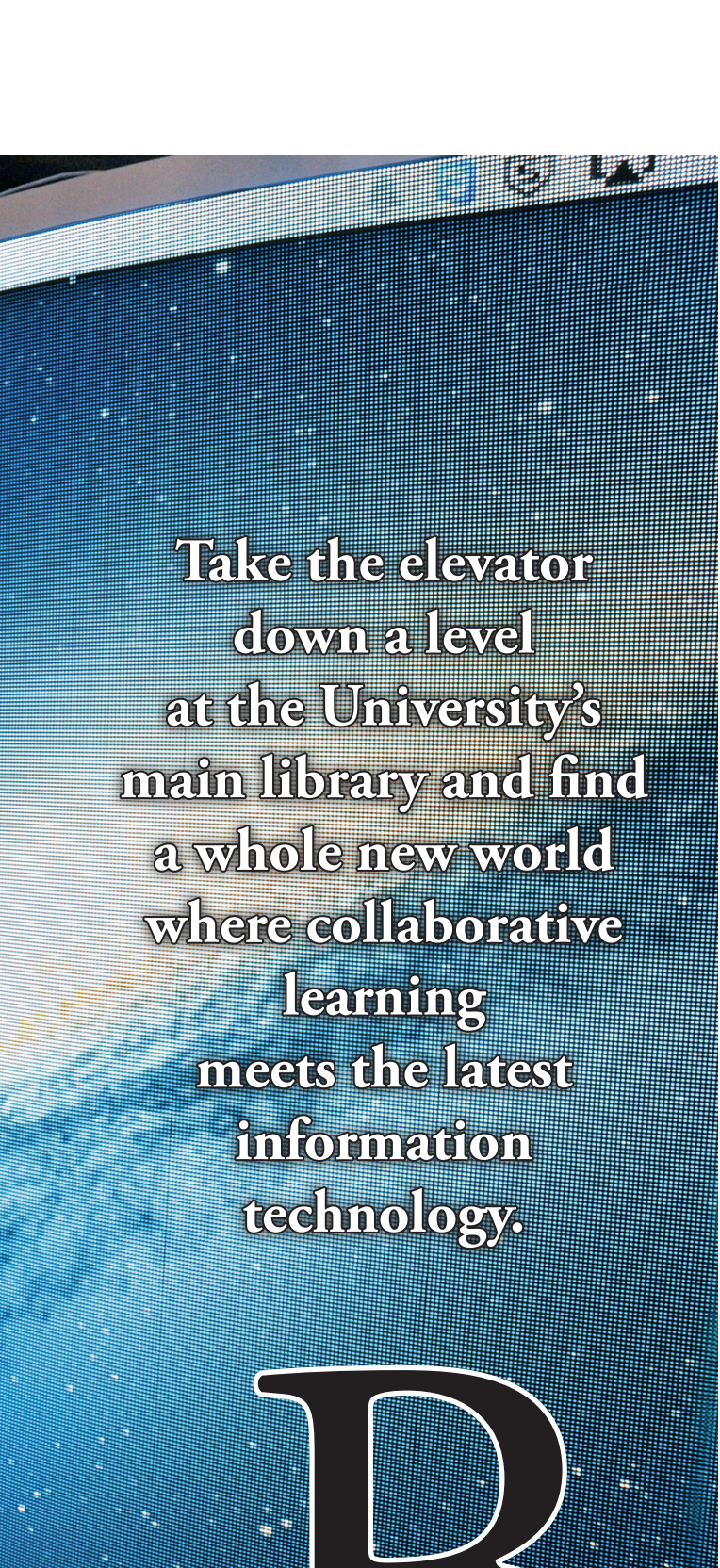


Alice Vile studies by the NanoLumens wall at the entrance of the Peggy V. Helmerich Collaborative Learning Center in Bizzell Memorial Library. The library project, which was completed this fall, involves the complete renovation and modernization of approximately 18,000 gross square feet on the Lower Level of the Neustadt Wing.



Robert Taylor

The Wow! Factor



**Take the elevator
down a level
at the University's
main library and find
a whole new world
where collaborative
learning
meets the latest
information
technology.**

Prepare to have your jaw drop.

That seems the standard response to the Peggy V. Helmerich Collaborative Learning Center, an 18,000-square-foot renovation on Lower Level One of Bizzell Memorial Library. The project has put OU Libraries firmly on the leading edge of information technology.

The HCLC was made possible through a \$500,000 lead gift from the Helmerich Foundation of Tulsa. The remainder of the \$6.6 million effort was supported by Section 13/New College distributions, funds first made available in 1893, before statehood, when OU's first president, David Ross Boyd, petitioned President Grover Cleveland for a portion of state oil royalties.

"University Libraries has been significantly enhanced by the generous support of Peggy Helmerich and her late husband, Walter Helmerich III, who established both a major endowment for the library and an endowed faculty chair for the dean of libraries," President David L. Boren said in announcing the gift to the OU Board of Regents. "This most recent gift continues the Helmerich family's legacy of generosity." *continued*

BY ANNE BARAJAS HARP

at **B**izzell

After a yearlong construction project, the HCLC was formally dedicated November 7. But students did not have to wait that long. The center opened September 15 to an onrush of 1,000 eager visitors on its first day. On average, some 1,200 people have used the HCLC since then.

