

# RE



# INVENTING DOUGLAS

## How One Library Revamped Its Space

By Jill M. Tarabula

I'm proud to say we've received many compliments on the space redesign and reallocation from students, faculty, and staff outside the library.

**C**linton Community College (CCC) is a small campus serving a rural community just outside the city of Plattsburgh in upstate New York. We are part of the State University of New York (SUNY) system. The Leroy M. Douglas Sr. Library (Douglas Library) is located in the George Moore Academic and Administrative Building (Moore Building), which overlooks historic Lake Champlain, with views of the Adirondack Mountains of New York and the Green Mountains of Vermont.

The college attracts a diverse population of students with varying educational needs and career goals. Local high school graduates from the region sit next to nontraditional students from area manufacturing facilities, military veterans, and students from outside the region who seek a change of scenery. In addition, nearly 40 international students attend CCC. Douglas Library

annually serves approximately 1,560 full-time equivalent students and more than 165 full- and part-time faculty and staff, as well as community patrons.

Prior to becoming a college, the property was the site of a well-known resort hotel established in 1890, the Hotel Champlain. Guests included Presidents William McKinley, William Howard Taft, and both Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt, along with many wealthy businessmen and other socialites of the period. In 1910, the original hotel burned to the ground and a new, 200-room steel and concrete structure was built in its place. Hotel Champlain remained an exclusive resort for years until the Great Depression brought about the end to the luxury hotel era. In 1951, the property was purchased to serve as a Jesuit seminary, Belarmine College, which operated until 1966. In 1969, Clinton County leased the property and began admitting students to Clinton Community College.

Why am I providing all this background? Knowing the history of our building helps to paint a picture of the challenges we faced and how we've worked to overcome them. Douglas Library is located in the former hotel's dining room, kitchen, promenade, and ballroom on the second floor of the Moore Building. A dumbwaiter, while no longer used, is still in place, as are many of the original light fixtures, steam radiators, and other decorations.

### Quaint but Dysfunctional

While the Moore Building is magnificent with all of its history and charm, the space currently occupied by the library was not designed for this purpose. Of course, many updates have been made since its days as a hotel; however, there are structural hurdles that hamper library progress. The metal framework of the leaded glass windows and the steel construction behind the plaster walls interfere with wireless signals. Another issue is that the physical layout of the space includes a variety of rooms; as a result, students aren't necessarily aware that we have spaces designed for quiet study, group study, and group viewing, as well as a 20-seat classroom.

Scattered throughout this maze, we have plenty of resources to offer. The library houses more than 42,000 print books, along with a small collection of print journals and newspapers. Special interest collections include the Adirondack Collection (regional interest and local authors), Juvenile Literature Collection, Special Collections (college and library archives), and Media (DVDs, vinyl records, CDs, and software). Our librarians continue to build a strong virtual library to better serve the needs of an ever-growing distance learning population as well. In addition, library patrons have access to resources not physically available at Douglas through interlibrary loan.

Until summer 2011, the library provided two service points—one in the main reading room and a second in the media services area, located outside the main reading room in the alcove behind the reference and circulation desks. The area had been staffed with a full-time clerical position



*The new Hotel Champlain*



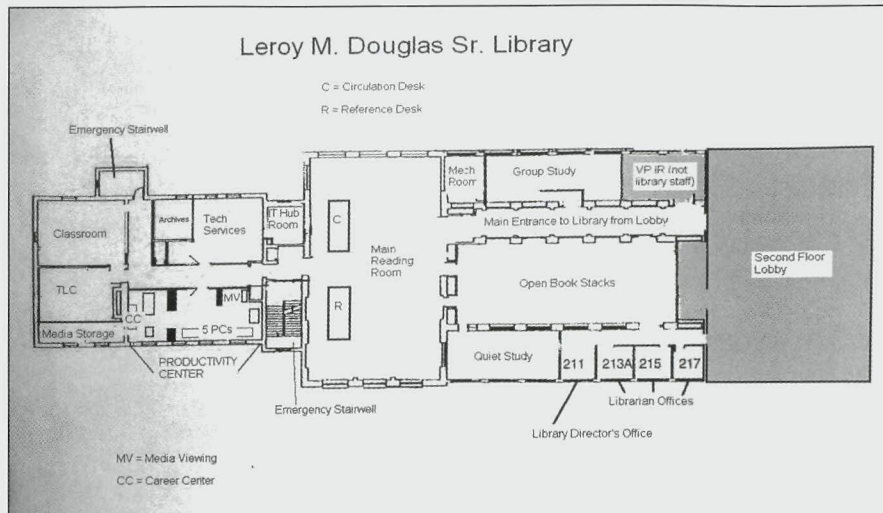
*This former hotel dining hall is now the library.*

