Abstract

Purpose: This study sought to identify the types of spaces, amenities, and policies that a family room should have.

Method: Using a graduate student and students enrolled in a Sociology 404 (qualitative research methods) class, the study sought to identify the needs of patrons with children by examining other family rooms at Utah Valley University and the University of Utah as well as family spaces and programs at nearby public libraries.

The study employed an online survey, observation, focus groups, and interviews. All results helped verify patron needs and suggested design.

Findings: The final results highlighted several key features for the family room, including specific features needed for this space. Specific features include furniture, technology, policies, floor designs, suitable environment, toys, technology access, and group study spaces. Policies include issues of safety, security, and cleanliness, as well as technology use.

Practical Implications: The project highlighted Brigham Young University’s dedication to meeting student learning needs. This presentation will be of interest for academic libraries wishing to develop a family room or wishing to develop collaboration opportunities with faculty outside of the library.

Introduction

At the beginning of the fall 2015 semester, Brigham Young University’s (BYU) Harold B. Lee Library investigated the need for a family room being placed within the library. The assessment sought to determine the following:

1. Is there a need?
2. What design features should a family room have?
3. What policies should govern its use?
4. What are some potential designs given the area is approximately half that of a basketball court?

Method

The study team based their recommendations on data collected through:
• an online survey of BYU students and faculty,
• focus groups with BYU parents,
• observations and interviews at other libraries.

The online survey was administered to a random sample of students (undergraduate and graduate) and faculty to determine what percent of students and faculty had children, the ages of their children, and what amenities such a room should have. Using volunteers from the survey, focus groups were held to further understand family needs for such a space within the library. Finally, using partners external to the university, observations and interviews were conducted. The partners included patrons and employees of nearby public libraries and the libraries at the University of Utah (UU) and Utah Valley University (UVU).

Results

Survey results indicate that approximately 22% of all students and faculty have dependent children at home. Of this 22%, almost half are children of undergraduate students. Almost two-thirds of all reported children of BYU students are under the age of five. Consequently, we suggest that the room be designed to cater to parents of children under the age of five. The percent of children in each age group is listed in Table 1.
Table 1.
Percent of Reported Children by Age Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age (years)</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 2</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2–4</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5–8</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>9–11</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>12–14</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>15–17</td>
<td>8</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Qualitative data indicate that the BYU community is excited about having a family-friendly space in the library. A few examples of student comments expressing this excitement include:
• “... it's such a great idea.”
• “Thank you for whoever donated... it's really hard to be a parent while being in school.”
• “I think this is really cool by the way.”

For What Will They Use It?
Based on the data, we expect the family space to be used for three main reasons. First, student parents will use the room to meet study needs. Sarah, a student mom, shared the juggling she and other student parents encounter. Sarah explained:
So me and my husband are both in school right now so we switch off with my daughter a lot... sometimes I need to nurse on campus and it's hard to find a place that's close... And it would be nice if [my husband] was studying and he could just come in and be with us while doing that. Or having to print something and you didn't feel like you had to rush or that you were inconveniencing everyone around you and people were just like, “Get out with your baby.”

Second, student parents will use the room to meet the needs of their children. Students expressed the desire to have a room that can (1) accommodate having sleeping children close by, (2) provide safe play and engagement opportunities (with toys different from those children have at home) to entertain children who are awake, (3) enable nursing or pumping milk in an appropriate space, and (4) have restrooms, drinking fountains, and furnishings that are comfortable for children. Such amenities co-located will help student parents to better use their time and better concentrate on schoolwork.

Third, parents will use the family-friendly space to meet their spouse and “switch off with kids between classes.” Time is extremely valuable and, for parents, a place on campus where they can switch off childcare will ease the balancing act between work, family, and school that is necessary to complete their university studies.

What Does It Need?
To accommodate the needs for taking care of children while studying, the family room must provide a number of services. Based on the data, the research team developed the following conceptual underpinnings followed by concrete suggestions regarding features in, layout of, and policies for the family room.

Conceptual Underpinnings
This section refers to design and protocol features recommended for the family room.

Safety and Cleanliness
For parents to feel comfortable bringing their children, the family room must promote child safety from injury and illness. The rooms and its furnishings, including toys, must be regularly cleaned. Upholsteries should be easily cleanable. Hand sanitizer or sanitizing wipes could also be available for parents to use to clean surfaces and toys.

