

*P*

PROPOSAL FOR UNIVERSITY CENTER

George Mason University proposes building a University Center which will combine library and student service functions into one building. The library contained in the University Center will be a model Library of the Future, incorporating the latest in technology to provide maximum access to information for students and faculty. The combination of library and student service facilities makes possible cooperative use of space in a variety of areas, including study space, copy center, media production, electronic classrooms, and loading dock/storage/people-moving space.

The University Center concept expresses George Mason's philosophy of interaction and engagement with its community. By placing the library in the University Center, we take the library to the students and faculty, and disavow the cloistered library, separate from the rest of the university. In the University Center students will be able to read, do research, collaborate, and socialize in one unified space.

The University Center library is designed around the library's commitment to active participation in the academic enterprise, and to involving students in acquiring knowledge and competence. The architectural design encourages interaction with the resources provided, and with others engaged in learning. The small book and materials collection will contain core materials used by students and faculty alike throughout their academic careers, which form a common core of knowledge around which they can interact.

The University Center library will incorporate the latest in information technology, always keeping in mind that the technology is the supportive mechanism for the human learning process. The computer work stations will be networked to increasingly more complex and distant systems, so that students can begin work with a limited sphere of information and spiral outward to larger, more sophisticated systems as they develop the ability and need to do so. The computer support system will use expert systems technology applied to the automated systems already in existence. The system design is planned to enable researchers to make contact with other students and faculty interested in the same research areas, thereby encouraging the kind of human collaboration so important to effective learning, in addition to helping the library user reach out to other information resources.

Early inspiration for this concept came from the work of a task force on the library, which included faculty from all areas of the university. Faculty will continue to collaborate with library and student services staff in planning, as will personnel from University Computing. Library and Student Services have identified eight areas of common interest, and teams of staff from both areas

are working together, and with faculty where appropriate, to develop design concepts for these areas. The areas so far identified are:

- Information Center
- Meeting and Study Rooms (including electronic classrooms)
- Media Production Area
- Bookstore
- Theatre
- Scheduling and Security
- Faculty Involvement
- Service Areas (loading dock, entrances, custodial, etc.)

Library staff are also working with University Computing staff on designing the computing/networking facilities serving the building, and on developing the information systems, electronic classrooms, and individual work stations in the University Center. Their goal is to develop a workstation at which a student can access all the information systems in the university, regardless of their physical location, and can move outside of the university where appropriate. The workstations will be equipped to receive video and audio information as well as text, and some will be designed and located in such a way as to facilitate group use.

The University Center makes better use of resources in at least two ways: sharing space cuts down on individual space needs and avoids costly duplication, and the engaged, interactive design assures that this valuable resource will continue to be central to the academic process.

CSH/yk