

Finding Lockwood

by: **KEN HOOD**, Facilities Planning & Management Officer, UB Libraries



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One of the greatest rewards of my 30-year career in the University at Buffalo Libraries was the recent opportunity to engage in the process of “wayfinding” with students and faculty of UB’s School of Architecture and Planning. This energizing and enlivening experience brought together the old, established and known with the new, futuristic and imaginative.

In my relatively new role as Facilities Planning and Management Officer for the University Libraries, I had a strong desire to understand the workings and professional perspectives of architects and designers. I inquired about the possibility of working with a group of students on “wayfinding” for the Libraries, and UB Associate Professor M. Beth Tauke responded enthusiastically, developing a syllabus for her Inclusive Design Research Group studio during the fall semester 2009.

We journeyed through the creative process together. Background readings and research requirements were extensive. Each student developed an understanding of the rich history of libraries, the dynamic changes libraries are undertaking, and what the future holds for the notion of “library.” The scope of their research was local, national and international. In particular, they studied the UB Libraries, focusing on Lockwood Memorial Library – its convoluted structure and its potential for being the “heart” of the University. What they discovered was far greater. They discovered the “soul” of Lockwood Library, a soul made manifest in their new and imaginative designs.

Initially, the students tried to “find” Lockwood from various points on campus using various sensory cues. For our first meeting the students stood in the courtyard area outside Lockwood, and I waved them in to meet me in the Government Documents area. They could easily see me; but to reach me, they needed to find the main entrance on the building’s second floor and navigate two intertwined, glass-enclosed staircases. It was an amusing yet telling experiment.

The studio's "inclusive design" perspectives provided useful information regarding the navigational needs – visual, auditory, physical – of our library users. The syllabus went further – requiring students to use online sources, on-site services and other means – to locate specific, esoteric items. All of these interfaces were analyzed, providing the students with the experience and understanding needed to design a Lockwood Library of the future. Their design models and visions were beautiful!

I was so impressed by the project, I asked the students to create an exhibition of their work to share with Libraries faculty and staff. Again, Professor Tauke accepted the challenge and developed an independent study for the spring semester 2010. This subset of the original studio group prepared an exhibit of their design models, accompanied by narrative descriptions of their work and a video presentation. The students also participated in a Libraries’ Town Forum to outline, for library staff and guests, what the students had discovered and to discuss how they imagined a new Lockwood.

Collaborating with these students and learning how architects approach their work, how they think and how their creative imaginings take concrete form, were rich and rewarding experiences. It is my hope that developing more programs like these will foster stronger bonds with colleagues across the disciplines.

[PHOTOS OF THE EXHIBIT](#)

[PRESENTATION SLIDES](#)