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## Learning commons (Designing library space): A comprehensive working model for Academic libraries

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### Abstract

A learning common in an academic library is a space designed to facilitate collaborative and active learning, providing students and faculty with access to resources, technology, and support services. These spaces have evolved to meet the changing needs of the modern learner. The idea of learning commons has been introduced to colleges and universities in many countries of the world. In this article the author examined the literature on Academic library learning commons to describe the concept, main characteristics, and benefits of learning commons. The purpose of this study is to provide a comprehensive working model of the learning commons for Academic libraries. It's a dynamic and collaborative space that provides a wide range of resources and services to enhance learning and foster creativity.

**Keywords:** Learning commons, Information commons, Scholar's commons, Learning spaces, Academic library, Future library

### Introduction

In the present time, the need for Learning Commons has become increasingly evident and critical due to a variety of factors that have reshaped the landscape of education and learning. Learning Commons represents a dynamic and multifunctional space within educational institutions, libraries, and community centers that fosters collaborative learning, innovation, and knowledge sharing. Several key reasons underscore the significance of Learning Commons in today's educational and information-rich environment.

First and foremost, the rapid evolution of technology has transformed the way we access, consume, and create information. Learning Commons provides a hub for students, educators, and the community to navigate this digital age effectively. It offers access to cutting-edge resources, including digital databases, e-books, and multimedia tools, which are essential for 21<sup>st</sup>-century learning.

Secondly, the emphasis on collaborative learning and interdisciplinary approaches has gained prominence in education. Learning Commons provides a physical and virtual space that encourages collaboration among students, faculty, and experts from various fields. It promotes teamwork, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills, aligning with the demands of the modern workforce, where teamwork and adaptability are highly valued. Furthermore, the growing importance of lifelong learning and continuous skill development makes Learning Commons indispensable. In today's rapidly changing job market, individuals must continually update their knowledge and acquire new skills. Learning Commons offers a supportive environment for self-directed learning, where individuals can engage in online courses, workshops, and access resources to enhance their competencies. Equity and accessibility are also vital considerations.

Learning Commons can bridge the digital divide by providing equal access to educational resources and technology for all members of the community, regardless of their socioeconomic background. This inclusivity is crucial in promoting educational equality and reducing disparities in access to information and learning opportunities. Moreover, Learning Commons aligns with modern pedagogical approaches that emphasize student-centered and experiential learning. It encourages active learning methods, such as problem-based learning, flipped classrooms, and project-based learning, which have been shown to be more effective in promoting deep understanding and retention of knowledge.

Lastly, the need for a holistic approach to education and personal development is gaining recognition. Learning Commons often incorporates areas for relaxation, reflection, and wellness, recognizing that mental and emotional well-being is essential for effective learning and academic success.

### **Methodology**

This study is based on a qualitative assessment method using content analysis techniques. An extensive review of literature on "Learning commons" was carried out to provide a comprehensive working model of learning commons for Academic library.

### **Aim of study**

Learning commons play a pivotal role in shaping the educational landscape of today. They offer a holistic learning experience that goes beyond traditional classroom settings, fostering collaboration, innovation, and inclusivity. The paper aims:

- To focus on the importance of the learning commons in Academic library to improved student success rates by providing the necessary support and resources for academic excellence.
- To provide a comprehensive working model of learning commons for Academic libraries.

### **Learning commons**

A Learning Commons is a flexible and inclusive learning space designed to support and enhance various aspects of education, including formal classroom instruction, independent study, collaborative projects, and research. It is a concept that has gained prominence in educational institutions, such as schools, colleges, and universities, in recent years. A "Learning Commons" is a concept that has evolved over the years to describe a physical or virtual space within an educational institution, such as a school, college, or university, designed to facilitate collaborative learning, research, and academic support. It's a flexible and inclusive environment that encourages active engagement and interaction among students, faculty, and sometimes even the broader community. Here are definitions from experts and institutions:

According to D. Russell Bailey and Barbara Gunter Tierney in their book "The Learning Commons: Seven Simple Steps to Transform Your Library," a learning common is described as "a learner-centered, flexible, and collaborative space that is designed to meet the academic, technological, and information needs of all students and faculty in an integrated and holistic manner."

Harvard University defines its Learning Commons as "a community of spaces and people designed to support inquiry, active learning, and collaboration. Harvard's Learning Commons brings together diverse resources, programs, and people into a single networked hub, fostering innovative approaches to learning and teaching."

### **Virginia tech defines**

Its Learning Commons as "a collaborative, technology-rich environment where students and faculty come together to study, research, learn, and share ideas. It's a place where information resources, technology, and expert help are provided in a flexible, inclusive, and learner-centered setting."

