Lessons from the 2015 UCSC Instance of the Ithaka S+R Student Survey

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In spring 2015, the UC Santa Cruz University Library conducted the Ithaka S+R Undergraduate Student Survey plus the optional Library Space Planning module. The survey was targeted to a population of 15,694 enrolled adult undergraduate students, with 1,766 students completing the instrument. The university library used the results to examine how public space programming met our students' needs and to help prepare for a renovation of our Science and Engineering Library.

Background

The university library consists of two facilities: McHenry Library and the Science and Engineering Library. McHenry Library underwent an 80,000 square foot addition, seismic retrofit, and complete renovation project that concluded in 2011. The Science and Engineering Library opened in 1991 and requires renovation to meet current and future capacity and program needs of the campus.

The library had worked with Ithaka S+R twice in the previous year. We conducted the Local Faculty Survey in the spring of 2014 and collaborated on a cognitive interview-based field test of the in-development Library Space Planning module for the Undergraduate Student Survey in the fall.

Methodology

We brought in our Office of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Policy Studies (IRAPS) to help us implement the full survey. IRAPS was accustomed to doing outreach for the biennial University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey and had useful strategies for raising awareness and driving response rate. They also had access to the university's academic information system and could provide us with more comprehensive and reliable demographic data than could be derived from student self-reporting in the survey's demographics module. The only demographic questions we included in the survey were those about gender and on-campus or off-campus residence. We liked that Ithaka S+R's gender question allowed students to self-identify with non-binary identities and believed that student self-reporting about current living arrangements would be more accurate than campus data.

Ithaka S+R had good experience using the Qualtrics platform to do e-mail outreach to students using customized links. IRAPS preferred using a generic link combined with aggressive marketing to raise awareness and response. We settled on a hybrid approach and launched the survey on April 6, 2015. Customized links went out via e-mail over the university librarian's signature. Generic links were available on the library web site and library social media outlets. The generic link differed in that students had to enter their campus identification numbers to start the survey.

We had hoped to run the survey for three weeks as we had the year before for the faculty survey. By the end of April, our response rate was only about 5 percent. We extended the survey until the end of the quarter on June 5, but interrupted advertising and outreach during alumni weekend and during student elections.

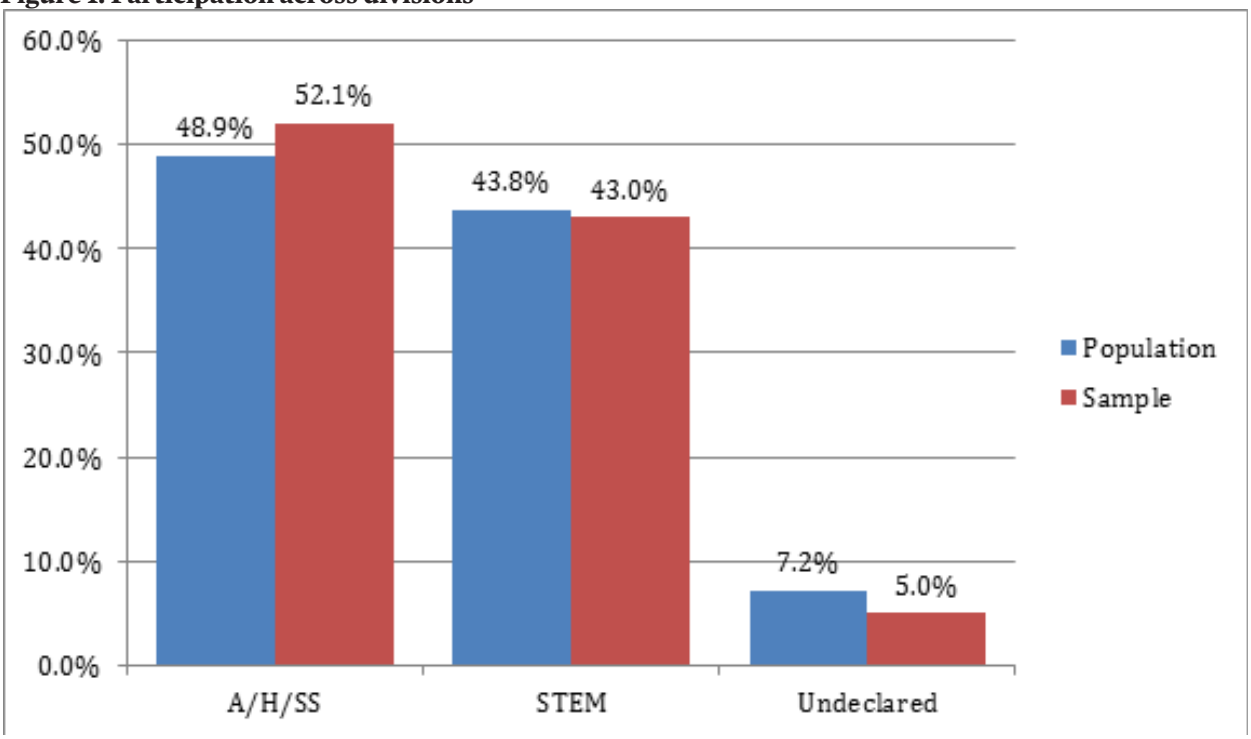
Most of the survey responses came from the direct e-mail appeals. Fifteen hundred twenty-three completions came from the custom links and 243 came from the generic links. The hybrid approach was not an intended use case for the Qualtrics software. Scheduled e-mail reminders to students who had not completed the survey were inadvertently sent to students who had completed it via the generic link. This occasioned several complaints after the first reminder e-mail, but Ithaka S+R quickly diagnosed the cause and implemented a manual fix. Eleven percent of eligible students completed the survey by June 5, 2015.

