

The Library Is for Studying: Student Preferences for Study Space

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S009913330900069X>

This article compares “soft space” of libraries to comparative places on campus. It has a thorough quantitative examination of what aspects of a library students are drawn to.

Some notable quotes:

“As for the attractiveness of the different spaces, study rooms were the clear favorite—and reinforcing an ideal of seclusion, rooms on the fourth floor were more popular than those on the third floor. Signage in rooms encourages use by groups rather than individuals, and in fact 63% (3rd floor) and 71% (4th floor) of those in study rooms were in groups. The next most popular group areas were the “soft chair” area on the fourth floor of the library, and the Business corridor. The latter reflects the class nature of the students gathered there adjacent to their classrooms. The other areas studied were primarily (75–95%) used by individuals.

The traditional study carrel still apparently has appeal. Most of the carrels at the University Library are arranged around the perimeter (stacks are internal) of each floor, allowing for plenty of natural light and views through curtain windows.”

“It is a mistake to think of the library only as a place where services such as reference, instruction, and computer use are provided. The library is a campus space, one uniquely suited to meet important student needs for space as well as services and resources. Where will students do what they need to do? Where will they read? Plug in their laptops? Eat and drink? Talk with their classmates and friends—and not have to listen to other people talking? Have a place to concentrate in quiet? As Scott Bennett argues, effective library design takes account of a wide range of student needs, beyond particular service provisions.”

This last quote is important in that it highlights what the library should do, and what the museum should, conversely, not do. The museum cannot accommodate all study habits and students, so those considering implementing study areas within it should not concern themselves with doing so.

For example, the researchers found that carrels are popular and necessary in a library, especially as finals approach. However, the museum likely doesn't have the space for this. And if a student wants a carrel they can go to the library.

Measuring Library Space Use and Preferences: Charting a Path Toward Increased Engagement

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/251356>

This article investigated how the library of the University Dayton was currently being used as well as what students preferred, at the time of the study and in the future. This article was perhaps most relevant of all. Here are some notable quotes:

“Their results were similar to Sommer’s, indicating that users preferred to sit alone at tables, even when carrels were available in the area.”

For some students, just seeing others study helps them to do it as well. Sommer found library readers preferred open areas and suggested that these students found the presence of other studiers to be beneficial motivation.¹³ Linda Schneekloth and Ellen Keable confirm this finding, especially as it **[End Page 409]** relates to heavy users who came to study because that is where studying is “expected and condoned.”¹⁴

“Moving from research on library behaviors to the library environment, not much has changed since 1960 when Stoke et al. found that the typical student values the following characteristics in study spaces: freedom from distractions and noise, good lighting, personal control of temperature and ventilation, comfortable chairs and adequate desk space, plain décor and furnishings.¹⁶”

“Michael Loder found that students, both individuals and groups, preferred tables and study rooms over carrels.”

“Small study rooms, which could hold one to three students, were also popular.”

“In research, there are conflicting reasons for why a place is good or bad, because people are different and have different preferences.”

The museum should not be a place that accommodates all uses and types of people, because it is too small and that is not its purpose. Rather, if it is likely to be used as a study space, it is by a select few people that routinely come back to it.

“The library was identified most often (47 percent) as the best place to study because it was comfortable, quiet, lacked distractions, had convenient resources, and was a familiar environment. The library was also selected second most frequently (20 percent)—after “my room,” 36 percent—as the worst place on campus to study due to the following reasons: poor lighting, too quiet, too noisy, uncomfortable, puts me to

sleep, and tendency to watch other people. The library was also identified most frequently as the best place to get ideas and the worst place to hang out with friends.”

“Students preferred to study, develop new ideas, and get academic work completed in locations that were quiet and free of distractions, comfortable and relaxed, familiar, and convenient. Students preferred to be with their friends in places with food and which appeared friendly, were not crowded, and did not restrict noise. These results led us to conclude that both individual study spaces and group learning spaces were needed in the library, but the characteristics of the two types of spaces should be different.”

“Of note was the finding that 70 percent of the occupants of the library were in areas with windows.” (This is one of the problem areas. People like windows, but the Museum doesn’t offer much in the way of this).

“The most frequently occupied tables, other than computer stations, were the four- to six-person square or rectangular tables.”