There should be open sight lines allowing parents to see their children, covered outlets and hidden cords, rounded furniture edges, toys that are not choking hazards, carpet to cushion falls, and reduced noise to promote child safety.

Open Design
An open design promotes the high-visibility sight lines previously mentioned and promotes ease of
movement. Parents must be able to easily supervise their children. There should be no vision-obscuring shelves, doors, or furniture between the parents’ desks and play areas. An open design also promotes ease of movement for children in strollers and allows for parents to keep infants who are not mobile close.

Separated Sections
Distinct sections in the room will promote safety and success for parents and children. The family room should have distinct study, play, and personal needs (i.e., nursing and lactation) sections. Separate (but not strictly enforced) play areas for younger (up to 18 months) and older children (18 months and above) will promote child safety. These sections could be designated by different flooring patterns (see sample pictures in the appendix). For example, a kitchen area could be tiled while play and study areas are carpeted but with different carpets in these areas.

An Environment Open to Family Needs
Though library norms are changing, noise (especially noise made by young children) still violates academic library norms and food is not universally acceptable. Children make noise, especially when playing, and users of the family room must expect and be tolerant of this reality. Children must also be free to consume food provided by their parents. Mothers must be able to nurse or to pump breast milk.

Self-Contained Library Family Room
Needed amenities should be available within the room. The room should promote convenient study by providing access to group collaboration spaces, Wi-Fi, access to library computers for those who choose not to carry a computer with them, and a printer. The room should promote convenient care of children by including family-friendly restrooms and drinking fountains along with the aforementioned lactation/nursing space.

Publicity
An unadvertised room will likely become an underutilized room. It would be advisable to place the room in an already well-trafficked area. Doing this will be a form of natural advertising. Good room placement should still be complemented by well-placed signage. Direct promotion by various means (e.g., making colleges, advisement centers, and Women’s Resources and Services aware of it; using social media; putting it on the tour) should also be done.

Features
Based on the research, we recommend that the family room include the following features.

Media and Technology
Modern education requires access to media and computing capability. The family room should facilitate student use of media and the use of student-provided computers. It should also include access to library-provided computers and a printer. For parents who are comfortable with children being entertained by media, an area where this can occur should be provided. The placement of such an area should be on the periphery rather than in a place of prominence. It would be good to provide educational media choices for use by children.

A Variety of Engaging Activities
Parents continually mentioned the need for children to be engaged or distracted by toys and activities so that student parents can focus on their studies. Focus group and interview responses on this topic can be categorized into four groups: (1) creative, (2) constructive, (3) educational, and (4) purely recreational. The room should also contain books or other learning activities. Toys could include dress-up materials, play kitchens, coloring and craft supplies, and a variety of building materials. Recommendations from the BYU preschool included climbing structures. Additionally, carpeting containing colorful patterns could provide a useful source of entertainment.

Comfortable and Functional Furniture
The family room should contain furniture that will help parents study effectively. Comfortable seating and desks or tables with enough space to spread out study materials are a must. Couches or comfortable chairs for parents would also be nice. Child-sized chairs and tables should be included. Comfortable seating for children and storage cubbies might be considered.

Kitchen Area
Parents have to deal with hungry and messy children. A small, simple kitchen—with refrigerator, microwave, sink, paper towels, trashcan, and drinking fountain—will help parents in this regard.

Bathroom/Changing Room Facilities
Librarians connected to family rooms at other universities said it would have been more effective to have family bathrooms within close proximity.
of their respective rooms. Surveyed patrons agree. The family room should include a family bathroom. Mothers or fathers can take their child(ren) of either sex into the restroom without causing the discomfort or stress that sometimes accompanies taking a child into a restroom intended for the other gender. Bathrooms should contain changing tables and Diaper Genies. One focus group participant suggested including a machine that vends diapers. This could help parents who either forgot or who had fewer diapers than needed.

A focus group respondent said that child-sized toilets are “awesome when you are potty training.” Besides a child-sized, manual-flush toilet (because, based on the experience of multiple parents, auto-flush toilets often scare young children), there should either be a sink (auto faucet sinks are considered helpful) mounted for children or a step stool provided for children to use a sink mounted at a standard height.