OU Dean of Libraries Richard E. Luce recalls students taking a tour, then immediately returning with friends in tow. One professor told Luce his students had insisted that he visit after they had seen the space. “My students said I had to come over here,” he told Luce. “I didn’t know why, but I came. Now I know why.”

While three decades have passed since Bizzell’s lower level was built as part of the Doris W. Neustadt Wing, walking into the HCLC is like arriving in another age. Visitors are greeted by the Community Room, a setting for lectures, symposiums, and special events. Its show-stopping centerpiece is the Prysm Wall, a 117-inch digital display that dwarfs adults. The display can be used as a touch-screen whiteboard, written on with using fingers as the pens, and as an interactive projector for multiple electronic tablets.

Luce says the Prysm Wall is the only one of its kind in Oklahoma, and he believes it will have endless applications for visual learning.

“Imagine I wanted to show a book that had a high level of detail,” he says. “Here, I could bring up a digitized copy, blow it up, and the whole class would be able to see. Together, we could really share that experience, talk about it, annotate. It changes the dynamic of how we’re able to help students interact with materials.”

Outside the Community Room is the Bookmark Café, expanded from its original incarnation. Like other spaces in the library, the café features opaque wall panels that can be written upon and wiped clean. The panels allow groups to visualize and share ideas at the drop of a hat. “Much handier than a napkin,” Luce quips.

Idea sharing takes on a larger scale in the main area of the HCLC. Informal study spaces whose décor has been likened to “Mad Men” meets “The



From the latest technology to white boards and markers, students find whatever they need for problem-solving in the Collaborative Learning Center. Petroleum engineering sophomores Maddy Revella and Eric Kanady combine laptop and white board to do homework in the Community Room.

Jetsons” are scattered throughout the long room. Students can project laptop computers and tablets onto multiple video screens, and freestanding furniture means that students can configure the space to fit group needs. Dozens of six-foot, standing white boards also can be moved about as desired.

Luce points to eight glassed-in rooms anchoring the HCLC. These provide a quiet space for group study or meetings and feature the same technology as the center’s open areas. Students can book the rooms either in person or online as far as a week in advance.



The Collaborative Learning Center features informal and flexible learning spaces that can be accessed by students between classes. The open, contemporary design has large windows that take advantage of the Canyon Garden, with comfortable conversation pits offering views into the garden.



“My students said I had to come over here. I didn’t know why, but I came. Now I know why.”

Students gather in one of eight glass-walled group study rooms in the center. Sliding glass doors can filter sound between rooms when needed. The modular rooms may be reserved by students using the on-site panel up to 12 hours in advance or on the Exchange calendar.

Also offered is a bank of computers with high-end design software for video, audio and geographic information systems projects. Recording studios are available to faculty and students for creating presentations that can be stored onto flash drives and edited on these units.

Students in all areas of the center can take advantage of the “Help Hub,” a central troubleshooting desk staffed by representatives of both the library and OU Information Technology. They and trained students rove the HCLC to demonstrate technology and offer library expertise.

All told, the HCLC staff is present for students and faculty

“The creative process is part of what we are trying to enable here at the library—to give students the tools, the spaces and the human expertise to create knowledge and understanding.”



Photo Provided

In the Community Room, students have access to the 117-inch Prysm Wall, which can be used as a digital whiteboard and as an interactive projector for multiple electronic tablets.



Robert Taylor

One of the most popular spots on the renovated lower level is the Bookmark Café, where students can take a break from studying and enjoy a variety of snacks and premium coffees without leaving the library.

more than 100 hours each week, says Emerging Technologies Librarian Matt Cook. Cook's job will be to keep an eye on the changing IT vista while discovering ways to educate students, faculty and staff on the latest educational tools.

He already is busy in an area dubbed the "Mini Core," patterned after "The Core" at OU's Stephenson Research and Technology Center. The walled area features a central lectern and 10 surrounding video screens. Each screen can be controlled either by the instructor or by those seated at adjacent tables with pop-up control boards. The instructor can override each screen display to share content with the entire class. This Collaborative Learning Classroom also has video-conferencing capacity.

Faculty and graduate students have their own area next door at the Digital Scholarship Laboratory, which includes areas for breakout groups, a video-conference room and team pods. Luce hopes the space will encourage collaboration and "cross-pollination" as researchers from various disciplines share ideas.

The HCLC was one result of a six-month strategic planning process, during which Luce held listening sessions with faculty, staff and students. "They flushed out a list of needs and desires," he says. Luce and his staff also made a point of visiting libraries throughout the country and abroad while traveling, and have brought the best ideas they discovered back to OU.

"But I can't say that there is another place that blends things together in quite this way," he adds proudly.

Luce believes the HCLC addresses the reality of today's educational world. "Increasingly, we're expecting students to do more than consume information. We're expecting them to acquire information, analyze it and to create information.

"The creative process is part of what we are trying to enable here at the library—to give students the tools, the spaces and the human expertise to create knowledge and understanding," he says. "It's an absolutely vital skill as they leave OU and move into the workforce."

Anne Barajas Harp is a freelance writer living in Norman.