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CREATING INNOVATIVE LEARNING SPACE AT UNIMAP LIBRARY THROUGH FAILED AND SUCCESSFUL EXPERIMENTS

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ABSTRACT

UniMAP Main Library in Pauh Putra Campus was established in 2012, almost ten (10) years after the establishment of Universiti Malaysia Perlis. It was designed in 2005 to provide sufficient space for collection building, academic-class facilities and services. Extensive changes to the library's interior design were proposed in 2011 in view of changing landscape of digital environment. Internal layout consumed large areas of collection development space for only limited amount of actual print collections held by the library.Moreover, the initial design was not able to accommodate space requirements for Generation Y such as leisure areas and wired working facilities for students to enjoy their gadgets. Obviously, the early design emphasized on providing space for individual study rather than collaborative learning space. Brief surveys carried out among undergraduate students in 2015 successfully provide an insight of modern university library expected by Generation Y. After five years of operations, the library basically welcomes many positive remarks by academic, industry and corporate communities despite many failed and successful experiments.

Keywords: Academic class facilities and services; Library's interior design; Generation Y.

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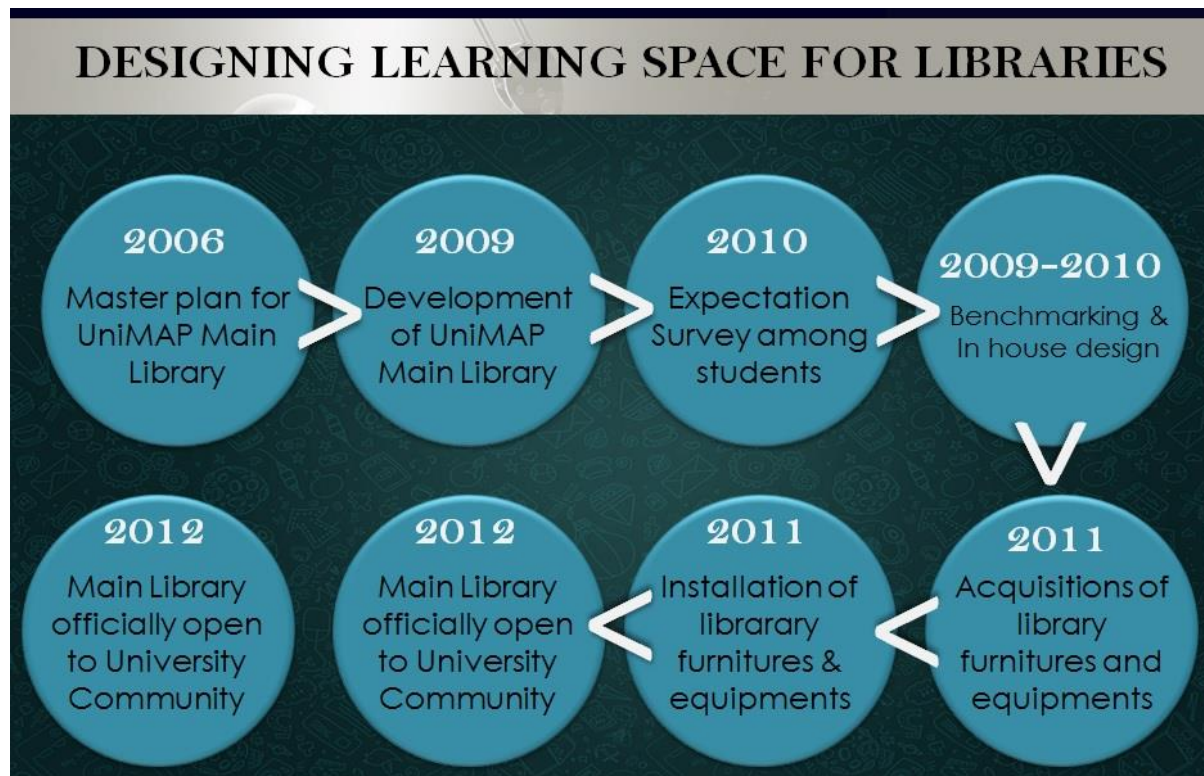*System and innovation in libraries*

1. INTRODUCTION

The library was established in year 2002 with the establishment of Kolej UniversitiKejuruteraan Utara Malaysia or widely known as KUKUM. During 10 years after its establishment, the library resides in level 1 and 2, Podium Block within KWSP Building in Kangar, Perlis. Interestingly, the areas were previously occupied by a local well known shopping mall among surrounding residence. Limited library areas were then becoming the university major concerns due to rapid growth of library collections and students population. Yearly collection budget allocation was optimized by acquiring more electronic resources items covering electronic journals. Focus was given towards developing comprehensive electronic collections to support teaching-learning and research projects in engineering field. Over ten years, the library operates within distributed campus environment with significant preference towards digital contents.