In short, a Learning Commons is a multifaceted educational space or concept that prioritizes collaboration, technology integration, and learner-centeredness to support academic success and foster a sense of community within an institution. Its design and purpose may vary from one institution to another, but the overarching goal is to provide an environment that enhances learning, research, and student engagement.

### **The main characteristics and features of a Learning commons**

#### **Collaborative Spaces**

Learning Commons often provide areas where students can work together on projects, assignments, or group discussions. These spaces are conducive to teamwork and foster a sense of community among learners.

#### **Technology Integration**

Modern technology and digital resources are integral to a Learning Commons. This may include access to computers, high-speed internet, multimedia tools, and interactive displays to support various learning activities.

#### **Information Resources**

Learning Commons offer a wide range of resources, including books, e-books, journals, databases, and other reference materials. Librarians or learning specialists are often available to help students navigate these resources effectively.

#### **Flexible Seating**

The seating arrangements in Learning Commons are often adaptable, allowing for different learning styles and preferences. Students may find a mix of traditional desks, comfortable seating, standing workstations, and quiet study corners.

#### **Multifunctional Spaces**

These spaces are designed to accommodate various learning needs. They can host workshops, presentations, lectures, and other educational events in addition to individual or group study.

#### **Access to Expertise**

Learning Commons often provide access to academic support services, such as tutoring, writing centers, research assistance, and subject-specific expertise, to help students excel in their studies.

#### **Open and Inclusive Environment**

Learning Commons aim to be welcoming and inclusive, promoting diversity and equity in education. They are open to all students and often serve as hubs for interdisciplinary collaboration.

#### **Extended Hours**

To accommodate different schedules and study habits, many Learning Commons offer extended operating hours, including evenings and weekends.

#### **User-Centered Design**

The layout and services within a Learning Commons are typically designed with the needs and preferences of

students and educators in mind, ensuring that the space is responsive to the evolving demands of education.

### Continuous Improvement

Learning Commons are often evaluated and updated to incorporate new technologies and teaching methods. Feedback from users is valued in shaping the evolution of these spaces.

Overall, a Learning Commons is a dynamic and adaptable environment that fosters active learning, collaboration, and the development of 21st-century skills. It reflects a shift in educational philosophy towards more student-centered and experiential learning, where students are empowered to take ownership of their education and engage with information and knowledge in diverse ways.

### Benefits of Learning Commons Centers

In recent years, the concept of the learning commons center has gained widespread recognition and popularity in educational institutions worldwide. These centers serve as dynamic and versatile spaces that foster collaboration, innovation, and knowledge sharing among students, faculty, and staff. A learning commons center is a flexible, technology-rich environment designed to support diverse learning activities and interactions. These centers typically provide a variety of resources, including books, digital resources, study spaces, group meeting rooms, and access to expert assistance. Their primary purpose is to break down traditional learning silos, encouraging interdisciplinary collaboration and self-directed learning.

### Some advantages of learning commons centers are

#### Promoting Collaborative Learning

Learning commons centers create an atmosphere where students can collaborate on projects, exchange ideas, and work together on assignments. These spaces facilitate peer-to-peer learning, fostering a sense of community and shared knowledge.

#### Access to Diverse Resources

Learning commons centers offer a wide range of resources, from traditional printed materials to digital databases and multimedia resources. This diversity of materials enables students to explore subjects from multiple perspectives and formats.

#### Enhancing technology integration

These centers are often equipped with cutting-edge technology, such as interactive whiteboards, video conferencing facilities, and 3D printers. Such tools enable students to engage with content in innovative ways and prepare them for the demands of the digital age.

#### Supporting Individualized Learning

Learning commons centers empower students to take control of their learning. They provide quiet spaces for focused study and research, allowing individuals to work at their own pace and on topics of personal interest.

#### Expert Assistance

Many learning commons centers employ librarians and educational technologists who can provide guidance on research, information literacy, and the use of educational

technology. This expert support enhances the quality of learning experiences.

### Cultural and Inclusive Spaces

Learning commons centers often reflect a commitment to diversity and inclusivity, welcoming students from various backgrounds and cultures. This inclusivity fosters a rich exchange of perspectives and ideas.

### Adaptive Environments

Learning commons centers can adapt to the evolving needs of the learning community. They are designed to accommodate changes in teaching methods, technology, and pedagogical approaches.

### Preparation for Real-world Challenges

By encouraging teamwork, critical thinking, and problem-solving, learning commons centers help prepare students for the challenges they will face in their future careers.

### Improved Academic Performance

Research has shown that students who utilize learning commons centers tend to have better academic outcomes. They benefit from the collaborative and resource-rich environment.

### Community Building

These centers serve as hubs where students can form study groups, seek mentorship, and connect with peers who share similar academic interests. This sense of belonging contributes to a positive educational experience.

