I Wish My Library Knew That...
How to Align Evolving User Needs with Static Spaces

ABSTRACT

Are there spaces in your library that no longer serve their original purpose?
Are they cluttered, outdated, or just ill-equipped to meet user needs?
User needs change over time, and it can be challenging to align those needs with existing spaces.

How do libraries learn about user needs?
This poster describes quick, easy, and inexpensive techniques to collect feedback from users. Ask us how the University of Colorado Boulder Libraries used these tools to create change in our Research Services area and throughout the library.

INTRODUCTION

Librarians formed a cross-departmental task force to gather data and recommend improvements for a heavily used space in the library that was plagued with a poor layout and an ever-growing collection. The task force addressed the following questions:

• What is the primary purpose of this space?
• What do users want to do in this space?
• What do users need from this space?
• How can the space be improved to accommodate these needs?

OBSERVATIONS: How is the space being used?

Task force members observed users during a variety of days and times during the semester. Observations were recorded in the following template, which tracks:

• Number of users
• Activities and interactions with technology and/or collections
• Provides space for additional notes or sketches.

Key Findings:

• Users like to spread out and stagger seating across large tables
• Students working independently or in groups of 2
• Users chose seats close to power outlets
• Little to no engagement with the collection
• People using both personal and library computers

FLIPCHART FEEDBACK: What do they think about the space?

Quick and direct responses to simple queries on white boards or paper posters on easels.

Key Findings:

• Need additional power outlets
• Need better lighting
• Want more comfortable chairs and standing desks
• Want more vending options including food and office supplies
• Want 24/7 hour access to entire library
• Facilities are not clean

REPLY CARDS: How and Why do people use the space?

Reply cards are mini-questionnaires designed to learn what people are doing in the library and why they chose that specific space for the activity.

Key Findings:

• Majority of users are undergraduate students
• Chose this space because it is quiet
• Most student spend 2-4 hours in the space; long-term studying

TOUCHSTONE TOURS

How do people navigate the space?
How would they describe it?
Ask someone to give you a tour of the library.

• Note how they describe each space
• Trace how they navigate from area to the next
• Ask questions such as why they like/dislike the space or what they would do to improve the space
• Remember to follow their lead!

FLIPCHART FEEDBACK:

What do they think about the space?

Quick and direct responses to simple queries on white boards or paper posters on easels.

Key Findings:

• Students do not understand our terminology
• Repeat users tend to follow the same path to navigate the library
• Preference for study location based on purpose and goals (e.g. focused study or group study)

CONCLUSIONS

These techniques can be applied to a variety of library spaces and completed with minimal levels of staffing and funding. They can be used to provide immediate feedback as well as build a foundation to sustain ongoing, user-focused assessment.

The results at the University of Colorado Boulder provided insight into user behavior and challenged long-standing assumptions about services, spaces, and collection needs.

Next Steps:

• Investing in new furniture
• Repurposing existing furniture
• Hiring a space consultant to make recommendations about the layout

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References