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CAMPUS NEWS

UMass celebrates 20 percent expansion of library's Learning Commons

By: **Matt Rocheleau** | February 08, 2010 |

As part of an ongoing, five-year, $8.5-million renovation project, the University of Massachusetts celebrated a 20 percent expansion of the Learning Commons in the campus' main library yesterday.

The 6,000 square-foot addition, which opened at the beginning of the semester, boosts available seating by 80 percent – from 250 to 450 – in the W.E.B. DuBois Library's Learning Commons, according to a University press release.

The basement of the 26-story library added eight group study rooms bringing the total number of glass cubicles to 26.

A final phase of the library's renovations will add more area for staff use in the Learning Commons and is expected to be completed by June, said director of development and communications for the campus' libraries, Emily Silverman.

The $8.5 million in renovations, which began in 2005, have also improved other areas of the library, including quiet study spaces on the building's second, third and fifth floors, Silverman said.

As a separate project, she added that the University is also exploring plans to add a small, multi-purpose auditorium to the Learning Commons.

Overall, the library's 30,000 square-foot bottom floor houses over 200 multi-purpose work stations equipped with PCs and Macs, and offers more than 400 campus network- and Internet-enabled ports, as well as full wireless access and other high-tech study and research tools.

The Learning Commons opened in 2005 and has received $600,000 in donated software from Microsoft Corp., which designated UMass as its first Microsoft IT Showcase School.

Junior industrial engineering major Anna Vecha, 20, said she uses computers in the library at least twice a week to access the Adobe Dreamweaver software installed on campus computers and is happy to see the library is expanding its services.

"I think it's definitely getting better. I didn't have to wait at all [for an open computer]," she said, while working at a station in the recently renovated area. "But, I think that it may also be because a lot of students don't know about [the addition], yet."

Chancellor Robert C. Holub and Provost James V. Staros joined Libraries Director Jay Schafer and other campus community members for Monday's celebration of the expansion.

Schafer said the Learning Commons' impact on student academic life has been "nothing less than dramatic."

"This is a groundbreaking approach," he said in the release. "We have been able to tap the latest technology to shape an environment in which students have convenient access to information, and a space where they are able to work together and to consult with faculty and staff in ways that allow them to thrive intellectually and creatively."

Learning Commons coordinator Carol Will said staff and student employees are encouraged to watch for those in need of help.

"You'll notice this is not a really quiet space now. We want people to be able to talk and work together and collaborate," said Learning Commons coordinator Carol Will in the release. "Everyone has to be on the lookout for people who look lost or hesitant. We welcome questions and we want to help. We have new users in here every day, and we never tire of the questions."

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