### A comprehensive working model of a Learning Commons for Academic library

Creating a working model of a Learning Commons for an academic library involves designing a collaborative and technology-rich space that supports various forms of learning, research, and collaboration. Here's a comprehensive model that you can adapt to your specific institution's needs:

#### 1. Physical Space Design

- **Open Layout:** Create an open and flexible floor plan with modular furniture, movable partitions, and designated zones for different activities.
- **Collaboration Areas:** Include group study rooms, project collaboration spaces, and comfortable seating for discussions and teamwork.
- **Quiet Zones:** Dedicate some areas for individual study or research, ensuring a noise-free environment.
- **Technology Integration:** Provide easy access to power outlets, charging stations, and high-speed Wi-Fi throughout space.
- **Natural Light:** Maximize natural light with large windows and incorporate greenery for a more inviting atmosphere.

#### 2. Technology Infrastructure

- **High-speed Internet:** Ensure reliable and high-speed internet connectivity.
- **Interactive Displays:** Install interactive whiteboards and large screens for presentations and collaborative work.

- **Laptops and Tablets:** Provide loaner devices for students who may not have access to personal technology.
- **Virtual Reality (VR) Stations:** Include VR stations for immersive learning experiences.
- **3D Printing and Scanning:** Offer 3D printing and scanning services for research and project work.

### 3. Learning Resources

- **Print Collection:** Maintain a curated collection of print materials, textbooks, and reference materials.
- **Digital Resources:** Subscribe to online databases, e-books, journals, and multimedia resources.
- **Open Access Materials:** Promote open educational resources (OERs) and open-access content.
- **Librarians and Academic Support:** Provide expert librarians and academic support staff to assist students and faculty in research and information retrieval.

### 4. Collaboration and Presentation Tools

- **Collaboration Software:** Offer access to tools like Google Workspace, Microsoft 365, and project management platforms.
- **Video Conferencing:** Enable video conferencing rooms with equipment for remote collaboration.
- **Presentation Tools:** Equip meeting rooms with screens, projectors, and audio systems for presentations.

### 5. Workshops and training

- **Digital Literacy Workshops:** Host workshops on digital literacy, research skills, and information literacy.
- **Technology Training:** Offer training sessions on using library technology resources effectively.
- **Research Support:** Provide guidance on research methodologies and citation styles.

### 6. User support services

- **Help Desk:** Set up a help desk or information desk for immediate assistance.
- **Tech Support:** Offer technical support for issues related to hardware, software, and connectivity.
- **Research Consultations:** Provide one-on-one research consultations with librarians.

### 7. Assessment and Feedback

- **User Feedback:** Collect feedback from users through surveys, focus groups, and suggestion boxes.
- **Usage Analytics:** Use data analytics to assess space usage and resource utilization.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Continuously adapt the learning commons based on user input and changing needs.

### 8. Accessibility and Inclusivity

- **Accessible Design:** Ensure that the space and resources are accessible to individuals with disabilities.
- **Multilingual Resources:** Provide materials and support in multiple languages.
- **Diverse Spaces:** Create spaces that cater to a diverse range of learning styles and preferences.

### 9. Community engagement

- **Collaborative Events:** Organize events, workshops, and seminars in collaboration with academic departments.

- **Partnerships:** Collaborate with local schools, universities, and community organizations to extend learning opportunities.

### 10. Sustainability

- **Green Initiatives:** Implement sustainable practices such as energy-efficient lighting, recycling stations, and environmentally friendly materials.

### 11. Marketing and Outreach

- **Promotion:** Market the learning commons through various channels, including social media, newsletters, and campus events.
- **Orientation:** Provide orientation sessions for new students and faculty to showcase the resources and services available.

### 12. Security and Privacy

- **Security Measures:** Ensure the safety of users and resources through access control, security cameras, and emergency procedures.
- **Privacy Policies:** Maintain strong privacy policies and practices to protect user data.

The Learning Commons has become a hub of academic activity on campus, fostering a culture of collaboration and learning. It has improved student success rates by providing the necessary support and resources for academic excellence. But it is to remember that the success of a Learning Commons depends on adapting to the evolving needs of your academic community, so regular assessment and updates are crucial to maintaining its relevance and effectiveness.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the contemporary educational landscape demands the presence of Learning Commons as a versatile and adaptive space that addresses the evolving needs of learners and educators. It facilitates the acquisition of digital literacy, supports collaborative learning, fosters lifelong learning, promotes equity, aligns with modern teaching methods, and acknowledges the importance of well-being. As society continues to evolve, the role of Learning Commons in promoting education, innovation, and community engagement will only become more vital. As educational institutions continue to evolve, learning commons centers will remain integral in equipping students with the skills and knowledge needed to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

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