

## Information Commons Pilot Project Report December 2003

### Purpose and Mission

The mission of the Information Commons is to support and advance both the educational mission of Hamilton College and the research needs and personal growth of the students, faculty and staff, by facilitating access to, and professional assistance with, scholarly collections and information resources.

Since 2002, the Reference Librarians and team members from Information Technology Services have been discussing and planning for the creation of a common service point to better serve the information needs of Hamilton College's students, faculty and staff. The result of these meetings is the introduction of an Information Commons within Burke Library. An Information Commons joint service point and adjacent area is a collaborative venture where the resources of the traditional library are integrated with a wide range of advanced technologies, along with corresponding support services. The Information Commons supports both curricular and research needs and demands, nurturing and advancing an educational and personal development environment for all Hamilton College community members, enhancing both individual and collaborative achievement. With professional staffing by both the Library and Information Technology Services, we will work to satisfy the information and technology-based needs of the College and local community.

### General Description

The "Information Commons", when fully developed, is intended to function as a central point of contact, where patrons can come to get assistance on the spot, or referral to the appropriate resource or service, without having to either go to several different places, or to remain confused about how to get assistance. The Information Commons will offer streamlined Library and Information Technology Services, with greater ease of access than is available now through our two organizations, and with service enhancements that accrue when the two organizations collaborate in physical space, as well as in function.

The pilot project for the Hamilton College Information Commons is being designed to test the concept in a number of ways: We are trying to determine what the community thinks of the service, or thinks the service should be. We are also learning more about the work processes of the different groups, Librarians and Information Technologists, and what happens when we bring these processes together in a coordinated way. Since this is largely a "learning experience" for us all, this initial pilot will be a small, controlled effort. The main services being launched for the pilot:

- A [common service point](#), where both Reference Librarians and Instructional Technologists will be available for walk-in consultation, during a restricted set of hours.
- [Extended referral services](#), coordinating both reference and technology support
- Formally defined [collaborative study spaces](#), available for reservation by small groups of students

The general committee for the development of the information commons pilot project split into three subcommittees to develop the plans for these three different types of services.

## **Common Service Point**

The potential implementations of a common service point are numerous, and making decisions about some issues is particularly difficult given our current limited understanding of the way this location and related services will work. Therefore, we describe our plans through a list of attributes, some of which we view as “constants” – things we believe really must exist in any implementation – and some of which we view as “variables” – things we would like to see, or that we might trade off against each other.

### **Constants**

- Single workspace with sufficient area and tools for two professional staff, one Librarian and one information technologist. This workspace would revert to being the reference desk when not in use as the Information Commons.
  - There is a preference for one desk configured for two people, if new furniture is possible. Otherwise, 2 desks arranged to appear as a single point of service.
  - Desktop level connections for power and internet to assist with the use of laptops.
  - Physically oriented to allow visual connection to entryway and to computers in the Information Commons public computer area (see below).
  - Chairs for staff and patrons, with the ability to configure for two different consultations at one time.
  - Two phones, each with 2 lines (Reference and Information Commons)
  - Two workstations, one with the current reference software; the second with the MPC image.
  - An “IC” space on both ESS and the web server.
  - Desk/Service Point Sign: A single sign at the desk, which reads “Information Commons”.
    - Although this location will sometimes be only the Reference desk and not the I.C., the committee believes that using a single “Information Commons” sign all of the time will be less confusing to patrons, and may assist them to begin thinking of this location as their first stop for information help of all types.
  - Some nearby additional consulting space.
  - Shelving for ready reference volumes and I.T. and Library documentation.
  - Drawer space at least equal to the existing space at the Reference Desk.
  - Convenient access to a printer.
- Small group demonstration area adjacent to the Service Point:
  - Connectivity to both Macintosh and Windows computers, separate from the IC point of service workstations.
  - Preferably with a large plasma screen display.
  - Moveable, comfortable seating for a small group of people.
  - Some visual/architectural separation, from the service desk and student work areas.

