



THE EVOLUTION OF
LIBRARY WEST

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Chair of Library West



These historical images of Library West through the year reflects the design style as what has come to be known as mid-century.

Since its beginnings as a graduate research space, Library West (LibWest) has continually sought to update its spaces and technology in tandem with the changing scholarly and social needs of its faculty and students.

Completed in 1967, Library West became the second library built on the UF Campus and served as the Graduate Research Library until the 1980s, when the Libraries began retooling to serve as centers for subject specialization. At this time, Library West became the official Humanities and Social Sciences Library, with sister libraries like the Marston Science Library, the Architecture and Fine Arts Library, and the Education Library.



Fig. 3 2004, the addition of the north wing of Library West added 55,000 sq. ft., increasing the branches total by about 67%.

In the 1990s, both the university’s academic programs and its student enrollment expanded considerably, and Library West’s collections were likewise extended to support this growth. This change, however, presented the branch with its first major growing pain, as it simply was not built to house a collection of that size while also providing sufficient spaces for students and faculty to study and conduct research. During this period, the branch underwent several



Fig. 1

sizeable amount of room for study space. Renovations to staff areas facilitated workflow, and the transfer of materials to offsite storage and the reorganization of onsite collections liberated more room.

Near the end of the 1990s, Library West saw an increase in the number of specialized database computers and networked workstations—eighty computers in all—which became known as the “InfoSwamp.” At this time, increased traffic from UF’s ever expanding student population and the changing service expectations of its research community led to the closing of the branch in 2004 for a two-year, massive renovation that included the construction of a north wing.

This addition expanded LibWest’s existing footprint from 50,000 square feet to 89,000 square feet, allocating even more collection space, which now boasted forty miles of track for movable shelving (Fig. 2), allowing the library to house 1.7 million volumes of print materials.



Fig. 2

small but significant renovation projects. Its card catalog cabinets (Fig. 1) were removed and replaced by an Online Public Access Catalog, freeing up a



Kisling Timeline:

George A. Smathers Libraries’ history was compiled by Vernon N. Kisling, Jr. through 2007. Vernon worked at the Smathers Libraries for more than 25 years, serving as the collection manager for the environmental sciences and the history of science. He also served as the Chair of the Marston Science Library.

1967

The Graduate Research Library opened and the old library was designated the College Library. The names were changed to Library West and Library East in 1970.

1987

Library East was renamed Smathers Library after Senator George A. Smathers provided a significant gift to renovate the building. The renovations were completed in 1996.

Check out the entire Kisling Timeline:
<https://communications.uflib.ufl.edu/at-a-glance/smathers-library-history>.

2013

Neuharth (founded USA Today) Reading Room relocated to Library West, Previously located in Weimer Hall.

The mission is to serve the instructional and research needs of UF’s College of Journalism and Communications.





NORTH FACING CURTAIN WALL 2006 RENOVATION

North facing curtain wall and café curtain wall: the new spaces in Library West afforded sweeping new views that did not exist in the original. Over time since the reopening, the Libraries have been able to create seating that engages studying students with these dramatic architectural elements. Counter seating is especially efficient in terms of added capacity, and also allows for incorporating much sought after electricity for charging ubiquitous mobile devices.



CAFÉ CURTAIN WALL 2006 RENOVATION



CAFÉ CURTAIN WALL 2021

In 2006, Library West reopened and its “InfoCommons” area presented patrons with a brand–new environment focused on furnishing flexible and integrated spaces for collaborative and individual study and research. Seating increased from 400 to over 1,400 and LibWest’s capacity for technological expansion also kept pace, featuring 120 computers, a Digital Media Center, two Media Production Studios equipped for video editing, and a studio equipped with specialized ADA equipment and software. For the first time, Wi-Fi was accessible throughout the building. Other improvements included LibWest’s first ever group study rooms, the largest of which was equipped with video conferencing equipment.

