

Library Constructs Cyber Cafe

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aduples@tulane.edu

Quiet is no longer required on the first floor of Howard-Tilton Memorial Library. The floor is being transformed into the Learning Commons, an enclave where library patrons can use powerful computers, find high-speed wireless Internet access and relax in the comfy lounge while drinking gourmet coffee.



The Learning Commons, a cyber cafe in Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, has desktop PCs and Macs and outlets for wireless access. (Photos by Alicia Duplessis Jasmin)

The Learning Commons will be staffed with both [library](#) and [technology services](#) representatives, says Lance Query, dean of libraries and academic information resources.

"We didn't want our Learning Commons to be just a glorified computer lab," says Query. "We plan to have librarians and technology specialists working side by side so that when a student has a question about content, they can get help from the librarian, and when they need help with some of the technology, we'll have someone here to handle that question as well."

In the design of the computer lab, special attention has been paid to layout and furnishings. Elongated desks allow several students to gather around one computer for group work, while comfortable seating is strategically positioned near windows, providing a natural backdrop for readers.

"When our reference collection was in this area, people would look in from the outside and see a bunch of bookshelves," says Query. "Now, at night especially, it's inviting because you see people moving around and there's a lot of light."

The finished space will house a PJ's Coffee bar along with approximately 80 computers with access to printers and scanners. There also will be an abundance of floor and table outlets to accommodate hookups for laptop computers.

Derek Toten, director of instructional media and learning spaces, says there will be an assortment of PCs and iMacs available in the Learning Commons. Previously, technology services had been PC-based, but is now introducing Apple computers into public computing spaces.

"We have a group presentation system for students to utilize, and we've also added media production and editing software to most of the computers," Toten says.

Students also will have the ability to check out digital cameras, camcorders and other media equipment at the start of the fall semester.

The Learning Commons project has been jointly funded by a private donation, the Howard-Tilton library, the Tulane president's office and technology services, led by Charlie McMahon, vice president for information technology and chief technology officer of the university.

A formal grand opening for the Learning Commons is scheduled for September when all construction is complete.