A Space Odyssey: A Library's Journey to a Better Space Assessment

Jena Styka
Assessment and Administrative Project Coordinator
Kelvin Smith Library, Case Western Reserve University

PURPOSE

Case Western Reserve University has seen record size incoming classes over the last few years, and the library has seen a 40% increase in gate count data since 2014. With that, Kelvin Smith Library has wondered how we can accommodate the growing number of patrons in our finite space. While we have always collected library space assessment data, we needed to rethink how we were collecting and using our data to make meaningful changes.

Previously, we took a general count of patrons studying in each study space. The findings? We were busy, and people were using our spaces. However, we needed to dig deeper to learn how patrons used our spaces. This study allowed us to collect data to make meaningful changes.

The questions:
1. How many patrons are in a given study area? What floors are busiest?
2. Do their preferences and needs change throughout the day?
3. How many patrons are working at each study space (table, computer station, collaboration room etc.)? Do they tend to work alone or together?
4. What types of study tools are they using?
5. Do their preferences and needs change throughout the time and day of week.

The Goal: Maximize space efficiency!

APPRAOCH AND DESIGN

1. Using a map of our library, we identified each study space and study seat we wanted to observe.
   a. Each study area got its own box on a modified map of the library.
   b. Within each box, we broke down the number of each study spaces: tables/carrels/pods, with a place to enter how many patrons (if any) were working at that individual unit.
2. We then created an observational key for tracking relevant behaviors.
   a. We indicated behaviors with a corresponding letter, such as if patrons were using a library-issued computer, computer monitor, or whiteboard.
   b. When this behavior was observed, we placed the corresponding letter next to the count.
3. We conducted our study during a typical week (not midterms, nor finals) at the hours of 9AM, 1PM, 5PM, 9PM.
   a. We identified who would conduct the study at what times. We used members of our assessment team, access and delivery team and student assistants! Everyone received ample instruction for consistent results.
4. Data was analyzed using Excel and Tableau. In Tableau we mapped all data onto our library maps. This visualized where patrons were primarily studying and in what sized groups.

The findings:

Successes
Our quiet study space is busiest—Traditional tables & solo seating “pods” are in high-demand

Traditional tables, regardless of noise level, were the most popular furniture option. Solo seating “pods” that are both comfortable and private were near capacity more often than not. Can we add more of these seats?

Patrons study alone in the morning & together in the evenings
Collaboration rooms were not a popular choice in the mornings (ranked #8 at 9AM) but ranked #1 at 9PM. Likewise, solo seating was the #2 choice at 9AM, but declined to #6 at 9PM. How can we accommodate both study styles?

Ongoing Challenges
Patrons love the computer stations, but not the computers
Computer stations in KSL are like individual desks, and students frequently filled these spaces regardless if they needed a computer. The library-issued computers were only used about half the time that the computer station was occupied. How can we ensure patrons who need the computers can access them?

Patrons do not want to sit together when doing quiet studying
The quiet reading room had an especially high table occupancy rate but on average, only one person was working at a table. With four seats to a table, a lot of seats go unused! How can we encourage students to share study spaces?

PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATIONS

From our data and maps, we identified areas of the library where usage was noticeably low, and what spaces and furniture usage was particularly high.

In our follow up assessment of the spaces, we found that the new additions were almost always filled to capacity! Using our data, we were able to successfully adjust our furniture options to reflect more of what our patrons wanted!

In the meanwhile, we have operationalized this study to conduct it once a semester.