Build It |Right| and They Will Come

“I think the morale of the entire student body has been lifted,” says Michelle Harris (V’08) in a moment of unsolicited praise for Penn Vet’s new Vernon and Shirley Hill Pavilion and its Atwood Library and Information Commons. Michelle says the students feel as though their status has been elevated. That elevated feeling has translated into an elevated gate count for the School’s Library: nearly 600 visitors per day. That’s more than twice the daily count at the old Vet Library, according to Barbara Cavanaugh, the Head of the Atwood Library. “I think we got it right,” she says, “and the response of our community is the proof.”

Since its opening this past December, the Atwood Library has realized every aspiration of the staff and architects who labored over its design. Cavanaugh was a key part of this four-year process, attending the building committee meetings that led to the architectural plans, donning a hardhat during the construction phase, furnishing the space and filling its shelves. “For me, the real success of the facility is best conveyed in the many ways people are using it,” Cavanaugh says. “I watched the process unfold, from the ground breaking to the ribbon cutting. But it wasn’t until the students began filling the carrels and the faculty and clinicians starting holding rounds in the study rooms, and not until we began conducting workshops in the electronic classroom and giving consultation sessions in our offices that I realized how well our design insights worked.”

It’s About Connections

The windows surrounding Cavanaugh’s office look out on the Library’s main thoroughfare and most of its seats. Students are tapping at keyboards in the look-up space and studying at carrels, with a scenic stretch of the Penn skyline as a backdrop. One student is even seen hunched over a microscope as the Vet Librarian describes how she insisted on having an open and accessible office-front. “I need this type of visual interaction with the people I serve, and they need a sense that the staff are within reach when they want help. It means some loss of privacy—I can’t eat lunch in here!—but the service benefits more than compensate. This Library’s design and its service culture are all about being connected.”

One look at the Library’s entryway and you understand Cavanaugh’s point about connections. The Library has no door, no frame or partition separating it from the building’s teaching and research facilities. The absence of a doorway makes a powerful statement: Atwood is permanently open—physically, conceptually, programmatically one with the community it serves. [continued inside]
A Tour Through the Working Library

By eliminating the hard entrance, the architects allowed surrounding spaces to flow seamlessly into the Library. Within this fluid area, Atwood is a point of convergence for lots of traffic through Hill Pavilion and along a maze of footbridges connecting Hill to the Ryan Veterinary Hospital and neighboring buildings.

The Library occupies 7,000 square feet of prime, second floor real estate and anchors the eastern expanse of the $75 million facility. The core space consists of thirty-two carrels and twelve table seats, a twelve-station computer look-up area, lounge areas, and stacks for some 30,000 volumes. There are also two group study rooms in the core of the Library. One room doubles as the Atwood Digital Laboratory, a place where people can view videos, digitize slides or VHS tapes, and prepare computerized presentations. This is an important support for faculty since projection systems in the new building’s lecture halls require the use of digital media.

The Library also contains the sixteen-station Robert F. Fairchild Electronic Classroom. For one of only a few times since opening, the Classroom’s lights are dimmed. “We’re using the room for brownbag seminars on databases and for PowerPoint and RefWorks training,” Ms. Cavanaugh explains. “In the past, we had to hold these sessions a quarter of a mile away in the main Library, or in the older Veterinary School facilities. Many clinicians and students, who are in class all day, did not have time to travel to Van Pelt, and the School’s facilities lacked hands-on capabilities.”

Vet students are enthusiastic about classes held in their own library. The new Classroom offers the latest viewing and projection technologies in a large and comfortable training area. Its video conferencing system enables the librarians in Philadelphia to broadcast their sessions to the Veterinary School’s large animal facility at New Bolton Center, in Kennett Square, PA. The Classroom is also available to faculty for seminars and break-out classroom space. And, if there’s nothing scheduled, it’s a convenient surge facility for students who need computer access or just another quiet study venue. “We leave the Classroom unlocked. I love opening the door and finding students working quietly in here,” Cavanaugh says.
On the frontier of the Library, just beyond the service points that mark out its inner space, Atwood has three additional group study rooms. Each is outfitted with a computer, wireless internet connections, and a large plasma display. Ms. Cavanaugh says the rooms are in continual use. “Students really felt the absence of group study space in the old Library. We knew from their input and from the increasing number of group assignments that group studies deserved high priority in the new space.”

Answering this demand meant decreasing the number of stacks. Cavanaugh and her staff sent older materials, duplicate copies and print versions of digital resources to storage to make room. As she speaks, students in one study room are huddled around a sprawling stack of notes; in another, two students are watching a surgical video. And in a third room, a number of people in white lab coats are projecting x-ray images and taking notes. Cavanaugh explains that this is a weekly meeting where clinicians review cases.

“Because of these attractive and versatile new group study spaces, we’re seeing the range of activities in the Library quickly begin to broaden,” says Cavanaugh. She explains that the Library has also become a venue for faculty meetings, and even the Vet School admissions staff uses the rooms, to interview prospective students and to show off the new Library.

Moving even farther from the Library’s core, Cavanaugh points out a lounge area with long tables that accommodate the need for social space. Here students can congregate, use the nearby vending machines for coffee and snacks, and plug in a laptop—even after Library hours, when the hidden security gate descends from the ceiling to secure the collections. She also draws attention to three seminar rooms that have come under Atwood’s purview and taken on part of the Library atmosphere. “Give us a space and we’ll find a way to use it,” she says. “Recently, for example, we used one of these larger rooms to hold an evening session on evidence-based veterinary medicine, part of a larger course being given by the Vet Hospital for residents and interns. The fluid design of the building gives us lots of opportunities to use the spaces for this type of outreach.”

