2011 Library Space Study: a Summary   July 6th, 2011

In the spring of 2011, the User Experience and Information Delivery & Library Access departments conducted a study of how library spaces are used in real time, in order to inform the discussion surrounding library hours and to gather baseline space usage data.

The study consisted of three parts:
- Observations
- A "Task Inventory Survey"
- Three open-ended flip-chart questions.

    In addition, other existing data, such as gate counts and circulation trends, was gathered to further inform the hours' decision process.

What we did – the methodology:

Observations:
- Users were observed in our spaces at 11am, 4pm, and 7pm over 7 observation days
    - Thursday, March 17
    - Monday, March 28
    - Tuesday, March 29
    - Friday, April 1 - Sunday, April 3
    - Wednesday, April 6
- Locations were marked on maps, which were later entered into GIS software
- Users with and without laptops were counted on each library floor

Task Survey:
- Paper survey distributed and made available to users at five libraries
    - On weekdays (3/17, 3/28, 4/6)
    - On weekend (4/2, 4/3)
- Incentive provided (candy)
- 990 surveys were returned
    - Approximately 11% were disqualified.
- 888 surveys were qualified and entered into Survey Gizmo by staff and student workers

Flip Charts:
- Questions posted on flip-charts in high traffic areas of each location.
- One flip-chart per location – except Hayden which had two (1st and 2nd floors).
- Questions stayed up for three days.
    - 1. What are three positive/negative words you'd use to describe our space? (created +/- columns on each chart)
      Posted - April 5-7 (Tu-Th)
    - 2. What is your favorite feature of the MIT Libraries?
      Posted - April 19-21 (T-Th)

o   3. Fill in the blank: I wish the MIT Libraries had…
    Posted May 2-4 (M-W)

What we learned -- the data in brief:

Where were library users?

On seven days, spread across several weeks, we observed and recorded more than 3700 users in our five physical locations, noting whether or not the user had a laptop.

- Tuesday was the busiest day - and 4pm was the busiest time, regardless of day - in all locations.
- Certain floors of each library were heavily used, while others were not.
- A snapshot of high traffic areas (total patrons by floor for all seven day):

    1. Hayden 1st – 793
    2. Barker 5th – 587
    3. Dewey 1st – 457
    4. Hayden 2nd – 412
    5. Dewey 2nd -- 359
    6. Rotch 2nd – 318

- Appreciation and desire for natural lighting was a prevalent theme in the comments. These were corroborated by observations. Seats near windows and/or with access to natural light demonstrated higher use than those without. Basements received lower use.
- An exception – **Barker** reading room. Showed high use and patrons described it as "beautiful" and "inspiring"
- **Hayden** generally had high use throughout. Windows and river views received high praise in the comments, and consistent usage across observations.
- **Rotch** reading room had very high use. Users commented positively on the windows and large work tables.
- The 1st and 2nd floors of **Dewey** were heavily used – with windows drawing users to the 1st floor and group study rooms to the 2nd.
- **Music** - smallest space - reflected in fewer users recorded during observations, along with a smaller scale of gate count and circulation data.

Did they have a laptop?

As previously noted, laptop usage was recorded.

- 59% of our patrons, across multiple locations, had laptops visibly displayed. Usage varied across library locations, individual floors, and observation times.
- Laptop usage in Dewey was highest and averaged 69%. Music was the lowest with 51%, followed by Hayden with 52%.
- As a point of comparison, 53% of the Task Inventory Survey respondents reported using their own laptop when asked about the equipment they used during their visit to the library.

Who were they?

Task Inventory Surveys were distributed and made available for three days, plus one weekend.

- 990 surveys were completed – 888 correctly.
- Most of the respondents were students – 41% undergrads and 40% grads.
- These numbers varied by location – with the majority of Rotch and Dewey respondents being graduate students, Hayden and Music undergrad, and Barker a more even mix, but still favoring undergrads.

What were they doing?

The survey asked users to report their activities in the library.

- "Individual work" - highest activity reported in all locations (59%)
- "checked email/surfed the web" (36%)
- "checked out or picked up materials" (32%)

Equipment, facilities and resources also showed trends. As noted above, the majority of users had laptops. Additionally, patrons used:
- library books (29%)
- a library computer (27%)
- Google/Wikipedia (26%)
- Stellar (20%)
- printer/scanners (18%)
- library databases (11%).

What else did they tell us?

Qualitative data was gathered from the task survey and the flip charts.

- In addition to comments noted above, users remarked on topics such as: noise, lighting, collections, temperature, seating, food, and staff.
- The most frequent request was for "more hours" with over 150 comments gathered from the Task Inventory Survey and the flip-charts regarding the desire for expanded hours.
- Study findings related to library hours were summarized in an earlier report (*Hours Themes from 2011 Space Study*) prepared by Christine Quirion for review by Steering Committee.

Final thoughts:

- Our spaces are valued and serve an important role within the MIT Community.
- Our spaces are used, particularly the 1st & 2nd floors of Hayden, the 5th floor of Barker, the 2nd floor of Rotch, and the 1st & 2nd floors of Dewey.

- People wish for expanded hours.
- People desire and appreciate natural lighting and comfortable, functional spaces (seating, temperatures, electrical, working equipment/WiFi, etc.).
- A number of people desire easier access to coffee/water, although a few complained about the presence of food in the library.

In closing, the wealth of data produced by this study will help inform and guide the work of several departments and committees within the Libraries. Additionally, it will serve as a solid starting point from which to develop more specific space studies in the future.