

**University of Massachusetts Amherst**

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**From the Selected Works of Krista M. Harper**

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# Participatory Design Ethnography in the Learning Commons: Initial Research Findings

Krista Harper, *University of Massachusetts - Amherst*

Students in Anthropology 397AR, Spring 2014, *Students in Anthropology 397AR, Spring 2014*



Available at: [https://works.bepress.com/krista\\_harper/23/](https://works.bepress.com/krista_harper/23/)

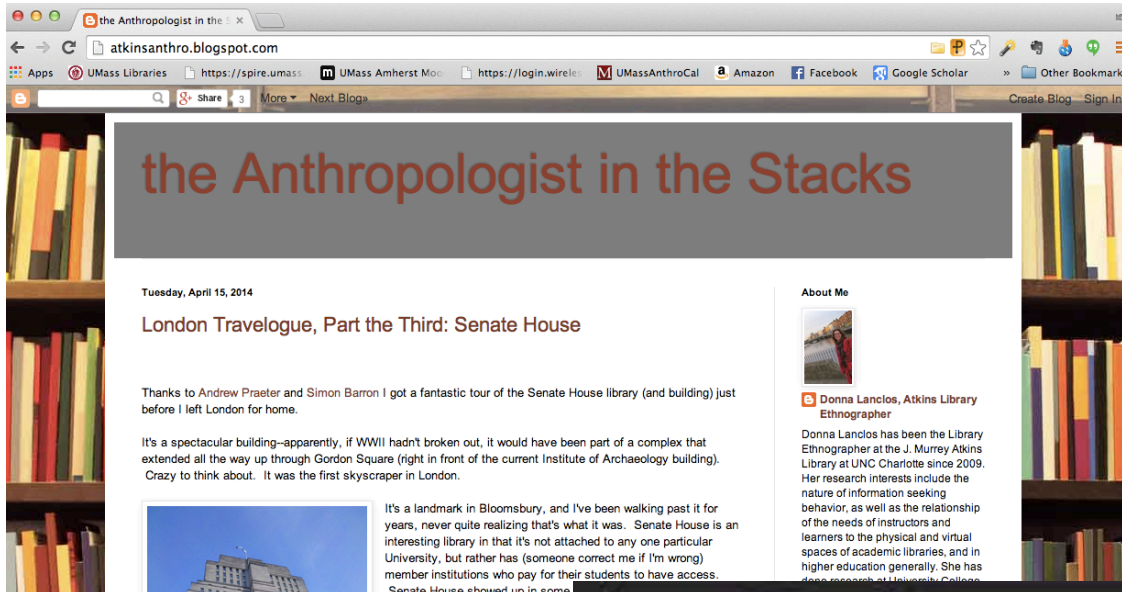
# Participatory Design Ethnography of the Learning Commons



Research in progress  
by Prof. Krista Harper & students  
in Anthro 397AR: Applied Anthropological Research  
Spring 2014

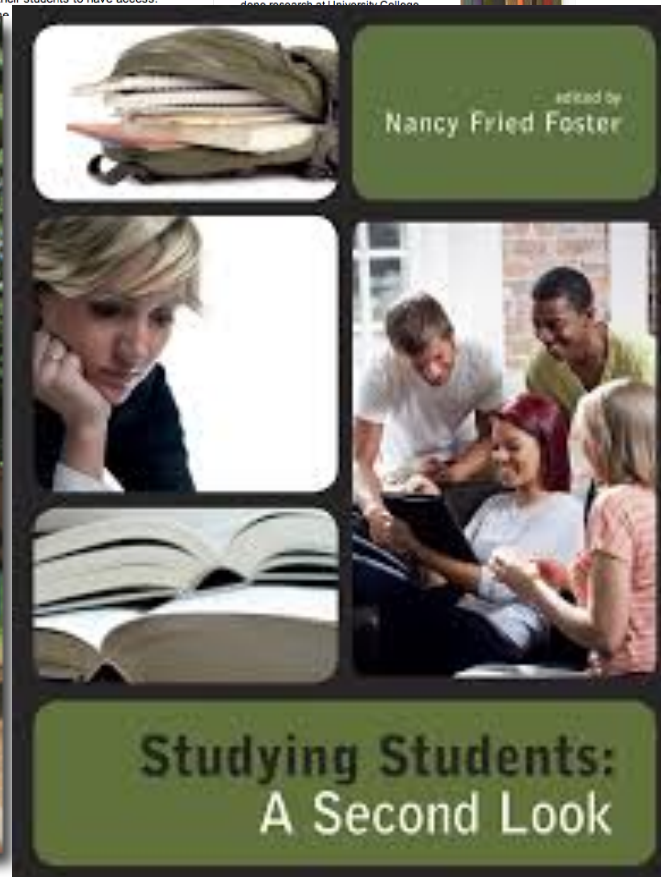
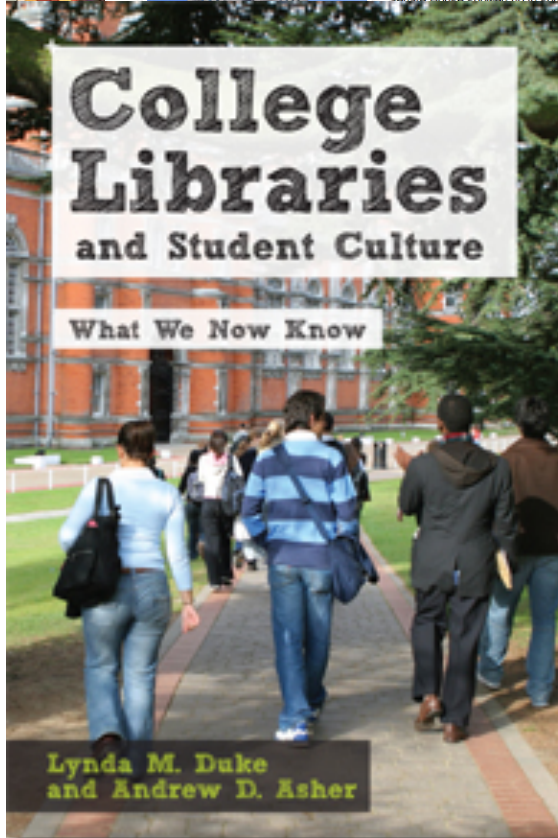
# Who we are & what we're doing

