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Huron University College Learning Behaviors and Learning Spaces - Student Survey Results

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Huron University College
Learning Behaviors and Learning Spaces Survey
Student Survey Results – June 2014

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I. Introduction

Method: The Learning Behaviors and Learning Spaces (LBLS) survey was conducted between March 10 and March 24, 2014 at Huron University College (HUC), sponsored by the Huron University College Library (HUCL). The survey was emailed to all students registered at Huron during the winter 2014 term with an invitation to participate as a means of supporting planning activities for the proposed Learning Commons.

Population: 173 undergraduate students responded to the survey along with 10 post-baccalaureate (i.e. Masters) students. There was slightly higher representation of first and second-year students (46 and 54) compared to third and fourth-year students (43 and 35).

The majority of students responding to the survey live off-campus: 77% (145) while 22% (43) identified themselves as living on campus at the time of the survey, i.e. in residence.

The Survey Instrument: The LBLS survey included questions about twelve learning behaviors identified through the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) as an important part of student success. Students were asked to indicate the importance of the learning behavior to their success as a student using a scale of: Not important, Somewhat Important, Important, or Very Important.

Students who identified a learning behavior as either Important or Very Important were further asked to indicate how well HUC provides spaces that foster this behavior using a scale of: Uncertain or do not know, Not very well, Adequately, or Very well.

Students who identified space at HUC as being provided Adequately or Very Well were further asked to identify specific on-campus spaces that foster this learning behavior, choosing from a prepared list. This list consciously excluded classroom and lab space. The list included:

- Residence halls
- Dining hall
- Student union
- Common spaces in academic buildings
- Recreational facilities
- Outdoor spaces
- Huron University College Library
- Other libraries at Western University
- Computing lab

For a full account of the student data collected through the LBLS survey please see Appendix 1.

II. Analysis:

a. Learning Behaviors

The top three learning behaviors identified by students as critical to their success reveal that students value both the opportunity to learn alone as well as in groups:

1. Students work alone, as individuals, to understand class material and to complete class assignments. (LB2)

   Out of the 12 learning behaviors listed, student's overwhelmingly recognized working alone, as individuals, to understand class material and to complete class assignments as key to student success, with 91% of students identifying this learning behavior as either Very Important (58%) or Important (33%).

2. Students discuss ideas from readings or classes with others (students, family members, co-workers, etc) outside of class. (LB4)

   Discussing ideas from reading or classes with others outside of class was the second most popular learning behavior for students based on the cumulative total (57%) of respondents identifying this learning behavior as either Very Important (18%) or Important (39%).

3. Students work with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments. (LB1)

   Working with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments is the third most popular learning behavior based on the cumulative total (53%) of respondents identifying this learning behavior as either Very Important (21%) or Important (32%).

The lowest rated learning behaviors relate to students working with faculty outside of class in different ways:

- 75% of students indicated that working with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, orientation, student life activities) was either Somewhat Important (48%) or Not Important (27%).

  Working with a faculty member on a research project outside of a course or program ranked last on the list of learning behaviors with 38% indicating this to be Somewhat Important and 35% responding Not Important, for a cumulative total of 73%.

A full ranking of learning behaviors surveyed, using the cumulative total for learning behaviors identified as Very Important or Important:

1. Students work alone to understand class material, complete assignments. (LB2)
2. Students discuss ideas from readings or classes with others. (LB4)
3. Students work with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments. (LB1)

4. Students discuss ideas from readings/class with faculty outside of class. (LB5)
   Students pursue independent study or self-designed major. (LB10)
5. Students 'work along' to understand class material and complete assignments. (LB3)
   Students have serious conversations with students different from selves re: religion, politics. (LB8)
6. Students have serious conversations with students different from own race, ethnicity. (LB9)
7. Students have culminating senior experience. (LB11)
8. Students participate in a learning community. (LB12)
9. Students work with faculty on activities other than coursework. (LB6)
10. Students work on a research project with a faculty member. (LB7)

There are only minor differences between the ranked list of learning behaviors identified as Very Important and the ranked list of learning behaviors identified as either Very Important OR Important:

