

“Why Do We Need to Expand the Jones Library? The Library is perfect as is!”

In a perfect world, we wouldn't need any more square footage. We truly wish that re-designing our interior to flow more safely and efficiently would solve our problems. As some people have noted, we have several inefficiently used spaces such as in the atrium and on the top floor. Unfortunately, there isn't enough of that inefficiently-used space to give us what we need.

To fully understand the need, it's best to look at each Library department separately, which is what we did when writing the *Building Program*, which you can find on our website. For example:

Young Adult

1. Over the last several years, young adult literature has grown exponentially in popularity, not only with teens, but also with adult patrons. With its unanticipated growth, the young adult collection was pulled out of the Kids' Room into a quarter of the Atrium. Staff have worked tirelessly to develop the YA collection to into an attractive and highly-circulated library. Our new young adult books, for example, circulate an average of five times in their first six months. With lending periods of three weeks, this means these books are borrowed again almost as soon as they are returned -- that's impressive! We also want to point out, five times is the average; some of these books circulate close to ten times within that six-month period.
2. Our collection needs to be developed further. There is an incredible amount of work that is going in to our young adult nonfiction collection. Staff have needed to find creative ways to sustain the growth of our collection within the extremely limited shelf space dedicated to young adults. Much like a child quickly outgrowing their clothes, our collection cannot be kept within our existing footprint.
3. There are no dedicated computer terminals for young adults (teens aged 12-17). We currently have a mere three laptops secured for teens to use, but these are kept downstairs in our Crafts Room, where there is low to no wireless Internet connectivity. Due to the age of the teens, many of them are not able to use the few computers available in the Kids' Room, and many are not comfortable using the computers in the Adult Reference area. We have been granted funds to supply new laptops for teens to use, however we again wonder where these laptops could be used most effectively, and securely, for teen programs.

4. There is no dedicated space for teens. This is perhaps the biggest challenge staff face. On Friday afternoons, teens flock to the Library. This is a part of the established Amherst town culture. To accommodate for this, we reserve The Woodbury Room downstairs to allow the teens to occupy their time. Staff have worked to offer innovative and engaging programs for this part of the day, and by working with the teens to establish a trusting relationship and reputation, we have seen our attendance grow, again, exponentially -- nearly a 400% increase over a two-year span.
5. In addition to Friday afternoons, we see high numbers of teens on early release days from the schools. The Library is one of the only places in Amherst that teens feel welcome. We are seeing hundreds of teens come to the Library. And in addition to the work Library staff have done with the collection and programs for young adults, Library staff have also established relationships with the schools to “borrow” school staff members and interns to assist in facilitating these teen programs in which we see high numbers of attendees.
6. Teens do not only come to the Library on Fridays and early dismissal days. During these other times, the Woodbury Room is typically in use by our other departments, which leaves very few places teens can spend their afternoons. This time spent at the Library ends up being unstructured, which results in what other community members might consider to be disruptive or “typical” teen behavior. To highlight one space in particular: a downstairs corner of the basement by the front of the building. This space has paint peeling off of its walls, stained and faded carpet and rugs, a broken window that has been patched with masking tape, and exposed pipes. This space is unattractive, uninspiring, and uninviting -- yet teens (and adults) still spend time in this area because there is nowhere else for them to go. This space has no wireless connectivity, and only two electrical outlets. It is not a functional space.
7. The teens of Amherst have a voice. Last week, staff visited the middle school where we asked a group of 7th graders for ten things they’d like to see at The Jones Library. Two of their points: a bigger Library, and a space to call their own. We challenge Amherst residents to speak to these teens in our community, our future generations, to hear precisely what they believe is in their best interest. We need to put them first, for we cannot begin to fathom how a town like Amherst could survive without their support.
8. We are thrilled at the prospect of a Library expansion. Staff are invigorated by the changes this would mean for this department, and energized by the vast potential that bodes for Young Adult Services. Part of the reason staff enjoy working at The Jones Library is because of its positive, prestigious reputation as one of the best public libraries in Western Massachusetts. There has been a tremendous amount of love and effort poured into our Young Adult Services department and we know that this expansion will set The Jones Library up for an even brighter reputation as a community that believes in, supports, and empowers their youth -- that is a reputation worth perpetuating, and one that we will continue to strive for.