipment in a well-designed space.
- Specialist technologies and space adequate to the needs of students with disabilities.

Desired outcome four – improved support

Expert support structures are in place to facilitate learning through:

- Providing expert support to facilitate learning through an integrated service delivered by multi-skilled staff.
- Assistance in the location, retrieval, evaluation and use of information.
- Assistance in the capture, manipulation, storage, articulation and transfer of information.
- Providing specialist support to students in English language skills development.
- Collaboration between other University IT service points and facilities to identify resources and expertise that will complement the activities of the Information Commons.
- Clear and effective system of referral and escalation of queries and problems.

(See <http://www.information-commons.auckland.ac.nz/?page=vision> for more information.)

The outcomes are based on a planning document from The University of Calgary Library (Ritchie, 1999).

The outcomes and service model were developed after comprehensive research of other Information Commons facilities. The research included studying journal articles, websites and email communication with Information Commons planners and managers who were generous with their time and provided very valuable advice.

It was determined that in early 2000 many Information Commons facilities in North America had separate reference and computing services desks staffed by experts. Crockett, McDaniel and Remy at the Leavey Library of the University of Southern California found that students were frustrated by having to differentiate between computer-based or research-based questions. Restructuring of their service resulted in an integrated service with appropriate staff training as an important component (Crockett et al., 2002; 183–4).

The decision to adopt an integrated learning support model was based on student needs and feedback, advice from colleagues at other Information Commons and on research findings recorded in the literature. Bailey and Tierney (2002; 284) identified the Information Commons model that focuses on integrating research, teaching, and learning activities within the digital and physical environments as the most successful. This model takes into consideration the needs and characteristics of the student as well as changes in higher education. It is a collaborative environment that provides a holistic approach to student learning. This can be achieved by integrating the facilities, tools, resources and expertise of learning support providers such as IT professionals, librarians, learning advisors, instructional technologists, multi-media producers, language advisors, writing advisors and others (Mountifield, 2006; p. 174).

The planning process for the service philosophy and model consisted of several steps, always with the Information Commons vision, desired outcomes and customer needs as the guiding elements. Existing roles within the University Library and ITS were examined, identifying each team's strengths and weaknesses. A new service model, based on collaboration between the University Library and ITS, was developed in draft format and submitted to key stakeholders and managers for comment. The draft proposal described the components of the service, proposed management and staffing structure, new procedures, standards, training requirements and the budget. The strategic advantages that the new service model would bring to the University of Auckland student body were highlighted. Several months of detailed operational planning took place after the model was approved and the associated budget assigned. The planning included developing position descriptions, training and recruitment plans; procedural manuals including reporting methods; access and security measures; and a marketing and communication campaign.

Guidelines for the use of the Information Commons (<http://www.information-commons.auckland.ac.nz/?page=guidelines>) and associated food and drink guidelines (<http://www.information-commons.auckland.ac.nz/?page=fooddrink>) were developed to encourage acceptable use of the facility, equipment and services and to manage student behaviour.

Establishing a successful Information Commons facility requires strategic thinking and positioning as well as tactical or short-term planning. Strategic thinking and planning will ensure that the facility and associated services are strongly aligned with the institutional mission, strategy and values and with student requirements. It is also critical in obtaining the required budget for the implementation and ongoing operation.

Service model

The University Library, ITS, the Student Learning Centre and the English Language Self-Access Centre collaborate to provide a proactive integrated learning support environment for students. The development of computer and information literacy, academic and English language skills are key focus areas of the Information Commons. Opportunities for training are integrated into all aspects of the service. The new building and associated services facilitated the blending of some services and the rethinking of traditional organisational boundaries that are often not student-centred. Facilities, resources, services and student support were co-located and integrated to varying degrees. The two main learning support providers in the Information Commons are the University Library's Information Commons and Learning Services department and the Student Learning Centre, a unit within the University's Centre for Academic Development.

The Information Commons and Learning Services department consists of four teams: the IC Helpdesk, Short Loan, ELSAC and Learning Services. Staff collaborate on many levels and often have roles and responsibilities across teams. All staff are appointed to the Information Commons and Learning Services department and may be required to work in any team or location that is part of the department. A statement to this effect is included in all job descriptions and training programmes ensure staff are multi-skilled.

