

9 Innovations Shaping Today's Academic Libraries

Creating an innovative space for all students is key in being a campus hub for learning and development.

When someone says “academic library,” what comes to mind? Less often, people are imagining academic libraries as the cavernous, dusty, dry spaces of the past filled with students poring over ancient tomes by candlelight.

In reality, today’s cutting-edge academic libraries are a little less like Hogwarts and a lot more high-tech. Academic libraries are hubs for learning that go beyond books and breach the realm of technology, digital literacy, and collaborative creation. But often, it’s difficult to figure out exactly what you need to spark this forward-thinking movement. Read on for inspiration from some of the most innovative libraries across the globe.

1 **Makerspaces –** the possibilities are endless

Books and computer software are already in your resource arsenal, but it’s time to pick up another kind of tool: a circle saw, literally.

Makerspaces, also known as “hack” or “hackerspaces,” are areas in the library where students can build, tinker, and create. Whether it’s a robot or a piece of artwork, makerspaces give students the resources to create and collaborate on physical, tangible projects. Students already use your space to work together on group papers and projects, but a makerspace allows them to continue that work in 3D.

CONSIDER:

Turn an isolated, rarely-used conference room into a makerspace — stock it with supplies and watch creativity run wild.



Global communication – foster the spirit of collaboration

While a quiet space may be great for silent individual work, it's not conducive to the collaborative spirit that has come to define many modern universities.

Colleges today welcome students, staff, and faculty from all over the world. Students learn about human rights, international trade, and study cross-cultural communication. Many colleges even include the importance of global and cross-cultural cooperation in their mission statements.

CONSIDER:

Open up your library to tutoring hours, group projects, lectures, reading discussions, and other student events and learning opportunities. By doing this, you'll be setting the library up as an integral part of the college's ability to encourage global communication.



Digital education – keeping up with technology

Do your digital resources keep up with the needs of students? Today, learning how to navigate complex software is part of the curriculum in many disciplines. From studio art to economics and chemistry, students use digital resources to map, design, differentiate, and model subjects.

This means the library needs to have much more than books and whiteboards available for students. As a librarian, you need to work together with different academic departments to make sure your digital resources add value to their classes.



Make an awesome space – design for form and function

Libraries are often centers of not only learning, but of beauty. We even see this in pop culture. BuzzFeed regularly posts about the most beautiful libraries in the world. All of this goes to show that the space in which learning takes place has a powerful impact.

CONSIDER:

Physically section off spaces for collaborative work, individual study, and presentations. Then, equip those spaces with the technology and resources students need to make their work shine, both inside and outside of the library.



Accessibility – connect with campus beyond your walls

Even if your library is the most gorgeous and equipped place on Earth, the truth is some students only leave their dorm rooms to go to class. You still need to reach this hermit population, so your library should connect to the campus beyond its four walls. The best way to do that is to ensure a wide variety of library offerings are available from anywhere — and we mean more than your digital catalog and scholarly databases.

CONSIDER:

Online help and internet chats with resource librarians can ensure you can connect with even the most shy of scholars. Think about how to connect remotely in other ways as well.

Although it may not be a traditional resource, every reading room needs a few squishy armchairs for learning in maximum comfort.

Whether it's through your own podcast like Utah Valley University, an interactive website, or a strong social media presence, connect with students in creative ways to show off your library's personality.



Go green – adapt to eco-friendly policies.

Environmental sustainability is a hot topic on campuses across the country, and librarians are already part of the conversation. From limiting copying and printing resources to installing more efficient lighting, there are plenty of ways libraries can cut down on their footprint.

CONSIDER:

Check out the American Library Association's advice on going green at your library to get started on implementing more sustainable practices today.



Innovative resources – creative and cutting edge

We've already discussed how learning is changing as students are creating, building, and designing instead of simply writing papers. Your library needs to be equipped with the tools to help students do this.

A makerspace is a great start, but think about renting or buying other resources to loan out to students. Video cameras, 3D printers, tablets, and editing software are all great additions to your library's multimedia offerings.

8

Resource management – preserving and protecting your resources

Students are often forgetful. Between writing a 15-pager on Colombian coffee subsidies and organizing the next meeting of the campus Cheese Club, they may forget to return a book or camera.

For all your resources, have a strong system for managing them. Whether ensuring the safety of loaned equipment, or creating innovative ways for tracking library books, efficient management of your resources makes everyone's lives easier.

9

Committed, awesome librarians – the human element

As cool as it is to have the latest technologies like Oculus Rift or a 3D printer available for student and faculty use, these tools are worthless without the people to purchase, promote, and educate students and faculty about them. The real must-have for academic library innovation is you, the librarian, who cares about creating an environment that fosters creativity, innovation, and new ways of learning on campus.

You've already shown you're this kind of person, so check this off your list and get back to work, you 21st-century library superhero!



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