# Research on the Information Commons in the University Library

Xiao Liu[1,a]

[1]Shenyang Aerospace University Library, Shenyang 110136, China

[a]email: 024lx024@163.com

**Keywords:** University library; Information Commons

**Abstract.** Information commons is a highly integrated information service mode and a space for people to study and communication which could just meet the needs of modern people. Information commons is very popular abroad, especially in university libraries, but is very rare at home until recently. Information commons could adjust to people's needs for information and study as well as for training information capacity which could promote the libraries' value and social status and promote the better educated urban construction. Thus, the libraries should carry out their own reform in order to improve information commons rapidly.

## Introduction

Recently, the rapid development of information technology and communication technology, the constantly changes of spread and utilization forms of information resources, the gradually raise of information users' levels and the complicated living environment for libraries and other information institutions all make the information service patterns and information commons produce a series of renovations and new things [1-3]. Information commons (IC) is well worth being analyzed and researched and will be discussed in detail here.

## Definition and Development Situation of Information Commons

### Definition

There is no unified definition about information commons in academia yet and there are many kinds of names about it, such as information commons, learning commons, learning and research center, information central, intellectual commons and so on. Besides the multifarious names, their services are same and the purpose of creating them is same as well which is to provide users more convenient and looser learning environment and richer resources [4].

We could research IC in three different ways: content, structure and function and services and features. Seeing from the content, IC is a new information service mode and a novel infrastructure which is adapted to users' new learning and research manner. It could integrate the traditional printed resources and digital resources with computer techniques and other kinds of information services in relative seamless information surroundings to provide one-stop service for users. Seeing from the structure and function, IC is constitutive of both physical space and virtual space with all kinds of techniques and equipment. It gathers intellectual resources and information resources together to provide information services which have made it novel learning and communication space and academic sources space as well. Seeing from the services and features, IC is a new all-around information service platform which could provide "24 x7" information and knowledge service that means all-weather, timeless and boundless service. It has characters of convenience and profession, and focused on technology, cooperation and ability as well.

The aim of IC is to provide users one-stop information service to meet their any kinds of needs for information, and people could enjoy every information service, use every information resource and get every answer just through one platform or window in one district. This one-stop service mode is the spirit of IC and the key to create and use it. IC not only has saved people a large amount of time and energy and provided people more plenty of resources and more convenient learning environment, but also has improved quality and efficiency of service of information organization.

In a word, IC is a new kind of highly integrated information service mode and service space

which is born to meet people's needs, and it is a new kind of learning mode, learning space, exchange mode and exchange space. We could say that IC is borderless and a large concept which has the most extensive cooperation with but not limit to public library, college library, archives, museum, information consultancy, government sector, bookstore, professional website and TV Media. All of these will make the range of IC expand infinitely. The establishment of IC by a library or a city or even a country is to embody and model IC which will not only realize the sharing and communication of information, knowledge, ideas and information service, but also provide e-learning, m-learning and even more open discussion ways. It can be asserted that the establishment of IC will influence people's learning, working and living badly.

### Development Situation

Since the early 90's of last century, IC as a "comprehensive library public service" mode appeared in some euramerican university libraries which brought new vitality to libraries. In the middle of 1990 s, text-based internet began to evolve to graphical user interface (GUI) and world-wide-web (WWW) with hyperlinks which made IC increase to hundreds or even thousands and then a more effective service department. IC mode has constantly changed and improved according to the users' requirements and it now becomes the main way for users to obtain information, technique and digital resources and to visit Information experts. Meanwhile, IC has played a key role in improving people's information quality and information capacity. We could say that in nowadays IC has become a very important part of university libraries and the most popular service mode and service space [5].

It is reported that the world's first IC appeared in university of Iowa in 1992 and at that time its name is information arcade. It was built up by the three of library, office of information technology and the university together using 1192000 US dollars and was expanded in 1994 with a new "information commons".

After more than ten years development, many foreign libraries have built up IC and some other libraries have built up computer rooms with IC thought to perform IC functions instead of total meaning IC [6]. This new kind one-stop learning and research mode is generally well received. In 2005, chairman of IFLA, Doctor Alex Byrne proposed to build up global information commons and hoped that governments around the world and international organizations would guarantee everyone in the world the rights of searching and passing information. To realize global information commons, we need at least enough broadband, newest information communication technology and unlimited and multilingual access interface to ensure people interview and release information without restrictions which needs the investment by governments, international organizations and commercial entities. He brought the purpose of building up global information commons as below:
1)  Providing extensive internet access node;
2)  Providing users their needed information in appropriate format and appropriate language;
3)  Training the reading and writing ability of users;
4)  Supporting health and education;
5)  Improving the status of women;
6)  Providing children learning opportunities and rights of life-long learning;
7)  Promoting reform and the economic development;
8)  Guaranteeing cultural heritage and cultural difference will be inherited and developed;
9)  Training interpersonal respect and understanding.

