Executive Summary

The UMBC community will be transformed and energized by the creation of an inviting hub of student learning and collaborative activity on the first floor of the Library. This will become one of the central spaces in the UMBC community for learning and creative activity, with resources, support and services needed by today’s students. The Student Learning Commons will become a focal point in the recruitment of new students and the retention of our current students. [http://aok.lib.umbc.edu/slc/](http://aok.lib.umbc.edu/slc/)

With this Grant Proposal we are requesting funding in the form of a seed grant to enable implementation of a pilot project space (Phase I) for a Student Learning Commons facility for UMBC’s AOK Library. Specifically we are proposing this grant to fund construction, and purchase of materials needed to furnish and equip the physical first-floor space that has been provisionally dedicated to this developmental effort. This initial phase in development of a Student Learning Commons resource will be instrumental in demonstrating to University Administrators and other stakeholders of the value and utility of this resource. Data collected through evaluation of the pilot phase of this project will be used to demonstrate the need for continued development of subsequent phases of this project.
Setting

Community

The University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) is a mid-sized public research-extensive university, located in the vibrant, diverse, middle-class Baltimore suburb of Catonsville, Maryland. It is one of 11 Universities of the University System of Maryland. The campus is conveniently located 15 minutes from Baltimore’s Inner Harbor and 30 minutes from Washington, DC. BWI Airport is five minutes away, as are AMTRAK and light rail stations. The fall 2007 enrollment was 12,041 students consisting of 9,464 undergraduate and 2,577 graduate students. UMBC offers a range of major and minor concentrations including physical and biological sciences, social and behavioral sciences, engineering, mathematics, information technology, humanities and visual and performing arts. UMBC is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, the Accrediting Board for Engineering Technology, inc. and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education. “UMBC supports the social and economic development of the State by contributing to an educated, informed, and creative citizenry; by the public service of our students, faculty, and staff; and through initiatives in K-16 education, workforce development, entrepreneurship, and technology commercialization in collaboration with public agencies and the corporate community.” (Johnson, 2003)

Library – The Albin O. Kuhn (AOK) Library at UMBC

“As one of the most visible buildings on campus, the seven-story Albin O. Kuhn (AOK) Library and Gallery holds a collection including almost a million bound volumes. The collection includes more than 4,200 current subscriptions, more than 180,000 government documents, and close to 5,000 VHS and DVD recordings, as well as a
number of special collections, archives, and manuscripts. Regarding journal subscriptions, faculty members in each department are able to request those they prefer, with requests from departments with graduate programs given top priority. This guarantees that the library’s holdings include those subscriptions most used and needed by faculty and by graduate students. Over 60 percent of subscriptions are available online. In a typical week, the library is open 84 hours, with a 24-hour access atrium and lounge. Thus far, the library has been successful in digitizing the resources available and allowing access to resources from outside the building and campus.” (UMBC Self-Study, 2006)

The Mission Statement attests that the Library “strives to meet the needs of a research university and continues to support a distinctive undergraduate experience. We will provide the highest quality information, resources and services for UMBC’s growing and evolving teaching, learning, research and service environment.” Today’s environment of declining State funding for higher education imposes severe financial constraints on costly new initiatives, including hiring much needed staff, and has prompted the Albin O. Kuhn Library to plan primarily to improve efficiency and effectiveness. “Consolidated package purchasing with the Maryland Digital Library (MDL) and the University System of Maryland and Affiliated Institutions (USMAI) allows the library to acquire online access to additional resources without significant cost increases. The library has increased user self-service and automation of services so that users can find information with minimal staff intervention. The library also provides greater access to services and resources from other area libraries, in part through a Baltimore academic libraries
consortium. The academic plan recommends that the budget for the library be increased to expand collections, staff, services, and hours.” (UMBC Self-Study, 2006)

Patrons

The Library currently has a seating capacity of 1,274, and the Library is visited by an average of 530,000 individuals each year! The majority of patrons are undergraduate and graduate students, faculty and staff.