Outcomes

The university library is in the early stages of planning a renovation of the Science and Engineering Library and we hoped to see a good representation of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) students in the survey results.

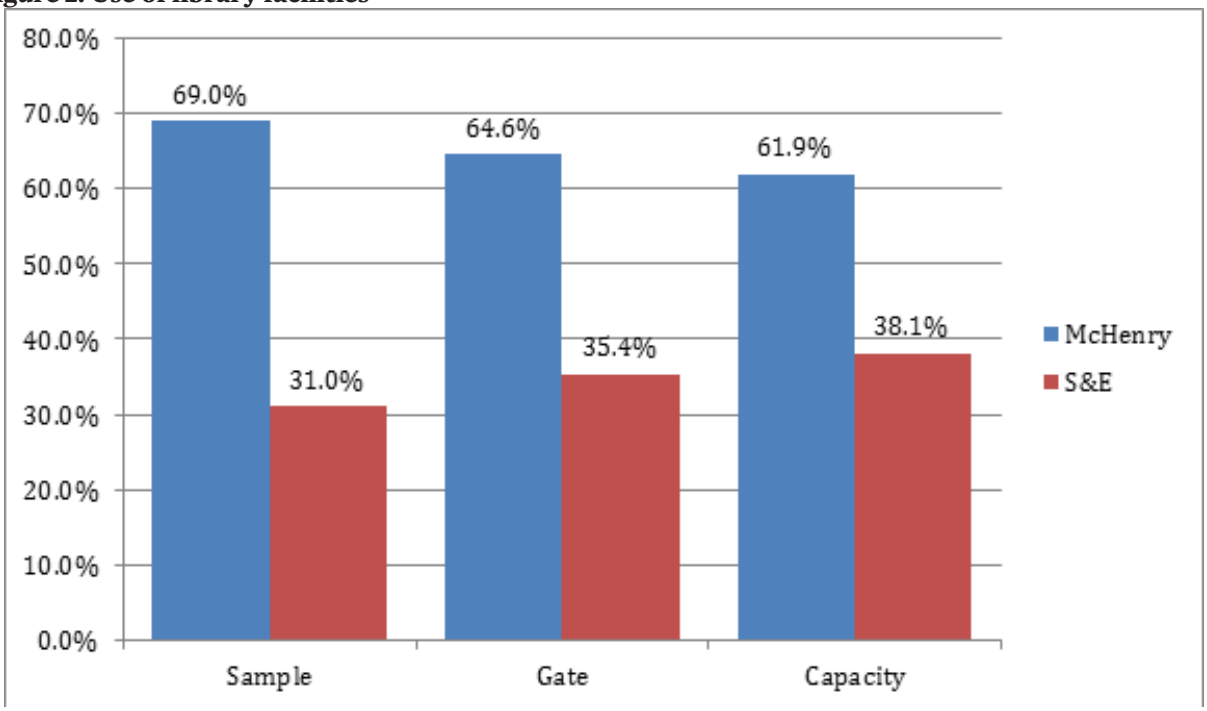
The sample well represented our arts, humanities, and social sciences (A/H/SS) students as well as our STEM students (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Participation across divisions