In our country, the focus on IC began very late and some university libraries in Taiwan and Hongkong have already begun to build IC. In mainland very few university libraries have build IC due to some personnel or expenditure reasons but some libraries have already made some attempts. For example, Tsinghua University has changed some facilities for IC in some reading rooms and School of Visual Arts in Fudan University has built up the first IC in our country.

### Significance of building Information Commons

### Providing One-Stop Comprehensive Service

IC has provided people one-stop comprehensive service which integrated all the resources and

services used to be dispersive together in one room. It has saved people amount time and energies and catered to modern people's needs for information. In IC, if users need to query the library's database or network information resources or to send and receive email or even chat online, there are computers connected to the internet; if users need to query the traditional literature resources, there are common reference books and some professional books and periodicals; if users need to print, scan or copy some resources, there are corresponding devices and networking services. If users have any questions even life issues, they could get help through internet or even face to face from librarians, technical experts and multimedia workers. There are group discussion rooms for users when they are congenial and need a soundproof room to discuss issues; there are power lines and network interfaces for users when they want to use their own laptops in IC; there are IC' network platforms for users when they want to get information resources without leaving home in anytime and anywhere. In a word, this IC's one-stop service is to satisfy people's needs for knowledge information and people could choose their needed information services and resources freely and conveniently.

### Meeting people's needs for learning

In modern society, people are anxious for communication and discussion and through which there come new thoughts and new inspirations. Hence, people need not only quiet and independent learning room but also open and free discussion room. IC could just meet their needs by building a comprehensive exchange and learning room gathering subject and technical specialists, librarians and abundant information resources.

### Promoting social value and social status of library

The rise of internet has shaken the important status of library's information resource base and the timeworn service mode has lost library lots of users. The appearance of IC has rekindled library's hope for survival and made library an indispensable room for users to study together. Some foreign university libraries have become the hottest place since they built up IC. The construction of IC would not only change the library's traditional service mode completely but also attract more users and get more visits which reflect more social value created by libraries. Even more important, IC has created a good opportunity for library's revitalization and stabilized the library's important status as city thesaurus.


## Library and Information Commons

By researching lots of IC cases home and abroad, it can be found that IC has many kinds of different forms such as virtuality and reality combined IC built by library and purely virtual website form, but most of them are library IC. Library owns massive amounts of shareable information, senior librarians who master professional knowledge of library, enthusiastic and patient technicians and the key prerequisite and condition of building IC as well.

However, many of the advantages library gets are not fully played and the amounts of information resources nowadays have reduced circulation and utilization of library. The important social status and specific social identity of library do not allow it to step down from the stage of history, and the library has been very close to the developments of human societies which has influenced all aspects of human societies, such as politics, economies and culture. The vivid character of public benefit and the full-bodied surroundings of books make library an eternal splendid temple that continues human civilization and pursues peaceful development.

Although the library is the optimal place for building up IC, it still has some unsatisfactory aspects which need to be improved at present. The library should carry out reform under its evolutive social functions and carry out professional work in IC mode; the library should concentrate wisdom from all social sectors and integrate resources of all social sectors; the library should break through the space-time restriction and build up learning, resource and communication room to make it centre of information dissemination, life-long education, entertainment, new friend making and academic discussions and then to provide information services as people's needs. All in all, IC will make the library become the optimal place for building knowledge city by its characters of open mode, rich dynamic resources, elegant and personalized surroundings, all kinds of

impeccable service equipment and modern service means.

## References

[1] Xiangming Mu.et al: A survey and empirical study of virtual reference service in academic libraries. The Journal of Academic Librarianship (2011).

[2] Y. Srinivasa Rao, B.K. Choudhury: Networked Services of NIT libraries in India: A study. Library Collections Acquisitions and Technical Services (2010).

[3] X. Liu: The Improvement of Computer Information Retrieval Efficiency. Applied Mechanics and Materials Vols. 651-653 (2014) p. 1984-1987

[4] X. Liu: Study on the Information Commons Construction of the University Library. Applied Mechanics and Materials Vols. 651-653 (2014) p. 2506-2509

[5] Russell BAILEY: Information Commons Services for Learners and Researchers: Evolution in Patron Needs. Digital Resources and Scholarly Publishing.

[6] Allison C, Beam J, Wess L: Implementing an Information Commons in University Library. Journal of Academic Librarianship. 27(2001) p. 432-439.