- This area will be used to provide small group demonstrations of Library and I.T. resources and tools – these demonstrations would be one of the “new” services available through the Information Commons.
- Possibly a table or other means of using the area for quiet small group study when not otherwise in use.
- See [Appendix A](#) for some photos of a similar space at Emory University.
- Information Commons public computer area:
  - Physical space must be arranged, following ADA guidelines, to allow access to systems by people with disabilities.
  - Some furniture arranged to support small group work, some arranged to support individual research and writing, and some “express” terminals for reference lookup.
  - Individual and group work areas need to be obviously separate from one another, limit disturbances.
  - Common “look and feel” of desktop environment across all systems in this area.
- Some space for “readers” to work with books (as opposed to working at a computer or with a group).
- Long term goal: More computer workstations, both for group and individual work, and more reading and consultation space, throughout the Library.

## **Variables**

- Hours of the Information Commons:
  - Initial discussions focused on identifying times when the computer labs and the Reference Desk were known to have heavy student traffic already. Suggested times during this discussion included:
    - 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM and 2:00 PM to 4:00 PM, Monday – Friday
    - 2:00 PM to 4:00 PM and 7:00 PM to 10:00 PM, Monday – Friday
    - 1:00 PM to 5:00 PM Monday – Friday
    - 2:00 PM to 4:00 PM and 7:00 PM to 10:00 PM, Sunday – Thursday
  - Discussion around the above times revealed serious staff resource shortages. For example, there is not enough ITS staff to adequately support I.C. staffing after 4:30 PM, or on the weekends, although past experience among the Librarians and the ITS staff indicate that these are times of heavy traffic by students.
  - There were also some concerns about the ambitious number of hours being targeted for the pilot, particularly since we are uncertain about the ways in which workflows may change due to this new service model.
  - Given the above concerns, and after additional discussion by the full IC committee, the Steering Committee offers these recommendations:
    - 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM and 2:00 PM to 4:00 PM, Monday – Friday OR
    - 1:00 PM to 4:30 PM Monday – Friday
    - Tailoring the hours of the IC to meet the needs of the academic calendar, such as offering more hours early in the semester, but perhaps giving up some of the hours during the last 2 weeks of the semester, allowing the professional staff to switch their physical locations or service emphasis in response to changing student needs.

- Staffing arrangements:
  - The Library will be staffing the Information Commons with a Reference Librarian in accordance with their current practices for the reference desk.
  - ITS will be staffing in accordance with the needs of the academic calendar, using Instructional Technology staff during the early part of the semester, and Help Desk staff toward the latter part. The trade off point will be determined by work flows in the two teams. “Technology emergencies”, such as a very destructive and infective virus or worm, may affect the approach ITS needs to take for staffing the I.C.
  - It is expected that the additional computer systems will increase the work load for the systems support staff of both the Library and ITS. We recommend the staff involved negotiate the management of this increased work load.
- Two laptop computers, 1 each of Macintosh and Windows, in addition to the two workstations at the main service point.
  - Can be used as the “driving” systems for demonstrations using the plasma screen in the small group demonstration area described above.
  - Can be used for other Reference or I.T. presentation needs when the service point is not active.
  - Will be kept in a secure location when not in use.
- Offer “show and tell” sessions from all areas of the Library and I.T. through the small group demonstration area:
  - Showcase projects like the Civil War digitization project.
  - Allow departments to explain some core services and related procedures.
  - Show short task targeted “how to” demonstrations using basic software or reference tools.
  - Demonstrations could be simple powerpoint “loops” with staff on hand to answer questions, or video tapes, as time and the topic dictate.
  - May be used for consultation or group study space when not in use for I.C. demonstrations.
- An IC email account, separate from the “askref, “HILLgroup” and “helpdesk” email accounts.
- Shift at an angle, but not remove, the current periodical shelving to improve traffic flow and line of sight between the Information Commons area and the Multimedia Presentation Center.

## **Extended Referral Services**

Opportunities for individual consultation with Reference Librarians are offered to all students. The service, Research Assistance, is offered throughout the academic year by appointment. Students receive a customized checklist of recommended sources prepared by the Reference Librarians.

