

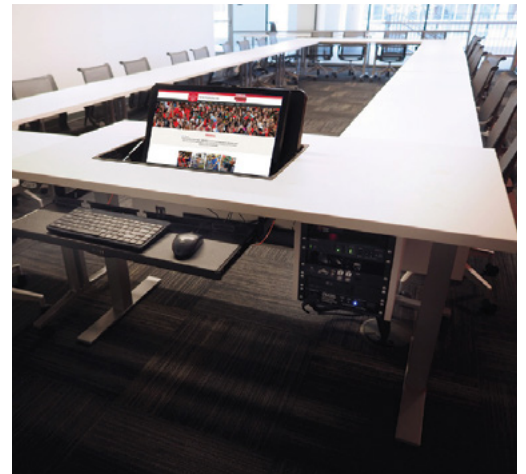


# Transforming Media Centers

## THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN MODERN EDUCATIONAL SPACES

BY MIRA KORBER

In Google Books N-Gram Viewer, a tool that allows users to explore the frequency of specific words or phrases in books, the term “computer lab” peaked for frequency of use in 2003. As of 2022, the term had returned to mid-1990s levels. Why? The past 22 years have rendered the notion of traditional computer labs obsolete as on-the-go mobile devices and HD flat screens replaced CRT monitors.



*continued...*



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In the 21st century digital age, defined by rapid technological advancements, media centers have evolved from traditional resource libraries into dynamic social and intellectual hubs. As educational institutions and organizations adapt to changing student needs, the integration of advanced technology into innovative furniture solutions has redefined what it means to build a digital learning space. The culture of scheduling trips to one or several centralized computer labs has shifted to seamlessly passing through the omnipresent “digital commons” across campus.

### Technology Integration: A Game-Changer

Technology lies at the heart of the modern media center. Whether it is a laptop, tablet, or in-surface charging station, technology empowers users with tools to collaborate, learn, and innovate seamlessly. SMARTdesks®, an industry leader in furnishing higher education spaces, has changed with the times. From its inception in 1997 to today, SMARTdesks has designed furnishings that facilitate learning in lockstep with advancements in technology.

At the Children's National Medical Center, for example, modular conference tables with flipIT® Laptop Safes ensure secure, convenient access to devices for eight users at a time. When laptops need to be stowed between sessions, they are secured, charging at the point of use. When deployed for use, the lids are low profile and do not obstruct lines of sight in the room. In a relatively small space, the Motif Computer Conference Model featuring flipIT puts eight users in front of their networked laptops and a projection screen—engineered for practical use in an institutional setting for education.







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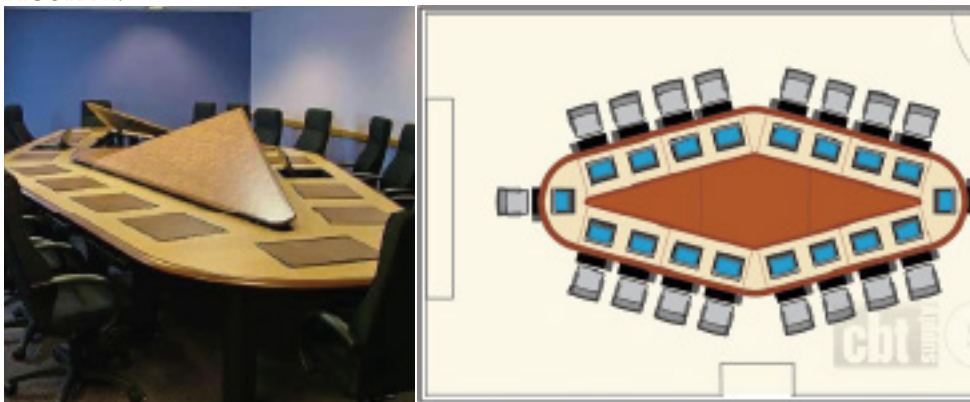


