Envisioning our Future and Living It: How We're Working at Charles[1]—Findings and Recommendations

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Introduction

Context for the Research

Temple University Libraries is participating in an assessment effort initiated by the Association of Research Libraries exploring how library spaces facilitate innovative research, creative thinking and problem solving. Here at Temple, we focused our research on how changes in library space impact the work of staff as individuals, when working with colleagues, and in their work with users.

We had a unique opportunity to explore these questions when we opened the new Charles Library in August 2019. We asked staff members, in one-on-one semi-structured interviews, how they envisioned their work changing upon moving to more open office spaces, as well as a very different environment for users' access to services, collections and technology. We conducted a second set of interviews after our move to the new space. We are positioned now to consider how our expectations, in terms of opportunities and challenges, played out and how those differences might inform decisions about space going forward.

- How is the space making an impact on how staff work?
- What are the opportunities in the new spaces?
- What are the challenges?
- What are the ways in which staff are challenged in handing these transitions?
- What are the ways staff feel supported in making these transitions?

The second series of interviews were timed for six months, or one semester, after we moved to Charles. The timing provided participants with some perspective on their work after the move, although it was recognized that changes were still happening in the spaces. Just two weeks after our last interview, the building closed down entirely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings presented here are a "snapshot" of what staff experienced at a very different time. While many of the recommendations will need to be put on hold, many others should remain relevant as we experience even more tumultuous changes in our library organization.

Method

In the first phase of the project, *Envisioning Our Future*, we interviewed 29 staff in the spring and early summer August 2019 to discuss the current spaces at Paley Library for individual, group and public-facing work. We asked about opportunities, as well as challenges, anticipated in the new Charles spaces. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for themes. The final report was shared and discussed in open forums for all staff.

Phase II of the project began with an invitation, again to all staff, and resulted in the recruitment of 29 participants. Sixteen staff members participated in both phases of the project. Interviews were conducted in February and March of 2020, about six months after the Charles opened on August 24, 2019.

As in Phase I, the participation in the project was wide, with all levels of the organization represented: bibliographic assistants, librarians, professional staff, department heads and team leaders, and members of

the Library Leadership Council. They represent an equally wide swath of roles and departments, including:

- Access Services
- Administration
- Acquisitions
- Communications
- Library Technology and Development
- Learning and Research Services
- Metadata and Digitization Services
- Press
- Scholars Studio
- Special Collections Research Center

We limited our interviews to staff who experienced working both at Paley and at Charles (interviewing 29 out of approximately 106 with desks at Charles). The average period of time at Paley was 5.25 years, although tenure ranged from one year to nineteen years.

Interviews were audio-recorded by the interviewer, and the recordings were sent to an outside firm for transcription. After stripping the transcripts of personal names, the individual transcripts were shared with participants for accuracy. The transcripts were then reviewed by at least two members of the research team to identify themes, Quotes were then selected to illustrate those themes. With the exception of outsourcing the transcription process, and a research team of smaller size, our method in Phase I and Phase II were the same.

Organization of the Report

This report is organized into sections, loosely based on the structure of the interview protocol (see Appendix I). We asked participants to compare their work spaces at Paley to those at Charles—they described spaces for individual work, spaces for collaborative work, and when applicable, spaces for work with users. We asked about opportunities in the new spaces as well as challenges. We concluded each interview by asking about their feelings related to the move and what they perceived to be most useful and supportive during the transition.

When applicable, we briefly describe findings from the first phase of the project and compare those findings to what was described in Phase II. With the COVID-19 pandemic and the closing of the library, this experience at Charles now provides a snapshot, even "time capsule," as many of those findings describe a work environment no longer accessible to us.

Our report concludes with recommendations for next steps, divided as issues of **Physical Work Space** and of **Communication, Dialog and Transparency**. While the recommendations for Physical Work Space must be put aside for now, the recommendations for communication have more relevance than ever.

Spaces for Individual Work

When we spoke to staff prior to the move, just about everyone was looking forward to the natural light available in the new library. Paley was described as dark, dingy and dirty.

Light, Air and Space

In contrast to Paley, the individual work spaces at Charles are filled with natural light, improving staff mood and creating for some, an inspiring feeling. As was anticipated prior to the move, many staff are proud of the space—proud to be a destination for faculty and students on campus. The investment in the Charles is an affirmation from the university that the libraries and its services are valued.

The move provided an opportunity to start with a clean slate and to leave behind materials and equipment no longer useful in day to day work. Staff now feel that our meeting spaces are attractive for visitors, lending an air of professionalism to interactions that staff have with one another and with students.

For all the pleasure of the natural light, the control of blinds and the, at times, overly abundant light can be problematic. Particularly at the beginning of our move, staff employed umbrellas at their desk in order to see their computer monitors. Staff also spoke of blinds in work areas being left closed for most of the day, providing them with little access to the natural light.

