Student advocates

The key to successful funding for a new building

by Karen L. Horny and Paul Seale

Obtaining funding for a new library building through the state legislative process can be a major challenge for publicly supported universities. At Southwest Missouri State University (SMSU), student advocates were key to our success when our project seemed at an impasse. The enthusiasm and commitment of the SMSU students provides a powerful example of how effective the voice of the constituency can be to generate legislative backing for campus library construction.

Project background

Our project had begun with local recognition that Meyer Library, the present main library building, had reached its capacity for the collec-

Paul Seale and Karen Horny with petition papers.

tions and was woefully undersupplied with electrical connections for computer equipment.

In 1995, the campus began a transformation to fully wired capabilities and the state was providing new funding specifically for

academic library technology, as well as campus networking. At this time, SMSU appointed a planning committee for library expansion and renovation. This committee was composed of the dean and associate dean of Library Services, the heads of Circulation and Acquisitions and Collection Development, the libraries' supervisor of Educational Media, the vice president for Administrative Services, the associate vice president for Information Technology, the faculty member who chaired the University Library Committee, the supervisor of Design and Construction, and student representatives for undergraduates and graduate students. The undergraduate student, Paul Seale, the Student Government Association's Library commissioner, took his communication responsibilities seriously and turned out to be the key person to rally student support when it proved essential to keeping the project moving forward.

The state legislature was initially positive about the project and, in 1995, appropriated

About the authors

Karen L. Horny is dean of Library Services at Southwest Missouri State University, e-mail: klh533f@mail.smsu.edu and Paul Seale, Student Government Association Library commissioner (1995–97) at Southwest Missouri State University, is now senior Web developer at Atlas Communications, e-mail: alienproducts@hotmail.com

planning money to solicit proposals from architectural firms, hire the chosen team, and develop the program and concept design for an addition to and renovation of the existing main library building.

The Library Planning Committee received more than a dozen excellent proposals, most of which teamed a firm nationally recognized for its library design work with a major in-state partner firm.

After presentations by the five finalist teams, the committee selected the proposal submitted by Cannon's St. Louis office in conjunction with Perry Dean Rogers & Partners of Boston.

Over a three-month period, the architects visited campus at two-week intervals, holding approximately two days of working sessions with the planning committee and library personnel, as well as more general information-gathering meetings with the various constituencies each time.

Discussions were documented on large charts that compiled issues and options in column form, correlating the perceived needs, goals, and possible solutions with multicolored linking lines. These charts hung on the walls of the library's employee lounge throughout the intervals between visits for further comments to be added using large adhesive notes.

Diagrams and drawings suggested the variety of traditional, modern, and radical architectural possibilities. Three contrasting preliminary schemes—familiarly termed the "tilted cube," the "Italian village" (with tower), and the "corner cut"—evolved dramatically into a concept plan with elements of each, and a computer-generated design was produced from a site photograph of the current structure. The "program" elements required for the building project were detailed in a spiral binder of nearly 100 pages.

SMSU was now requesting funding for the detailed blueprint design work and the actual construction. Unfortunately, we were competing with the strongly supported need for new prison facilities for the state!

The following notes, recorded by Paul Seale, the undergraduate representative on the Library Planning Committee, describe how we met the challenge to keep our project moving forward.—*Karen L. Horny*

Notes of student petition drive and "lobbying" activity

History

These actions and results accumulated as a result of a number of things that started back in my initial year (fall 1995–spring 1996 semesters) as library commissioner for the Student Government Association (SGA) at SMSU.

As SGA senate representative my freshman year and student representative for both the University Library Committee and the Dean of Library Services Search Committee, I had heard complaints from faculty, staff, and students alike about overcrowded library facilities, and concerns about which direction the university was taking to solve these problems.

Most of these complaints ranged from not finding the available document in the overpacked shelves to not having enough room for studying.

All these concerns were first solidified when both the campus newspaper and area media began reporting that the student sports center was possibly going to be renovated and expanded before Meyer Library. This resulted in a public and university outcry with a student-initiative resolution to put Meyer Library as the university's priority over the basketball facility.

This resolution (which I had the pleasure to author) was passed by the SGA senate overwhelmingly. In the end, the university cleared up the matter by stating the funding for the student sports center expansion would come from a different, private source. This would not interfere with the plans (at this point, potential plans) to renovate Meyer.

Interestingly enough, it was only a couple of weeks after this incident when the university used a committee (which I also was a part of) to select the architects for the library expansion project. During the initial concept phase, the architects were very careful and listened to everyone on campus whether it be librarian, student, or faculty.

Officials break ground for the new library at SMSU.