The DC Child Support Center opted for a Piano™ conference table with 18 seats and a collaborative design and integrated wire management systems. This enables group work while maintaining a sleek appearance. It serves as a hub for technology-driven collaboration, meeting the demands of public-sector teams. A flush-mount wire clip system allows fast, neat installation. Bayonet snap locks into chassis holes and can be released and reused. Perforated chassis provides complete, natural ventilation for installed components and multi-level racks are hinged for easy access. *SEE FIGURE 2.*

**Flexible and Collaborative Furnishings: Aesthetics Meet Functionality**

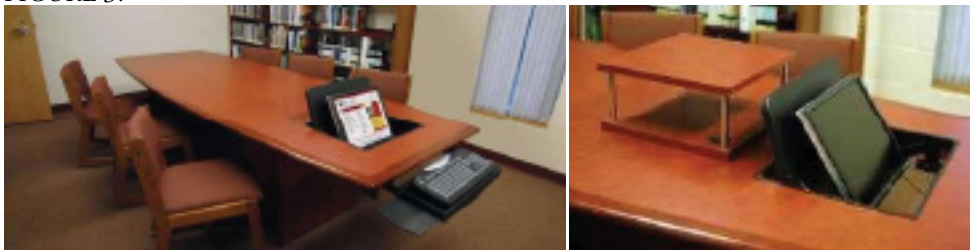
Modern media centers must accommodate a range of activities, from individual study to group collaboration, requiring adaptable furniture solutions. For Lehigh Carbon Community College, SMARTdesks® integrated a Piatto™ conference table with flipIT® monitors and CineStage™ projectors, allowing quick transitions between study and collaboration. While many libraries have reduced the number of fixed workstations available, a multi-use worksurface that offers both fixed technology with BYOD capabilities gives each institution—and student—maximum flexibility. *SEE FIGURE 3.*

FIGURE 2.



*This Piano™ Conference Table is complete with a hexagonal center lid is fixed position, including two articulating triangle shaped lids for wire management access.*

FIGURE 3.



Similarly, Severn Bancorp headquarters uses flipIT® Monitor Support Systems and Piatto® to maximize versatility, enabling users to alternate between digital and traditional meeting setups. The Piatto™ multi-function conference table supports an emerging paradigm. Today, there is little distinction between the processes of business communication and the processes of training and education. They share the same internet, and they run similar applications for video teleconferencing and e-learning. The need to interact between students and teacher is parallel to the needs for players in business to present and exchange ideas and information. Interiors are increasingly becoming centered around a multifunctional conference table that transforms into a computer-enabled theater for learning and communication. *SEE FIGURE 4.*

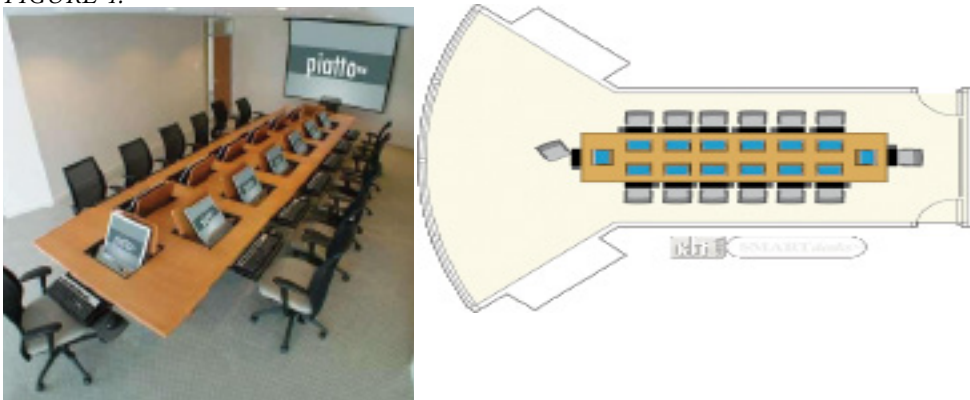
**Why Universities Should Update Their Media Centers**

In today's competitive landscape, universities must go beyond traditional offerings to attract and retain students, faculty, and corporate partners. One of the most visible ways to demonstrate a commitment to innovation is through state-of-the-art media centers.