Courses and workshops in information literacy, IT literacy, language and learning skills are presented in flexible teaching spaces. Individualised instruction is provided in consultation spaces throughout the building. IT literacy workshops are provided by the Student Learning Centre while IC Helpdesk Consultants provide point-of-need

roaming support throughout the building. Support material, catering for different needs and preferences, are available in a wide-ranging collection of print and online guides and self-paced tutorials. Frequently asked questions are available from the Information Commons web pages. Students who are unable to attend library courses can download the course handout from the online bookings website.

IC Helpdesk service

The IC Helpdesk service was a new model founded on the amalgamation of existing services and the establishment of new positions. The ITS Electronic Campus Helpdesk service merged with the University Library's Learning Services to form the IC Helpdesk Service. The service operated in a cross-functional multi-skilled team environment and consisted of two components, walk-in and roaming support. The IC Helpdesk area provides walk-in support to students, NetAccount sales and open consultation space, which could be used by staff members from the different student support departments. Roaming support (Figure 10.6) is provided on all levels. The staffing consisted of a full-time Help Desk Manager, six part-time After-hours Supervisors and a large number of Information Commons Consultants who were students employed on a casual basis. The Grafton Information Commons and Epsom Information Commons are managed as extensions of the Kate Edger Information Commons. Staff work in any location that is part of the Information Commons Group.

The role of the Information Commons Consultants was to serve as student support staff in the Information Commons. They provided a roving consultation service by assisting students using the computers in the Information Commons, work shifts on the IC Help desk, and assist with special

Figure 10.6 IC Helpdesk roving support



projects on a point of need basis. A detailed training programme ensured IC Consultants were able to support the use of electronic resources, enterprise systems and Library databases. They were familiar with Microsoft Office software, provided general PC skills support (e.g. accessing files from drives) and supported the printing, scanning and photocopying systems. Appropriate cross-training to develop skills in many areas was vital to the delivery of the service. Ongoing training and refreshers were provided at regular intervals. Senior students, preferably postgraduate, were employed to work in the Information Commons. They were expected to be available to work a minimum of 9 hours and no more than 20 hours per week. Shifts were usually between 3 and 6 hours long. A relatively large number of students, approximately 30–35, were employed to cover all shifts during opening hours. The Information Commons

soon became a sought after place for employment on campus. Although the model worked well and suited student employees with its flexibility, it was also not without its challenges in terms of continuity of service, communication and staff administrative processes. The service was reviewed at the end of 2006 and changes were implemented – see ‘Transformation and Repositioning’.

An Automatic Call Diversion (ACD) system was implemented in 2005 in order to make telephone assistance from the various Information Commons locations more efficient as well as to collect operational statistics. The ACD system distributes incoming calls evenly to the members of a number of answering groups, ensuring all calls are answered in a timely fashion.

The IC Helpdesk service is jointly managed by the University Library and ITS. The University Library is responsible for the day-to-day management of the service in the Information Commons. ITS takes responsibility for the IT infrastructure, associated hardware and software and the NetAccount support and development. All IT related problems and service requests are logged through the online enterprise SolveIT system.

The English Language Self Access Centre (ELSAC)

The ELSAC (Figure 10.7; <http://www.elsac.auckland.ac.nz/>) provides learning support to the growing number of ‘English as another language’ students at The University of Auckland. Students can improve their English language skills through guided self-study and through consultations with language advisors. The electronic learning environment, a software application that was developed in-house, gives students access to learning resources, monitors

Figure 10.7 ELSAC Language Advisor assisting a student



their learning and aids in the development of successful self-study skills. The ELSAC was transferred to the University Library's Information Commons and Learning Services department and relocated to the Information Commons in 2003. ELSAC also provides podcasts and iPod-compatible language learning exercises to students.

Learning services

The University Library offers a multifaceted information literacy programme (Figure 10.8) with specialised subject-based and generic components to students and staff. The Learning Services team, based in the Information Commons, provides leadership in designing, developing, delivering and evaluating the programme and its associated teaching activities, initiatives and resources. The team collaborate

Figure 10.8 ELSAC Students attending an information literacy course



with subject librarians across the Library system, learning designers from the Centre for Academic Development (CAD) and faculty to integrate information literacy into academic courses. The team offers a comprehensive range of activity-based library courses in the Information Commons. Students and staff use an online bookings database (<http://www.library.auckland.ac.nz/bookings>) to enrol in courses and to evaluate courses afterwards. The Learning Services team, in partnership with CAD, developed an interactive online tutorial for the Voyager catalogue. It is in the style of a graphic novel and teaches students how to use the Voyager catalogue through simulations. It follows three fictional students as they conduct research for an assignment and gain valuable information literacy skills along the way (<http://www.library.auckland.ac.nz/voyagertutorial/>).

