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Tips from the Trenches: To 3D Print or Not to 3D Print?

BY [ADMIN](#) · OCTOBER 17, 2013

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Editor's note: "To 3D Print or Not to 3D Print?" is the second in a series of blog postings, "Tips from the Trenches," by Cinthya Ippoliti.

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To 3D Print or Not to 3D Print?

Part of the mission of the learning commons is to stay on the cutting edge of technology. So it's no surprise that we've installed a 3d printer as a first and small step towards thinking about a makerspace in the Terrapin Learning Commons and the libraries as a whole.

Word of mouth is a powerful marketing tool because to date, we've received about 10 questions a day regarding its use and several students have printed some "fun" items. So what kinds of things did we have to consider when adding this tool? First, we had to decide what type of printer to purchase. Our IT partners were instrumental in helping us buy a MakerBot 2X-not so high-end that we couldn't afford it, but cool enough to attract attention.

What about policies and cost? This was fairly simple as these types of printers are becoming more and more mainstream. But there are still some logistics involved. Charge by the length of time it takes to print something or by its weight? Should students have a file ready to go or would we help them create it? We decided to charge 20c/gram and provide technical assistance for the students who wanted it, while simply processing the job for those who didn't.

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Should printing require mediation or be more self-service? At first we wanted to retain some control over the printer given that we ourselves had to learn how to use it, so it is comfortably perched behind our TLC Tech Desk in full-view and garners at least a few interested onlookers who watch its systematic, layer by layer whirring each day.

Finally, what happens if a job goes wrong? For now we're willing to re-print something if it's our fault and we're keeping things in a pilot mode. We've created a basic webpage with all of this information in order to assist students and give them an idea of what to expect: <http://www.lib.umd.edu/tlc/tlc-tech-desk>

So what's next for us? A few hands-on workshops and continued publicity with the goal of reaching out to others on campus who might be interested in either using this type of tool or providing programming and additional activities revolving around makerspaces. We see a strong connection with those taking classes in human computer interaction, the sciences as well as the arts.

What are the takeaways if you are interested in setting up this type of service?

1. A recurring theme is collaboration-find out who knows about these tools and

invite them to meet with you to identify potential partnerships and support.

2. Start small-we only have one printer for now and we're going to strategically build up this model, but it will take time and we don't want to rush into anything we can't sustain.

3. It's ok to make mistakes and learn as you go-that's part of the process, just keep things flexible and adjust as needed.

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