

The D.B. Weldon Library, the main branch of Western Libraries, is undergoing a major renovation as part of Western Libraries' Space Master Plan. This space assessment project seeks to assess the success of the renovation by gathering data about how newly renovated spaces are being used by students. The results of this assessment will be used to identify necessary modifications to the newly renovated spaces; baseline data about users' space use gathered in this assessment will also be used to guide future renovations and furniture purchases in libraries across the system, which will ultimately support Western Libraries' new Strategic Plan's goal of "Supporting Strategic Growth",



Did we get it right?

Foundations for ongoing space assessment

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Methods

To understand how usage varied between different spaces, we created a coding system to classify space. Our classification scheme evolved over time, from one developed by the architect's to a scheme that incorporated furniture and design decisions that were actually implemented over the course of the renovation.

When counting users, we created zones and categories to group spaces with similar characteristics together. These characteristics are based on the following two sets of qualities:

- 1 Focused (F) vs. Casual (C)
- 2 Social (S) vs. Non-social (N)

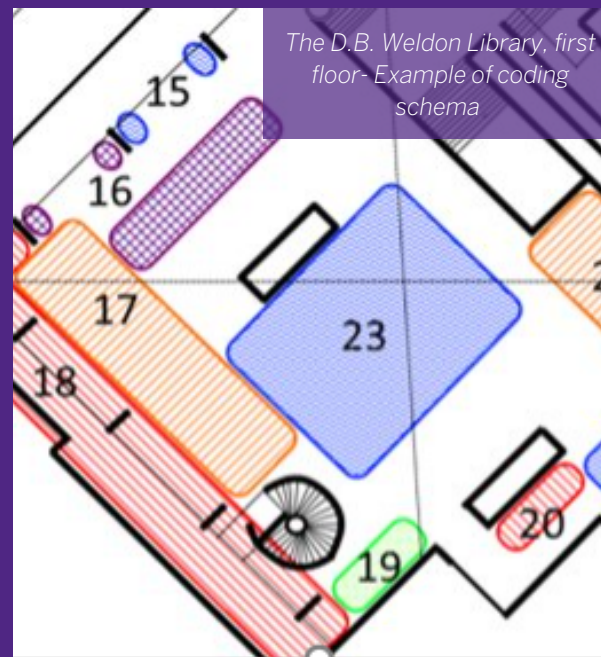
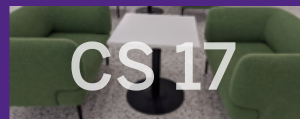
Comfortable, soft furniture, such as banquette seats and lounge chairs, were classified as casual seating, while more rigid, upright seating was classified as focused. In previous exam time observational studies we noted that more casual, "soft seating" was less frequently used during times when students were engaged in exam study than they were at other times of year. Observing trends between focused vs casual areas will be a valuable tool for helping ensure that library fits the needs of all users as the renovation continues.

Social spaces were defined as chairs facing other chairs, while spaces where users were not seated facing other users were classified as non-social. We chose to focus on furniture configuration rather than user activity as we felt it could be hard to verify without being invasive as to whether any given group was acting collaboratively,

23 zones 6 categories

We also categorized Drop-in [D] and Study Room [R] separately, as they had distinct identities and anticipated patterns of use.

Data collection involved performing periodic sweeps of the space where we counted users in each zone and made observations about noise level and interesting usage patterns. To respect the privacy of our users, we did not identify why students were using the space or whether they were working together.



Findings

- Noise levels varied with furniture types, with social spaces being louder than non-social ones.
- Casual seating areas were generally more popular than focused seating, with casual non-social seating being the most heavily used type of furnishing.
- Users consistently moved furniture to:
 - Create social spaces from non-social ones
 - Gain access to electrical outlets
 - Place tables in front of comfortable chairs



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Recommendations

- Create more configurations of single, comfortable chairs with a table, as this was the most popular arrangement.
- Arrange non-social focused seating into long rows rather than 4-6 person tables to encourage table sharing.
- Rearrange furniture groups between floors to achieve the desired noise level for each floor.
- Remove or hide electrical outlets that are across an aisle from a seating area, as these encourage tripping