

# How to Conduct a Basic Space Usage Study on the Fly

## A Case Study of the Lemieux Library and Learning Commons at Seattle University

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### Introduction

The Lemieux Library and Learning Commons provides a range of diverse learning spaces, collections, and services in support of Seattle University. In an effort to assess how its spaces contribute to academic success, our study looked at building usage through two lenses: building occupancy and patron perceptions. Building occupancy was measured by counting individuals throughout most of the building at regular intervals during the 2016 winter quarter. Perceptions of the importance patrons place on various benefits of coming to the building were measured using a questionnaire.



### Survey | Methods

In addition to counts of individuals occupying the building, an anonymous survey was conducted to gather evidence of patron perceptions of how the physical space contributes to their academic success. Patrons were asked to rate the importance of various potential benefits of coming to the Library and Learning Commons to their educational success. Hard copies of the questionnaire were distributed at service points throughout the building for two weeks during a peak traffic period. Entry into a draw for two iTunes gift cards was offered as an incentive to participate.

### Questionnaire

Patrons were asked the following question:

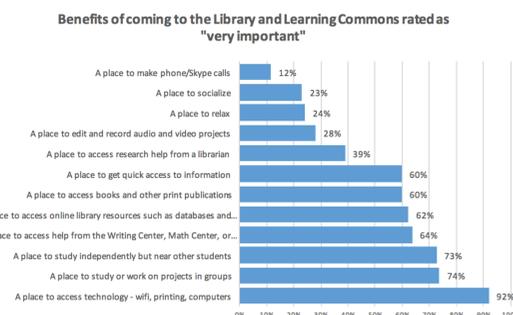
In your opinion, how important to your educational success are each of the following benefits of coming to the Lemieux Library and McGoldrick Learning Commons?

A place to:

- access books and other print publications
- get quick access to information
- access technology - wifi, printing, computers
- access online library resources such as databases and journal articles
- access research help from a librarian
- access help from the Writing Center, Math Center, or Learning Assistance
- edit and record audio and video projects
- study independently but near other students
- study or work on projects in groups
- socialize
- make phone/Skype calls
- relax

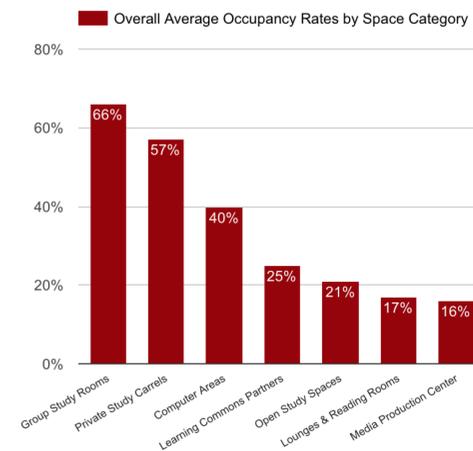
Participants rated each of the above using a 5-point scale.

### Results

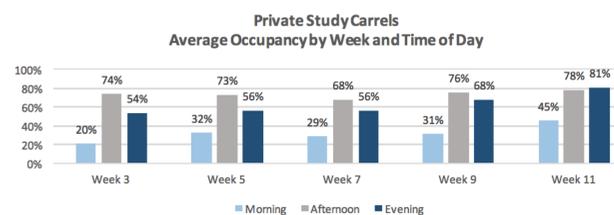


Taken together, survey responses and building count results suggest that the building is highly valued and utilized as a contributor to student educational success. To begin with, 73% of survey respondents identified as "very im-

portant", the Library and Learning Commons "as a place to study independently, but near other students". 74% of students gave the same ranking to the Library and Learning Commons as "a space to study or work on projects in groups".

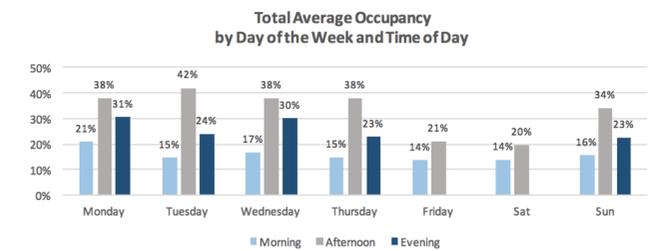


Also, the overall occupancy rate for individual and group study spaces was found to be among the highest in the building. For example, the overall average occupancy rate for the private study carrels was 57% - the highest overall average occupancy of all of the space categories apart from group study rooms (calculating group study room occupancy as the frequency with which they were occupied by at least one person). Moreover, occupancy rates for the private study carrels ranged from 68% to 78% in the afternoons, and rose as high as 81% during the evenings of week 11.



As for group work, the group study rooms were occupied by at least one person an average of 66% of the time, and this total rose to 78% in the afternoons and 76% in the evenings, with the highest overall weekly occupancy rate occurring during week 9 at 71%. No area in the Library and Learning Commons was as heavily used as the group study rooms or private study carrels.

Results of the counts also allowed us to visualize overall building usage patterns:



Comprehensive results are available in our Building Usage Study Report.

<http://libguides.seattleu.edu/buildingstudy>

### Discussion | Defining "Full"

Since mere counts of individuals in spaces lacks context and meaning, results from the building count were reported as percentages of capacity - i.e. as occupancy rates. Occupancy was calculated as a percentage of capacity, with capacity for any given space equaling the number of seats normally available. It is important to point out that no standards exist for ideal or expected occupancy rates in academic libraries. In many parts of the building, 100% occupancy would likely render a space too crowded and/or noisy for comfort and study. Standards for space occupancy could be gauged in a future study that surveyed and compared student perceptions of space occupancy with actual occupancy.

### References

Chamberlain, M. (2011). Space to learn: Student usage of the Lemieux Library and Learning Commons (Unpublished report). Seattle University, Seattle.

Seattle University. (n.d.) Seattle University Facts. Retrieved from <https://www.seattleu.edu/about/facts>

### Acknowledgements

This study would not have been possible without many contributions by L&M staff who distributed and collected surveys; conducted building counts, and contributed valuable suggestions in the planning and operationalization of the study. A very special acknowledgement goes to Melissa Chamberlain, whose 2011 building usage study served as a template for this one.



### Building Count | Methods

All library and learning commons spaces used by students for individual and group study were included in the count, including the Media Production Center, Writing Center, Learning Assistance and Math Tutoring area. Staff offices and instruction classrooms were excluded. Spaces counted were grouped into distinct categories, each defined by its specific purpose, and further differentiated by floor:

- Group study rooms
- Private study carrels
- Open study areas
- Computing areas
- Reading rooms and lounges
- Media Production Center
- Learning Commons Partners (Writing, Learning Assistance and Math)



Counts were conducted using an iPad and a Google Form, multiple times on every day of the week, on alternate weeks throughout the January 4th-March 27th winter quarter, beginning in week 3. Results were exported to Excel for analysis.

