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## User Perception and Use of the Academic Library: A Correlation Analysis<sup>☆</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores user perception, the use of an academic library, and the correlation between user perception and library use. The findings indicate that the academic library is a preferred place to study and spend time during non-class times on campus. The frequent user activities in the library included individual study, reading, computer use, finding information, group study, using reference and information services, and meeting and socializing. The correlation between library use and each of the user activities was examined. The findings suggest that users perceive the academic library primarily as a place for learning and information seeking. The study shows how users perceive and use the academic library, and provides insights into how libraries can strengthen their place and advance their role in the academic community.

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### INTRODUCTION

Academic libraries have played a crucial role on campus as the “heart of the university.” As an effort to advance their role in the academic community, libraries have accommodated changes in use trends to better support users in the process of learning and intellectual pursuit. Changes in the approaches of users to information seeking and learning have brought the need for transition in library facilities and services. Academic libraries have embraced new technologies and redesigned their services to accommodate changes in user needs and behavior.

Although extensive information is available remotely, the physical library is still a preferred place for users (Applegate, 2009). A range of studies have reported the increase in library facility use (Houlihan, 2005; McKay, 2011; Shill & Tonner, 2004). Researchers have referred to the increase as a “post-internet bounce” (Albanese, 2003). Academic libraries are still one of the most visited places on campus. They support a wide range of user activities for information seeking, individual and group study, socializing, and relaxation. As more social and collaborative aspects of learning have been emphasized in higher education, academic libraries have evolved into centers for social activities as well as centers for intellectual pursuit.

An academic library that adapts to the new academic and social activity trends of users will continue to serve as an essential institution within its community. As such, academic libraries should make continuous efforts to provide user-centered facilities and services based on the

understanding of user needs and behavior. Capturing changes in user perception and behavior is critical in planning library facilities and services. Given the importance of academic libraries in academic institutions and the changing nature of user perception and behavior, it is meaningful to examine users' perceptions of academic libraries and how they are related to their use of the libraries. This study explores user perception and the use of an academic library by means of a survey. It investigates user perception, use patterns, and the correlation of user perception and library use. An empirical study on user perception and usage behavior may provide insights into improving management decisions in planning library facilities and services.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have reported usage statistics and user preferences of academic libraries. In a study comparing pre-project and post-completion facility usage patterns for library facility projects, most of the institutions that completed a library facility project reported overall usage increases (Shill & Tonner, 2004). The specific facility features that were related to increase in usage included the quality of instruction lab, institution type, layout, number of data ports, public access workstations, natural lighting, user work space, telecommunication infrastructure, and overall ambience. The study provided empirical evidence that students would use a comfortable, well-equipped library even though there are electronic resources available remotely. The findings suggest that a well-designed library would attract students as a learning and socializing place and remain essential to the academic community. Martell (2008) reported increase in gate count and the use of electronic networked resources in a study providing data on library use from the

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**Table 1**  
Preferred places to study and read.

Place	The first preferred place		The second preferred place		The third preferred place	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Home	65	46.1	22	15.6	29	20.6
Library	61	43.3	55	39.0	17	12.1
Classroom	5	3.5	33	23.4	33	23.4
Lab	4	2.8	9	6.4	8	5.7
Café	4	2.8	15	10.6	29	20.6
Dorm	1	0.7	0	0.0	4	2.8
Lawn and outdoor bench	1	0.7	6	4.3	16	11.3
Other	0	0.0	1	0.7	5	3.5
Total	141	100.0	141	100.0	141	100.0

1990s to 2006. Dotson and Garris (2008) reported an overall increase in library use in a study examining usage patterns in Thomas Cooper Library (TCL) at the University of South Carolina. Specifically, there was increase in the use of group tables, individual tables, and internet-accessible computers and decrease in the use of stacks, connected individual desks, and catalog computers. As the study of building usage indicated a high use of study space, especially of group tables, TCL made more space for group tables and group seating. This resulted in increase in the use of study tables, showing that students wanted study space. The building survey provided the library with an opportunity to examine use of the library facility and user preferences regarding library resources, services, and space.

Applegate (2009) examined student preferences for study space and found that the library is the preferred place for academic activity that is not immediately connected with a class session. The most preferred study space in the university library was a study room, implying that students might prefer to be allowed to talk while studying in the library. The traditional study carrel appeared to have appeal, showing increasing use during the course of a semester. Wireless Internet access and electrical outlets were also considered as important elements for laptop users. Given (2007) examined the perceptions of both faculty and librarians on the design and availability of campus spaces. The study identified the need for welcoming spaces on campus to support students' informational activities and learning processes. The faculty and academic librarians noted that soft chairs, spacious tables, ergonomic workstations, clean surfaces, and aesthetic details were welcoming elements to support academic work. They also emphasized the importance of offering students a social space for collaboration, information sharing, and down-time with peers. Peterson (2005) identified five types of user activity for which library space should be designed: information seeking, recreation, teaching and learning, connection, and contemplation. She explains that library space should accommodate users' activities of seeking a wide range of information for their work and personal lives, and support those who seek entertainment material or activities for recreational purposes. Teaching and learning spaces are also needed to support activities such as group study, class, one-to-one teaching and learning, tutoring, literacy activities,

training, and homework help. For connection, libraries serve as communal gathering spaces for those who have academic, social, and cultural pursuits. For those who need a silent space, libraries serve as sanctuaries and designated places for contemplation.

Various studies have examined the relationship between user characteristics and patterns of use of academic libraries. In a study focusing on whether first-year college students' use of academic libraries was associated with the students' socioeconomic characteristics, Soria, Nackerud, and Peterson (2015) found that students' use of academic libraries was associated with a wide variety of socioeconomic indicators. The findings suggested that students from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds were less likely to use the libraries in areas such as circulation, reference services, accessing e-books and e-journals, and using library workstations. Whitmire (2003) examined whether there were differences in undergraduates' academic library use across racial groups. There were similarities across racial groups in terms of the frequency of library activities in which students are engaged, but differences were found in the frequency of activities such as finding materials while browsing the stacks, checking citations, and checking out books. There were also differences in the factors associated with academic library use across culturally diverse racial groups. Hall and Kapa (2015) investigated the specific needs of a library's campus community and found differences in library use across the users from different programs of study. The study reported that only 35% of the respondents came to the library to borrow material, whereas 84% visited the library to use study space. It was also found that the students who used the service points most frequently were not necessarily those who used the study spaces the most. Bridges (2008) examined the differences in undergraduate students' use of the physical library and the virtual library by academic discipline and class standing. The study found significant differences in the use of the physical library and the virtual library by academic discipline. However, no significant differences were determined in the use of the physical library and the virtual library by class standing.

Some studies have examined the relationship between library use and academic performance to demonstrate the positive impact of

**Table 2**  
Preferred places to spend time during non-class times on campus.

Place	The first preferred place		The second preferred place		The third preferred place	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Library	47	33.3	37	26.2	20	14.2
Café	44	31.2	30	21.3	27	19.1
Classroom	16	11.3	32	22.7	29	20.6
Gym	11	7.8	11	7.8	13	9.2
Lawn and outdoor bench	8	5.7	11	7.8	21	14.9
Lab	7	5.0	12	8.5	19	13.5
Dorm	4	2.8	1	0.7	4	2.8
Other	4	2.8	2	1.4	6	4.3
Sport turf	0	0.0	5	3.5	2	1.4
Total	141	100.0	141	100.0	141	100.0

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