After both formal and informal discussion with members of the Instructional Technology team of ITS, it was determined that both the Reference Librarians and ITS could gain much knowledge of assignments using the form students are asked to fill out prior to an appointment. The reference department form ([APPENDIX B](#)) now contains several questions on what type of format the research will lead to, and whether the student anticipates using any multimedia

materials. This gives the Reference Librarian information on what types of resources the student may be looking for, such as graphics.

A new checklist ([APPENDIX C](#)) was also developed to hand to the students at the end of the appointment. This form gives the student contact information for the Reference Librarian in case they need further information, and also gives contact information for other departments based on the information the student filled out in the earlier form. These departments include Instructional Technology, the Oral Communications Center and the Writing Center. A blank space is also available for other referrals pertaining to the student's research needs.

After much debate and discussion, the committee agreed that giving the student the contact information they may need to complete their project, instead of gathering information and having the referred departments contact the students, gives the students control of their research and planning. Not all students will need to contact the other departments, but those who do will have the information they need to do so. The Extended Referral service will assist us in tracking assignment trends and enable us to contact faculty about group instruction if the need arises.

## **Collaborative Study Spaces**

The Seminar Room Scheduling Subcommittee met several times and came up with a web-based form for students and other Hamilton community members to reserve evening and weekend study space in Burke Library. The Registrar's Office normally schedules the classrooms on the second floor of Burke Library, but have given us rooms 211 and 215 to schedule for group study space. They will still schedule evening and weekend activities in the other classrooms in the Library.

The form ([see appendix D](#)) for requesting evening and weekend study space can be found on the Library's list of Request Forms ([http://onthehill.hamilton.edu/library/library\\_services/access\\_services/forms.html](http://onthehill.hamilton.edu/library/library_services/access_services/forms.html)), the Registrar's web page, and several ITS web pages. The form has a link to the ITS lab reservations page, where patrons can check room availability. They must complete most of the information on the form, except for the free-text box, or the form will not submit.

