Meet the Learning Commons: A One-Stop Shop for Academic, Technology Needs

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Integration of new Media Tech and Library Information centers transforms the Library’s first floor

February 11, 2015  |  Sabrina Polin ’17

BRISTOL, R.I. – Been to the Library lately? Then you’ve noticed the new look. But as part of a longer-term transition from traditional library to The Learning Commons, the first-floor facelift is far more than a mere cosmetic upgrade.

Upon entering the Library, glowing blue signs greet visitors and advertise the new Media Tech Center and Library Information Center, an integration of academic and technology resources in a single location on campus. The previous lobby space has been removed to create more study areas and workstations on the first floor.

On Wednesday, the Learning Commons played host to a ribbon-cutting ceremony to celebrate the Library’s new Media Tech Center – created in partnership with the Information Technology department – and to anticipate further developments in other parts of the building.

Over the last decade, the Library has surveyed students, faculty and staff about the resources, services and facilities they would find most valuable, says Dean of University Library Services Peter Deekle.
“What we found from this feedback aligned with a highly recognized study on learning commons as
the new face of libraries,” Deekle says. With a more comprehensive approach to academic support,
“learning commons are what we call ‘one-stop, first-stop’ – where you can get answers and support
from numerous departments and services under one roof.”

The open, forward placement of the desks in the new Media Tech Center and Library Information
Center is intended to increase accessibility to resources, but also to prompt more visitors to inquire
about one-on-one help from the staff. An altogether new offering of services since the fall semester, the
Media Tech Center provides private consultation regarding laptops, tablets or video cameras, offers
out-of-warranty repair and addresses technical questions.

Expanding beyond the new info and tech centers, the first-floor study areas have been outfitted with
technology donated to the University through the Samsung partnership, creating a collaborative
learning space for students to work on technologically demanding projects. Two “flex galleries” –
digital displays featuring messages about university events or student artwork – are also new additions
to the first floor.

Whether or not the renovation is directly responsible for the dramatic increase in visitors this past
month – despite a series of snowstorms having reduced total operating hours – the Library has received
tens of thousands of visitors, many more than typically cross its threshold. At times, Deekle noticed
students searching for seats in the new areas – not necessarily a good thing, he adds, but evidence
that the space has become the students’ work and study destination.

While using the new learning space to study last week, sophomore Zachary Iadarola, an international
relations and business double major, praised the new features and updated first-floor look and said he
appreciated the new location of the Library Information Center and Media Tech Center.

“Having them right there is really welcoming, and I feel comfortable approaching them and asking for
help,” he said. “They’re also very resourceful – I used the Library Information Center to look for a book
and it took under five minutes. I’ll definitely be utilizing the services more in the future.”

Deekle says there is more to come in the renovation process of the Learning Commons. Additional
phases of work will address other parts of academic support including the University Advising Center,
Tutorial Support Services, Student Advocacy Office and Student Accessibility Services, among others.

“The overarching goal is to both attract and retain students and to ensure the success of their
undergraduate or graduate education through all of this support,” Deekle says. “So I urge everybody
to stay tuned for more change and improvements and to contribute their ideas.”