Temperature and humidity levels came up quite a bit, as well as the functioning of the automated light system. Flexibility in the orientation of seating and computer at one's desk can be limited by glare from windows, as well as how carrels are positioned relative to building columns. In spite of these constraints, many have personalized their space with plants, small pictures and favorite objects.

In most cases, the individual work space sizes are adequate to the work being done. However, there is no designated space for work that requires spreading out of print materials. There is a sensitivity about keeping to one's own territory, to not allow one's belongings to encroach into a neighbor's area. While most functional departments are co-located, some departments are spread out over two floors, creating challenges for workflow of physical materials, as well as supervision of students.

> **Interview Quotes:**
>
> I do love the daylight. I love the brightness of it and the whole space overall. I would say that ambiance, if you want to call it that, is good.[2]
>
> I think it puts people in a good mood when the room is filled with light and it's nice and clean and stuff.[3]
>
> [There is a] certain amount of professionalism that just sort of clicks with people in these rooms.[4]
>
> There's something about the aesthetics of the environment that are much more serious, you know. I feel a little more rejuvenated from moving to this space.[5]
>
> It's just that you're always clearly conscious of the fact that your stuff may been encroaching on your colleagues' stuff[6]
>
> I can look around, I can get up and walk around, and it's just, there's a feeling that I'm not alone.[7]

Togetherness and Distraction

The anticipation of how the open office space would support individual work varied to a great extent by the individual's situation at Paley. Staff members in private offices or smaller shared offices at Paley anticipated noise as a distraction to their work in the open work environments. There were concerns about the visibility of confidential information on computer screens and more frequent interruptions from

colleagues. Many staff prepared for the move by purchasing noise-cancelling headphones. And while the private office was considered to be a good space for individual work, it was often described as isolating. Staff working in more open spaces at Paley did not foresee significant changes to how they would do individual work.

At Charles, staff don't describe feeling isolated and many enjoy a greater sense of community with colleagues in the shared space, of not feeling alone. Some enjoy the convenience of scanning the space for locating a colleague to talk with.

A few participants said their work space felt less trafficked than at Paley, particularly those whose desks had been situated in the center of a busy work area. While some of them saw benefits to the open office environment as less isolating and more conducive to group work, more spoke to the noise and distractions of the space for their individual work. White noise, the kind of steady hum of a mechanical system, is more easily tuned out than a nearby conversation between colleagues. Of particular annoyance are telephone calls that are both difficult for neighbors to tune out and awkward for the call recipient to carry on freely without disturbing others in the open workspace. This is particularly difficult when accepting calls is part of one's work duties.

Several participants felt that staff parties near their workspaces were "invasive" and interfered with their ability to focus on individual work. Many staff have taken to wearing headphones when at their workstation. With or without the use of headphones, some are able to just "tune out" distractions to create a personal zone for their concentrated work. Distractions may also be visual and different types were described: the movement within one's sightlines, behind one's workstation, or the traffic to and from nearby meeting rooms.

To a great degree, the level of noise and distraction was based on the size of the work area and number of staff in that area, as well as the variety of work conducted in the space. Some staff appreciated the opportunity to sit with, and meet, other staff outside their department. Others felt they'd prefer to work side-by-side with colleagues doing similar work.

The shared work space has had a significant effect on how staff communicate with one another at their desks. In addition to the use of headphones for aural control, the headphones may signal to others, "I am not to be interrupted now." For those staff who used Slack, and this is by no means all, there is a sense that use has increased. Slack may be used to check on a colleague's availability for an extended in-person conversation. Several use Slack or email in order to keep others from overhearing private communication. Overall, there is a self-imposed unwillingness to "disturb the peace" by talking loudly. In spite of this behavioral norm, some participants reported frequent, often unwelcome interruptions to their focused work.

For many staff, there are options for doing individual work away from their regular desk. This can be working from home, working elsewhere in the building, or in another building on campus. Not all have this option, as their work requires physical materials or specialized software only available on a desktop computer. Several also expressed a concern about the use of space designed for other purposes, like the staff lounge or public spaces, for their individual or group work.

> **Interview Quotes:**
>
> So being in your own office there is a feeling of isolation. So I feel like here it's a nice feeling of more togetherness and working in a group setting.[8]

I really can hardly think of anything more challenging than not feeling that I have an assigned place where I know I can work and be productive.[9]

I've been surprised that in the new space the visual distractions actually bother me a lot more than the noise distractions… It's challenging to me just mentally to feel so seen by other people.[10]

So I think a lot of people are relying on Slack and email to communicate with each other and sort of respecting each others' non-office office space and not trying to be too disruptive.[11]

I find myself seeking other spaces more frequently, whether it be one of the breakout rooms or the staff lounge or even going to another part of the building.[12]