“The findings of the four parts of the space use and preference study confirm earlier research that suggests that, when students seek to study alone, they seek spaces with the following characteristics: freedom from distractions and noise, good lighting, comfort, and pleasing aesthetics. What may once have been considered deviant behavior can now be viewed as a sign that students find libraries as desirable spaces. By putting their feet on the furniture, talking and listening, and eating, students show that they have “moved in” and become comfortable in a space. We view these behaviors as indicators of the type of learning environments that students prefer: spaces that are comfortable, spaces that facilitate interpersonal communication, spaces that can be controlled, and areas that promote the integration of basic human needs and desires, such as eating, drinking, and enjoyment, with learning activities.”

Emerald Insight: Guidelines for creating a library coffee shop:

<http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/pdfplus/10.1108/03074800710823953>

Anchoring concept - shelter or security. If it’s an open space in the Museum, it should be set apart as a distinct space for studying.

Flooring - study found that wood flooring was preferred by most students that went off campus for special places to study, or “warm floor finishes.”

Tables - “square or rectangular tables are easy to pull together and work in accommodating groups.”

Lighting - “Adequate light to read can include task lighting near seats or lighting from the ceiling strategically placed over seating. Dimmer switches can alter light as needs change between night and day, or to meet the varying needs of individual patrons. Artificial lighting should be warm in colour range. Natural light from windows is also good for reading.” Some of the potential spaces in the museum, such as by the dinosaurs, already have a fair amount of lighting. Others, such as in the basement, are quite dark. If the open area in the basement will be transformed into a study space, better, soft, light should be brought in.

Visual appeal. - “Many students responded that their favorite third places were “warm.” Warmth can be incorporated into a space in many ways including finish materials (flooring, walls, colour, and texture) and lighting (light sources that emit warm spectrum light). Waxman (2004) found that many patrons used the words cozy and warm when favorably describing physical attributes they preferred. It is recommended that colours and textures considered cozy and soft be chosen over those that are more hard and slick. Soft textures have tactile benefits as well as sound absorption properties.”

Art - The museum certainly does not lack for interesting things to look at. The study found that students liked having artwork in coffee-shop type locations. The museum can implement some aspects of their exhibits into the study space to be used both decoratively and educationally.

“User Driven Design: Using Ethnographic Techniques to Plan Student Study Space”

-access through MSU library online

In this article: Provided with an opportunity to design a new study space for students during a library renovation, librarians and information technologists at Wesleyan University, a small residential campus, teamed up to learn ethnographic techniques and apply them by incorporating student input into the new space, rather than making decisions based on traditional methods.

Some notable quotes:

“Within larger academic spaces like the library, the students define their own “space” by spreading out their materials (books, notes, snacks) within easy reach, and even adopting a specific location within the library—a specific chair or computer—to use on a regular basis.”

“In nearly all cases, however, students avoid spaces that feel “sterile” or “institutional” because that atmosphere is not conducive to studying. Strong preferences for comfortable seating, having food and beverages at close proximity, and access to electrical power were common themes that we elicited from our photographers.”

“Despite the differences in the three design instructions, several common threads appeared across all three sets of drawings. Nearly every designer expressed the desire to bring nature inside the building. Most of the student design drawings included various types of plants (one placed a large tree in the middle of the room), some added fish tanks, and a few even included waterfalls. This matched what we found in the photograph exercise, which showed that many students had plants in their rooms.”

“Many students included artwork hanging from the walls as well as other window treatments to soften the space and make it more “homelike.” Aesthetically, the major emphasis was in making the space more intimate than the current layout.”

“Most designers emphasized furniture that was moveable and could be readily rearranged. The librarians in the Ethnography Group had already observed that students like to move furniture around as their needs change: from solitary study to group study, for example.”

Takeaways from all research:

Students are diverse in their habits and needs, and require a variety of furniture, space and privacy to study or get work done.

Large, square tables that can seat at least four people comfortably are much used, both in group work or individually.

Carrels are still necessary in libraries, especially during finals. But they aren't really the preferred study space for students.

Good lighting, access to a large amount of outlets, and ability to move furniture are all very important for student studiers.

Nice to have space feel intimate but interesting.

Other university museums that have study spaces:

<http://www.colorado.edu/cumuseum/exhibits/biolounge>

University of Michigan Museum of Modern Art