Short loan

The high demand print and video collection for Arts, Science and Business and Economics students are housed in the Short Loan area. The collection consists of over 14,000 prescribed and recommended texts and is selected by teaching staff. The service provides controlled access to material in high demand through 1 hour, 2 hours, 3 hours, 3 days, and 7 days loan periods. Students use 3M RFID SelfCheck equipment for borrowing and returning short loan material. The Short Loan department manages the University Library's electronic course material service. Journal articles and book chapters are digitised or linked to electronic holdings and made available through the Voyager library catalogue and the Cecil learning management system. There are over 5,000 items in the electronic course material collection (<http://www.library.auckland.ac.nz/slc/slchome.htm>).

The Student Learning Centre

The Student Learning Centre is part of the Centre for Academic Development and assists students with the development of learning and performance skills. The Centre provides support for undergraduates and postgraduates through workshops and individual consultations (<http://cad.auckland.ac.nz/index.php?p=slc>).

ITS Desktop Services

ITS Desktop Services are responsible for the hardware and software environment and support in all Information Commons locations. Three staff members are located in the Kate Edger Information Commons. The main responsibility

of these staff members is technical support for the Information Commons Group but they also provide services to other university departments.

Collaboration

A student-centred learning environment that improved student life and learning was achieved through strategic partnerships and collaboration between learning support providers. The Information Commons student support service model is underpinned by a commitment to service innovation, excellence and collaboration.

The partnership between the University Library and ITS is governed by a service level agreement that outlines the roles and responsibilities of each. It is revised annually. Strategic and operational priorities are discussed at monthly meetings. Requests for new software by staff and students are evaluated against a set of predefined criteria and an updated software image is installed prior to the beginning of each semester.

One of the strategic goals during the planning process of the Information Commons was to encourage a more coherent and integrated approach to IT literacy, information literacy, language and learning skills development. The University Library, Student Learning Centre and ELSAC, collaboratively and individually, contribute to the development of information literacy, IT literacy, language and learning competencies through a multifaceted programme that comprise discipline-specific and generic components. They work with academic staff to integrate these competencies into course curricula. Collaboration between learning support providers has evolved and strengthened over the past 3 years. They

promoted an institutional and strategic approach to learning support at every opportunity. An institutional information literacy policy was approved by Senate in March 2006 and together with The University of Auckland strategic plan, academic plan and graduate profiles highlights the institutional focus on information literacy and IT literacy programmes, activities and support (Beatty and Mountifield, 2006; 239).

A new collaborative initiative between the University Library, Centre for Academic Development, Student Learning Centre, Postgraduate Careers and Academic Departments is the development of a Doctoral Skills Programme (<http://www.auckland.ac.nz/doctoralskills>). The programme, which started in March 2007, is governed by representatives from these units and administrative and marketing support is provided by the Graduate Centre. The programme offers a variety of courses and individual consultations to support and assist doctoral students in two ways:

- to help students further develop their academic and professional skills so that they can complete their doctorates successfully and in a timely manner;
- to help students with career planning and professional development, in order that they may better achieve their goals following completion of the doctorate.

One of the ways that IT literacy is addressed in the Information Commons is through the use of MELL (Microsoft E-Learning). Information Commons and Student Learning Centre staff work together to promote the resource library and support students using the package. The MELL software is available on all computers in the Kate Edger, Grafton and Epsom Information Commons.

Outcomes

The Information Commons is a rich learning environment for the Net Generation student. It encourages collaborative and socio-cultural learning by offering, in one location, a modern IT infrastructure, flexible learning spaces and tailored learning support. It promotes social and learning communities by providing convenient, central and comfortable spaces for learning and socialising. It is ideal for collaboration, group work (Figure 10.9), discussions and peer coaching.

The Information Commons is consistently given the highest satisfaction rating of any University of Auckland service or facility evaluated in undergraduate and

Figure 10.9 Small group collaboration



postgraduate student surveys. It is clear from occupancy as measured by automatic door counts and manual head counts as well as network logins that the Information Commons is the preferred learning and social space on campus. Students are encouraged to provide feedback to the Information Commons management via focus group meetings and via the electronic suggestions box. Students seem to appreciate the opportunity to contribute based on the number of suggestions received and their willingness to participate in focus groups.