The renovated McHenry Library is the newer and larger library with more services. We were curious to know how many students picked each facility as their "go-to" library. Question 13 in the *role of the library* module asked, "Which of the following campus library buildings do you visit most often?" Sixty-nine percent chose McHenry Library and only 31 percent chose S&E. This is out of proportion to our academic demographics but is fairly consistent with building capacity and use. Of the library's 2,260 seats 1,400 are at McHenry Library. Sixty-five percent of the most recent year's gate count was at McHenry (689,080), while 35 percent was at S&E (377,655) (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Use of library facilities



Questions 25 and 26 in the *library space planning* module measured students' perception of personal safety while traveling to or from the libraries. Students expressed a high degree of confidence in their safety during the daylight hours and less at night (Figure 3). The change in the perception of safety was greater for students who did not identify as male and it was greater for McHenry users than it was for S&E users (Figures 4 and 5).

Figure 3. Perception of safety to/from both libraries by time of day

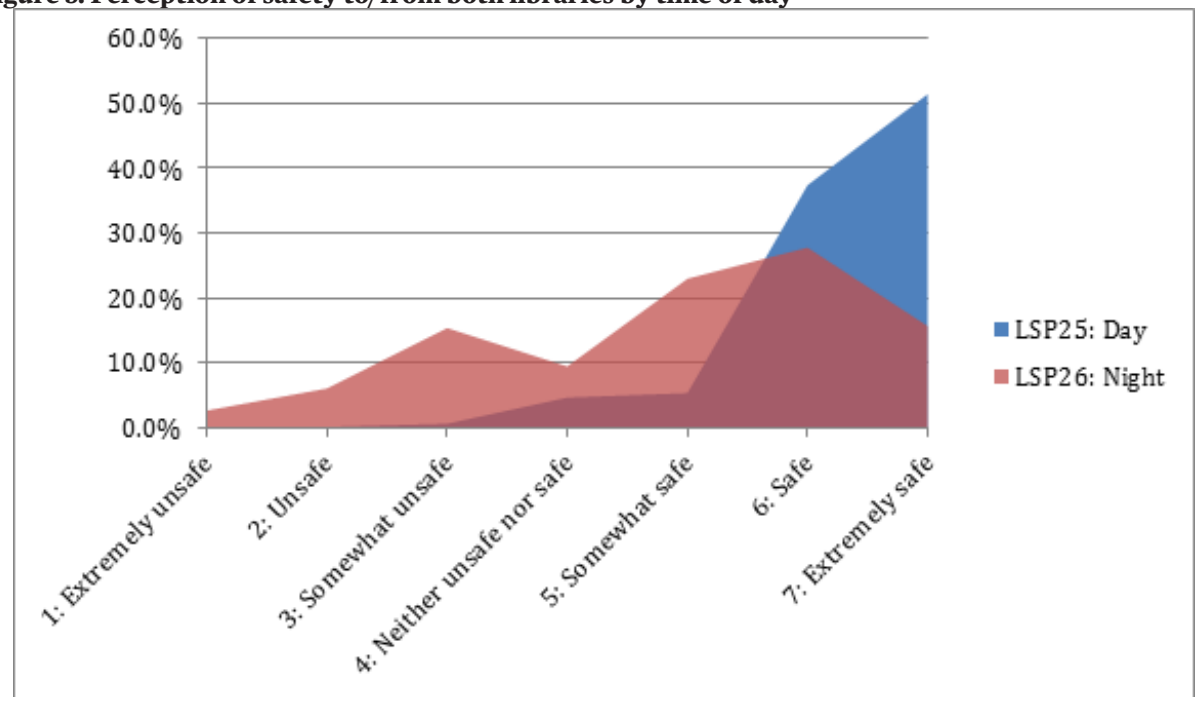


Figure 4. Mean perception of safety to/from McHenry by gender and time of day

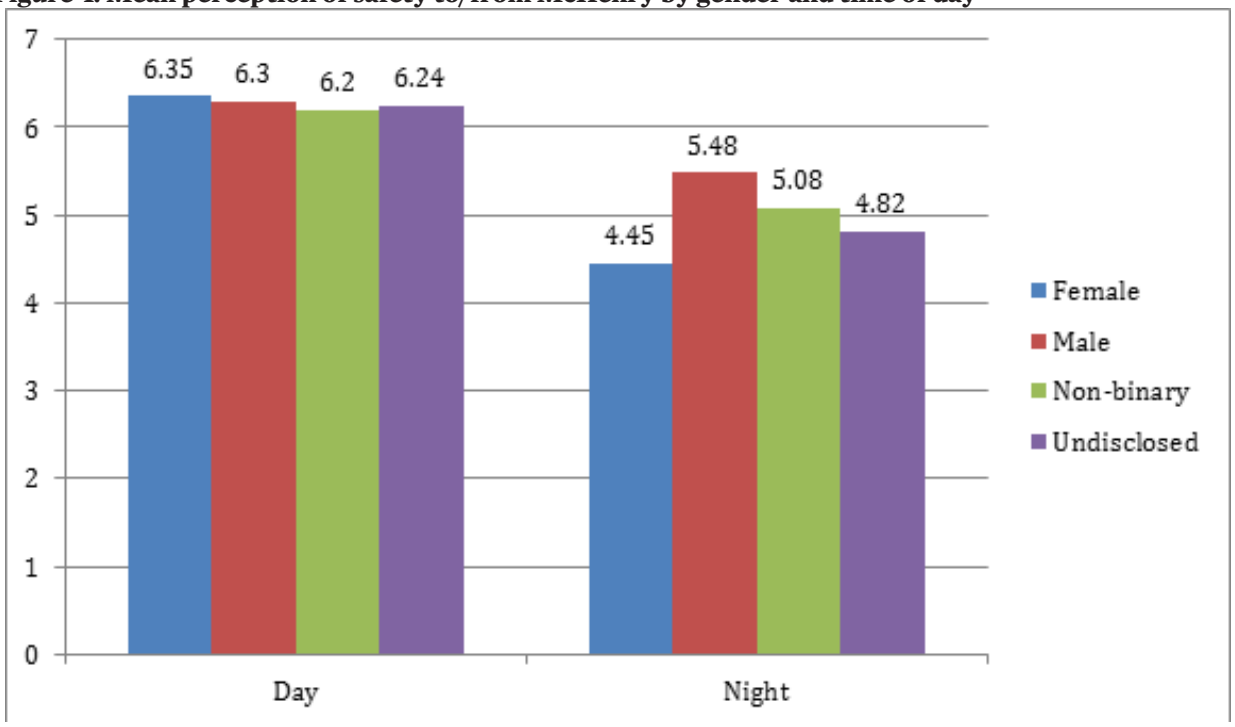
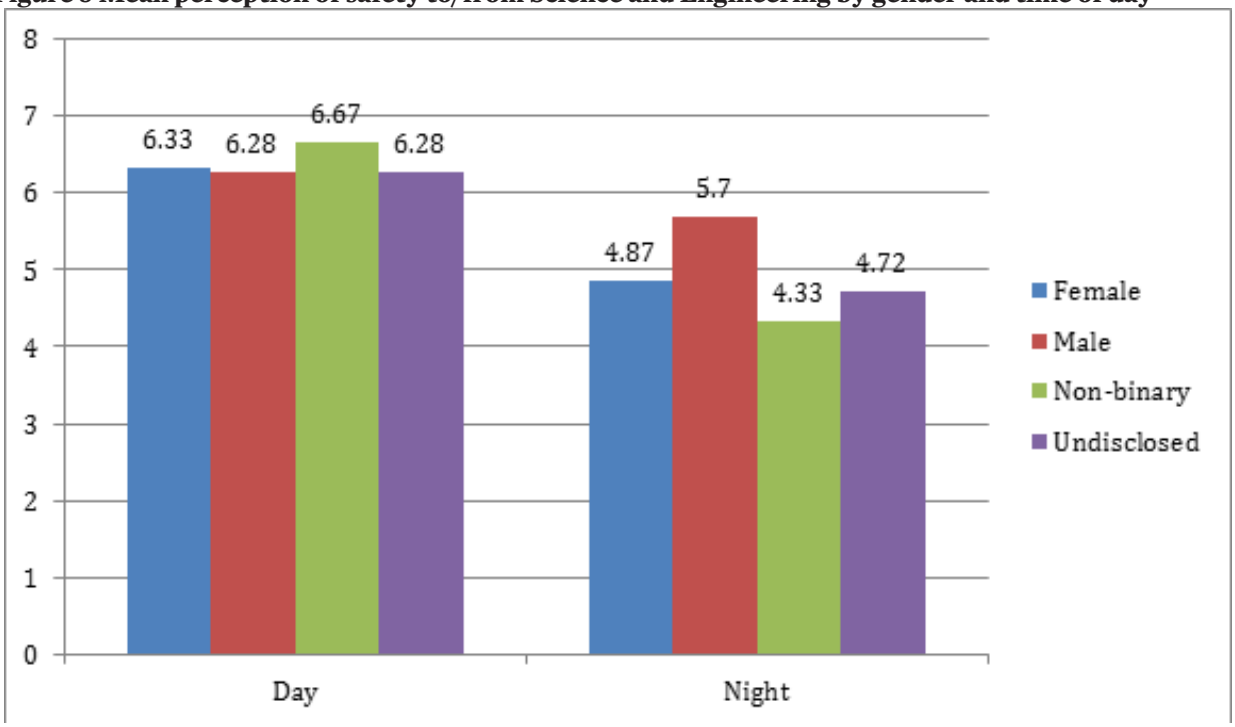