And I think that it's morally conflicting to take up and occupy limited student space as a staff person when I have a full desk that is supposed to be super conducive to this collaborative work environment, but then administration is telling me, oh, well, just leave your desk and go take up student space that we're recognizing is not sufficient.[13]

Privacy

In an open environment, one is always visible. Many staff described feeling self-conscious at times about this exposure, particularly the open display of work on their computer screen. It can be particularly disconcerting to have colleagues moving in the aisles behind, and many staff sit in highly trafficked areas. One participant described slouching in their chair to maintain a sense of privacy as well as to avoid the visual distractions of other staff moving through the space. Another was discomforted by a sense that colleagues were checking up on them, or inserting themselves into projects when uninvited. Staff may feel constrained in physical movements. Stretching or resting one's head on the desk is a behavior comfortably done in a private office, but less so when colleagues may be looking on. Even in meeting rooms, most seats are within view through glass doors. Staff soon became aware that meeting rooms were not soundproof, and many meeting rooms now have small white noise machines. While some staff are able to organize their work activity so that confidential work or projects requiring sustained concentration are conducted from home that is not an option for all.[14]

As noted above, staff feel severely constrained when using the telephone, a special challenge for those whose job entails handling requests (and complaints) from patrons by telephone. A few conference rooms do have telephones, and staff frequently use a breakout room for private calls on a personal cell phone. But for those who prefer not to use a personal phone for business, the lack of options for arranging a call or receiving an unexpected call requiring privacy is problematic. Of all the noises noted in the staff work areas, telephone calls were most disruptive to others and most troublesome for conducting private business.

Interview Quotes:

Everybody is very respectful of other people's privacy in that just because you're there doesn't mean they're going to, you know, stop and say something and interrupt you.[15]

I feel like I'm in a fishbowl sometimes.[16]

It's harder to be a human being with a body in this space.[17]

[It's] extremely difficult to figure out how to make those calls with no privacy. And I think that that quality of life stuff is important.[18]

Establishing Norms for Sharing Space

Once at Charles, many staff began establishing informal norms for behavior in their work areas. But interpersonal dynamics are also at play. In the open office environment, where no one has an office and all staff have the same dimensional footprint in their cubicle, a rank of preferred and lesser locations has emerged such as proximity to the windows, the direction one faces, having an end spot versus a middle, and staff are not unaware of who sits where. Closeness to the windows is considered a signifier of status by some. While some areas have developed norms for how best to control the light, for others there was some friction here. It came up several times: Who gets to control whether the blinds are up or down? Is it okay to move into someone else's personal desk area to adjust the shades, or should it be assumed that the control belongs to the staff person by the window? While one interviewee worried their concern seemed a petty issue, many staff referenced this perceived ability to control, or influence, the light.

There is a certain protectiveness of personal work space, as well as a respectfulness of not encroaching on others' space. This sense of personal space extends beyond the surface area, resulting in a reluctance of some staff to enter a colleague's (vacant) work area to adjust the blinds. While these cited examples may be anomalies, they reflect the greater challenge of negotiating norms within a large space accommodating staff with different work styles.

Some describe a changing pattern of communication with supervisors. The open environment can make it less comfortable, or convenient, to ask quick questions of their supervisors. Alternatively, supervisors, on occasion, need to set parameters for interruptions, finding that increased proximity to colleagues leads to an unwelcome frequency of questions.

> **Interview Quotes:**
>
> We've come up with a new set of cultural norms to do our work in, and it's working.[19]
>
> When we moved in, those challenges, the state it was in, the expectation of us being in here in that state and dealing with those things was a challenge for myself and others—in addition, on top of us trying to figure out our working dynamics in the new spaces. So I think that first couple months, I felt—as I described it, I was very high anxiety.[20]
>
> And people who were not near the windows were making it very clear that they were unhappy when the shades were down, because the natural light is the only good thing about this building. So don't be selfish.[21]
>
> Is it weird to then go over there and pull them up when I'm not right next to the window? Yeah, just a thought about the communal practices about window shades as a minor point, that's just different now about being a large open office space.[22]

Spaces for Connecting

Meeting Rooms

When we spoke with staff at Paley, most were looking forward to the increased number and more robustly equipped spaces for meeting with colleagues. In addition to these benefits, the breakout rooms would be proximate to departmental work areas, making them more convenient for use. It was anticipated that the requirement for scheduling rooms for all meetings, including consultations with faculty and students, would be an unwelcome overhead. This was of special concern for those staff coming from

private offices. Not having a designated office would also mean potential difficulty that users would have in finding them.

At Charles the meeting rooms have been a success overall. Staff enjoy a greater variety of spaces, with, in time, more robust and reliably operational technology. Meeting rooms that accommodate remote meeting participants are increasingly essential for group meetings of any size.