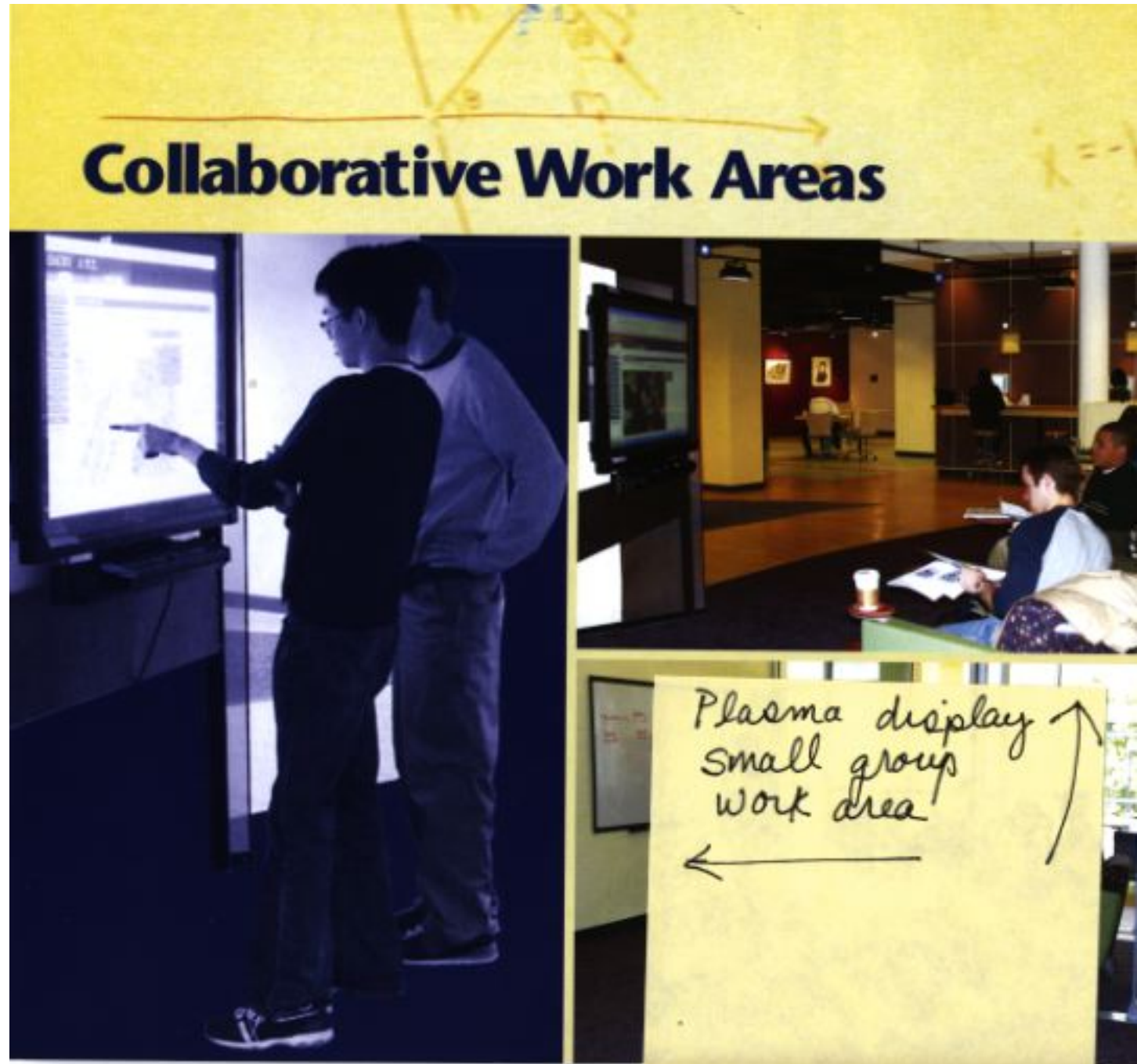
The form, when submitted, will be sent to the Circulation Department's email address, [askcirc@hamilton.edu](mailto:askcirc@hamilton.edu). The patron will also see onscreen confirmation of what they have requested ([see Appendix E](#)).

The Circulation department will receive the email request ([see Appendix F](#)), and then go into the Add/Edit/Delete Reservations system to input the request. Gretchen Schulte will meet with the Circulation Department to train them on this system. If the room is not available when the patron has requested it, or if further communication with the patron is needed, the Circulation Department can reply to the initial request to do so.

We are stressing a 24 hour in advance reservation, and will let people use the rooms if not reserved.

Advertising the new service is still needed. Various venues may include the Spectator, Daily Bull, Library Home Page News, and other web pages.

## Appendix A



The two photos above give relatively “close up” views of the small group study area at Emory University.



The photo above shows the small group area against the traffic lane and the support services “desk” in the background.

# Appendix B

Received by: \_\_\_\_\_

## Research Assistance Request Form

Appointment \_\_\_\_\_  
(date and time)

Librarian: \_\_\_\_\_

.....  
Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Course Name and  
Instructor: \_\_\_\_\_

What is your assignment? (check all that might apply):

\_\_\_\_ Written Paper - How long? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Oral presentation with audio-visual components

\_\_\_\_ Visual presentation/poster

\_\_\_\_ Web presentation

Do you wish to incorporate any of the following (check all that might apply):

\_\_\_\_ Video

\_\_\_\_ Audio

\_\_\_\_ Graphics

\_\_\_\_ Animation

When is your assignment/project due? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your topic? Please give a narrative description. Use the other side of the paper if necessary.

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What words, names, dates, phrases or synonyms are associated with your topic?

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How familiar are you with your topic?

Very \_\_\_\_ Somewhat \_\_\_\_ Not at all \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_

Could you use materials written in a foreign language?

What language(s)? \_\_\_\_\_

What sources have you consulted?

