



Assessing Transcendence: Do Spaces that Inspire Meet Students' Desires?

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Purpose of Study

Library users have varying affective responses to architectural styles. What are they? How can they be assessed? What should librarians do with that information?

We measured student perceptions and preferences for traditional as compared to modern library spaces at the University of Louisville and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary to assess if students:

- Saw some library spaces as having transcendent inspirational qualities;
- Preferred those spaces for anticipated future use; and
- Saw those spaces as advancing the institutional mission.

We conducted this study to:

- Inform upcoming library renovations at our institutions;
- Validate/expand a previous research study and address the limited amount of empirically-based research literature in the area of the affective qualities of library spaces;
- Compare results between the two institutions; and
- Identify generalizable data that could help inform other institutions.

Design/Methodology

Builds on research published in 2011 by Jackson/Hahn who set out to develop a survey that went beyond "library as place" satisfaction questions to see whether traditional library spaces produced an inspirational student experience and if that experience brought about a beneficial link to university mission.

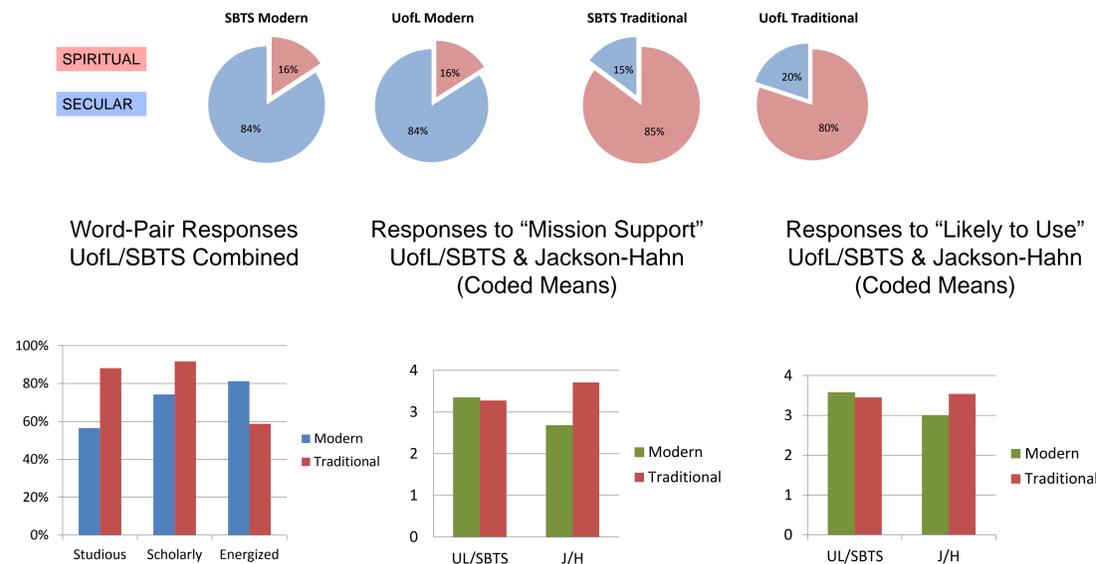
Jackson/Hahn concluded that students:

- Regarded traditional spaces as more spiritual than modern spaces; and
- Preferred the traditional spaces indicating they would visit them more frequently and viewing them as more supportive of the university mission.

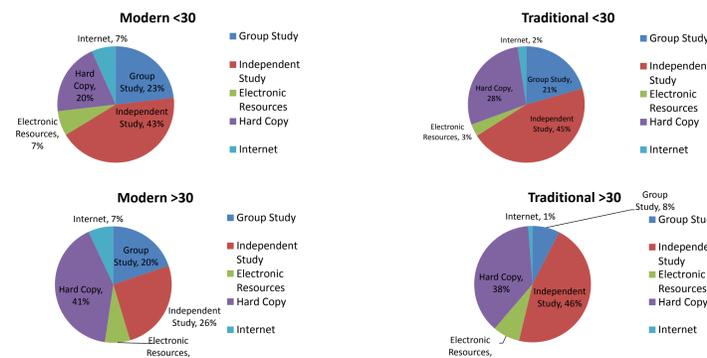
They noted the limitations of having only 54 respondents with all respondents being students at large research universities.

Findings

SPIRITUAL VS. SECULAR DESIGNATION



Phrase to Describe Purpose By Age Demographics



Traditional Exterior



Suzzallo Library, University of Washington

Modern Exterior



Hunt Library, North Carolina State University

Traditional Interior



Fisher Fine Arts Library, University of Pennsylvania

Modern Interior



Philological Library, Free University of Berlin

Samples from the Image Pool

Design/Methodology, cont.

Our modifications to the original study included:

- Shortening the survey instrument and moving it from print-based to online;
- Administering the survey at a research university and a theological seminary for comparison purposes; and
- Seeking valid sample sizes with 312 completed surveys at U of L and 165 at Southern Seminary.

Additional design elements included:

- Creating a normed pool of traditional and modern library exterior and interior images;
- Utilizing the split-randomization method to create four different survey versions each with different images;
- Incorporating coded means analysis of word pair responses to measure abstract qualities associated with the spaces; and
- Administering the survey with four laptop computers (one for each version) at both institutions.

Findings & Conclusions

- Confirmed that transcendent qualities can be identified in that:
 - Students at both institutions clearly found the traditional spaces inspirational and the modern spaces secular; and
 - Traditional spaces were seen as more scholarly and studious while modern spaces were viewed as more energized.
- Validated Jackson/Hahn findings that students would identify traditional/modern architecture as spiritual/secular but did not validate their findings that students would prefer traditional spaces or that those spaces would be viewed as more supportive of advancing the institution's mission statement.
- Both the traditional and modern spaces were seen as helping to advance the university mission.
- Students expressed a desire for improved spaces regardless of whether those spaces were modern or traditional.
- Demographics such as degree level sought and age have some bearing on how students perceive and might use library space.
- Whether looking at traditional or modern spaces, students indicated their primary use of space would be for independent study.
- U of L students were slightly more likely to use the modern spaces and Southern Seminary students were somewhat more likely to use the traditional spaces.