While it was widely recognized that Charles offers a greater number of meeting rooms with better variety and technical capacity, there is a lack of clarity as to who is able to schedule rooms, which rooms are schedulable and which are not, and who makes those decisions. There is uncertainty about how rooms can be used, including whether having lunch in a room was allowed, or using a room for a private phone call. This is an area where a more widely shared resource is visible and potentially available to all, but processes for developing norms, and policies for managing that resource, are not clear to all staff.

There is a definite overhead for scheduling of rooms. From making a phone call to scheduling a research consultation, the additional time and cognitive load adds to overall workload for those working with others. The simple one-on-one conversations now requires consideration: Will this conversation be short or sustained? Will others be disturbed? Is it private or not? Is a room available for having the conversation elsewhere?

Several noted a difference in the availability of breakout rooms based on staff area. For instance, the administration suite has a high number of meeting rooms, and scheduling one is easy for those in the suite. In other work areas, the rooms are not as readily available. Finally, the technology available in the different rooms is not the same, creating some additional confusion and added burden for scheduling appropriately. Again, many interviews were conducted while technology was continuing to develop in the staff meeting rooms.

> **Interview Quotes:**
>
> It's almost always pretty easy to find a room to go work in with colleagues.[23]
>
> I can just eyeball whether people are available. And that's actually more efficient.[24]
>
> Just the efficiency of booking spaces has been the biggest challenge... every space seems to have its different issues and learning about how to book the spaces has been the biggest issue.[25]
>
> Being able to book a room according to what your technological needs are has been tricky, and there's no place to really figure out, a central place, to figure out what room has what in terms of capacity or technology. So, that's been a challenge.[26]
>
> You expect to spend five minutes jostling with the technology at the beginning of a meeting.[27]

Collaboration and the Serendipitous Meetup

Prior to the move to Charles, staff had varying perceptions of how the open office design would result in increased collaboration and connections between staff, particularly across departments. While this benefit was stated as a principle of the planned design, not all expected this would happen. The wariness of creating noise and distraction would prohibit new collaborations based solely on proximity. Many staff did look forward to an increased possibility of serendipitous meet ups—coffee with a colleague or a

chance meeting on the staircase. They also hoped that the increased visibility of services like the Scholars Studio would result in a greater awareness of colleagues' work.

The open office environment at Charles has not yet contributed directly to collaboration among staff. In terms of communication and interpersonal dynamics, it has actually had the opposite effect. While some staff do report interactions with different colleagues due to different seating arrangements than at Paley, this has not resulted in new project collaborations described by participants. As noted above, there is a respect for keeping conversations to a minimum in order to not disturb others. There is also a hesitancy about brainstorming to generate new ideas in a public area, where those ideas, not ready for "public consumption," may be overheard.

The increased visibility of services (Special Collections, Scholars Studio) does not seem to have resulted in more awareness by staff. These services and staff are still physically separate from other staff areas.

While the transition to a more open working environment has not always led to more in-person work-related interaction, several noted that the staff lounge has become livelier. Not only is it light, but the shared refrigerator means that staff from a wider range of departments interact there.

> **Interview Quotes:**
>
> I think the one thing that I think I might've said, "Let's do differently," in the planning of the office space is having people that work together sit next to each other.[28]
>
> I don't love the staff space. I don't think it offers the collaboration that it was promoted to do, you know?[29]
>
> You'd think with the open office space, everybody's together, that would increase a sort of intimacy or frequency of communication between people. But it's actually the opposite, because it negates people's freedom to choose to interact with other people.[30]
>
> I see more people using the lunchroom, and there is an example where the visibility is a good thing, I think, because you can see who's there.[31]

Spaces for Working with Users

Prior to the move to Charles, Paley staff were looking forward to the increased visibility of several key spaces for users. Formerly located on the lower level of Paley, the Charles Events Space, the Special Collections Research Center, and the Scholars Studio are far more visible at Charles. In addition to a more accessible location, instruction spaces would be equipped with the latest technology. Library staff who teach were excited about the opportunities for more pedagogical options in the instruction spaces with flexible room arrangements. In addition, staff welcomed a single service desk prominently located on the first floor of the building.

In spite of the increased visibility, there were concerns expressed about signage. Alongside that worry, was the expectation that the spaces would be in too much demand, more than could be accommodated. Some staff were worried also about the radically different approach to collections access. Would the ASRS (Automated Storage and Retrieval System) even work? With no private offices assigned to librarians, would students and faculty be able to find them?

Now that staff have moved to Charles, these spaces are used heavily in our work with users. Most used, according to our interviews, are instruction spaces, consultation rooms, the One Stop Assistance desk, and the referral rooms nearby. The library's events and exhibits spaces were cited as well. While staff are

excited and proud of the increased visibility of many spaces for users at the library, they were also frustrated by the lack of "readiness" of spaces, the problems of noise, the activity of contractors in the work spaces, and inadequate technology in user spaces. These issues were occurring just as the building was getting extensive public attention, intensifying the need to present a positive front to the community. The reality of what a "library for the 21st century" would feel and work like for both users and staff became a concrete, and oftentimes challenging, reality.

