Renovating for the future

New Information Commons at the University of the Sunshine Coast Library
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In 1997, the University of the Sunshine Coast (USC) opened a new library building. The building was recognised as Australia's building of the year, winning the prestigious Sir Zelman Cowen Award from the National Royal Australian Institute of Architects (see *inCite* volume 18, September 1997 and volume 19, March 1998 for previous articles on the library building). Six years later the library staff are preparing for renovations to physically link the library with the university's newest and largest building, the Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) Centre.

Designine Brisbane   Information & Communications Technology Facility   Existing Library Modification Plans

Located immediately south of the back of the library, the ICT Centre is a five-storey, 6000 square metre facility that will provide the required physical and technological infrastructure to accommodate the growth and development of the university. Courtyard space in front of the ICT Centre will encourage informal gatherings of students, staff and visitors to enjoy the sub-tropical climate of southern Queensland. Two additional separate buildings, a café and an art gallery, will be located adjacent to the courtyard adding to its social and community use.

When the ICT Centre opens in 2004, it will house a range of university activities including: computer laboratories, multimedia studios, the University's Computing and Communications division, International Student Office and the English Language Centre, the Student Guild, Reprographics, Records and Registry, and the campus bookstore.

The existing library building has almost exceeded the present shelving capacity of 80 000 volumes. A walkway from the second floor of the ICT Centre to the second floor of the library will create additional library space, and an opportunity to double the present capacity. However, as this space is not immediately required, library occupancy of the second floor will be gradual and in stages. Currently space has been allocated to accommodate the expected growth in the print collection over the next three years for 27 000 additional volumes (see the draft floor plan).

In addition to the new space, exciting changes include the proposed internal renovations to the ground and first floors of the existing library building. A new entrance to the building will improve pedestrian circulation and traffic flows, and computer access will improve significantly with the creation of an information commons.

In May 2002, the library conducted a customer satisfaction survey. More than seventy-three per cent of the survey respondents were satisfied with the library and more than seventy-five per cent ranked the overall quality of the library as good to excellent. However, the one area where the library ranked the lowest for customer satisfaction is with the number of library computer workstations. The importance of adequate numbers of computer workstations was second only to the easy accessibility of information resources. As the majority of the university's computer laboratories are timetabled for lectures and tutorials from 8:00am to 5:00pm, it is understandable that the demand is very high for computer workstations within the library. The library has also invested significantly in its electronic collections. Approximately ninety-six per cent of the library's serial collection is in electronic format. Therefore, it was decided to create an Information Commons (IC) within the library to provide
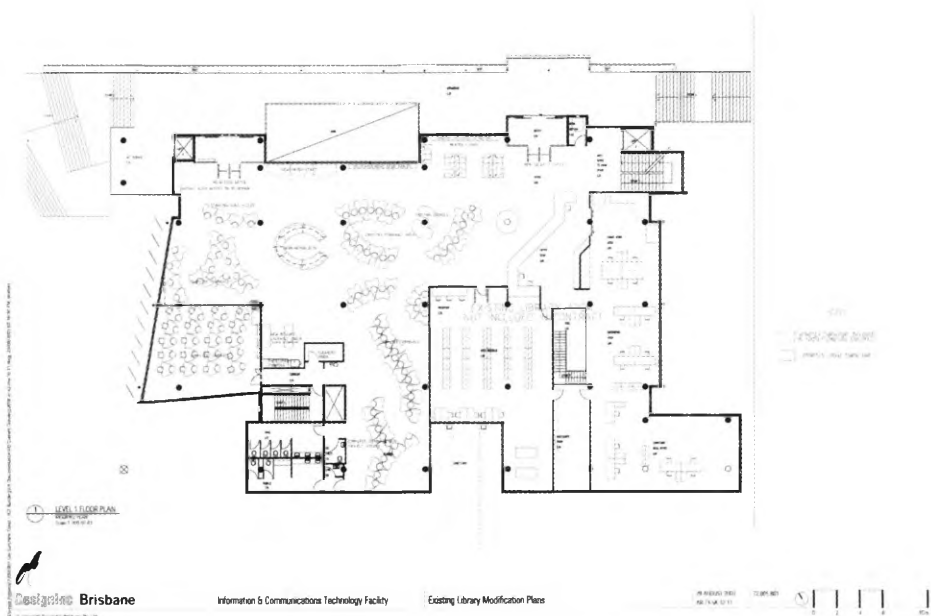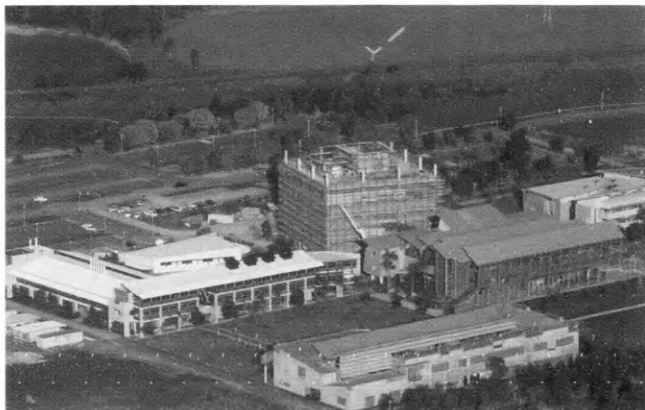
An aerial view of the USC Library renovations site

the space, technology and expertise to support the scholarly use of information resources.

Students will be able to access approximately 105 workstations in the IC. Some of the workstations will be open access, not requiring authentication, to the library's print and electronic resources. However, the majority of workstations will require authenticated access to the USC network and be available only to USC students and staff. These workstations will provide integrated access to the library collections, electronic services and resources; to the internet; e-mail; student intranet; and to computer software and tools to enable students to learn, to research and to prepare assignments. A number of express workstations will also be designated to facilitate quick access to e-mail and printing. The IC will include technical help and professional research assistance from a new information desk strategically located to welcome people from the new entrance.

Networked printing and photocopying services will also be located in this area.

The IC is non-timetabled space, except for a small area consisting of twenty workstations, for use by library staff for information literacy training; and by IT help desk staff for technical training including introductions to the USC network and for general productivity tools. An operable wall allows for privacy when in use as a training facility, but can open to be included into the IC area.

The design of the IC is intended to support individual study but also to encourage collaborative learning. Workstation tables are modular, some with privacy screens, others open to encourage communication. The tables are in groups with no harsh linear layout and have sufficient desktop space to accommodate an ultra-small computer with a flatscreen monitor. While there are no group study rooms in the IC, some of the existing study rooms on the second floor of the library will include a computer for group use.

Students will be able to start the research process; locate, evaluate, and select the information they need; get research and/or technical assistance; and complete assignments from one location. The goal is to provide a learning environment for students to achieve academic success. The IC is scheduled to open in February 2004.   ■