At present, UniMAP Library consists of the Main Library in Pauh Putra Campus, Branch Library in Kangar as City Campus and Digital Hub at Uni CITI Alam Sungai Chuchuh. The University Library in Kangar City Campus reflects 10-years experiments and dedicated approaches towards building up an innovative hybrid library. Successful experiments were adopted by UniMAP Mini Library at School of Manufacturing Engineering in Pauh Putra Campus and extended to the Main Library in the same campus. Adopting the concept of hybrid library, UniMAP Main Library encounters major revisions from its original design. Figure 1 shows milestone towards developing UniMAP's hybrid library.The Main Library was officially named after His Royal Highness Tuanku Syed Faizuddin Putra, Crown Prince of Perlis in a memorable ceremony held at the library on 29th September 2016.

Figure 1. Milestone Towards Developing Learning Space at Universiti Malaysia Perlis

2. DESIGNING LEARNING SPACE FOR LIBRARIES

Initial efforts towards developing the University Main Library were carried out since year 2006. Major focus was given to create a university library with unique design and aesthetics values. Recommendation made by the first Chief Librarian on developing spiral ramp to replace ordinary staircases was materialised on design by architects and engineers. Exterior design exclusively showcase futuristic library with glass wall and attractive glass dome constructed on top of the building. The design of glass dome and wall provides interesting view of the whole campus areas in the future. It's dynamic in terms design clearly translated the library aim to enhance exploration of knowledge among the university members. The glass dome creates obvious distinction between the library with other building complex in the campus. However, minimal focus was given on providing access to contents, facilities and learning spaces according to futuristic trends. Hence, the library interior design and space allocation was still very much connected to conventional academic libraries.

3.   1INITIAL SPACE DESIGN

In 2009, the library team was advised to review the initial interior design of the library areas covering location and segmentation of services and facilities. Highest percentage of library areas was given to collection development (45%), learning and studying areas (30%), services and facilities (15%) and 10% for office areas. This is based on simple estimation of space allocation according to proposed floor plan. Common features of conventional academic libraries were noticeable through huge number of bookshelves. In addition, group study tables were placed to provide areas that are conducive for studying and optimizing the library collections. Due to these specific features of conventional academic libraries, focus was not given to fulfil growing needs for collaborative learning among new generation of library users. Recognizing drastic changes of library users' behaviour throughout the globe, the library must be seen as fascinating learning space to support teaching-learning, research and consultation activities.

2.2   HYBRID LIBRARY AND LEARNING SPACE DESIGN

UniMAP obviously developed a hybrid library which is defined as an organizational entity that brings together a wide range of academic assets including metadata, catalogues, primary source materials, learning objects, datasets, digital repositories and physical resources in a structured and managed way (Regg Carr, 2011). The UniMAP library aimed to offer state-of-the-art facilities to support access to electronic resources and services in the library. Besides housing thousands of printed volumes of books in the library, UniMAP is dedicated to introduce new technologies and latest learning devices to support current needs of our students. However, the library team needs to understand real expectations of students towards the library's collections, facilities and services. In 2010, UniMAPlibrary carried out a brief surveys among undergraduate students on their expectation of future UniMAP Library. The survey contains three open ended questions and managed to collect more than 100 valuable recommendations from undergraduate students.

