

# Science by Design: Working with a Student Design Team to Develop a Science Commons

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## Introduction

Science librarians strive to seamlessly supply users with resources. Yet success can obscure the library's role in research. Norlin Library at CU is exploring a solution: a Science Commons.

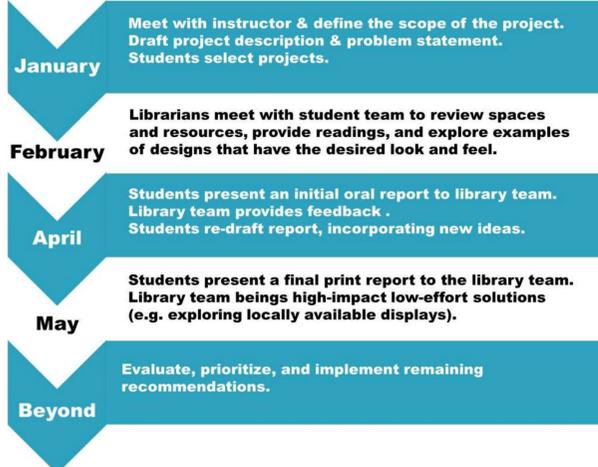
Our goal is to develop a user-focused space that clearly embraces the library's past and future role as a space for the creation of new knowledge. But obstacles of time, money, and skill stood in the way.

Our solution was to connect with a design and technical writing class. The students helped us overcome those obstacles while they experienced an authentic learning opportunity.

## Why a Science Commons?

- To increase faculty and student awareness of the library's role in supporting scientific research beyond that of content purchaser.<sup>1</sup>
- To increase scientific literacy by making science visible and accessible to students regardless of their major. Only about 30% of Americans take college-level sciences courses; thus alternate methods of delivering scientific content are necessary.<sup>2</sup>
- To showcase CU as a place where scientific innovation happens, improving the awareness of visitors, admitted students, and the community.

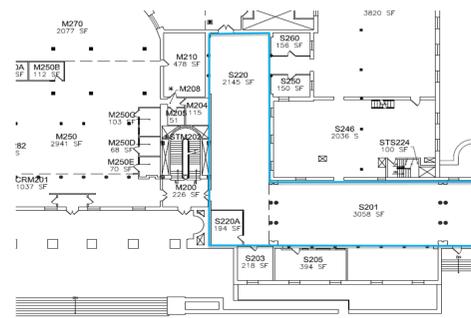
## Project Timeline



## Current layout and (dis)use of science spaces

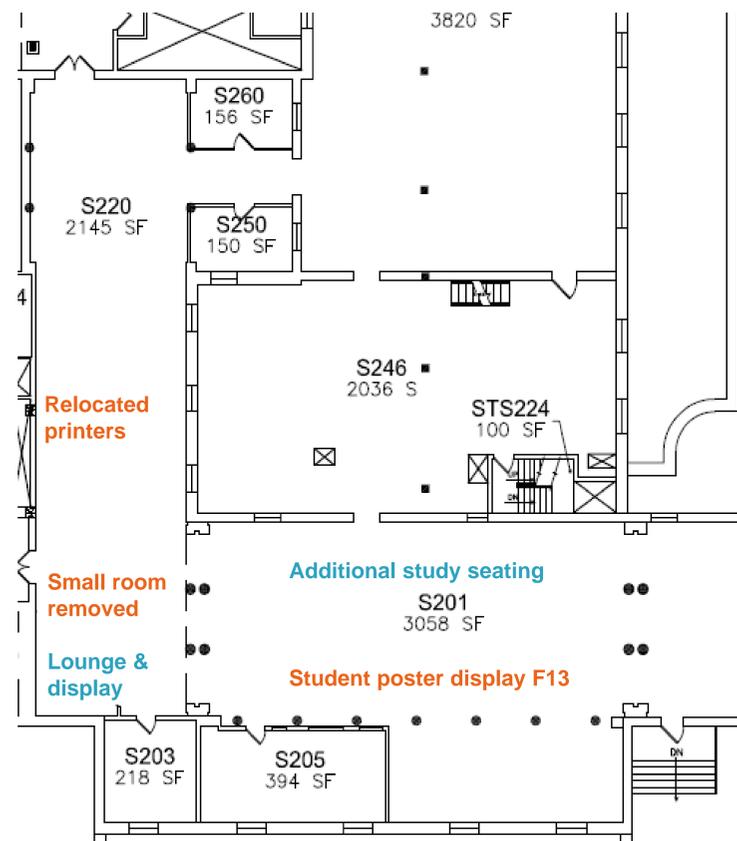


Library S220.



Library S201.

## Redesigned Science Commons



### Design Team Recommendations:

- Add more study seating in empty areas.
- Replace small office behind former printer location with lounge seating.
- Display student and faculty research projects.
- Enhanced décor throughout the space.
- Install a projector for paperless displays.
- Move printers to free traffic flow.

### Fall 2013: Proof of Concept Display

- Display of student work from writing & rhetoric program juxtaposing scientific communication with visual persuasion.
- Highlights library resources.
- Students engage with the rhetoric of science and persuasion, supporting critical thinking.



Changes in progress  
Changes under consideration

## Benefits of working with a student design team:

- Students on the team are attuned to their peers' needs for spaces; their perspective on seating, noise, and visual effects may be more relevant than a librarian's.
- Students have time to conduct surveys and do the legwork of making initial contacts with possible future project partners so librarians can strategically manage time investments.
- Students on the design team had a wide and deep range of experience with the science departments we support, making more connections more quickly than the relatively small team of librarians.
- Students developed a sense of investment in the library.

## Foundations for success:

- A clear, large-scale vision for the project before meeting with a student design team.
- The ability to articulate that vision and a willingness to gently guide students back on track if needed.
- An appropriate class to work with: programs in writing and rhetoric, design, and technical communications are good sources.
- An understanding that the research students produce is useful but quick and dirty.
- An understanding that students cannot know all local institutional barriers to change (both an advantage and disadvantage).

## Literature cited

- Housewright, Ross, Roger C. Schonfeld, and Kate Wulfson. *Ithaca S+R US Faculty Survey 2012*. 2013.
- Falk, John H., and Lynn D. Dierking. "The 95 Percent Solution." *American Scientist* 98.6 (2010): 486. Web. 8 Feb. 2013.

## Acknowledgments

Thanks to the Spring 2013 Writing 3035 student team, Rolf Norgaard for involving the library, and Barb Losoff for initiating the goal of a redesign of science spaces.