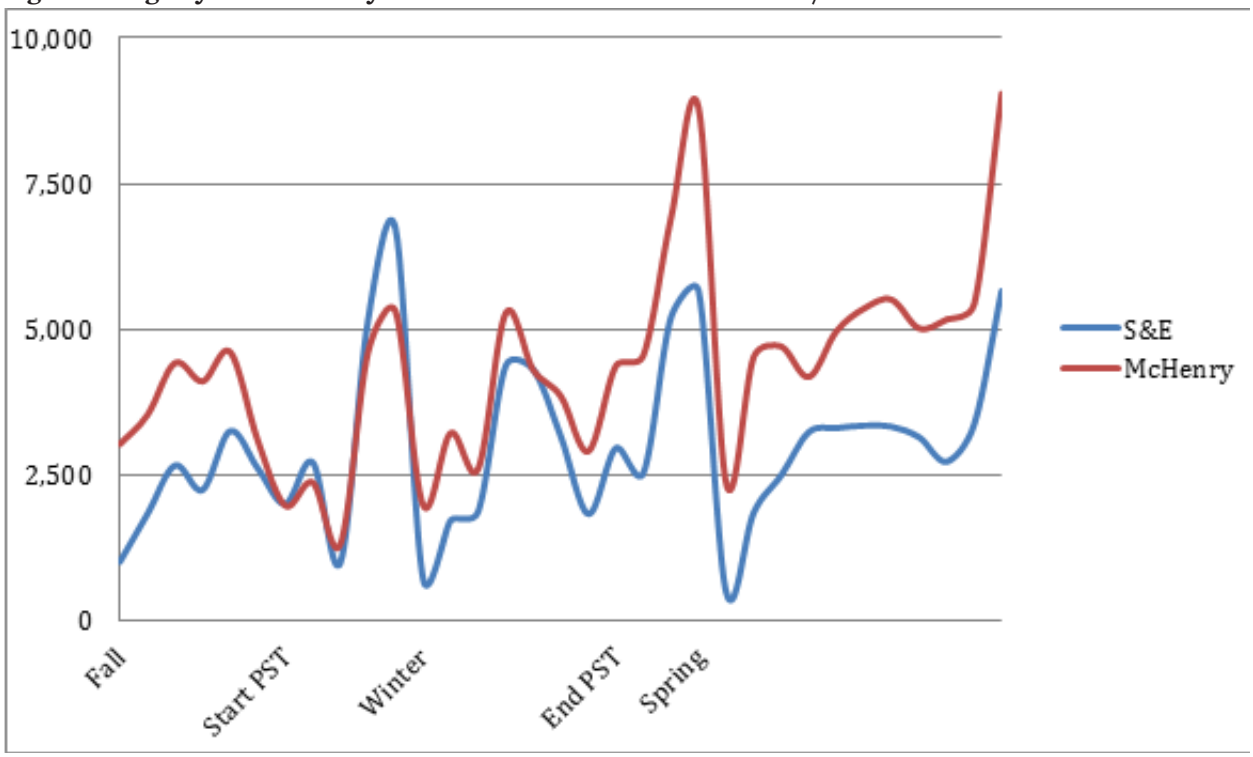
Figure 5 Mean perception of safety to/from Science and Engineering by gender and time of day