responsible for circulating and maintaining media materials, course reserves, and equipment. Three TV/VCR/DVD stations for group viewing of reserve materials, five student computing stations, two scanning stations, and one color laser printer were located here as well. The media collections were kept secure in a locked storage room and were only accessible by staff. But the area could be staffed only until 4 p.m., given budget constraints. After that time, staff working the main desk had to do double duty, which was not ideal since students needing assistance had to leave the room to find a staff member.

### Turning Chance Into Change

In July 2011, as chance would have it, the full-time staff member in media services opted to take another position on campus, and it was decided that the vacant position was not to be refilled.

Discussion ensued as to how to deal with maintaining and building the media collections, especially with regard to serving student needs efficiently and keeping track of



The library's floor plan created some challenges.

media materials. In order to retrieve media materials from the locked storage room, staff members had to leave the main reading room. Something had to change.

Just removing the media office's furniture would leave us with a big, open room with lots of potential to quickly repurpose. What to do with all this newfound space? The obvious choice was to simply turn this one area into something else, maybe a group study space, since so many had already requested it. What we had not realized yet is that we needed to take a broader brush approach. Ultimately, we would come to realize that by freeing up that one space, we could move everything around in order to reallocate various spaces throughout the library. Indeed, we could reinvent ourselves.

But first, we had to be baptized by fire, which came in the form of a couple of false starts.

As a quick response to our staffing situation, we did what seemed to be the most obvious thing to do. We took out the office furniture and renamed the former media services area the Group Study by Appointment room. An online form was created, allowing students to make reservations to use a variety of tables, with or without viewing stations. Our grand hope was that the new area would be popular and well-used. (Alas, as time would tell, it was not. The unsupervised area with free internet access would become a magnet for nonacademic activity, but I'm getting ahead of myself...)

The other matter we had to immediately attend to was the media collection, which was located in a locked room far removed from the staff at the main desks.

I approached my director about relocating all DVDs and VHS tapes to a locked room behind the circulation desk. At the time, we were using this room as a closet to store catalogs, printer paper, holiday decorations, and other miscellaneous materials. The IT department also had a server tower in this room, but we felt if we removed our extra materials and placed the media shelving on the walls opposite the tower, our collections would fit and not interfere with IT's components. When we approached IT with the idea, there was concern about the server's security because all li-

brary staff and student workers would have regular access to this room. IT suggested walling off its portion of the room; however, it was not deemed feasible. Furthermore, in the process of reviewing our request, it was suddenly determined that all library material would need to be removed from this room and the locks would need to be changed to ensure server security. We no longer had access to this room at all. So much for that idea!

Now what? It was time to see the larger picture.

### Bringing the DVDs Out of the Closet

Being good librarians, we consulted the reference literature. Published studies in professional journals touted the virtues of consolidating service points and moving library materials to open-stack and self-serve models, not only to encourage circulation but also to fulfill staffing shortages and changing space needs. Eureka! We realized our bad luck was just an opportunity in disguise. How could we shuffle things around to make it all work better?

We really needed to move media materials to streamline service and improve access. We had already been working on weeding the VHS tape collection, especially outdated nursing titles, but the fall semester was quickly approaching and this project was not completed yet.

To make life easier on library staff, we reviewed the reserve DVDs and VHS tapes; any required items for the fall semester were moved to the course reserve shelf behind the circulation desk. Due to the quantity of materials, we had to use a book truck for overflow. While this reorganization was helpful, it still didn't address the larger issue of how we would provide access to the popular entertainment DVD collection.