Instructor \_\_\_\_\_

Encyclopedias \_\_\_\_\_

Textbooks \_\_\_\_\_

Periodical Indexes \_\_\_\_\_

Library Catalog \_\_\_\_\_

Internet/Other \_\_\_\_\_

Do you need special types of information such as primary sources, maps, statistics or illustrations? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What is the time period you are interested in? (i.e. 18<sup>th</sup> century, 1980-present, 1998) \_\_\_\_\_

Please list 2 or 3 of the most important authors or citations to articles published on your topic:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

# Appendix C

## Extended Referral Form

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

You have just met with a **Reference Librarian** to discuss research strategies and resources.

If you need further assistance with your research please contact:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Other resources on campus that may help you with your project are:

\_\_\_\_\_ **Instructional Technology Services**  
*For help in using computer applications and multimedia tools.*  
course-support@hamilton.edu or 859-4877

\_\_\_\_\_ **Oral Communication Center**  
*For help developing effective oral communication skills*  
jhelmer@hamilton.edu or 859-4063  
smason@hamilton.edu or 859-4373

\_\_\_\_\_ **Writing Center**  
*For assistance with and the evaluation of written papers*  
swilliam@hamilton.edu or 859-4363

\_\_\_\_\_ **Other:**

Please contact them as soon as possible to make arrangements for the next part of your project.

# Appendix D

Hamilton College Library Form - Microsoft Internet Explorer

File Edit View Favorites Tools Help

Back Forward Stop Home Search Favorites Media Print Mail

Address [http://my.hamilton.edu/library/library\\_services/access\\_services/forms/study\\_space\\_form.html](http://my.hamilton.edu/library/library_services/access_services/forms/study_space_form.html) Go

198 College Hill Road  
Clinton, New York 13323

Close Print

## Hamilton College Library Burke Evening and Weekend Study Space Request Form

This form allows you to request either Burke 211 or Burke 215 for evening and weekend group study. You will be notified via email within 24 hours of the status of your request.

**Requests must be placed at least 24 hours in advance.**

For more information please contact the Circulation Department in Burke Library at 859-4479 or [askcirc@hamilton.edu](mailto:askcirc@hamilton.edu).

**These rooms are available for reservation:**

Monday-Thursday	4pm - 2am
Friday	4pm - Midnight
Saturday	10am - Midnight
Sunday	10am - 2am

**Room descriptions:**

<b>Burke 211</b> 4 tables - seats 16 adults Projector DVD Player VCR	<b>Burke 215</b> 4 tables - seats 16 adults Macintosh and Windows computer Projector DVD Player VCR
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Please click [HERE](#) to check room availability.

Please indicate the room, date and time you need:

**Room to Reserve:**  Burke 211  Burke 215

**Date needed:**

**Start time:**  A.M.

**End time:**  A.M.

If you will need the room on an ongoing basis, please indicate the reason here:

**Contact Information:**

**Name:**

**E-mail:**

**Campus phone:**

Please proofread your request before submitting it.

Close Print

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Done Internet


# Appendix E

Hamilton College Library Form - Microsoft Internet Explorer

File Edit View Favorites Tools Help

Back Forward Stop Home Search Favorites Media Print Mail

Address [http://my.hamilton.edu/library/library\\_services/access\\_services/forms/study\\_space\\_form.cfm](http://my.hamilton.edu/library/library_services/access_services/forms/study_space_form.cfm) Go

 198 College Hill Road  
Clinton, New York 13323

Close Print

**Hamilton College Library**

**Thank You.**

Your **Study Space Request** has been sent to the library.

You will be sent a confirmation within 24 hours.

For more information please contact the Circulation Department in Burke Library at 859-4479 or [askcirc@hamilton.edu](mailto:askcirc@hamilton.edu).

You might want to print this as a reminder of your request.

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**Your Study Space Request information follows:**

Room needed: **Burke 211**  
Date of Job: **October 27**  
Start time: **9 PM**  
End time: **10:30 PM**

Name: **Reference Librarian**  
E-mail: **askref@hamilton.edu**  
Campus Phone: **x4735**

Special Instructions (if any):

Date Submitted: October 17, 2003

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Done Internet

# Appendix F