We were curious whether the lower perception of safety in the evening affected students' choice of library use by time of day. We did not have gate count data at intervals shorter than a day, but we did have evening head count data taken at intervals of two hours. We examined the data over the course of the previous academic year and discovered that McHenry's share of the user population decreased

from 65 percent overall to 59 percent at night. We further parsed the data to compare the early fall and spring hours under daylight savings time with the late fall and winter hours of standard time. During daylight savings time, 62 percent of the evening users were in McHenry Library. During standard time, the percentage dropped to 53 percent. When we mapped the data as a time series, we found peak demand for S&E around fall quarter finals (Figure 6). S&E use was 20 percent higher than it was for winter and spring finals. Use of McHenry Library dipped for fall finals by 40 percent relative to winter and spring. Overall, use of the library was 16 percent lower during fall quarter finals than it was for winter and spring. We know that students feel safer getting to S&E at night. We suspect but have not confirmed that S&E lacked the capacity to fully serve the demand for study space during fall quarter finals.

Figure 6. Nightly headcount by week for both libraries for AY 2015/16



We could intuit some of the reasons students might prefer Science and Engineering to McHenry. Our campus is situated in a redwood forest and campus planners have taken pains to preserve its natural beauty. McHenry Library is located at the heart of upper campus, in a densely forested area that is inhospitable to automobile traffic. One cannot see another campus building from either the north or south entrance to McHenry Library. City transit stops are a quarter-mile away and the East Remote commuter lot is more than a half-mile distant. The Science and Engineering Library, by contrast, is situated on the well-lit Science Hill, surrounded by busy labs and classrooms. Transit stops and the Core West parking structure are conveniently located.

Question 27 in the Library Space Planning module invited students to tell us what factors influenced their perceptions of safety. Eighteen percent of survey respondents left comments. They confirmed what we suspected and articulated additional points of concern. They told us that lighting on pedestrian paths leading away from McHenry Library was particularly bad. They expressed frustration that the campus lacked a late-night safety escort program. Several expressed a fear of the "other," whether in the form of wild animals (the campus has deer, raptors, wild turkeys, coyotes, bobcats, and the occasional mountain lion) or people who were not part of the campus community. Some told us that being a woman out at night in contemporary society was inherently dangerous and they were always on guard.

The library could not directly remedy all of the factors that make students feel unsafe. We shared

our survey results with campus stakeholders who might be better positioned to do so. Campus Facilities recently upgraded exterior lighting from McHenry Library's south entrance to the Performing Arts parking lot with much brighter LED fixtures. The campus police department has secured funding to support a late-night safety escort program for the 2016/17 academic year. Our Library Student Advisory Council selected branded LED miniature flashlights as one of their promotional items for the year and will give them away at evening events like the quarterly citation management workshop.

Conclusion

The Library Space Planning module gave us a lot of data that will improve our programming. We are early in the first phase of renovating the Science and Engineering Library and are preparing to create a ninety-eight-seat Active Learning Classroom and forty-eight-seat Information Commons on the main floor. Both of these new resources will be available for the 2017/18 academic year.

The survey told us that students generally did not like the older kinds of seating we provided at S&E and were frustrated at the dearth of seats, computer workstations, and AC power outlets. It told us that they used the library more for exam study and completing assignments, and less for accessing physical collections, conducting research, or working on group projects. It told us that they placed a high value on access to good food.

In summer 2016, the library completed a collections consolidation project on the upper level of the Science and Engineering Library, increasing seating capacity on that level by 45 percent. As part of the Active Learning Classroom Project, we are adding a second exit to the Dougherty Reading Room. This space was originally the Science and Engineering Library's current periodical room. In that collection's heavy configuration, one exit was sufficient for the number of users. Adding a second exit will allow us to increase the room capacity from forty-nine to ninety-nine users.

Some campus stakeholders have yet to embrace our vision of a renovated Science and Engineering Library as a student-focused nexus of scholarship. The survey data and local data that the survey made us reconsider in a new light are helping us describe our goals in the context of student success.

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