Visibility

The visibility of the events space and Special Collections Research Center are assets, as is the attractiveness of the Charles grand lobby space, where students like to take selfies. Likewise, instruction spaces are more visible to students. The instruction spaces and study rooms are bright and cheery. The variety and increased number of instruction spaces and consultation rooms were frequently mentioned as positives when working with users. For many, the consultation rooms lend an air of "professionalism" to an interaction. One librarian felt it was easier to "create a connection" with students in the new instruction space. And because the Charles has become a desired destination, more faculty are requesting instruction sessions in the library's classrooms.

Prior to the move to Charles, librarians worried that students would miss knowing their subject specialist could be located in a private office. Although it initially caused some confusion about where to meet up, the presence of "reception" for librarians meeting with students is now seen as a positive. Librarians have also observed that students are learning they can meet with staff in multiple places and librarians can be mobile too.

In the first semester, however, the reality of working in the user-centered spaces at Charles was disappointing and frustrating. The spaces on the 1st floor received the harshest criticism. The One Stop Assistance desk was ill-equipped with technology, the size problematic for both internal interactions, as well as staff to patron interactions. The location of the desk under the stairs resulted in no clear sightline from the main entrance of the library. The referral rooms to the side of the One Stop were plagued by HVAC noise for much of the first semester. Staff described these as noisy, cramped, and awkwardly set up for interactions between a staff member and student.

> **Interview Quotes:**
>
> It's kind of psychologically oppressive to continually inhabit the shadows under the stairs. You have this concrete shaft, basically, hovering over your forehead the entire time you're standing there, and it's bound to weigh on you in a subconscious way. And it's almost like they didn't—like they want you hidden.[32]
>
> So I think it's been nice to be in a beautiful space, but the work that we want to do to serve patrons has been harder. And I feel like we're never done with training, either with ourselves or with our students. Because we're always trying to compensate for the way the desk was built.[33]
>
> It's kind of shocking that there's still that sound of the jet about to take off right outside of the consultation room.[34]

Staff as Frustrated Ambassadors

The Charles did open on schedule and in time for the beginning of classes in the fall of 2019. This was recognized as a significant (and necessary) accomplishment. This meant that staff had little time to prepare for the services they were expected to provide. In fact, many staff members had not been in the

space prior to the actual move to their new workspaces, although visuals were provided on a regular basis. For supervisors managing the change, supporting staff through these changes was difficult.

Public service desks had little technology, construction was still underway, and the browsing collection, in fact the entire fourth floor, was off limits to patrons. For staff on the "front lines" the situation was incredibly stressful. Their excitement was accompanied by frustration, particularly as they strove to address user needs.

When instruction began in August, the instruction rooms were not fully equipped with the planned technology, nor was the furniture configured as expected. Moreover, the seats did not accommodate the size of classes that are typically taught in those spaces. The anticipation of the spaces and their potential, the desire by faculty to use those spaces, and the unpredictability of what would be working all contributed to increased stress for staff conducting instruction in these spaces. While much of the technology problems were resolved by the end of the semester, the frustration and sometimes anger were not forgotten.

Many staff felt a disconnect between the public messaging about the building and their personal experience with it: the burnout, the frustration, the perceived lack of centralized information about the building and planned improvements. They felt a lack of consistent and timely information sharing. For many, pride in the building was tempered with an acute awareness of the buildings' failings in some important areas, particularly when working in spaces with users.

Interview Quotes:

There is a significant amount of burnout that I experienced after the first couple of months indeed in this space and I think, well, I can only really speak for myself, I have observed that in a lot of other people in terms of just feeling really exhausted from the process.[35]

The opening days were just painful. They were, like, horrifying, all of the stuff we didn't know and then questions we couldn't answer versus the questions we were getting, you know. It was really tough. It was really tough.[36]

Obviously, the university has been putting a lot of work into promoting it, but there's just so much that still isn't really working in terms of services, technologies, the use of the space for users, that I just find really challenging in a lot of ways.[37]

You can't really have widespread acknowledgement that this unbelievably expensive building is not really what we had hoped for, right. I get that. You can't do that. But that's how a lot of us feel, I think.[38]

I want to keep that diplomatic presentation of the building, but knowing that since some people are finding it not providing what they need—you know? So, that's awkward at times.[39]

I work with students and faculty a lot, and I'm often their only point of contact at the library. And I've gotten a lot of negative feedback, particularly from students about things that aren't in my control or that I don't understand that have been communicated to me, and that's been a challenge.[40]

One of the most challenging parts about that experience and through my ongoing feelings about Charles is my sense that there is a disconnect between those individual experiences of the space and the larger conversation happening about this building.[41]

It's really made me think about what's my responsibility to represent this building to other people, or… for my own sake that I just don't want it to get back to the administration that I was complaining about the building.[42]

What is a Library?