More than 1,300 DVDs were still inaccessible in storage. Knowing the high rate of demand for these items, we discussed moving the DVD collection to open-stack shelving in the main reading room. Theft was a concern, but after discussion, we felt ease of access overrode potential security issues. We talked about investing in a locking case system for several thousand dollars, but it wasn't cost-effective. If we later discovered theft was a significant problem, we would explore other options then.

We scoured the campus in search of available bookcases that would allow us to shelve the existing DVD collection with room to grow. Fortunately, we were able to find two matching cases. *Voilà!* DVDs became open stacks and self-serve!

### Freeing Up Space by Going Digital

Once the popular DVDs were moved to the main reading room, attention was refocused on updating the nursing/

allied health VHS tape collection. With an upcoming reaccreditation visit, something had to be done to improve the nursing media collection. While it was no longer used, one VHS tape featured a nurse with a beehive hairdo; a few others showed nurses delivering care without wearing gloves. These antiquated artifacts had to go.

After collaboration with nursing department members to determine how to meet their needs, we explored replacement options. First, the nursing department was asked to identify the content it absolutely needed, especially for the next two semesters. We then compiled a spreadsheet of 140 critical titles identified by nursing faculty and searched for potential DVD replacement material, adding these titles to the spreadsheet along with their respective costs. At this point, we became aware of a streaming nursing video collection offered through a consortial SUNY library initiative. We investigated its feasibility with regard to content coverage, cost, and accessibility.

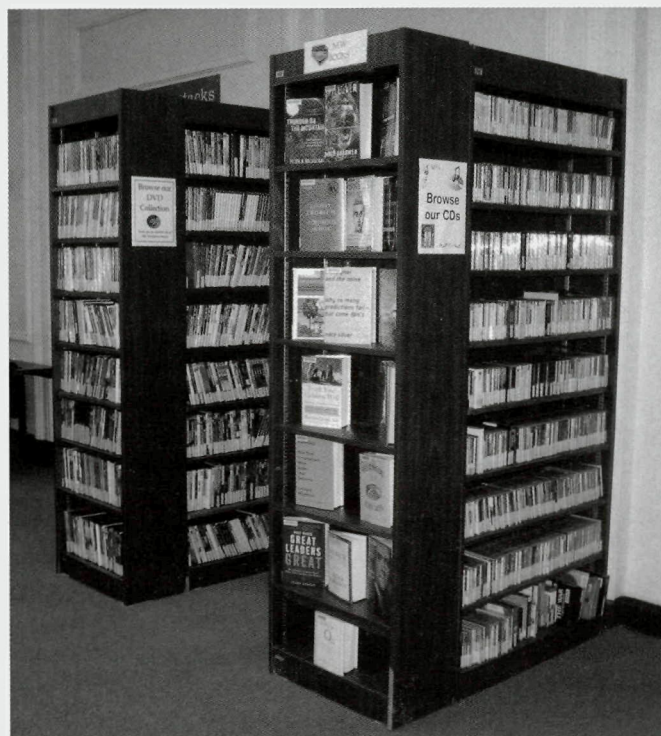
Once the comparisons were made, we found it would cost approximately \$13,000 to replace nursing VHS tapes with comparable DVDs but only \$2,500 annually for 100 titles in a customized streaming nursing video package. This was a no-brainer—we trialed the package.

Professional literature has shown the value in moving physical media to streaming media to improve accessibility. Streaming also allows for updating content in a more timely and cost-effective fashion—not to mention the space that it saves. Staff also liked the idea of streamed media because it would reduce the need to handle physical items.

Finally, we reviewed comparable streamed content as replacement material. Once the comparisons were made, we found it would cost approximately \$13,000 to replace nursing VHS tapes with comparable DVDs but only \$2,500 annually for 100 titles in a customized streaming nursing video package. This was a no-brainer—we trialed the package in November 2011.

After the trial ended, nursing faculty members were asked for feedback. They were extremely pleased with the quality of the content, its currency, and the convenience of remote access. In March 2012, we started our subscription with the streaming package and weeded the remainder of the VHS tape collection. Our 3,000-title VHS tape collection was history.