There was also a substantial increase in the use of various learning support services after co-location in the Kate Edger Information Commons. Membership of the ELSAC increased from 200 in 2002 to 1,200 in 2006. The Student Learning Centre reported an increase in attendance of workshops and individual consultations. Daily issues of short loan material have been increasing steadily each year since the opening of the Information Commons.

The majority of all information literacy courses are offered in the teaching rooms located in the Information Commons. There has been a significant increase in student and faculty participation in the information literacy programme since the opening of the Information Commons. In 2003 there was a 36 per cent increase in student attendance at all library courses, followed by 21 per cent increase in 2004 and 30 per cent increase in 2005. An unexpected but pleasing outcome was that attendance of optional generic courses grew by 109 per cent in 2003 and by 22 per cent in 2004. It indicates that students value opportunities to develop their information literacy and are increasingly aware that it enhances their learning. The high visibility of the programme, targeted marketing, increased tailoring of content and the excellent teaching facilities in the Information Commons are major contributors to its ongoing success.

Table 10.2 Information literacy statistics

	2002	2003	2004	2005
Presentations to groups	898	1,527	1,838	2056
Participants in group presentations	13,409	17,924	21,606	27,797

Source: CONZUL statistics (<http://www.aut.ac.nz/CONZUL/statistics.htm>).

The University Library's information literacy statistics show a considerable upwards trend since the opening of the Kate Edger Information Commons in 2003 (Table 10.2).

The learning support providers in the Kate Edger Information Commons have found that working collaboratively offers benefits such as the sharing of resources and expertise, a cross-functional multi-skilled team environment, more student-centred programmes and the development of new standards and best practice models.

Beagle (2006; p. 35), Mountifield (2006; pp. 174–5) and White et al. (2005; p. 6) encapsulate the benefits and outcomes of the integrated Information Commons as:

- Convenience; a one-stop shop for IT, information, language and learning needs.
- Expert support; collaboration between librarians, IT professionals, writing consultants, media specialists, language and learning advisors.
- Continuum of service; supporting the access, use, evaluation, management, integration, and creation of information.
- Integrated technology-enabled learning environment; latest hardware, software, multimedia, networks and file storage.
- Flexibility to adapt the physical, virtual and service environments to accommodate changes in technology and in the expectations and needs of students.

- Catering for collaborative and individual learning styles and social needs.
- Promoting IT and information literacy development.
- Service excellence; self service, satisfaction, seamlessness.
- Comfort and collaboration.
- Formal and informal learning groups and communities of scholarship.

Transformation and repositioning

A key objective of the Information Commons Management is to ensure that the service model continues to meet the changing needs of learners. Student and staff feedback provided useful information for the periodic appraisal of services, activities and operations. Several refinements have been made to customer services, the IT environment and staff management processes since the opening of each facility. Conducting research into current and emerging trends in higher education, information and communication technology and e-learning ensures that the strategic role of the Information Commons continues and strengthens.

It became clear after 3 years of operating the service that the original Information Commons Helpdesk service model was no longer meeting the diversifying student requirements in an efficient and effective manner. Several factors contributed to the decision to review the service in mid-2006. Changes in university enterprise systems such improved identity management resulting in single sign-on and the development of self-service financial services had a significant impact on the service. The Information Commons also moved towards a fully cashless environment at the start of 2006 by discontinuing all cash-based functions and making

cash-taking autoloaders available. The deployment of self service NetAccount ePOS (electronic point of sale) units in all the IC Group locations had a considerable impact on desk-based activities. The ePOS system allows students to add credit to their NetAccount via a self service Eft-POS terminal and touch screen. Since the implementation of ePOS in August 2006 the number of Helpdesk transactions at Kate Edger and Grafton Helpdesks has decreased noticeably to just over half what they were the previous year during the same period.

The service model was one that employed a large number of casual student staff, all working various hours. A lack of continuity in the delivery of services and effective communication became problematic. The ongoing recruitment, training and scheduling of casual staff and the associated administrative processes consumed an undue amount of managerial time. As the range of self-service options grew, staff were able to devote more time on increasingly complex individual queries and support. It became evident that employing part-time students was no longer suitable for the type of role that was emerging.