Within the next four months, initial design was produced to integrate current orientation of library collections, services and facilities into new demands and expectations from students. Nevertheless, physical structure of the library did not permit additional space and new structures for high technology oriented facilities and services. Effective strategies were generated by the library team to inculcate innovative learning facilities into conventional space design. Guided by recommendation lists from the survey, new definitions of services and facilities were produced in order to fulfil strategic directions of UniMAP Main Library.
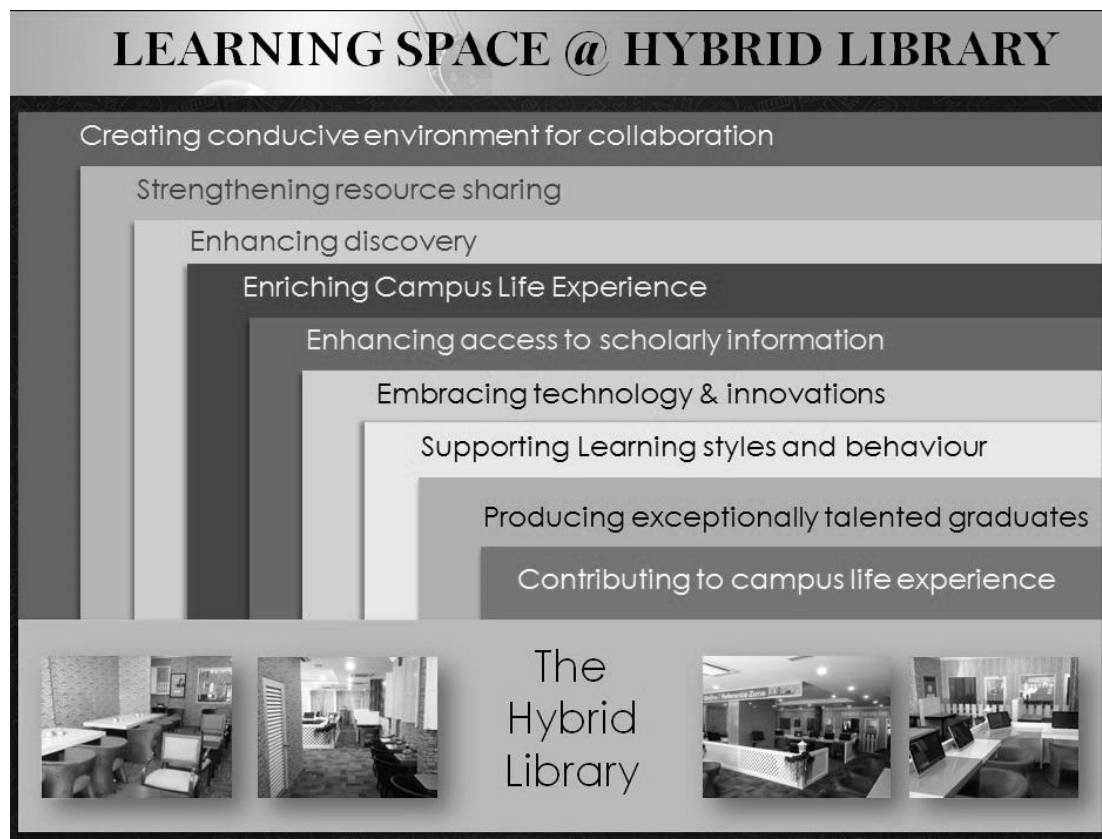
This covers nine (9) elements of UniMAP learning space; contributing to campus life experience, producing exceptionally talented graduates, supporting individual learning styles and behaviour, embracing technology and innovations, enhancing access to scholarly information, enriching campus life experience, enhancing discovery, strengthening resource sharing and creating conducive environment for collaboration (refer to Figure 2).Space constraints at the Main Library in City Campus, Kangar prohibited implementation of many mass events covering students and faculty members. Within 10 years after its establishment, the new Main Library will be able to provide platform for various activities and event to further contribute towards excellence campus life experience.

3.   INNOVATIONS AND CREATIVITY AT UNIMAP LIBRARY

Innovations and creativity is the focal point of Tuanku Syed Faizuddin Putra Library since its establishment in 2012. The library is designed to adapt changes and requirements of new environment and strategic directions from its customers and stakeholders. Ongoing benchmarking with world-class academic libraries in few countries covering South Korea, Australia, Singapore, Thailand and Japan has helped the library to form interesting identification of Tuanku Syed Faizuddin Putra Library. Besides installation of high technology equipment and devices at the library, priorities were given to visual concepts representing local attractions, local environment and creating library as conducive home for users. As a result, the library environment does not replicate other libraries in the other part of the world. Hence, it has its own unique identity which is linked to the university and its surroundings.

Figure 2. Elements of UniMAP Library Learning Space

According to Director of Utrecht University Library, there are three key reasons why the library should innovate (Robert Elves, 2015). First, we need to adapt to a changing environment. Secondly, libraries need to improve existing products and services and thirdly, we need to make use of new opportunities. Small Group Activities (SGA) called Creative Team involving few library staff was formed to cater new needs and requirements from time to time. Members of the Creative team are responsible to propose ideas and concepts to add value to the library environment. Experimenting with creativity at the library is a unique approach to enhance its role within the university, locally and globally. The team has continually contributed towards enhancing services areas and facilities at the library.