**Enhance Student Recruitment and Retention**

The decision-making process for prospective students often hinges on the quality of

FIGURE 4.



campus facilities. For a tech-savvy generation raised on smartphones and instant connectivity, modern media centers create a powerful first impression. During campus tours, spaces equipped with VR/AR labs, interactive digital displays, and collaborative workstations showcase the university's dedication to cutting-edge learning environments. Students want to know that their university will provide the tools they need to thrive in a technology-driven world. A well-designed media center becomes a tangible demonstration of this commitment.

Competition among universities further heightens the need for advanced facilities. Media centers equipped with the latest technologies can distinguish one institution from its peers. Parents and students alike take note of campuses that invest in resources designed to foster academic success and creativity. In this sense, a media center is not just a resource—it is a recruitment and



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retention tool, signaling that a university is serious about its students' future.

**Transform Learning and Collaboration**

Media centers are spaces where students engage in hands-on learning and collaborate on projects that mirror real-world challenges.

Advanced technology plays a pivotal role in this transformation. Interactive whiteboards, high-performance computers, and data visualization tools make it easier for students to work together, share ideas, and innovate. Group workstations with built-in power and data ports further enhance collaboration,

allowing students to connect their devices seamlessly.

These spaces also support personalized learning. A media center equipped with podcast studios, multimedia editing stations, and even AI-powered tools allows students to tailor their educational experiences. AI is not going away, so it is better for educational institutions to harness it rather than banish it for their students.

**Attract Top Faculty and Corporate Partnerships**

A modern media center doesn't just appeal to students—it also attracts top-tier faculty and researchers. Professors and researchers seek environments that support their teaching and scholarship, and media centers equipped with advanced tools for research and collaboration provide that support. For example, facilities with GIS mapping technology or video conferencing tools make interdisciplinary research and global collaboration seamless. In turn, these resources enhance the university's reputation as a leader in innovation and research.

Corporate partnerships also flourish in universities with updated media centers. Businesses looking to invest in research and development or seeking top talent are drawn to institutions that provide cutting-edge spaces for innovation. Media centers can even double as incubators for startups, offering a natural meeting point for academia and industry. By fostering these connections, universities can secure sponsorships, internships, and other mutually beneficial relationships.

**Increase Accessibility and Inclusion**

Modernizing a media center is also an opportunity to promote inclusivity and equity. Today's students expect their universities to cater to diverse needs, and a well-designed media center can help achieve that. ADA-compliant furniture, assistive technology for students with disabilities, and quiet spaces for neurodiverse learners are essential features of an inclusive space. Universities that invest in these updates not only broaden their appeal to a wider range of students but also demonstrate a commitment to equity and accessibility.

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Additionally, media centers can play a role in addressing the digital divide. Providing access to high-end equipment and advanced technology ensures that all students, regardless of background, have the tools they need to succeed. These resources level the playing field, enabling every student to fully participate in the academic and professional opportunities the university offers.

**Promote Sustainability**

As sustainability becomes a central concern for students and institutions alike, media centers offer an opportunity to lead by example. Incorporating energy-efficient lighting, furniture made from sustainable materials, and paperless technology not only reduces the environmental footprint of these spaces but also aligns with the values of today's students. Universities can even seek certifications like LEED for their renovated spaces, further enhancing their reputation as environmentally conscious institutions.

Beyond sustainability, modern media centers are designed with adaptability in mind. Flexible furniture, modular workstations, and scalable technology ensure that these spaces can evolve alongside future educational trends. Whether accommodating new technological advancements or adapting to shifts in learning styles, an updated media center is a long-term investment in the university's ability to stay relevant.



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Mira Korber works in Strategy and Marketing for SMARTdesks®, which works with K-12 and higher-education clients to furnish learning spaces for in-person, hybrid, and remote learning. She is also the founder of a tutoring company and has advised EdTech companies on strategic product planning. She holds a Master's of Education Policy from Vanderbilt University.

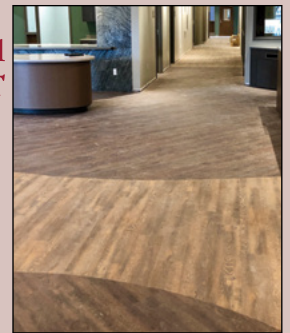
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