



The Library Is for Studying: Student Preferences for Study Space

by Rachel Applegate

Available online 21 June 2009

Systematic observation of non-computer seating areas in library and non-library spaces on an urban campus showed an important role for the library in individual and group study area choices. The study provides data on important points to consider in library design, including laptop needs and gender preferences.

INTRODUCTION

Today, the academic library seldom takes the form of a classical temple on the quad of a serene college campus—for some institutions, it takes no form at all, being entirely virtual or provided through cooperative agreements. However, for most American colleges and universities, one or more physical libraries continue to supply not only collections but spaces—for research, for study, and for group work. At the same time, other facilities on campus are also being designed to foster effective out-of-class encounters between students (and with faculty). Where does the library fit into this ecology? Specifically, how do students use the library's "soft spaces"—areas that are not the stacks and not computer labs: carrels, tables, soft chairs, and study rooms. How does that compare with newly developed gathering spaces in other campus buildings?

The present study was conducted at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis. This campus has 30,000 students, of whom 21,200 are undergraduates. Very few undergraduates (1%) live on campus. The University Library (UL) serves all programs except law, dentistry, medicine, and art; it is centrally located on the campus, has extensive computer stations (clusters) on each floor and has complete wireless coverage. In 2004–2006, most of the floor space in the reference area was renovated to create an Academic Commons which among other things was specifically designed to encourage and accommodate group study activities.¹ A pilot area was constructed then carefully evaluated, and those findings used to design the majority of the space, with approximately 70 workstations.²

During the 2007–2008 academic year, the UL's study spaces were fully operational and stable throughout the year. Elsewhere on campus, an open corridor (windows on one side, classroom entrances on the other) in a building serving business students was renovated with expanded seating areas, also available throughout both semesters. Between semesters (in January 2008) a new Campus Center opened, approximately one-quarter mile away—again, designed to provide gathering areas for students, very few of whom have dorms as alternative spaces.

This study proceeded inductively (without a pre-determined research question) but systematically: gathering data to see what uses were made of the

*Rachel Applegate is Assistant Professor at the Indiana University School of Library and Information Science, Indianapolis, IN, USA
<rapplega@iupui.edu>.*

various alternatives available, with particular attention to personal laptop use, group gatherings, and gender preferences. Some of the findings are local and others have broad relevance to academic space design.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a substantial body of literature on the use of the library-as-place, along with a smaller set of writings on student use of spaces generally on campus. Most of the library research has focused either on renovation and new construction, or more specifically on re-designed services—new libraries, new “information commons.”

New construction is generally seen as associated with increased use. Two studies by Shill and Tonner found increased usage for new areas or libraries³ and many directors can name physical features that they believe attract students to the library.⁴ Certainly each new library building or renovation or is done with the purpose of meeting student needs.

More specific are the many writings and some research on the “information commons”, broadly defined as a physical convergence of digital or technological tools and assistance with traditional reference services, resources, and areas.⁵ In 2004, twenty-two of 74 responding Association of Research Libraries members had information commons. Installations at the University of Nevada Las Vegas,⁶ Emory University, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign⁷, Lehigh University⁸, and Longwood University⁹ have shown positive usage and high patron satisfaction.

Just as an information commons reflects a broader conception of library services than “computer lab” and “reference desk,” there is also interest in a broader conception of library space usage than “information retrieval,” as well as exploring student usage of spaces in general. Templeton called for this broader perspective on both library use ecology and the methods used to examine it, emphasizing the usefulness of an ethnographic approach,¹⁰ a tool used by Suarez at Brock University (Ontario).¹¹ Gayton¹² and Shoham and Roitberg¹³ also provide evidence of large amounts of non-library usage: usage not concerned with library resources or services, occurring at the academic library. The 2004 collection by the Council on Library and Information Resources, *Library as Place*, speaks to these concerns,¹⁴ and an EDUCAUSE paper emphasizes the importance of learning spaces attuned to student learning processes.¹⁵ An exit survey at this library found that most students were doing non-library-specific activities (e.g. email rather than database searching, studying textbooks rather than checking out books).¹⁶

Outside the library field there has been growing attention to these broader academic-activity issues, with discussions of the role of the physical environment in student learning. Chism and Bickford promote the appreciation of furnishings, décor, and room design for the atmosphere of respect for academic work that they convey.¹⁷ Unfortunately, an entire volume on “improving the [physical] environment for learning” in higher education makes no mention of library spaces.¹⁸

Although it is evident that interest in the whole ecology of space on campus is intense, among librarians

and others, there continues to be a relative lack of data beyond anecdotal observation and reports based on experience.

This study addresses this gap in three respects. First, it is finer-grained than whole-library studies. It examines usage of specific, differently-configured, areas within the library. Second, it is longitudinal, tracking usage throughout the week, the semester, and the academic year, to map “seasonal” changes in activity. Finally, it compares library usage to simultaneous non-library gathering area usage.

METHODOLOGY

The basic data gathered in this study was the presence of individuals in a space, by gender, being or not being in a group (sitting together and interacting), and laptop use. Because all observations were conducted in publicly available areas with no individually identifiable information recorded, the study qualified as “exempt” from the campus Institutional Research Board.

The spaces were in the University Library (UL) and adjoining areas. The UL is a large square building with four stories. A basement level houses archives and classrooms; the first floor has the ground-level entrance, along with technical services, campus offices (a Center for Teaching and Learning), and classrooms. The upper three levels house library functions. On the second floor there is a large circulation desk area on one side and the reference area with an “Academic Commons”—group and individual computer-equipped desks divided by partitions, as well as a room for the campus Writing Center. Also on the second floor and open to users is a separate Philanthropy Library (Phil.), with a variety of seating options. The third and fourth floors have rows of computer stations in the center by an open atrium, with stacks surrounding them; around the edges there are either carrels by large curtain windows, or faculty offices and group study rooms.

The second floor of the Library is connected to two other buildings via a corridor, with a curtain wall and outdoor patio on one side and benches along a muralled wall on the other. One of the adjoining buildings houses the Kelley School of Business; its second-floor corridor has classroom entrances along the interior side, with a curtain-window wall on the other side, and benches and a variety of seating options and areas in between.

The areas included in this study included several seating types: carrels (3rd and 4th floors, plus the Philanthropy library), group study rooms (3rd and 4th floors), soft areas (one area within the Philanthropy library and in the center of the 3rd and 4th floors with sectional sofas and chairs); tables and chairs in the Academic Commons not furnished with fixed computers, and the benches and chairs in the Business and Library corridors (see [Table 1](#)).

The data collection excluded fixed-computer stations. Any part of an area that had fixed-computer stations was omitted: seats at those stations were not counted as part of capacity and computer users were not included in the user counts. For example, the seats in the UL's Academic Commons included were the minority of seating options available at free-standing

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/358668>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/358668>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)