**Layout**
The data suggest that there should be an open layout overall with limited divisions. The more open the room, the more family-friendly and accessible it will be. Furniture placement needs to be carefully considered to provide the desired openness and maintenance of sight lines. Major things to be considered in the layout include age-appropriate and open play spaces, a separated entertainment area where media might be viewed, a lactation room, and group study spaces.

**Age-Separated and Open Areas for Children**
Parents are concerned that their children may be hurt while playing in the family room, either by toys that are not age-appropriate or by older children who do not know how to behave around younger—especially the youngest—children. These concerns can be addressed by having appropriate toys for different age ranges located in separate parts of the family room. Low dividing walls that the youngest children would have difficulty crossing, but that would still allow for parents to see their children, are advisable. Because such measures will lessen parental concerns over their children’s safety, they will also promote more effective parental study.

Some parents suggested that the age dividing the two groups is approximately 18 months. Beyond that approximate age, children can mostly mix safely in a combined open play space. For parents with multiple children, this can be important since the ability to interact with siblings is comforting for some children.

**Separated/Sectioned-Off Media Space**
Many parents see age-appropriate media, viewable on a TV, iPad, or computer as an additional avenue to entertain or distract children while they work. Some parents find this unattractive. These differences suggest that a media area should be separated from the main play area with a glass or other partition so parents can see their children watching television as they work. Another parent-suggested alternative is to have “iPads that you can check out [that] you don’t have to let your kid play with it if you don’t want to but other people can.” Any iPads should have protective cases and screen protectors and, for noise control, headphones could be provided.

**Lactation Room**
Nursing mothers may constitute a significant number of family room patrons suggesting the need for a distinct lactation room, containing comfortable (preferably rocking) chairs, separate from the bathroom(s). This will convey that nursing mothers need not be hidden in a corner of a bathroom but that they should feel respected, welcomed, and comfortable.

The lactation room should be comfortable both for mothers who prefer privacy and those who prefer greater openness. This might be accomplished by having chairs that allow for a mother to easily turn around and face the wall if they want more privacy or by providing optional curtain partitions.

**Group Study Spaces**
Group study spaces will be useful for parents. One respondent said that in a family room she would, “be able to do meetings with a baby. ‘Cause I’m in the Family Life Major so a lot of the...women have kids. And trying to find time to meet or a place to meet on campus is almost impossible if you have to bring kids with you. So this would be really good if there were more than one mom with kids.”

Given the suggested open layout for the whole space, the group study options in the family room might be modeled after the open-entry group study “rooms” that currently exist on the south side of the library’s Learning Commons. Such group study spaces would be useful for parents who need to work with classmates while providing an option for families to
be together in one designated location. Open entry with glass partitions provides easy access to and maintains line of sight for both parents and children.

**Policies**

The research team examined the most frequently mentioned policy suggestions and utilized the data gathered from observations to compile a list of four policy recommendations for the BYU family room.

**Parents are Responsible for Their Own Children at All Times**

The family room will not be a daycare center. It is for use by student parents who, even as they study, will care for their own children. Parental failure to understand and accept this policy will lead to improperly supervised children who increase safety risks for themselves and other children. This will, in turn, lead to fewer parents who will bring their children to the family room. Establishing that parents are entirely responsible for their own children will help prevent these undesirable outcomes.

While many parents expressed the desire to have someone in the room watching their children while they study, quite a few others expressed that they feel responsible for their own children. One mother expressed that she would be uncomfortable and feel unsafe leaving her child with a library worker.

**Security Called if Children Left Alone**

Because the family room will not be a daycare center, parents must be aware that security will be called if children are left unsupervised. Both the UU and UVU have a zero tolerance policy regarding unattended children. This policy promotes child safety even as it reduces potential liability issues for the university. BYU should implement the same policy.

**Clean Up After Yourself and Your Children**

As previously noted, many of the parents surveyed and interviewed consider sanitation and cleanliness to be important. A clean-up-after-yourself-and-your-children policy, aided by appropriate things such as sanitizing wipes and Diaper Genies, will help to address this important issue. Parents should also be encouraged to not use the room if they or their child(ren) are sick. Together these will make for a more inviting space and a healthier campus.