LB ranked by highest score for 'Very Important'	LB ranked by highest cumulative score 'Very Important OR Important'
1 Students work alone (LB2)	1 Students work alone (LB2)
2 Students work with classmates (LB1)	2 Students discuss readings outside class (LB4)
3 Students pursue independent study (LB10)	3 Students work with classmates (LB1)
4 Students 'work along' (LB3) Students discuss readings with faculty (LB5)	4 Students discuss readings with faculty (LB5) Students pursue independent study (LB10)
5 Students discuss readings outside class (LB4)	5 Students 'work along' (LB3) Students have serious convos (rel, pol) (LB8)
6 Students have serious convos (rel, pol) (LB8) Students have serious convos (race, ethn) (LB9)	6 Students have serious convos (race, ethn) (LB9)
7 Students participate in learning comm. (LB12)	7 Students have culminating sr exp (LB11)
8 Students have culminating sr exp (LB11)	8 Students participate in learning comm. (LB12)
9 Students work w fac outside coursework (LB6)	9 Students work w fac outside coursework (LB6)
10 Students work on res proj w faculty (LB7)	10 Students work on res proj w faculty (LB7)

In comparing these two lists, the same learning behaviors appear in the top 5, with the exception of LB8 which only appears on the cumulative list that identifies a learning behavior as Very Important OR Important. LB6 and LB7 appear in the same order on both lists (9 and 10).

b. Learning Spaces

In the LBLS survey students were asked to identify, for those learning behaviors that are Very Important or Important, how well HUC does in providing on-campus space to foster this learning behavior: Very Well, Adequately, Not Very Well or Uncertain. Students were then asked to identify specific on-campus learning spaces that foster this learning behavior, selecting from a list of ten possible spaces (purposely excluding classrooms and/or labs). The following analysis considers responses provided on learning spaces for the top 5 learning behaviors identified through the survey (using the cumulative score of Very Important and Important).

1. Students work alone to understand class material, complete assignments. (LB2)

   HUC does:
   Very well – 9%
   Adequate – 55%
   Not very well – 34%
   Uncertain – 1%

   Most popular space associated with this LB: Huron University College Library - 91%

2. Students discuss ideas from readings or classes with others. (LB4)

   HUC does:
   Very well – 5%
   Adequate – 47%
   Not very well – 41%
   Uncertain – 6%

   Most popular space associated with this LB: Common spaces in academic buildings – 88%

3. Students work with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments. (LB1)

   HUC does:
   Very well – 9%
   Adequate – 55%
   Not very well – 34%
   Uncertain – 1%

   Most popular space associated with this LB: Huron University College Library – 87%

4. Students discuss ideas from readings/class with faculty outside of class. (LB5)

   HUC does:
   Very well – 23%
   Adequate – 54%
   Not very well – 21%

Uncertain – 1%

Most popular space associated with this LB: Other – Faculty Offices – 56%

Students pursue independent study or self-designed major. (LB10)

HUC does:
Very well – 15%
Adequate – 46%
Not very well – 16%
Uncertain – 21%

Most popular space associated with this LB: Huron University College Library – 89%

5. Students 'work along' to understand class material and complete assignments. (LB3)

   HUC does:
   Very well – 17%
   Adequate – 51%
   Not very well – 28%
   Uncertain – 2%

   Most popular space associated with this LB: Huron University College Library – 89%

   Students have serious conversations with students different from themselves re: religion, politics. (LB8)

   HUC does:
   Very well – 11%
   Adequate – 47%
   Not very well – 29%
   Uncertain – 10%

   Most popular space associated with this LB: Common spaces in academic buildings - 82%

From the above data it would appear that HUC spaces that foster LB important to students are acceptable but have room for improvement, with between 47-55% of students identifying space provided as Adequate. Few students selected Very Well to describe learning spaces at HUC, although 23% used this category to describe space provided where students discuss ideas from readings/class with faculty and 15% used this category to describe space where students can pursue independent study.

LB with associated spaces that received a high (i.e. over 30%) Not Very Well ranking included space for students to work alone to understand class material (LB2, 34%), space for students to

discuss ideas from readings/classes with others (LB4, 41%), and space for students to work with classmates on class assignments (LB1, 34%).