UMBC offers a range of services that support student learning. Depending on the nature of their learning challenge students may seek help at the Writing Center that is located in the Library, the Math Lab, the Chemistry Tutorial Center and/or the Physics Tutorial Center, all located on campus away from the Library. The Learning Resources Center (LRC) also offers course-specific tutoring on a wide range of first- and second-year courses at UMBC.

Staff

The staff of AOK Library consists of 24 full time equivalent (FTE) faculty and associate staff, 35.5 FTE non-exempt staff, 1 FTE contractual staff, and approximately 100 student assistants. There are 10 full or part-time reference librarians who respond to approximately 13,500 reference requests each year.

Statement of Need

UMBC is currently focusing much of its energy on recruitment and retention of students and faculty – as highlighted in the Provost’s Strategic Framework for 2016 report to the campus. (Johnson, 2003) The Provost’s report describes progress in implementing the
recommendations of planning task forces focused on six strategic issues. First and foremost on this list of strategic issues is “enrollment management” meaning a strong focus on “Student Body Size and Composition”, and attention to increased retention of enrolled students.

Several studies have reported that library facilities and resources are a key factor in student recruitment and retention. A dynamic and user centered library design is a vital component in faculty and student success. Deborah Tenofsky describes “Lippincott (in Oblinger and Oblinger (2005) Educating the Net Generation)…” who “proposes ways that libraries could improve services by ‘making use of the imagination, creativity, technical skills, and perspectives of Net Gen students’ (p. 13.9). She concludes that librarians should merge the students’ technology skills with best practices from library pedagogy to provide rich college experiences and develop lifelong learners (p. 13.13).” (Tenofsky, 2007)

Tenofsky goes on to note that “Universities are experiencing changes in the expectations of first-year students. These students are members of the Millennial generation, whose expectations of college life and support services differ from generations of the past.” (Tenofsky, 2007)

Given the evolving needs of today’s University students the Library’s current student resources have been critically examined. We have identified the significant need to provide areas for students to work in small groups, with readily available computing
resources, in a location in close proximity to library materials and support services. We have identified and validated the utility and appeal of the students’ preference for a “one-stop” service facility that is located in the Library. A mission commitment has been developed to create more collaborative work spaces with technology available for group access and ability to practice MS PowerPoint® presentations.

**The Learning Commons Model**

“The learning commons model functionally and spatially integrates library, information technology and other academic support services to provide a continuum of services to the user...It is a dynamic place that encourages learning through inquiry, collaboration, discussion and consultation.” (McMullen, 2008) “The focus of a learning commons goes beyond helping students “manage” information to helping them “manage” their learning.” (Schmidt, 2007) “It is a collaboration space and requires partnerships and cooperation across disciplines...It also creates opportunity for increased usage of library collections...In the learning commons model, the library becomes a laboratory, a space for knowledge creation...The distinction between knowledge seeking and knowledge creation is important and informs the planning and implementation of a learning commons.” (Roberts, 2007)

Scholarly literature and the Internet provide many examples and impressive success reports of educational institutions within the United States, and in other countries, that have embraced a plan to create Student Learning Commons in their own libraries (e.g., Bayer, 2008; Bennet, 2007; Schmidt, 2007; Pace University Learning Commons Initiative [http://libtech.typepad.com/commons]; University of Pennsylvania’s David B. Weigle Information Commons [http://wic.library.upenn.edu]; Georgia Institute of
With the creation of an inviting hub of student learning and collaborative activity on the first floor of the Library the UMBC community will be transformed and energized. Our goal is for the Student Learning Commons to become the central space in the UMBC community for learning and creative activity, and to become a focal point in the recruitment of new students and the retention of our current students.

Our goals for the creation of a Student Learning Commons at UMBC will be accomplished by updating workspaces, utilizing the latest technologies for learning activities, offering immediate access to assistance for research, computing and tutorial needs, and by connecting students with information resources and the support they need to succeed.