- Applied Anthropological Research class
  - Teaching goal: Building ethnographic and user experience research skills
  - Research goals: Students studying students' library experience



# Ethnography in the Library

- Nancy Fried Foster
- Lynda Drake & Andrew Asher
- Donna Lanclos

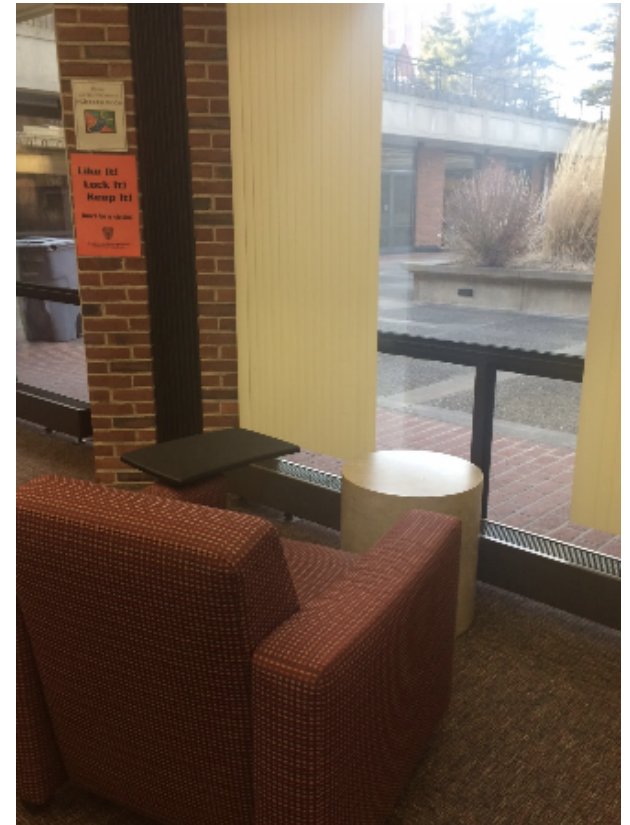


# Questions about the LC

- **Activities**
  - What do undergrads do at the LC?
- **Motivations**
  - What motivates students to come to the LC ?
- **Built Space**
  - How does the built space of the LC impact users?
- **Technology**
  - How are students using tech?
- **Help**
  - How do students see “human element” of the Library?

# Research Methods

- Student Cognitive Maps
- Self-observation
- Participant observation
- Walking interviews
- Photovoice Discussions
  - Favorite place
  - Least favorite
  - My study space
  - Why I come
  - Should change
  - Help!







# Initial Findings: USE

- Expected uses
  - Studying individually & in groups
  - Taking classes
  - Seeking help
  - Using computers & printers
- Unexpected uses
  - On-campus “living room”: napping, socializing
  - Checking social media
  - “Playtime” during study breaks



# Initial Findings: MOTIVATION

What *motivates* students to come to LC?

- Printers
- Group work
- “Quick work” between classes
- Convenience

• What *deters* students from coming?

- Feeling “overwhelmed” by environment
- Conflicts over space in high-use areas

# Initial Findings: BUILT SPACE

- Students LOVE the group work cubicles
  - BUT conflicts and discomfort about solo users
  - Wish they had individual, transparent cubbies
- Laptop tables controversial: high-use, but seen as loud and distracting
- Outlets are key
- Preferred non-desk seating= comfy chair with moveable tray
- Considerations: Overall flow, people lining up

# Initial Findings: SENSORY EXPERIENCE

- Sound
  - Students enjoy “white noise” of activity
  - BUT too loud during LC primetime
- Light: Maximizing natural light
- Color: More dynamic but “classy”
- Art & Plants: very desirable; use screens?
- Make the most of the Courtyard as an aesthetic asset

# Initial Findings: TECHNOLOGY

- What tech do students *come to use*?
  - Printers—key problem area
  - OIT Computers with specialized software
  - Many don't know about laptop rental
- What tech do students *bring*?
  - Smartphones common, tablets less so
  - Laptops (increasingly)
  - Need for ubiquitous outlets

# Initial Findings: GETTING HELP

- “On my own”
  - Timing and crowds
  - Unclear who to ask for what
  - Don’t want to be bothersome
- “Not knowing”
- “Invisible” librarians
  - BUT students who formed a relationship with a librarian used their services
  - AND “Ask a Librarian” placement helped



# NEXT STEPS

- Summer 2014: More data analysis; planning for next phase
- Fall 2014: 3-4 graduate students continue research
- Spring 2015: Possible collaboration with Prof. Amanda Walker Johnson
- 2015-2016 school year: Harper conducts more research with classes as needed

# Thanks for joining us today!

- Ideas for further ethnographic projects?
- Contact Prof. Krista Harper at [kharp@anthro.umass.edu](mailto:kharp@anthro.umass.edu)
- Twitter: @kristamharper