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## "Increasing Individual Study Options by Restyling a Non- Library Gathering Space"

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# Increasing Individual Study Options by Restyling a Non-Library Gathering Space



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The Zondervan Library building at Taylor University was constructed in 1986, and features a Galleria, or thoroughfare, connecting our primarily residential area of campus to the primarily academic building sector. The entrances to the Library proper as well as to the Ringenberg Archives & Special Collections are located within the Galleria. Hundreds of students pass through the Galleria daily, often multiple times per day, regardless of whether they ever enter the Library proper. One aspect of the Galleria is a classroom-sized open alcove with a wall of windows that feature a serene view of campus. Historically, this space has contained soft seating and end tables that can be easily rearranged into a large circle, small groups, individual units, etc. Throughout the past few years, the Library staff has noticed reduced use of this particular space, although students occasionally use it for group meetings or as a landing place between classes.

With the construction of several new buildings over the past decade, many of which featured informal seating and/or collaborative spaces, usage of and preference for the Galleria alcove has diminished. Although the Library team discussed ideas for revitalizing or renovating the space, no plans came to fruition aside from a recent reupholstering of a few pieces of furniture in an effort to enhance the aesthetic of the space.

As our team reviewed the pandemic-related state and University protocols in place during Summer 2020, and prepared both to re-open the Library and to welcome students back to campus in the Fall, we considered all of the building's spaces and seating areas, including those in the Galleria. Capacity had to be reduced – four person tables became single-user tables, and we stowed many of our chairs and soft seating options within the Library proper in favor of appropriately-spaced individual study carrels. Aware of the dramatically-reduced study and seating situation we were creating in the Library, we looked for ways to transition other seating areas in the

building into study spaces. Thus, the decision was made to convert the soft-seating located in the Galleria alcove into as many appropriately-distanced, single-user study spaces as possible.

In the Galleria alcove, all existing furniture was removed, and ten individual study carrels (with side panels) were placed at an appropriate distance from one another. Two small standing café-height tables were placed in the center of the room as well. This created a space for approximately twelve students to study. This alcove was also designated as the only “Eating Zone” in the Library building, a pandemic-related change that will likely endure for a variety of reasons. The new furniture dramatically changed the aesthetic of the space; instead of a casual hangout area, it became a quiet individual study sanctuary.

Throughout the past six months, the reconfigured space has seen a noticeable increase in usage. Often multiple carrels are in use throughout the day, and the standing tables are used quite frequently as well. The reconfiguration has seen such an increase in users that the Library team is inclined to maintain the individual carrel setup beyond the current pandemic situation, instead of reinstalling the soft seating. This arrangement also offers an after-hours option for continued study, as the Galleria is accessible to students beyond the Library’s open hours.

This example of successful repurposing of space will certainly be a point of consideration as we emerge from the capacity and space restrictions of the pandemic and continually consider how best to meet our students’ needs. †

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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