A Common Vision, a Collaborative Plan

In the design of the Atwood Library and Information Commons many stakeholders—architects, faculty, clinical specialists, school administrators, librarians and IT professionals—achieved a unified vision of how a library should function within a research setting. Commenting on this consensus, Vice Provost and Director of Libraries, Carton Rogers said, “I am pleased Dean Hendricks and her predecessor, Dr. Alan Kelly, believe, as we do, that the Library is important to the academic experience of students.” By committing a spacious portion of the new building to the Library, Rogers said, the School took a bold step. “The people entrusted to plan the new space understand how learning occurs, so they insisted on the integration of books, computers, lab resources, and a variety of study environments.” And the architects, Rogers went on to say, “did an outstanding job of marrying spatial concepts to the programmatic vision they were presented.”

“In the end,” Rogers concluded, “the library as place is reaffirmed...or maybe, I should say, the Library is re-imagined.” The work done on the Veterinary Library, in the Vice Provost’s mind, is a guide for thinking anew the interactions between libraries and their various communities.
To further illustrate the point, Rogers cites the recently created Weigle Information Commons, in the Van Pelt-Dietrich Library Center, a joint project of Penn’s Libraries and School of Arts and Sciences. He notes that the Libraries, working with Dean Eduardo Glandt, recently completed an architectural planning study for the rehabilitation of the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences Library, and that the Libraries are working with the Schools of Nursing and Medicine on a new vision for the Biomedical Library.

Of all the disciplines at Penn, the sciences are witnessing perhaps the most acute change in research and teaching practices. No one knows that better than Barbara Cavanaugh, so the last word goes to her: “When users told us they needed more digital information, the Library delivered it. When faculty couldn’t leave the stables of New Bolton for reference help, we went there. When the School expressed the need to integrate the library and group study spaces, classrooms and current technology, we worked on that.” A student interrupts to ask where she can find the anesthesia DVD her professor referred her to, and Cavanaugh is connecting once again. Scientists and physicians, along with the students they train, are dealing with a remarkable evolution of the tools used to discover, access, and communicate medical information. Librarians and library facilities are more critical than ever to the success of that pursuit.

“I envy today’s students the partnership with the library that is represented by this glorious place...”
Dr. Steven W. Atwood graduated from Penn's School of Veterinary Medicine in 1980. After an internship at the New Haven Central Hospital for Veterinary Medicine in New Haven, Connecticut, he entered private practice at the Nantucket Animal Hospital, 20 miles off the coast of Massachusetts.

For several years, Dr. Atwood had the distinction of being Nantucket Island's lone veterinarian. Not surprisingly, he established strong bonds with many of his clients. When he moved to Martha's Vineyard, one individual continued to bring him her shelties for veterinary care. "I'd known her for many years," said Dr. Atwood. "She was a very knowledgeable client...asked good questions, and really took incredible care of her animals. There was no question they were absolutely spoiled and doted over. This person lived alone, and her animals really were her life. They were extremely important to her and so their care was very important to her, too."

Motivated by her deep love of animals and her relationship with a caring and capable veterinarian, Dr. Atwood's friend told him of her wish to leave money that would benefit veterinarians of the future. She sought his advice and he recommended she consider Penn's School of Veterinary Medicine. The idea of funding the School's new Library was the brainchild of emeritus Dean, Alan Kelly. "I ran that suggestion by this individual," Dr. Atwood recalls, "and it was very enthusiastically received." Dr. Atwood's close friend was determined to remain anonymous, but embraced the idea of naming the Library for the veterinarian she so appreciated.

Steven Atwood's practice enjoys an impressive clientele, including the pets of many summertime residents of Martha's Vineyard, among them Beverly Sills, Carol Burnett, Bill Murray, Dan Aykroyd, Carly Simon, Mike Nichols, and author David McCullough, to name just a few. "The late John F. Kennedy, Jr. had a little black cat and a dog that we saw," said Dr. Atwood, and "His sister, Caroline, has a nice golden retriever that we have met. They all seem to love their animals."

Dr. Atwood is one of three veterinarians worldwide selected to participate in the Medical Curriculum for Professionals Program, leading to a Doctor of Medicine (M.D.) degree at the University of Health Sciences Antigua School of Medicine, West Indies. Since 1982, this unique program has recognized the significant bond between human and veterinary medicine and has emphasized training doctors toward strengthening that relationship. Atwood is also the recipient of the Wilfred O. Foundation Medical Scholarship. After graduation from medical school, he will be providing medical care in rural and medically underserved areas of the world, in return for this support.

Dr. Atwood was graduated from the University of Wyoming with a Bachelor of Science degree in molecular biology, from the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine with a Veterinariae Medicinae Doctoris (V.M.D.) degree, from the University of Health Sciences Antigua School of Medicine with a Doctor of Medicine (M.D.) degree and is currently a candidate for the Master of Public Health (M.P.H.) degree in Public Health Practice at the University of Massachusetts Medical School and School of Public Health and Health Sciences. Dr. Atwood was awarded membership of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (M.R.C.V.S.) of England in 2004 and sits on the Board of Overseers of the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine and the Massachusetts State Board of Veterinary Medicine.

### Construction Details

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