The library also set aside space specifically for its graduate students, dedicating the entire sixth floor as an exclusive access, “graduate students only” area. The fourth floor, the designated “quiet floor” of the building, was outfitted with eighty–four graduate carrels for dissertating graduate students. The 2006 reopening heralded another big first for Library West: snacks and drinks were now allowed in the building, and a Starbucks Café was installed on the first floor near the entrance.

Over the last 15 years, Library West has continued to improve and upgrade its spaces and technologies to meet the learning and research needs befitting its preeminent, R1 institution status. As the library expanded hours to 24/7 access, study space again became a hot commodity. A service desk area on the third floor was removed to increase seating, and fourth floor renovations added more room for quiet study. Other more recent upgrades include renovations to the library’s entrance to make it more welcoming to visitors and a remodeled first floor café has expanded study space.

In the last decade, areas in Library West were carved out to house valuable services for our students. The Scott Nygren Scholars Studio was created as an instruction,

SECOND FLOOR CONCEPT



SECOND FLOOR 2006 RENOVATION



SECOND FLOOR 2021



meeting, and project creation space for researchers in the digital humanities. Through a partnership with the UF Office of Academic Support, and the UF Writing Studio, free tutoring is available in the LibWest Tutoring Center. More recently, West's instruction classroom enjoyed a full renovation, transforming from a cramped classroom space, into the Library Instruction Lab.

Library West also continues to upgrade and improve technology offerings. Since 2009, hundreds of power outlets have been added throughout the building to accommodate mobile device users. Approximately six years ago, UF Academic Technology (AT) became a partner when it assumed management of all computers, software, printing, and study room A/V equipment within all the branches. Library West greatly benefited from this partnership, seeing the number of patron workstations increase to over 200 along with six new iMacs. AT also supports ten online proctoring booths in West, where students can take exams while being monitored remotely. With grant funding obtained by librarians from the UF Student Technology Fee Grants program, Library West has also provided students with upgraded group study room technology, a One Button Video Recording Studio, and high-speed digital scanners.



SECOND FLOOR CIRCULATION DESK CONCEPT



SECOND FLOOR CIRCULATION DESK 2021

To maximize first floor space for very heavy compact shelving, the 2006 design located the circulation desk to the second floor, creating a challenge of how to effectively move patrons to the second floor, which has become the entrance level into the library. The solution was escalators to enhance the speed and ease of moving the estimated 1.5 million visitors a year into the facility. Additionally, the first floor entry space was envisioned as a 24-hour open study space and food vending. This vision eventually changed to the first library-based Starbucks.



FIRST FLOOR CAFE CONCEPT



FIRST FLOOR ESCALATORS/ELEVATOR 2021



Study Rooms & Carrels

One Button Video Recording Studio



Lactation Room

Library West has also made recent updates to its facilities with an eye towards diversity, equity, and inclusion, and now offers a lactation room – the first on the main campus, a gender-inclusive restroom, and a meditation/prayer room. In partnership with AT and the UF Disability Resource Center (DRC), LibWest supports DRC students through an improved Accessibility Studio with a private study space equipped with more accessible technology and software.



In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Library West has been forced to restrict access and availability of some resources. With social distancing, seating capacity has been reduced to 310, group study rooms have temporarily been converted to staff offices, and many of the smaller collaborative spaces are shuttered. Tutoring, digital humanities, and library instruction will be held online for the foreseeable future. For now, West employees continue to support our patrons through online research consultations and library instruction, and the building is still open for research and individual study. Meanwhile, the library is taking advantage of the lower foot-traffic to make repairs and small renovations. When the branch is back to “normal,” there will be newly enhanced spaces and improvements for our UF community to discover and enjoy, and a new chapter of Library West’s history will begin.



2018 Accessibility Studio



Library Instruction Lab

Further reading: Freund, L., & Seale, C. (2007). *Transforming Library West at the University of Florida: A Fairy Tale Makeover*. (<https://journals.flvc.org/flalib/issue/view/4090>)