In the above list of top 5 learning behaviors, HUCL is identified in 4 out of 7 cases as the most popular space for fostering each learning behavior. In those learning behavior categories where it does not rank first, it is listed as the third most popular space (LB4, LB5) and the fifth most popular space (LB8). This is out of a list of 10 possible learning spaces. This reflects the range of different uses students make of Library space.

The above data, considered alongside comments provided by students at the conclusion of the LBLS survey, indicate that there is a strong desire for more spaces outside of class where students can work together in groups, where conversation and dialogue can take place in aid of learning:

"Could use more spaces that foster group work, group learning. The library space for this is limited and the S.A.C. is not always conducive for effective learning. Access to classrooms is beneficial, but weekend access would be helpful as well."

"The huron library is great but it is really just designed for independent study and the study rooms are always booked."

"A great study area that is quiet but not silent would be great…SAC is way too noisy, library is too quiet."

"As an off-campus student, there are limited options for places I can go study in between my classes, and having additional study space that allows group seating and a lower amount of distractions would be a great help."

"There needs to be a space at Huron where students can do their work that is not loud and busy like the SAC but foster some conversation unlike the silence of the library."

III. Next Steps

The LBLS survey has identified learning behaviors that are important to students at HUC and the spaces they currently use to support learning outside of the classroom. Further, students have identified how well space provided by HUC supports desired learning behaviors. While much has been learned as a result of the LBLS survey, more research needs to be done on learning spaces at HUC for students, particularly in relationship to the proposed HUCL Learning Commons expansion. For example, defining suitability of learning space at HUC is an area where more investigation would be useful. Understanding what students feel constitutes a space that supports learning 'adequately' versus 'very well' should be a priority, where HUC should aspire to have more spaces identified as supporting learning 'very well', particularly in the proposed Learning Commons.

The HUCL is cited by students as a popular space to engage in different types of learning behaviors throughout the LBLS survey. The data and student comments collected through the survey indicate that the HUCL needs a better balance between quiet space and conversation friendly space where group learning can take place. For example, students have indicated that *"The huron library is great but it is really just designed for independent study and the study rooms are always booked."* This balancing (and expansion) of Library space would reflect the learning behaviors most valued by students, where two are focused on working individually/independently while five seek to be achieved in collaboration with others. It would also be useful to understand what students consider to be 'Common spaces in academic buildings', as this space appeared in the top three out of ten possible learning spaces for nine out of ten learning behaviors.

Given the above, it is recommended that a series of focus groups be held with students in the fall and winter (14-15) to probe further into these areas.

IV. Appendix

The following provides a summary of data collected for each learning behavior studied through the LBLS survey.

LB1. Students work with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments.

Over half (53%) of students identified this learning behavior as either Very Important (21%) or Important (32%) to student success. 45% of students indicated this learning behavior was Somewhat Important (30%) or Not Important (15%).

Of those students who identified working with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments as Very Important or Important, 9% indicated that HUC does Very Well in providing space for this purpose while 55% felt space provided was Adequate. 34% of students responded Not very well. 1% were Uncertain.

Huron University College Library was identified as the most popular space for students to work with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments. The top five spaces identified were:

1. Huron University College Library – 87%
2. Other libraries at Western University – 80%
3. Common spaces in academic buildings – 68%
4. Dining hall – 28%
5. Computing Lab – 26%

LB2. Students work alone, as individuals, to understand class material and to complete class assignments.

91% of students identified this learning behavior as either Very Important (58%) or Important (33%) to student success. 6% of students identified this learning behavior as Somewhat Important (5%) or Not Important (1%).

Of those students who identified working alone, as individuals, to understand class material and to complete class assignments as Very Important or Important, 25% indicated that HUC does Very Well in providing space for this purpose while 54% felt space provided was Adequate. 17% of students responded Not very well, 3% were Uncertain.

Huron University College Library was identified as the most popular space on campus for students to work alone, as individuals, to understand class material and to complete class assignments. The top five spaces identified were:

1. Huron University College Library – 91%
2. Other libraries at Western University – 75%
3. Common spaces in academic buildings – 54%
4. Computing Lab – 28%

5. Dining hall – 22%

LB3. Students, while working alone to understand class material and to complete class assignments, do this in proximity to other students working in the same way ("working along").