Providing varied and flexible collaborative spaces that adapt to student’s changing patterns of learning and innovation will transform the Library into the “place to be” for lively group study, scholarly discussion, collaboration, team building, and academic coaching.
At this time the University system is being asked by State Government to contain costs and cut funds. The Student Learning Center is seen as an additional service, not a vital one that has to be funded for accreditation. Nevertheless, in this proposal we have cited numerous references and provided ample evidence of academic libraries that have already implemented Student Learning Commons facilities with resounding success. That success can be measured in increases in student satisfaction, performance, and retention, all vital strategic performance objectives of UMBC as articulated in the Provost’s Report to the UMBC Community, *Strategic Framework for 2016*.

**Needs Assessment**

A thorough needs assessment has been conducted through brainstorming with and polling Library professional staff, and most notably through a series of five focus groups of undergraduate and graduate students. The purpose of the focus group series was to determine what types of resources and functions potential users would prefer to see in a Learning Commons facility as a means to help the Library define operational and material priorities for the project. The needs assessment clarified students’ expectations for collaborative working space in the Library. Most students indicated a preference for access to group study areas, while at the same time desiring partitions or other noise reduction features to avoid being distracted by group activity. Most students expressed a need for computing resources in group areas including access to specific software packages, and scanning and printing hardware, and PowerPoint projection technology. The ideal space for group work included large tables to spread out, and comfortable seating. Most students would prefer the opportunity to have food and drink while studying. Nearly all students indicated they would like to have technology support
readily available that includes assistance with basic computing tasks as well as staff familiar with specific software applications.

General objectives proposed by Library personnel include one-stop service to students, facility dedication to student productivity, a resource that effects an increase in attendance numbers, opportunities for mental refreshment, and ideally the ability to provide in-depth research assistance and computer technical support.

**Groundwork**

Plans for the Student Learning Commons for UMBC’s AOK Library, and the results of the needs assessment have been communicated to the Library’s Executive Staff, and were presented at the All Staff Library Assembly on January 14, 2008. Results of the needs assessment were used in briefing University administration to gauge interest, gather feedback and determine potential issues.

Highly visible space located on the first floor of the Library has been identified as the ideal location for UMBC’s Student Learning Commons. In preparation for use of targeted first-floor space the reference collection has been weeded and reduced, and the Government Documents collection, which currently occupies the intended space, has been weeded and reduced and will be moved to another location.

**Proposed Program/Service/Initiative**

We are requesting funding in the form of a seed grant to enable implementation of a pilot project space (Phase I) for a Student Learning Commons facility for UMBC’s AOK Library. This Student Learning Commons is intended to be an inviting hub of student
learning, collaborative and creative activity with resources, support and services needed by today’s students.

Specifically we are proposing this grant to fund purchase of materials needed to furnish and equip the physical first-floor space that has been provisionally dedicated to this developmental effort.

The objective of this initial pilot phase project is 1) to construct and implement three group meeting rooms equipped with a computer work station and computer presentation technology that will accommodate up to 6 students; 2) to install three kidney-shaped group study tables equipped with a computer work station and network access hardware for personal laptop access; and 3) to install three group study tables, similarly equipped with computer hardware and electrical and network technology, but also equipped with partitions to accommodate up to four small groups at each table.

Other major objectives of this initiative are to use the space as a demonstration of the concept of Student Learning Commons for University Administrators, State Officials, and other stakeholders including students, and as a testing laboratory to gauge the volume of usage of the resource. This plan involves locating the Student Learning Commons such that user activities will be visible from the main exterior walkway as it approaches the main entrance of the library. This positioning is intended to “advertise” and promote use of the resource to students, and to make this vibrant center of activity visible to campus visitors and prospective students. Finally, this project will demonstrate a major
improvement in use of space that is centrally located and highly visible from outside the library, but that is currently used to shelve the Government Documents collection.

**Timeline**

When this pilot project is funded we have calculated a timeline to implementation of 150 days. Furnishings and electronic equipment options have been selected and multiple suppliers identified. Price bids will be obtained from a minimum of three suppliers. Once materials are ordered time to delivery will be 30-45 days. Construction materials have also been selected. Multiple bids have been obtained for the glass walls with doors. Time to delivery for specialty construction materials, such as the glass walls and structural fittings will be 60 days. UMBC architectural and construction staff are on alert and prepared to move forward, and technical drawings are complete.