4.   SUCCESSFUL EXPERIMENTS

In digital age, libraries are providing access to electronic resources across the campus. More focuses were given to designing effective physical space to support teaching-learning and research activities as well as information needs for life-long learning process. This is in line with new requirements towards library of the future. According to Miguel Figuera (2015):

> "The library of the future, whether the physical space or its digital resources, can be the place where you put things together, make something new, meet new people, and share what you and others bring to the table. It's peer-to-peer, hands-on, community-based and creation-focused."

4.1   Creating More Collaborative Learning Space

UniMAP Library created more collaborative learning space to support students in engineering, science and technology.Since 2012, study areas were converted to collaborative learning space to fulfil customer's needs towards collaborative learning strategies. As a result, all discussion rooms at the library were upgraded to wired discussion rooms with access to wide screen computers and Wireless Internet Access. Conventional reading areas were re-designed to enhance collaboration and communication among users either within dedicated rooms or open areas. Users may optimize collaborative learning space at Wired Discussion Rooms (Figure 3), Semi Collaborative Learning Zone (Figure 4), Noise Zone (Figure 5) and Smart Learning Zone (Figure 6). These areas are fully equipped with wide screen computers, smart board technology, modern design of tables and chairs and Wireless Internet Access. Those facilities are conducive for group presentation sessions, group discussions and small group classes. Those facilities are designed to support access to electronic resources and electronic services offered by the library.
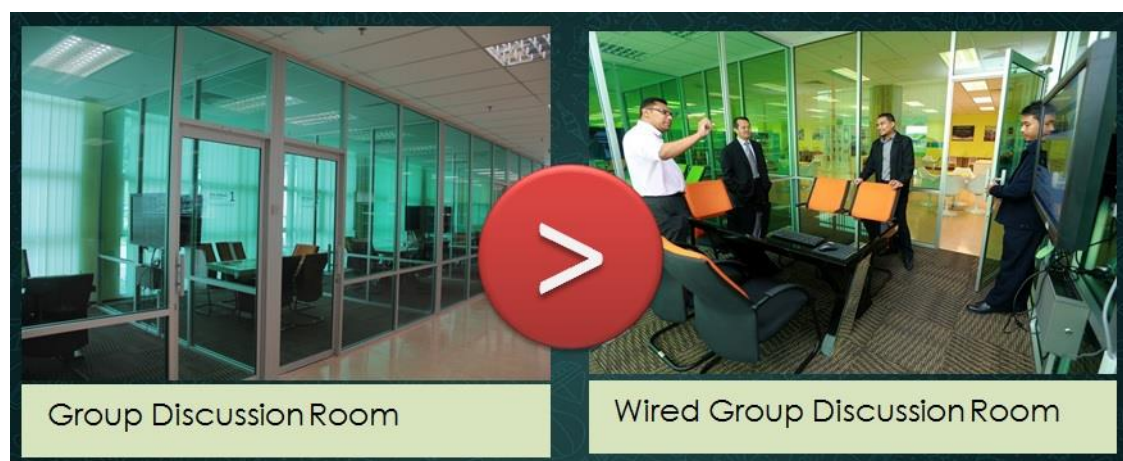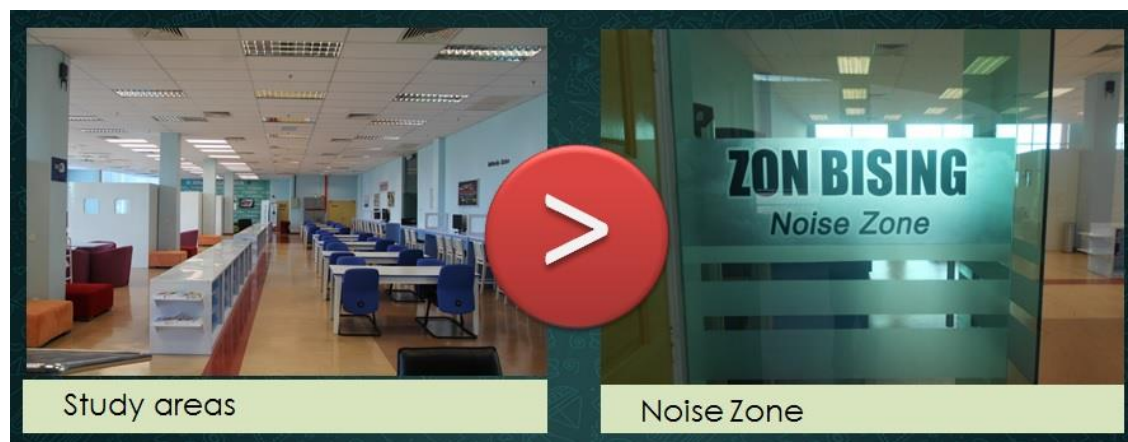
Figure 3. Wired Discussion Room