50% of students identified this learning behavior as either Very Important (19%) or Important (31%) to student success. 48% identified this learning behavior as either Somewhat Important (32%) or Not Important (16%).

Of those students who identified 'working along' as Very Important or Important, 17% indicated that HUC does Very Well in providing space for this purpose while 51% felt space provided was Adequate. 28% responded Not very well, 2% were Uncertain.

Huron University College Library was identified as the most popular space on campus for students to work alone to understand class material to complete assignments in proximity to other students working in the same way. The top five spaces identified were:

1. Huron University College Library – 89%
2. Other libraries at Western University – 79%
3. Common spaces in academic buildings – 58%
4. Computing Lab – 35%
5. Dining hall, Outdoor spaces (tied) – 31%

LB4. Students discuss ideas from readings or classes with others (students, family members, co-workers, etc) outside of class.

57% of students identified this learning behavior as either Very Important (18%) or Important (39%). 42% of students identified this learning behavior as Somewhat Important (35%) or Not Important (7%).

Of those students who identified discussing ideas from readings or classes with others as Very Important or Important, 5% of students indicated that HUC does Very Well in providing space for this purpose while 47% felt space provided was Adequate. 41% of students responded Not very well, 6% were Uncertain.

Common spaces in academic buildings was identified as the most popular space on campus for students to discuss readings or classes with others. The top five spaces identified were:

1. Common spaces in academic buildings – 88%
2. Dining halls – 54%
3. Huron University College Library – 42%
4. Outdoor spaces, Other libraries at Western University (tied) – 40%
5. Computing Lab, Residence halls (tied) – 21%

LB5. Students discuss ideas from readings or classes with faculty members outside of class.

52% of students identified this learning behavior as either Very Important (19%) or Important (33%) while 46% identified this learning behavior as Somewhat Important (37%) or Not Important (9%).

Of those students who identified discussing ideas from readings or classes with faculty members outside of class as Very Important or Important, 23% indicated that HUC does Very Well in providing space for this purpose while 54% felt space was Adequate. 21% of students responded Not very well, 1% were Uncertain.

Faculty offices (identified under 'Other') were identified as the most popular spaces on campus for students to discuss readings or classes with faculty members outside of class (56%). The top five spaces identified for this learning behavior were:

1. Other (Faculty Offices) - 56%
2. Commons spaces in academic buildings – 44%
3. Huron University College Library – 24%
4. Outdoor spaces – 20%
5. Other libraries at Western University – 16%

LB6. Students work with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, orientation, student life activities).

23% of students identified this learning behavior as either Very Important (9%) or Important (14%). 75% of students identified this learning behavior as either Somewhat Important (48%) or Not Important (27%).

Of those students who identified working with faculty members on activities other than coursework as either Very Important or Important, 19% indicated HUC does Very Well in providing space for this purpose while 32% felt space provided was Adequate. 35% of respondents responded Not very well, 12% were Uncertain.

Common spaces in academic buildings was identified as the most popular space on campus for students to work with faculty members on activities other than coursework (80%). The top five spaces identified for this learning behavior were:

1. Common spaces in academic buildings – 80%
2. Student Union (SAC) – 46%
3. Outdoor spaces – 33%
4. Faculty offices & Huron University College Library & Recreational facilities (tied) – 26%
5. Computing Lab & Dining hall & Other libraries at the University of Western Ontario – 20%

LB7. Students work on a research project with a faculty member outside of course or program requirements.

25% of students identified this learning behavior as either Very Important (7%) or Important (18%). 73% of students identified this learning behavior as either Somewhat Important (38%) or Not Important (35%).

Of those students who identified working on a research projects with a faculty member outside of a course or program as Very Important or Important, 11% indicated that HUC does Very Well in providing space for this purpose while 35% felt space provided was Adequate. 29% responded Not very well, 23% were Uncertain.

The Huron University College Library was identified as the most popular space on campus for students to work on a research project with a faculty member outside of course or program requirements (60%). The top five spaces identified for this learning behavior were:

1. Huron University College Library – 60%
2. Common spaces in academic buildings – 53%
3. Other libraries at Western University – 40%
4. Other (Faculty offices) – 33%
5. Computing Lab – 26%

LB8. Students have serious conversations with other students who are very different from themselves in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions or personal values.