**Program Evaluation**

Methods for evaluating the success of this project have been considered by Library’s professional and executive staff and discussed at the All Staff Library Assembly. Once the features of the pilot project space have been implemented, usage data will be collected through direct observation in four-hour increments, and user opinions will be prompted using a series of questionnaires, surveys, and a suggestion box. Data collected will be compiled weekly, and analyzed monthly. Comparisons of key factors will be quantified monthly and quarterly. Data collected will be instrumental for demonstrating to the University Administration and other stakeholders the value and utility of the Learning Commons resource, and the need to proceed in funding subsequent phases of this resource development.
Current Proposal:

This proposal is limited to constructing and furnishing the pilot project space. We will limit these features to:

- **construction of 3 six-person meeting rooms, each with one exterior glass wall;**
  - one white board per room;
  - one computer workstation per room;
  - one table per room with electrical and local area network supply;
  - computer driven projection technology and projection screen for each room

- **acquisition of modular furnishings**
  - three kidney-shaped open tables complete with electrical and local area network supply;
  - three pie-shaped sectional tables with partitions, electrical and local area network supply.

Proposed Budget

**Student Learning Commons – Pilot Project Space**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Construction of 3 six-person meeting rooms with one glass wall and door</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 erasable white boards @ $200</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 computer workstations @ $2000</td>
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<td>3 table electrical supply, network cables, service @ $500</td>
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<td>3 conference tables @ $1000</td>
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<td>3 computer projector @ $1200</td>
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<td>3 retractable projection screens @ $800</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 kidney-shaped open tables @ $1000</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 pie-shaped sectional tables with partitions @ $1500</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 table electrical supply, network cables, service @ $500</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>38 desk chairs @ 300</td>
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**Total for Pilot Project Space** | $164,000* |

* The $164,000 question.

**Future Goals:**

In the future phases we envision UMBC’s Student Learning Commons functioning as an integrated services hub where students will be able to receive individual and group support and to provide an array of features including:

- computer workstations clusters;
- service desk
- collaborative learning spaces - to include computer projects technology and whiteboard
- presentation support centers
- instructional technology centers for faculty development
- electronic classrooms
- writing centers and other academic support units
- spaces for meetings, seminars, receptions, programs, and cultural events;
- cafes and lounge areas

We anticipate the future Student Learning Commons will be a partnership among UMBC Campus resources including 1) Learning and Writing Services; 2) the Library; 3) Information Technology; and 4) Teaching Support Services.

**Conclusion**

It has been reported in several studies that library facilities and resources are a key factor in student recruitment and retention. A dynamic and user centered library design is a vital component in faculty and student success. According to Tenofsky, students of the millennial generation “*may possess characteristics and expectations far different from past generations. Some of the characteristics assigned to this generation include computer literate, team oriented, and self-assured. Many will text message their friends,*
watch television, listen to music, and complete their homework all at the same time.”

“If universities want to educate and retain these students then campus culture and
teaching pedagogies will need to evolve to meet the Millennials’ requirements.”

(Tenofsky, 2007)

The time is now for UMBC to move forward to adapt its Library resources to best serve
the needs of its students and faculty. UMBC’s AOK Library Student Learning
Commons Initiative is in line with UMBC’s Mission and Vision Statement to “...become
the best public research university of our size by combining the traditions of the liberal
arts academy, the creative intensity of the research university, and the social
responsibility of the public university.” Due to significant State funding limitations
UMBC faces a continuing challenge in building its staffing for library services, as well as
its collection of periodicals and books, with limited resources.

The pilot project we propose represents a giant step forward for UMBC to meet the
evolving needs of today’s university students. We trust you have found our proposal
sufficiently compelling that you will act favorably in deciding to fund this new beginning
in student services, this pilot program for UMBC’s Student Learning Commons
development
References


