

Library Space Use Study: What We Learned

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OLA Super Conference 2018

Space Use Study Overview

- Commissioned by CULC in 2015
- Series of 3 studies:
 - Space use
 - Employee Happiness & Engagement
 - Community Employment
- Participating Libraries:
 - Brampton Library
 - Calgary Public Library
 - Markham Public Library

Research Team

- Kimberly Silk, Principal, Brightsail Research (PI)
- Brampton Library – Rebecca Raven, CEO
 - Rebecca Jones, Service Delivery Director
 - Alison Clarke, Service Delivery
- Calgary Public Library – Bill Ptacek, CEO
 - Lisa Hardy, Facilities Design Lead
 - Jacqueline Puff, Research & Planning Assistant
- Markham Public Library – Catherine Biss, CEO
 - Shaun McDonough, Research Analyst
 - Andrea Cecchetto, Manager, Learning and Growth

Space Use - Research Questions

1. How are people using the different spaces in the library?
2. When they are in the library, what are they doing there?

Scope

- **Brampton Library**
 - Population: 593,638 (2016)
 - 6 branches total, 3 in study
 - Four Corners, Gore Meadows, South Fletcher's
- **Calgary Public Library**
 - Population: 1.4 million (2016)
 - 18 branches, 5 in study
 - Fish Creek, Forest Lawn, Louise Riley, Saddletowne, Southwood
- **Markham Public Library**
 - Population: 353,000 (2016)
 - 7 branches, 1 in study
 - Unionville

Methodology

- Review of scholarly and professional literature identified a common approach to assessing space use:
 - Seating sweep observation method
 - Used by Vancouver PL, Toronto PL, Edmonton PL, as well as libraries in Norway

Two data collection instruments were designed for this study:

- Space Observation
- Patron Survey

Space Observation: Zones

- 9 defined spaces:
 - Library Entrance
 - Main Info Desk/Service Point
 - Circulation Desk
 - Quiet Study Area
 - General Seating
 - Displayed / Merchandised Collections
 - Shelved Collections / Stacks
 - Program Area
 - Children's Area

Space Observation: Activities

- Louder activities across all library spaces
- Quieter activities across all library spaces
- Louder activities by time of day
- Quieter activities by time of day
- Louder activities by gender
- Quieter activities by gender
- Patron Possessions by space type
- Patron Possessions by age group

Patron Survey: 10 Questions

1. Why did you come to the library today?
2. Do you feel welcome when you come to the library?
3. Do you find the library staff helpful?
4. Did you accomplish what you intended to, by coming here today?
5. Were you able to find what you were looking for?
6. Did you interact with staff, or were you able to help yourself?
7. How do you feel about the library furniture?
8. How do you feel about the general atmosphere of the library?
9. How do you feel about the layout of the library?
10. How do you feel about the free Wi-Fi?

Data Collection

- Deployment schedule of 3 cycles of observing the 9 defined spaces across the 9 branches
- Each cycle included scheduled observations at different times of the day and days of the week, over a one-week period
- Staff used tablets and/or Chromebooks to observe the spaces, ask patrons the survey questions, and record the responses using a Google form

Response Rate

- Observations:
 - Brampton: 1 634 observations across 3 branches
 - Calgary: 1 483 observations across 5 branches
 - Markham: 517 observations across 1 branch
- Patron survey*:
 - Brampton: 221 responses across 3 branches
 - Calgary: 395 responses across 5 branches
 - Markham: 137 responses, 1 branch

*NB: Most patrons provided more than a single verbal response to survey questions.

Key Finding #1

Patrons experience libraries as welcoming places.

- 96% of patrons feel welcome when they visit the library.
- 91% of patrons find the library staff helpful.
- 69% of patrons find the library furniture to be comfortable.
- 1% reported the need for more and improved furniture.

Key Finding #2

Patron expectations are being met

- 90% of patrons report they accomplished what they intended to when visiting the library.
- 85% of patrons report being able to find what they were looking for.
- Most patrons are accomplishing this without help from staff (60%), while many interacted with staff (35%) during their visit.

Key Finding #3

Libraries are social places

- Patrons are interacting with staff, and with other patrons, throughout the day:
 - 40% in the evening
 - 31% in the afternoon
 - 24% in the morning
- When patrons are talking in groups, they are both socializing and studying.

Key Finding #4

Managing noise-level expectations is challenging

- There is often conflict between patrons who expect the library to be quiet, and patrons who are using the library to socialize, engage with their children, and participate in programs.
- While 14% of patrons described the library as quiet and peaceful, 13% reported the library as too noisy.
- Loud and quiet activities are taking place throughout the day, and with very little difference in participation by gender.

Key Finding #5

Traditional library activities are still popular

- Libraries continue to be places where people seek quiet activities, including browsing the collection, reading, writing and studying:
 - 25% of patrons reported that they use the library to study.
- Patrons continue to depend on the library as a place to borrow books:
 - 36% of patrons reported borrowing a book as the primary reason for visiting the library.
- 3% of patrons indicated the need for more study space.

Key Finding #6

BYO device is the new normal

- Handheld devices and laptop computers are common possessions patrons bring with them to the library:
 - 72% of adults and 21% of teens have a handheld device with them at the library.
 - 56% of adults and 33% of teens have a laptop with them at the library.

Lessons Learned

Benefits

- Using an accepted and common methodology allows for some comparison across studies and over time.
- Contributes to body of knowledge.
- Lots of data were collected, specific to system and branch, to inform practice, policies, space and service design.

Challenges

- Observation studies depend upon staff participation.
- Data collection is time consuming, and competes with other staff responsibilities.

Learn More

CULC Research Reports at CULC.ca:

- [Community Employment Study](#)
- [Employee Happiness & Engagement Report](#)
- [Library Space Use Study](#)

Q & A

Thank You

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