**Media Kept at a Reasonable Noise Level**

In order for student parents to be able to study effectively, noise levels must be conducive to that. Multiple parental comments made this point in focus groups and interviews. Children at play are often noisy enough without adding unduly loud media. If the media choice is for a dedicated TV rather than, or in addition to, iPads or some other option, the volume level on the TV should be kept at a level conducive to study. One respondent stated that, “kids match the volume of the TV, so keep the TV volume low...”

**Limitations of Study**

Throughout the project, the research team tried to ensure reliability through providing recommendations supported by strong data with as few limitations as possible. However, not all limitations could be avoided. The following limitations on this research exist.

Few models could actually be observed in higher education settings. Both UVU and the UU library family rooms are relatively new and are different in a number of ways from what BYU plans. The bulk of observations and interviews came from local public libraries. However, most parents interviewed in the public libraries had not gone to the library for personal study and thus may not accurately represent the BYU student population.

The survey sent to a sample of BYU undergraduates, graduates, and faculty members had a low response rate. Of 3,667 surveys sent, about 800 people started the survey, and about 600 were screened out due to filtering questions. A more precise estimate of the number of children of students and faculty and their ages is not available.

Respondent responses in focus groups and individual interviews with BYU students were based on perceptions of a proposed library family room rather than on actual experience within such a room.

**Conclusion**

The family-friendly space is intended to be a place for student parents to bring their children to play while they study. To be a child-friendly and child-oriented space unlike any other on campus, the family room needs resources to meet the needs of the students and children. Drawing from observations, survey responses, interviews, and focus groups consisting of BYU students and faculty,
we recommend that certain broad concepts be implemented in the family room. These include:

- Safety and cleanliness
- An open design
- Separated sections
- An inviting environment for families
- Self-contained features
- Publicity

In order to best serve the needs of BYU students and faculty, the family room's features, layout, and policies should be considered with these broad concepts in mind.

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Appendix: Pictures of Potential Family Room Amenities

Figure 1: Clockwise from top left: University of Utah Library, University of Utah Library, Utah Valley University Library, Wasatch County Library

- Parent Study Rooms:
  - Glass walls enable uninterrupted line of vision for parents to see their children while working with peers in a quiet environment
Figure 2: Clockwise from top left: Utah Valley University Library, University of Utah Library, Utah Valley University Library, Wasatch County Library

**Desk and computer areas:**

- Outlets on top of the table and out of reach of children.
- Short wall dividers allow uninterrupted line of sight for parents.
- Circular tables for family study.
Figure 3: Clockwise from top left: Wasatch County Library, Wasatch County Library, Provo Library, Provo Library

**Play Structures:**

[Clockwise]

- A structure for children to play on and read in.
- A seating structure for story time.
- Soft benches for children to read on.
- Amphitheater structure for children to play in. If toys are placed in the middle of the amphitheater, the structure encourages children to stay in the circle.
Figure 4: From the top from left to right: Wasatch County Library, University of Utah Library, Springville Library, University of Utah Library, Museum of Family History (Salt Lake City, UT)

Carpeting/Toys:
- Colorful carpeting engages children
- Immobile toy structures with various creative toys on top
Figure 5: Clockwise from left to right: Provo Library, Wasatch County Library, Provo Library, Provo Library, Provo Library

Media Stations:

- Small chairs for children
- Colorful computers with interactive games installed
- iPad stations
Figure 6: Clockwise from left to right: Provo Library, Provo Library, Utah Valley University Library, Utah Valley University Library, Wasatch County Library

Child Furniture:
- Colorful chairs
- Size appropriate
Figure 7: Clockwise from top left: University of Utah Library, University of Utah Library, University of Utah Library, Springville Library

**Nursing Area:**

- Microwave is for sterilizing pump materials or warming milk. Fridge for storing milk.
- Separate rooms for mothers who want to nurse in privacy
- Comfy chairs for mothers who want to nurse in the open
Figure 8: Clockwise from the left: University of Utah Library, University of Utah Library, Provo Library, Utah Valley University Library

**Shelving options:**

- Shelves should be short to enable parents to see their children over the shelves, and for children to reach the books
- One option is the book “buckets” (pictured right, bottom). This allows an easier system for kids to replace books when finished with them
- Shelves could also be used as toy storage (pictured left, bottom)