The Assistant University Librarian (Information Commons and Learning Services) and the IC Helpdesk Manager undertook a review of the service and staffing model during September and October 2006. The purpose of review was to examine, evaluate and make recommendations on the services and staffing structure of the IC Helpdesk.

The following questions were asked to inform the review:

1. What are student needs and expectations?
2. What are the main components of the service?
3. What are the desirable components of the service?
4. What are basic services and what are advanced services?
5. How many staff should be on duty during various periods in the Kate Edger?

6. How many staff members are required at specific periods for optimal service delivery?
7. How many staff members are required after 7 p.m. and over weekend for security and safety purposes?
8. What are the best hours for the summer vacation – should they match General Library's hours?
9. How can we work with Campus Security to ensure a safe environment?
10. What IC Supervisors work patterns are optimum for service excellence?
11. Which IC Supervisors portfolios are critical?
12. What are the housekeeping tasks that are performed every day; at what intervals?
13. What is the impact of the self service options?
14. What university-wide deployment of ePOS systems is planned?
15. What further service integration is required in the Information Commons?
 - relationship between IC Helpdesk and Learning Service.
 - relationship between IC Helpdesk and Short Loan.
16. What is the current level of collaboration with the Student Learning Centre?
17. What level of collaboration with the Philson Library on the Grafton Campus is possible and desirable?
18. What level of collaboration with Sylvia Ashton-Warner Library on the Epsom Campus is possible and desirable?

Statistical data for all locations was obtained to determine usage patterns. Hourly head counts, people counter statistics and computer logins were analysed for the period shown in Table 10.3.

Table 10.3 Analysis period

Weekdays	Weekends
7–8 a.m.	8–9 a.m.
8–9 a.m.	9–10 a.m.
5–6 p.m.	10–11 a.m.
6–7 p.m.	11 a.m.–noon
7–8 p.m.	Noon–5 p.m.
8–9 p.m.	5–7 p.m.
10–midnight	7–10 p.m.

The enquiry statistics, NetAccount POS transactions (at the desk with staff helping) and NetAccount ePOS transactions (self service) provided useful trends.

A new service and staffing model was developed with 03 January 2007 as implementation date. IC Management articulated a service focus for 2007 to be that of providing more advanced support for IT consultations and drop in sessions in collaboration with the Student Learning Centre, as well as increasing the range of IT and information literacy courses and support materials in collaboration with Learning Services. Staff meetings were held in November to introduce and explain the new model.

The new staffing model of the Information Commons Helpdesk service is based on an increase in permanent staff with fewer casual staff. The new model called for the establishment of three full-time permanent positions (each 37.5 hours per week) and one full-time fixed-term contract position (37.5 hours per week, from March to November). These positions have daily work patterns of 7.5 hours between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. The six permanent part-time staff (20 hours per week) remained and continue to work after hours and over weekends. Twelve casual positions working after hours and over weekends remained.

New permanent positions were advertised at the end of 2006 and in January 2007. A number of existing casual and part-time staff accepted permanent full-time positions and new staff have also been appointed. The review and the reallocation of the existing budget created the opportunity to create a new full-time position in the Learning Services team. Responsibilities have also changed within this team as it has been agreed that the team will take greater responsibility for the professional development and training of library staff in close collaboration with the Library Staff Development Advisory Group, the Library Human Resources Manager and the Library Management Team.

Future challenges

The ongoing operational challenge is to ensure that the service model continues to evolve to ensure excellent frontline services as well as the further blending of learning support services to match student needs. To achieve continuous growth requires a flexible design that can adapt in response to changes in technology, pedagogy and learning needs. Collaborators' ability to integrate their services, capabilities and potential into the learning process and campus-wide learning initiatives, and to involve faculty in the process, will ensure that the Information Commons continues to provide a strategic advantage for The University of Auckland.

Conclusion

The Information Commons at the University of Auckland provides much more than access to computers. It is a general learning environment that is considerably different from any

other on campus. It encourages social leaning, group collaboration, social activities, and is likely to be closer to the working environments that students will experience in their future careers. It accommodates different styles of learning and the open and flexible nature provides students with greater choice of where, when and how they learn.

Note

All floor plans in this chapter are reproduced courtesy of Warren and Mahoney Architects, Auckland, New Zealand.

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