Figure 4: Semi Collaborative Learning Zone

Figure 5. Noise Zone

Figure 6: Smart Learning Zone

4.2   Wired Areas

Recent scenario shows that library users do not rely on public access workstations or computers to support their teaching-learning and research activities. . At UniMAP library, users show dependencies on public access computers only for document printing from the Internet or e-resources platforms. Nowadays, majority of university students owned laptops and other gadgets suitable for storing and retrieving information. Students optimized their gadgets to store relevant documents and to produce their scholarly works. Laptops for instance becoming

hub of resources for students integrating variety of functions for play-work-fun. Therefore, more wired areas need to be created instead of enhancing number of computers in library labs or public areas.

Due to initial design constraints, installation of electrical and Internet points were not possible. Only selected carrels nearby the library walls were managed to equip with electrical sockets by additional wiring. Students preferences towards facilities equipped with electrical sockets were interestingly showed in their selection of study areas in the library. Based on this observation, UniMAP Digital Hub in UniCITI Campus was designed to satisfy students' needs and preferences towards the library facilities. The Digital Hub provides 100% access to power outlets furniture, and 100% WIFI coverage. As a whole, students also require wired facilities within collaborative learning areas to support their learning behaviour.

4.3   Learning Pods

Conventional library design is focusing on providing space for individual study areas. Group study spot were located nearby library collections area to allow convenient access to reading materials. Development of e-book as powerful information resources lead to changes in students learning behaviour. Eventually, providing learning space is related to many other factors besides the library collections. At UniMAP Library, efforts were carried out to provide more collaborative learning space that fully equipped with Wireless Internet Access, nearby other library facilities and the library staff. In fact, focus was given to create dynamic and mobile facilities to support collaborative learning behaviour to support available facilities, namely limited number of discussion rooms and leisure areas. At least 16 learning pods in various forms; cubical, partitions, and mobile rooms were added to the library facilities for the past 4 years. Assuredly, learning pods are becoming popular choice for UniMAP students to fulfil their study behaviour.

5.   FAILED EXPERIMENTS THAT LEAD TO BETTER SOLUTIONS

5.1   Creating Multipurpose, Highly Adaptable Gathering Place

The library creates many dedicated areas for different customers. In 2013, the library developed Postgraduate Lounge to support research activities among postgraduate students. This initiative was implemented by the library team through observations and visits to various academic libraries in Korea and Melbourne. The visited libraries in Melbourne for instance,

provide personalised working areas for postgraduate students to ensure conducive ecosytems for postgraduate students to collaborate, network and most importantly, to produce excellent research reports. Access to the dedicated areas is restricted to postgraduate students only through access-control card. Similar model was adopted by the library management team to support various initiatives on the University High Impact Research.

The model was not practical for UniMAP since locations of postgraduate students were scattered across Perlis in more than 25 administrative centres. As a result, the Postgraduate Lounge was underutilized and access to this area was open to undergraduate students after 2014. In 2015, direction for Postgraduate Lounge was later rebranded as Industrial Engagement Zone (Ind-e-zone) as part of a national initiative to enhance graduate employability by Talent Corp. Ind-e-Zone was optimized by Centre for Industry & Government Collaboration (CIGC), UniMAP to organize training sessions from industrial partners. The area was equipped with meeting rooms and cubical for interview sessions. However, the area was actually converted to multipurpose, highly adaptable gathering places to support various events and activities in the university. Libraries in the future should be able to provide multipurpose learning space and specialised area for dedicated customers is no longer practical.

6.   CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

UniMAP library received many positive feedbacks and responds from both academic community and the public regarding our concept and approach in developing effective learning space for Generation Y. In this present scenario, academic libraries must be willing to create a living library, which is adaptable to change and technology.

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