Observing Graduate Students' Use of Library Space

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Based on a “sweeps” study in public libraries (Givens & Leckie, 2003), this observational research tracks how the physical space and resources are used in a faculty-supported graduate library. We create a snapshot of what is going on in the library at a given moment in time, and then compile the results to determine how users behave in our space. These results will inform planning for an upcoming move.

What is a “library sweep”?
• Non-obtrusive, observational research method
  Walk through the library space and record the activities and possessions/objects/resources in spaces being used
  Produces snapshot of library use at a given time

What is the Graduate Resource Centre (GRC)?
• Faculty-supported library
  Provides information resources and services (human, print and digital) to support Faculty of Information and Media Studies’ graduate programs
  Non-circulating resources

Resources include:
• 2000 monographs
• 520 reference volumes
• 120 print and electronic journal subscriptions
• 135 audio-visual resources

Space is also an important resource for graduate students:
• Individual study
• Group work
• Socializing

What space requirements (quality and quantity) are required for an upcoming move?
• Investigate graduate students’ use of physical space
• Investigate graduate students’ interaction with resources and other materials

Methodology:
1. Create a map of the GRC space
2. Create codes for various locations within GRC in a logical sequence
3. Create checklists to track numbers of individuals and their activities and possessions
4. Observe the space three times per term (beginning, middle, end) sampling a variety of times during operational hours (morning, noon, afternoon, evening, weekend) recording what you see
5. Compile repeated measures data and analyze

Preliminary Results (N=178):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Capacity</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group Work Tables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Study Carrels</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Area</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example of use:
• Eating/drinking: Mean=0.1 – no policy changes

What’s happening in these spaces?

What materials are used in these spaces?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Materials / Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Using laptop (30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Bookbag (78%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searching/Retrieving</td>
<td>Conversing (23%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charging Laptop</td>
<td>Binders / papers (52%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using Laptop/Cell/iPad/e-reader</td>
<td>Laptop (41%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using Computer/Copier</td>
<td>Interacting with staff (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to music</td>
<td>Books, reserves, etc. (34%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating</td>
<td>Sorting / stapling (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking</td>
<td>Coat / jacket (26%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleeping</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waiting for Staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interacting with staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversing with Others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References
• MIFS, M. (2012). It’s just plain common sense: Grounding space planning in evidence-based research. Scholarly@Western

Future Directions
Use “sweeps” with other data-gathering methods for space planning:
• Headcount statistics (ongoing)
• Facebook polls (ongoing)
• Graduating surveys (ongoing)
• Comment cards(ongoing)
• Needs assessment (updated)
• Focus groups (future)