Paley, for all its dirt and dinginess, was a library like other libraries. With traditional open stacks, many library carrels supporting quiet study, and a public service desk on the main traffic thoroughfare, the library felt familiar and comfortable for staff who worked there. Even the Brutalist architecture was mentioned in a fond, if nostalgic way.

Once at Charles, many of the staff we spoke with had very positive feelings about the new spaces. The openness, the light, the clean and fresh spaces seemed a stark contrast to the old Paley building. Staff expressed optimism about the space and its potential for transforming the library's place on campus.

In addition, Charles has prompted many staff to reconsider their ideas and expectations for what an academic research library should be. They acknowledged the inspirational qualities of the architectural space with light and dramatic lines and expressed the excitement and pride of working in this space.

At the same time, some felt frustrated by their lack of preparedness in addressing questions from users: "Where are all the books? Where are the computers? Where can I go to study in private?" There was a degree of confusion about the actual design of the spaces, the choices made for furniture, the data driving the decision-making for space use. Is the purpose of the library to bring people and the organization together? Is this changing our understanding of what a library is?

Interview Quotes:

I come in here every day, and I think it's really cool that I work here.[43]

It is just pretty exciting to be in a brand new building and a building that's much more aesthetically pleasing than the kind of drab, yucky interiors of Paley.[44]

I do know a lot of our students complain about the lack of space to sit and a lot of lack of space to study in private quietly… I do think there should be more consideration for different types of studying. It is a library.[45]

There's just a lack of transparency, and why was this furniture chosen? Who chose it? Why did they choose it? What research did they do first? [46]

The way that we've actually manifested things and occupied this building have been extremely limiting in the way that you can actually use the space, whether it's seating or actual private space for study or something that's actually useful for what people consider a library to be.[47]

On Change and Communication

With change comes the need for communication. At Paley, we asked staff about what worked best for them as they prepared for the move to Charles. Concrete things were mentioned, like the Ask Me

Anything (AMA) sessions on Slack. But prior to the move, staff did not all have a clear sense of the data gathering and decision-making process behind the library's planning and design. As an organization, we did not talk together about the vision of the new library and how it would play out at Charles.

The Phase I, *Envisioning Our Future* report stated: "many staff feel a lack of opportunity to be involved in the planning, design and decisions made related to implementing the building program."

That report also noted: "For some, the communication about the visual aspects/physical aspects of the move were useful, but for others, more substantial discussions of how the spaces are intended to operate would be more useful."

These points, in retrospect, seem relevant to our findings in the Phase II interviews. Perhaps there is a certain self-fulfilling prophecy. But with an average staff tenure at Paley of about 5 years, many staff were not involved in the early planning phases of the building. This process included meetings with staff and sharing of a design brief. While decision-making as plans developed involved many campus and external stakeholders, as well as budgetary constraints, the library's planning group was small relative to the number of staff working at Charles.

Operational Communications

We asked staff about support once the move to Charles was complete, and communication was one of the most persistent themes. To some it seemed that more attention was paid to staff communication prior to the move than afterwards. The lack of consistent information about the status of repairs made staff feel their work was not important. Several staff spoke about the slow completion of repairs to address the noise outside consultation rooms. This translated to staff as low priority, that the work conducted in these spaces was not valued.

Many interviewees expressed feeling uncomfortable, almost disloyal to the organization, in their feelings of frustration. There were a few, but not many, contexts for talking freely about staff experiences. It was perceived by staff that their questions to "library administration" were annoying, that questions would be "met with an eye roll."

> **Interview Quotes:**
>
> However, all of the different maintenance, repair, tech work, setup, stuff like that last semester, it just felt like every day I would come into work, and I'd have no idea what the state of the building was going to be, how I was going to get from the entrance to my office, you know, the temperature, the lighting, the kinds of issues that the students would have with the space that they would report. All of that upheaval felt pretty stressful.[48]
>
> So I feel like that kind of communication has been sort of just a weakness, both—I feel it was insufficient during the move, and then after we got here, it just sort of got worse.[49]
>
> It feels like gaslighting to me to receive emails about how important and how impressive this building is when my everyday reality is that the spaces I work in don't work well for what I need to do, aren't ready, and don't have a timeline for being ready.[50]

Empathy and Appreciation

We interviewed staff at a time that was recognized by us and by participants as a transitional period. This timing was intentional: to provide some time for experience in the new space, but to also capture the

experience of transition and change. Participants recognized that change is difficult and staff morale was impacted.

Most staff recognized that the space is a work in progress, that resources and technology need to go towards user-centered spaces first—study rooms, for instance. And yet, many staff expressed a frustration that their concerns about how the space was working for them were met with a lack of regard. In more than one case this was perceived to be a lack of interest and appreciation in how the work gets done, a lack of empathy for what staff do on a day-to-day basis and the specialized needs for the spaces they work in.