50% of students identified this learning behavior as either Very Important (16%) or Important (34%). 46% identified this learning behavior as Somewhat Important (32%) or Not Important (16%).

Of those students who identified having serious conversations with other students who are different from themselves (etc) as either Very Important or Important, 11% indicated that HUC does very well in providing space for this purpose, while 47% felt space provided was Adequate. 29% responded Not very well, 10% were Uncertain.

Common spaces in academic buildings was identified as the most popular space on campus for students to have serious conversations with other students who are very different from themselves (82%). The top five spaces identified for this learning behavior were:

1. Common spaces in academic buildings – 82%
2. Dining hall – 66%
3. Outdoor spaces – 53%
4. Residence halls – 41%
5. Huron University College Library, other libraries at Western University (tie) – 38%

LB9. Students have serious conversations with other students different from themselves in race or ethnicity.

48% of students identified this learning behavior as either Very Important (16%) or Important (32%). 50% of students identified this learning behavior as Somewhat Important (31%) or Not Important (19%).

Of those students who identified having serious conversations with other students different from themselves in race or ethnicity as Very Important or Important, 16% indicated that HUC does Very Well in providing space for this purpose, while 43% felt space provided was Adequate. 30% responded Not very well, 9% were Uncertain.

Common spaces in academic buildings was identified as the most popular space on campus for students to have serious conversations with other students different from themselves in race or ethnicity (88%). The top five spaces identified for this learning behavior were:

1. Common spaces in academic buildings – 88%
2. Dining halls – 69%
3. Outdoor spaces – 61%
4. Residence halls – 44%
5. Huron University College Library, Recreational facilities (tie) – 41%

LB10. Students pursue independent study or a self-designed major.

52% of students identified this learning behavior as Very Important (21%) or Important (31%). 46% of students identified this learning behavior as Somewhat Important (28%) or Not Important (18%).

Of those students who identified pursuing an independent study or self-designed major as very important or important, 15% indicated that HUC does Very Well in providing space for this purpose, while 46% felt space provided was Adequate. 16% responded Not very well, 21% were Uncertain.

Huron University College Library was identified as the most popular space on campus for students to pursue independent study or a self-designed major. The top five spaces identified for this learning behavior were:

1. Huron University College Library – 89%
2. Other libraries at Western University – 64%
3. Computing Lab – 38%
4. Common spaces in academic buildings – 33%
5. Dining hall, Residence halls, Student Union (tie) – 15%

LB11. Students have a culminating senior experience (comprehensive exam, capstone course, thesis, project).

37% of students identified this learning behavior as Very Important (11%) or Important (26%). 62% of students identified this learning behavior as either Somewhat Important (32%) or Not Important (30%).

Of those students who identified having a culminating senior experience as Very Important or Important, 16% indicated that HUC does Very Well in providing space for this purpose, while 35% felt space was Adequate. 20% responded Not very well, 27% were Uncertain.

Huron University College Library was identified as the most popular space on campus for students to work on a culminating senior experience (comprehensive exam, capstone course, thesis, project). The top five spaces identified for this learning behavior are:

1. Huron University College Library – 100%
2. Other libraries at Western University – 80%
3. Common spaces in academic buildings – 55%
4. Computing Lab – 45%
5. Outdoor spaces – 25%

LB12. Students participate in a learning community or some other formal program where groups of students take two or more classes together.

35% of students identified this learning behavior as Very Important (15%) or Important (20%). 62% of students identified this learning behavior as either Somewhat Important (39%) or Not Important (23%).

Of those students who identified participating in a learning community as Very Important or Important, 17% indicated that HUC does Very Well in providing space for this purpose, while 45% felt space was Adequate. 21% responded Not very well, 15% were Uncertain.

Common spaces in academic buildings was identified as the most popular space on campus for students to participate in a learning community. The top five spaces identified for this learning behavior are:

1. Common spaces in academic buildings – 86%
2. Huron University College Library – 54%
3. Other libraries at Western University - 50%
4. Dining hall – 45%
5. Recreational facilities & Residence hall (tied) – 18%