As a result of the VHS weeding, we had enough space to move all the DVD reserve items to the shelving unit behind the circulation desk. The TV/VCR/DVD cart in the media



DVD case

viewing area was removed and replaced with a 27" monitor and a PC for group viewing. While this area was intended primarily for nursing students, it also comes in handy for foreign language, human service, and criminal justice majors. Things were really looking up.

### Reconfiguring the Computers

Another challenge we faced was how to maximize student access to computers for academic work. One of the biggest complaints we heard from students was that there were never enough available computers in the library for completing assignments. The problem was exacerbated by the fact that some students were monopolizing the computers while doing things on the internet other than academic work. In the summer of 2011, we continued to work on repurposing our old media services area and reassessing our media holdings, but we also needed to consider the best place to put our computers.

The first thing we did was to repurpose our existing "computer lab" and turn that area into a quiet study area; this area was in the stacks and one of the quietest areas of the library. The lab computers were redistributed throughout the library and were all equipped with full internet access. Every day, the 33 stations across the library were occupied at all times. Unfortunately, we found it necessary to ask students who were using the computers for recreational purposes to vacate the stations to allow waiting students to work on their assignments, print out their papers, or do other things we require of them. Having to police the machines was quite a dreaded duty for the staff. We ultimately



*The productivity center doubles as a career center.*



*The reinvented main reading room*

decided to kill two birds with a single stone by dedicating some computers for true “academic use only” and moving them into the space once occupied by media services and which had briefly been transformed into our Group Study by Appointment room, which, as I noted at the start of this article, no one ever seriously used.

The new “productivity center” is a place where students can use Microsoft Office software, print documents, check their student portals and campus webmail, use scanning equipment, and perform other tasks directly related to their academic work. If we ran out of workstations in other campus libraries, students waiting to print their papers could always come here. Why? The somewhat diabolical secret to our strategy was that the computers in this room would not have full internet access. As a result, it was almost certain that a student waiting to print out a paper, while other students used the internet-accessible computers to go on Facebook, could always come here.

We also dedicated a part of this space as a career center, which features a collection of the library’s print books and resources on resume and cover letter writing and career information. In addition, helpful online articles were identified and printed out for students to read there or to take with them, including job prospects, STEM career material, and salary information.

In order to accommodate those students who wanted to come to the library to catch up on their social networks, check their private email, and pass the time gaming, we installed standup wireless kiosks in the library hallway. These stop-and-go kiosks became so popular that we added two more.

So one thing led to another. The pieces of the puzzle fell into place, and we suddenly realized that while we may have lost a staff position, we gained an entirely repurposed space.

### Achieving the End Game

How are things in Douglas Library now? Well, things are going very well for us, indeed. I’m proud to say we’ve received many compliments on the space redesign and reallocation from students, faculty, and staff outside the library. We’re pleased that we solved significant issues creatively by repurposing existing spaces and resources and spending relatively little money doing it. Students appreciate having increased computer access via the productivity center, the standup kiosks, the collaborative group study space, and the quiet study area. We are growing the career center by updating resources and collaborating with our campus Career and Transfer Office, with the goal of encouraging our students to explore postgraduate options and make their career choices with the help of our available resources. We added two more bookcases to the DVD collection, and we relocated the library CD collection to the other side of this shelving unit to encourage circulation through visibility.

What are our future plans? We are in the process of moving forward with Phase 2 of the productivity center. With IT’s support, we are investigating ways to permit access to selected internet-based academic resources including library databases, libguides, ANGEL CMS, and the library catalog. So, while we may be learning as we go, just stay tuned, folks; there’s more to come!



**Jill M. Tarabula** (jill.tarabula@clinton.edu) is

the systems and technical services librarian at Clinton Community College’s Douglas Library. Since joining the staff in 2010, she has initiated and implemented changes to existing library services, trained staff on new processes, and redesigned library spaces to accommodate student needs. When she isn’t at the library, Jill spends time with her husband, two kids, and two dogs, enjoying everything the Adirondack region of New York state has to offer.

Copyright of Computers in Libraries is the property of Information Today Inc. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.