Interview Quotes:

I think it takes a couple of years to really create a new library... I'm starting to feel good about the building. After three, four months I'm starting to feel like this is where we are. This is our future.[51]

I feel confident that we'll have the technology at some point. It's just frustrating that it's taken as long as it has and it's not been as smooth as it could be.[52]

I do think like morale seems to be really low right now throughout the organization. I think some of it is just like you can only take on so many new things at once, and I think we've all been like pushed to the limit with all of this newness.[53]

So I haven't felt that positive about the move at all and I felt that it was a deeply covert sort of operation that was not really keeping any of the staff people who are doing work on the ground at lower levels—was not keeping them in the fold at all. And whenever issues are raised it seems like we are more of a burden bringing up issues to administration's attention instead of being, like, oh, thank you for pointing that out.[54]

There were so many opportunities at places that we could be excited about our environment and that could help staff morale have really not been—the opportunities have been lost because of the issues with the building itself or just the lack of communication or empathy from the top and that's disappointing.[55]

Supporting Staff through Change

Staff told us that they often found the most useful, readily available support from colleagues, particularly those in their physical work area. It is there that the mysteries of the automatic light system are laughed about, or the complaints about construction noise are vented. In general, staff felt more support from their peers than what interviewees refer to as "library administration." Participants spoke about the AMA and the Continuing Education Committee-sponsored sessions related to stress relief. These kinds of peer-to-peer events were cited frequently as useful before the move as well. The open meetings to discuss workplace norms, as well as these interviews, were also mentioned as providing staff an opportunity to give voice to both the positive and more difficult aspects of the move and working at Charles.

Interview Quotes:

The staff did a really good job of continuing to advocate for things that needed to happen for this space to be usable.[56]

It's actually been helpful that we've had some kind of sessions where we've aired our complaints because then it feels like there's more of a comradery, even if it's negatively balanced about the bad things.[57]

And talking to [colleagues] about their experiences with the transition has helped me just feel like I'm not imagining that I'm having a hard time.[58]

If you want people to be able to find the support they need, they have to be able to voice unpleasant emotions about things.[59]

Change is hard. I feel like in a couple of years it's going to be fine. I think sometimes it's a little demoralizing that people either aren't seeing the potential of the building. They're expecting everything to be perfect right away.[60]

Recommendations for Further Exploration

Physical Work Spaces

Findings:
Many of the concerns expressed during this project related to the physical spaces in which we work. These issues of space related to the configuration of desks, articulation of policies and procedures, use of telephones, and location of staff seating in relation to each other. We recognize that to a large extent, these will not have relevance for consideration for action for some time due to the COVID-19 pandemic, new policies for remote work, and budgetary constraints.

Recommendations:
- How do we best create clarity around meeting room access and scheduling policies? Is this an area for more input from staff in the various work areas?
- Is the meeting room scheduling system working and how might we adjust so that it works better. Do we have the right balance of rooms that are reservable and open, and the best mix of rooms in each of the work areas?
- Is there potential for changes to seating assignments?
- Is there potential for re-positioning of desks?
- What are our options for increasing the availability of telephones? For instance, might we reduce the number of desk phones and increase the number in breakout rooms?
- How do we establish a process for ongoing discussions of norms by staff work area?

Providing for Communication, Transparency and Dialog

Findings:
As many staff readily agreed, change is difficult and stressful. It was hard to adjust to different work spaces and simultaneously provide our users and community with the many virtual and physical services they demanded at the start of the semester. Added to that high demand were the ongoing infrastructure inconveniences and inadequacies. Understanding, empathy and appreciation for the work that staff do at all levels of the organization cannot be underestimated. As we have learned less than a year after the move, the conditions of work are volatile and require clear communication, dialog and trust—whether we are moving to a new building or enduring the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recommendations:
- Recognizing that staff in all areas of the library need ready access to authoritative information about library policies and procedures, develop systematic mechanisms for regular communication to all staff in a central, easily accessible location.

- When at all possible, make more transparent and communicate about decision-making processes particularly as they affect the spaces for staff work.
- Consider sharing minutes from meetings whenever possible.
- Establish regular opportunities for staff to discuss norms for shared workplace behaviors.
- Develop a series of facilitated discussions to talk about issues raised in this report.
- Provide opportunities for staff to engage in assessment activities related to building use that may be used in recommending changes.

Concluding Remarks

There is wide acknowledgement that the Charles represents a huge effort towards imagining, designing and building a library for the 21st century. It is an inspiring, forward-looking space for our users, our community, and the pride of the University. The Charles also continues to be a work in progress. The findings here help to surface how the library and press staff anticipated the changes, and how they experience the space for the wide variety of work they do. We identify the areas that provide opportunity and present challenges, and attempt to articulate how we can best amplify those opportunities while addressing the challenges in positive, collaborative ways.

