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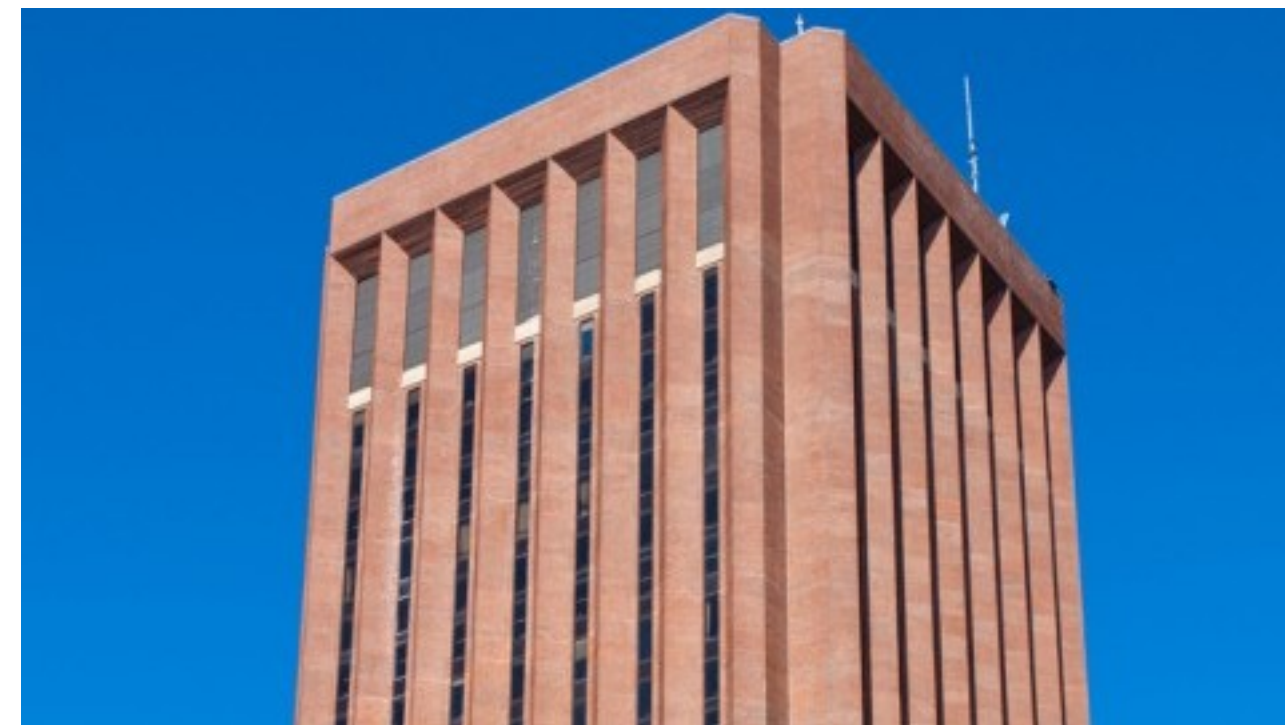
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Library labyrinth targets stress

Posted by [Daniel Maldonado](#) on Thursday, April 17, 2014 · [Leave a Comment](#)



Matt Modica/Collegian

The W.E.B. Du Bois Library at the University of Massachusetts has installed a stress-relieving meditation labyrinth called the Sparq Labyrinth.

Installed over spring break, the labyrinth is a small setup on the ninth floor of the library, which consists of a projector, an iPad and a series of descriptions and instructions on how to use the device. There are also posters indicating the benefits of meditation and the history of labyrinths.

Donna Zucker, associate professor at the College of Nursing, has been conducting research on how labyrinths relieve stress and work as a form of meditation. Previously, Zucker worked at a prison in Northampton, studying prisoners' reactions to labyrinth therapy.

The Sparq Labyrinth was created by University of Oklahoma student Matt Cooke. Cooke had noticed that doing work on computers for an extended period of time causes stress, so he decided to design these projected labyrinths for students in libraries to be able to take breaks and relieve stress.

According to Zucker, "(Cooke) read an article I wrote on labyrinths in prison and he thought that he would contact me." The labyrinth was then brought to UMass and installed in the library.

A small, circular labyrinth is projected onto the floor, where one is supposed to walk through to the center, meditate, do yoga, dance or whatever one does to relax, then exit.

"There are no dead ends; it's just one continuous circuit to the middle. And then once you get to the middle, you can pause and do some relaxation," Zucker said. "We ask people to take a minute and think about it. To take a couple deep breaths and focus your attention like you would do before you begin yoga. And then walk

or do the pattern that's on the floor. And just think about nothing.”

Zucker is planning on using the labyrinths for a study on stress and blood pressure.

“My study is actually going to be enrolling students who will elect to be in a control or to be in an experimental group, and I'm going to measure their blood pressure before and after and see if it makes a difference. It did in the jail study, so I'd like to see if it works with normal subjects.”

“I spend a lot of time in the library, even more now towards the end of the year. It's good to know that there is something to help me get through finals stress free,” said Bre Santospago, a sophomore majoring in psychology at the University.

So far, there has been very little publicity about Sparq.

“I have flyers that are going to be distributed to different professors on campus, and I asked the distributors to talk about it with the students. The students who are interested can contact me and then I can enroll them into the study,” Zucker said. “We are just taking it out of its silent phase and we are bringing it out into the public phase.”

“It's like an art exhibit,” Zucker said. “This is version 1.0; (Cooke) is already working on 2.0.” Because of low ceilings at the library, the size of the labyrinth is limited, and there are still adjustments to be made.

The Sparq Labyrinth is in the library until the end of August. Anyone is free to use it, and it is open during all library hours.

Daniel Maldonado can be reached at dmaldona@student.umass.edu.



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