

**Re-visioning a Marshall Gallery for the Present and Future:
Marshall Gallery Task Force Charge
May 2022**

Past Space Design and Uses

The Marshall Gallery has long served as an introduction to the Main Library building, with a formal aesthetic that reflects the time it was built. The space speaks to some elements of the University's history through a prominent set of oil paintings depicting the first six presidents of the University.¹ The formal aesthetic and the sparse furnishings do little to reveal the collections, services, and expertise available to Library visitors. The Gallery tends to function primarily as a pass-through space to other locations in the building, if not actively hiding activity in the core areas of the building.

As background for this proposal, we examined a few documents related to the construction, uses, and furnishing of space since the Phase one of the Library was completed in 1924-26. The Main Library has been granted "Local" significance in the National Register of Historic Places, for its Architectural, and Community Planning and Development significance.² The interior elements of the Marshall Gallery are passingly described in the National Register Filing Document that the University submitted in 2000 (page 6). Excepting the addition of acoustic tiles and furniture, the space has not been altered since the time of construction.

In March 2021, focus groups were conducted as part of the Main/Undergraduate Library integration. As part of those focus groups participants were asked to describe the ways in which the two spaces differ and encouraged to consider the "vibe." Students consistently commented on the unwelcoming nature of the Marshall Gallery, specifically commenting on the "echoiness" of the space which discourages social interaction and encourages students to retrieve materials and leave as soon as possible. Lack of comfortable seating and adequate signage were underscored as ways in which the Library and Marshall Gallery create an unwelcoming environment.

¹ The history and provenance of the six oil paintings are described in Muriel Schienman's PhD thesis, but unmentioned in her book. In the thesis, she notes that numerous paintings of campus leaders were commissioned from UI Art Department Faculty, including this series, and that generally the portraits came in either as gifts or through university funds, wryly noting that "[t]he belief that they can preserve history, that they are appropriate tokens of esteem, that they can encourage and inspire no longer prevails." Muriel Scheinman, "Art Collecting at the University of Illinois: A History and Catalogue," Thesis Ph.D.--University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign., 1981, vol 1, p. 157.

² Department of the Interior. National Park Service. (3/2/1934 -). *Illinois MPS Library-University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*. File Unit: National Register of Historic Places and National Historic Landmarks Program Records: Illinois, 1964 - 2013, 2013. <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/28890735>

We envision the Marshall Gallery as a welcoming, active space that signals the rich collections and expertise available in the building, and provides a landing point for students, faculty, and visitors to get oriented to the building. The message that the space implicitly conveys with its current furnishings stands in stark visual contrast to the University and Library values of diversity, equity, inclusion, and welcoming; goals that complement our role as stewards of information, records, and recorded knowledge. The current design aesthetic exclusively reflects the dominant culture of the time it was constructed, with commensurate implications of exclusivity and the Library in the role of gatekeeper and protector of authoritative knowledge. While the Library represents the shared human values of intellect, reason, and wisdom, these are just one element of our service mission to campus. As a majestic entrance to the heart of campus, the gallery should serve as a welcoming space to all users, which recognizes the diversity of the campus and the local community, while acknowledging the intellectual heritage of the University in general and the Library in particular, as a place of knowledge discovery and exchange.

The space has significant potential to be a showcase for what the Main Library has to offer, orienting visitors to the building through clear, accessible wayfinding tools and signage, and helping visitors quickly identify key features of the building, such as specialized collections, study spaces, service points, and restrooms. The open spaces in the Gallery also present opportunities to build community with users through pop-up collections and exhibits, and programming supporting the teaching and research mission of the Library and the University.

Charge

The Marshall Gallery Task Force is charged with:

1) implementing **short-term, non-permanent** improvements to the space in time for fall 2022 semester. For short term adjustments, it is important for the group to confer as much as possible with stakeholders, especially in units within the Main Library that may be affected, and ensure adjustments do not interfere with other library operations.

2) making preliminary recommendations for longer-term changes in a report to be submitted by December 15th, 2022. In developing this report, the group should investigate options for updating the Marshall Gallery space to address the needs articulated in the bullets below, in consultation with colleagues in the Main Library and other Library Units, with feedback from Library users. The team should constitute and consult with an advisory group, and incorporate other Library-wide feedback mechanisms. The group's final report should include outcomes which speak to the following:

- Articulation of a vision and purpose for the space which is inclusive of the diversity of individuals who have participated in and contributed to University and Library history, as well as reflective of the rich cultures, backgrounds, and identities of individuals who are part of today's campus and community;

- Recommendations for how the space can contribute towards improved wayfinding for the Main Library building;
- Articulation of a broad list of activities the space could support, which are in alignment with the vision for the space;
- Identification of any environmental or logistical issues with the space which impair or could impair use, such as acoustics, temperature control, etc.
- Recommendations for a longer-term management plan for the space, including identifying a unit or team to manage, book, and keep the space updated to meet day-to-day needs;
- Finally, the task force should consider how strategic decisions about the space will be collaboratively designed and updated over subsequent years, to ensure that both the vision itself and its application remain relevant to the Library and campus life.

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