User-focused, User-led: Space Assessment to Transform a Small Academic Library

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Abstract

Objective: By collecting and analyzing evidence from three data points, researchers will understand how library spaces are used. Results will be used for evidence-based decision-making regarding library physical spaces.

Methods: Undergraduate researchers, sociology faculty, and librarians used mixed-methods to triangulate findings. Seating sweeps were used to map patrons’ activities in the library. Student-led focus groups discussed patterns of library use, impressions of facilities, and library features and services. The final step will be a campus survey developed from seating sweeps and focus group findings.

Results: Seating sweeps showed consistent use of the Library's main level Learning Commons and upper level quiet spaces; the library's multipurpose lower level is under-utilized. Students use the main level of the library for collaborative learning, socializing, reading, and computer use. Students use the upper level for quiet study and group work in study rooms. Focus group findings found library use is task-specific. For example, a student may work with classmates on a project using the main level Learning Commons during the day, and then come back at night to use the quiet floor for test preparation. Participants shared additional spaces on campus they use for study and the characteristics of those locations.

Conclusion: These data offer empirical evidence for library space needs. Some data aligns with previous space studies: access to power outlets, lighting, noise, and outdated environment. New concerns included: crowding, graduate students lacking designated study space, and needing quiet study space away from group study space. Data from seating sweeps and focus groups will be used to create a campus survey to capture other information related to library use and space needs. Survey findings will offer a richer understanding of how the library is viewed and used by all of campus.

Disciplines
Library and Information Science

Comments

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Double major in Sociology and Criminology; Minor in Communications
Background: The College

- Liberal Arts College, Rochester, NY
- ~3,800 FTE
- Undergraduate, Graduate, Doctoral
Background: The Library

- Built in 1975
  - Main Level remodel 2012
- 3 floors:
  - Quiet floor with study rooms
  - Learning Commons
  - Lower level: mixed use
- ~20 Library staff
Background: The Library

- 221,134 visitors FY16
  - Average of 58 visits per FTE

- Past surveys:
  - Special headcounts (2010)
  - Commuter survey (2010)
  - Architect survey (2011)
  - Library redesign survey (2013)
  - MISO survey (2013)
Literature Review

- Library as “Library as place” and “third space” \(^4^3\)
  - Flexible learning spaces that are neither home or the classroom
- Informal learning, a place for students to “be intentional about their learning” \(^1^0\)
- Library users’ needs are unique to the individual & can be task-specific \(^2^6^9\)
Literature Review

● Quiet & Individual Study
  ○ For “getting serious” \(2^34^58\)
  ○ Communal study space, but with personal boundaries \(1^78\)

● Group Study & non-quiet space
  ○ Social and informal learning space \(10\)
  ○ Flexible learning for working collaboratively, socializing, studying alone and alone-together \(2^34^58^10\)
Objective

- How are students using our library spaces?
  - Collect evidence to inform future space planning and renovations
  - What works? What doesn’t? What’s needed?
Mixed Methods

- Seating Sweeps -- 3x a day, 2 non-consecutive weeks
- Focus Groups -- 6 focus groups by student type
- Survey -- 3-week run, undergraduates
Method: Seating Sweeps

- Library staff, floor-by-floor
- Anyone in library
- Lasted 15-60 minutes
- Pen and paper & Google Forms
- Categories: desktop, laptop, cell phone, tablet, whiteboards in use, food/drink, group work, note taking, reading, sleeping, talking, headphones, other
Method: Focus Groups

- Participants (N=41)
  - Freshmen (n=9)
  - Sophomores (n=9)
  - Juniors (n=10)
  - Seniors (n=8)
  - Master’s (n=2) & Doctoral (n=3)
- ~1 hour sessions
- Tailored questions by class
Method: Survey

- Survey based on common focus group responses
- Created using Qualtrics
- Piloted with small group of students
- Email from Student Government
- Distributed to undergraduates, N=2948
Findings & Discussion

- Library as Place & Third Space:
  - Flexible furniture (e.g., white boards for privacy and study)
  - Making the space their own (e.g., lighting, shoes off)
  - Demand for stress relief room with nap pods
  - Spaces for group work, socializing, studying
Findings & Discussion

- Space Attributes:
  - Outlets, always more outlets
  - Underuse of lower level -- why?
  - Task-dependent -- quiet vs. non-quiet space
  - Flexible furniture, smaller tables, comfortable seating, lighting (updated & natural)
Findings & Discussion

- Quiet & Individual Study
  - For “getting serious”
  - Students want to study alone-together
  - Need more of these spaces, focus groups & survey
  - Occupancy: feels full by 20%
    ■ More, smaller tables
Findings & Discussion

- Group study & non-quiet spaces
  - Used for group projects, studying with friends, socializing
  - Flexible furniture
  - Checkout Desk & Research Help Desk
  - Lack of privacy for group work
  - Underuse of mixed-use Lower Level
Findings & Discussion

- Space-related services
  - The Library needs:
    - Stress-relief room, nap pods
    - Cafe
  - Extended hours
  - Interlibrary Loan
Question:
“I think the library needs...”
Limitations

● **Seating Sweeps:**
  ○ Multiple recorders’ interpretations

● **Focus Groups:**
  ○ Low master’s & doctoral participation

● **Survey:**
  ○ Purposefully excluded
    ■ Demographics
    ■ Master’s & doctoral students
Thank You

- Faculty advisers: Patricia Tweet, PhD & David Baronov, PhD
- Library staff: Kate Ross, Marianne Simmons, Brian Lynch, Lynn Seavy, Stacy Celata
Questions?