Motivating students

As stated before, the students already had much motivation for rallying behind the library. In this particular instance, the key was to motivate the students to do something constructive and applicable to the program. In essence, I wanted to take the emotion and motivate it into something constructive. I wanted the students and other interested individuals to be motivated regardless of their political affiliation, meaning bipartisan support for the project rather than finger-pointing at politicians. After taking the opportunities at hand in both SGA and the Residence Housing Association (RHA, the second largest organization on campus), a petition drive was organized to motivate students to focus their energy on advancing the library expansion project.

During these meetings, the media followed the program, specifically when the building concept plan went before the university's Board of Governors for approval.

After this approval, the university began the initial lobbying phase with the Missouri Coordinating Board for Higher Education (CBHE) and brought to campus state representatives and senators from both parties, as well as those running for office. In each of these meetings, held at Meyer Library, I stressed the student need and desire for the expansion of the library. The thrust of the entire argument was simply that this library expansion project would be the lynchpin to any development of the academic structure. Simply put, without it the university could no longer continue to provide the proper education or expand its academic programs the way they needed.

Of course, much of this effort to gain legislative support would still need to compete with other political priorities. In 1996, the popular issue of a need for more prisons suddenly loomed large, taking priority in both the governor's proposed budget and the legislative agenda, dumping many capital projects for education off the list for available funds. As a result, Meyer's expansion was in serious trouble, even with its high priority on the CBHE list. This outraged many people both on and off SMSU's campus. As a result of this upsurge of concern for the expansion project, the petition drive and lobbying effort was forged.

Focusing the students and the message

After establishing the proper foundation by urging students to be constructive in their attempts, I took the next step of organizing the large amounts of momentum, which had been building up for the past few weeks. The goal was to continue to sell the single, focused, upbeat message that the university desperately needed the library expansion to continue with its educational programs. Without the resources provided by the expansion, SMSU would be lagging behind in its educational resources.

The challenge in this process would be in bringing all the differing opinions from the various organizations to this point, starting with SGA. As a result, I focused all the calls I received from individuals and organizations to their SGA representatives, whom I could address directly as their library commissioner. The others I tried to reach and focus through a key RHA representative, Mary Hovorka (who would eventually become the SGA library commissioner when I graduated). This action precipitated into another pair of resolutions, one in each organization, initiating

A preview of the addition and renovation of the Meyer Library at Southwest Missouri State University.

the petition drive. Some 4,000 signatures were collected in two weeks.

The next set of actions we took included a trip to the state capital, Jefferson City, to meet with many state legislators. This event was properly coordinated between the students and the university administration. The university relations representative contacted the state lobbyist and several key officials in scheduling and coordinating the events for a two-day trip. During this trip, the President of the Student Government Association, the RHA Representative, and I delivered the signatures to important legislators during a breakfast, as well as in one-on-one meetings with vital state officials (which included the governor's spokesperson).

The actual impact

During the spring 1997 session, the state legislature added a budget appropriation of $1.25 million to do the detailed construction designs for the Meyer Library expansion. The governor left that appropriation in the legislation he signed into law, even though he needed to remove other capital projects, which would have overcommitted available funds.

While no one but the officials themselves can be certain of how much the student movement actually impacted the process, I do believe, from both observations and statements made by the officials, that our actions did make a difference. I believe that the petition drive showed initiative by the students and it added credibility to the process. Instead of the outlook by the legislature that the university's request was "just another building," the drive established the reality of how the library expansion would help

the education of young individuals attending the university.

I also believe the key to success was the organization, focus, and positive message of the initiative. Instead of taking a hard-line political approach, the supportive efforts made by the students in cooperation with the administrative position were indeed vital.

Equally important was the unified message sent by the students. While there were initially many student voices, all were focused to a single point, centered on supporting the project, not opposing a policy or direction of the governor or legislature. (If the message had read "Libraries NOT prisons," the effect would have been disastrous!)

A combination of all these factors made the entire project work. If any of the above were skewed in a different direction, the goal may not have been accomplished.—*Paul Seale*

Update

During the 1998 state fiscal year, the legislature passed and the governor signed a budget bill that included more than $24 million for the addition and renovation for the Meyer Library at SMSU. After some anxious moments, while all state capital appropriations were suspended until the settlement of a lawsuit over the application of tax cap levels, the funds were released to SMSU in January 1999. On April 29, 1999, the area chapter of the American Institute of Architects announced that the project's architectural design had won their honor award. Thanks to our student advocates, the addition will indeed be built; the groundbreaking ceremony took place on October 12.—*Karen L. Horny* ∎