

Haas, Leslie., & Robertson, Jan. (2004). *SPEC Kit 281 The Information Commons July 2004*. Washington, D.C.: Association of Research Libraries Office of Leadership and Management Services. 142 pp. ISBN 1-594076-658-8. \$26.06.

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This excellent publication offers suggestions to academic libraries for creating an Information Commons (IC). This is a SPEC Kit, a publication of the data and results from a librarianship study by the Association of Research Libraries (ARL). Six SPEC Kits are produced each year since 1970. The libraries consulted and studied for the SPEC Kits are all ARL libraries. The authors are librarians at the University of Utah. Leslie Haas is the Department of Reference Supervisor and Jan Robertson is the Technical Department Supervisor. The idea of an Information Commons emerged around 1990 as being more than a computer lab.

University students desire to complete all of their papers at a central locale, the information commons. Some libraries label the Information Commons with other titles like the “Integrated Computer Area,” “Learning Commons,” “Cybrary,” and other similar phrases. Libraries should inform customers via electronic and physical mediums about the forthcoming Information Commons. In addition to computers, these areas also offer books on career publications, grammar, computing, writing. Customers in the Information Commons utilize most frequently computers, printers, and the staff who answer technical questions. Staffing typically include full-time librarians, student workers, and paraprofessionals. The employees’ attire varies from badges to uniforms, like those of baseball players. The head of the Information Commons typically reports to the Dean or the Associate Dean of the library. Rather than utilizing a thorough training program, employees generally learn their skills work at the library. Students as

employees are utilized heavily in the IC. Ideal are students manning the computers and librarians being the reference librarians. IC patrons like IC availability during the day, help provided, roominess, additional seating areas, and high-tech programs for computers. Some campuses also offer individual study spaces within the Information Commons allowing for audio-visual development and editing. Assessment is stressed as a means of further developing the materials available with satisfaction questionnaires available both physically and electronically.

The SPEC Kit is based on a surveys answered by member libraries regarding the specifications of their information commons areas. The answers led the authors to make generalizations for the readers to act upon. For example, the authors determined that these areas typically measure twelve thousand one hundred fifty three square feet and are located on the first floor. There is an average of one hundred and twenty-nine computers. Among the technologies offered include video creation, gaming, and desktop publishing. Fourteen thousand four hundred patrons visit these areas each month.

Seventy-four universities revealed their concepts of Information Commons, including Purdue University, Cornell University, University of Arizona, and the University of Southern California. Appendices include specific proposals by some of these institutions in creating their own brands of an information commons. Specific plans, room layouts, and technologies available are included from select institutions. No two universities created the same computing areas. Consequently, readers of the SPEC Kit can pick and choose from the many ideas and possibilities available. Some of the material even includes the advertising campaigns that universities utilized in promoting their information commons.

The final section of the SPEC Kit explains how to select resources for the Information Commons, making available the documents and web sites for journal articles and web sites used in the creation of the book. A SPEC Kit title directory imparts to readers two hundred eighty-one spec kit names with cost and purchasing data. Clearly, *SPEC Kit 281 The Information Commons July 2004* is an unsurpassed resource on creating Information Commons. It is extremely paramount for academic libraries.