COVID-19 Postscript

The Charles closed on March 20, 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While most staff are now working remotely, and many will be doing so through the fall of 2020, others returned to work at the library when the building re-opened on August 3, 2020. All staff are working in spaces that look and operate quite differently than before COVID-19, and work routines are impacted as well. We expect to work in shifts, with just a few in the library building at any time. Meetings with colleagues will probably always entail a mix of in-person and virtual connection. How we work with users will be quite different, from communication through Plexiglass shields to all virtual reference services.

While we are not working in the same physical spaces, we continue to manage the opportunities and challenges of working as individuals, with our colleagues and with users. It is ironic that just a few months ago we expressed concerns about a noisy colleague nearby, and now that noise may be a crying baby, a barking dog, or construction outside our city windows. For those of us who wished for more freedom to work from home, we've received that in spades.

In spite of these changed conditions, we have much to pay attention to in this report, particularly issues of communication, transparency and trust. To continue developing as a strong organization, building our toolbox in these areas will serve us now and into our future.

> **Interview Quotes:**
>
> After three, four months I'm starting to feel like this is where we are. This is our future.[61]
>
> You come into work, and you just feel good. It's inspiring.[62]

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Acknowledgements

Research Team

Phase I of Project:

Phase II of Project:

Endnotes

[1] Pre-COVID-19
[2] Interview #15
[3] Interview #14
[4] Interview #16
[5] Interview #22
[6] Interview #28
[7] Interview #3
[8] Interview #5
[9] Interview #27
[10] Interview #11
[11] Interview #9
[12] Interview #21
[13] Interview #19
[14] Of course, this situation is changed due to COVID-19, as noted in postscript.
[15] Interview #24
[16] Interview #10
[17] Interview #6
[18] Interview #18
[19] Interview #22
[20] Interview #20
[21] Interview #4
[22] Interview #7
[23] Interview #2
[24] Interview #3
[25] Interview #28
[26] Interview #22
[27] Interview #29
[28] Interview #5
[29] Interview #15
[30] Interview #25
[31] Interview #1
[32] Interview #25
[33] Interview #26
[34] Interview #24
[35] Interview #17
[36] Interview #24
[37] Interview #21
[38] Interview #7
[39] Interview #15
[40] Interview #13
[41] Interview #21
[42] Interview #8
[43] Interview #10
[44] Interview #12
[45] Interview #17
[46] Interview #29
[47] Interview #19
[48] Interview #13
[49] Interview #4

[50] Interview #6
[51] Interview #3
[52] Interview #21
[53] Interview #2
[54] Interview #19
[55] Interview #28
[56] Interview #13
[57] Interview #12
[58] Interview #26
[59] Interview #17
[60] Interview #23
[61] Interview #3
[62] Interview #5

Appendix I: Interview Guide

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

1.   EXPERIENCE AT PALEY LIBRARY

- Can you tell me how long you worked at Paley?
- We will get into specifics later on, but in general, what did you like most about Paley?
- What did you like least?

2.   CURRENT WORK ACTIVITIES

- Tell me about what a regular day looks like for you.
- What are your primary activities?
- How much activity do you do on your own, how much is interacting with colleagues, and how much is working with users—that could be students, community or faculty.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THEN AND NOW

Now I'm going to ask you a set of questions related to the differences between your current work spaces and what you had at Paley.

3.   INDIVIDUAL WORK

- First let's talk about the space you use for your individual work. What are the spaces that you use for your work?
- How is this space like what you had in the old library?
- How are these spaces different than what you had before?
    - Physical similarities and differences
    - Ambience similarities and differences
- In what ways does it work better for you, in your individual work?
- What are the challenges it presents?

4.   WORKING WITH COLLEAGUES

Tell me about the spaces you use for your work with colleagues; when you get together to talk one-on-one or with a group; this could be informal meetings, or more formal meetings.

- What are the spaces that you use? What are the similarities and differences between these spaces and those at Paley?
    - Availability
    - Convenience
    - Technologies
- What do you experience as the opportunities for working with colleagues at Charles?
- Are there any particular challenges that you are experiencing when working with colleagues in this new space?
- In terms of behaviors, do you feel that those have changed in your work with colleagues?

5.   WORKING WITH USERS

You said earlier that you do work with users. Could you describe the nature of the work you do?

- What are the spaces that you use? Here at Charles.
- What are the similarities and differences between the spaces you use now and the spaces that you used when working out of Paley?
- In what ways does it work better in your work with users?
- In what ways does it present challenges?

6.   FEELINGS ABOUT CHANGES

- We've been in the building now for about a semester. Recognizing that Charles is still changing, how do you feel about your experience in the building so far compared to Paley? Has it been positive, has it created challenges?

7.   SUPPORT FOR TRANSITIONS

- What are the things that have helped you, or supported you in managing the transition from Paley to Charles?
- What kind of support would make you feel more comfortable in making these changes?

WRAP UP