The Mission

The UX Team was tasked with gathering student feedback on the library’s new furniture found on the lower level and second floor. The lower level has four new types of furniture; bar seating, soft seating, carrel tables, and carrels. The second level has high back carrels and carrels with shelves as well as the same carrel tables and carrels as the lower level (see pictures below).
The Study

1. 200 flyers were taped to the new furniture throughout the lower level and 2nd floor. The flyers asked students to email us what they liked and what they didn’t like about the new furniture and what could make the space better. The flyers were posted from Thursday March 8th to Friday March 23rd. We received 121 responses by email.
2. We spoke to students who were using the new furniture on the lower level and second floor. These brief interviews were conducted at different times of the day, including evenings and weekends, from Thursday March 1st to Monday March 12th. We asked students why they chose to study here, what they liked, what they didn’t like, how the furniture could be improved, and where else they like to study. In all, we conducted 36 interviews.

3. Before every interview session we made some general observations of the space. We noted things like how many people were in the space, how they were using or not using the new furniture, how they were behaving in the space, etc.

The Results: What we learned from students

Overall students are pleased with the new furniture. They find it clean and bright and they like having working lights, outlets, and USB ports. They like the variety of furniture options, including tables where they can stand to work.

“Overall, I am a big fan. The library feels more open and brighter thanks to the new furniture, and it’s a lot less gloomy spending long amounts of time in here.”

“I absolutely love the new furniture! I actually didn’t used to go to the library very often in previous years because I really didn’t like the old cubicles and setup (still not a fan of the third floor quiet area for that reason) but the new ones are so great! They feel more open and spacious, and are so nice and modern with the wood design, usb port and touch button for the lamps.”

“For the most part I really enjoy the setup of the library, as I can choose different places to study depending on how I am feeling that day and who I’m with.”

“I personally love this [bar seating] addition. I like that the desks are high, and allow for you to stand while doing your work. I've developed some severe neck pain from slouching so much throughout university. These desks help with my neck pain, because I can stand while doing my work instead of sitting.

There is also room for improvement.

Many students noted that the chairs are uncomfortable. Students asked for better lumbar support, cushions for the seat, footrests, and adjustable height chairs. Students told us that long hours spent studying in the new chairs is leading to pain and discomfort. If students were able to adjust the height of the seats, especially at the bar, this would make studying much more
comfortable. More chairs available for the bar would also be welcome.

“The seats are horrible. They are so hard to sit on they hurt my back after 30 mins of studying and I feel I have to keep getting up because my leg starts to hurt/numb from the seats. Some sort of cushion on the seats would be highly urgently needed.”

“Currently the chairs available aren’t quite tall enough so people are sitting at chest height with their working space.”

“I know everyone has different heights, and it is hard to implement something that will be perfect for everyone. This being said, the only thing I would recommend is making the chairs adjustable. When I actually sit down on them, I have troubles typing or writing in my notebook because the chairs aren’t high enough for the desk.”

The location of the light fixture and outlet on the carrels is problematic. Students also noted that some of the lights and outlets are not working, and this is a known issue to Facilities and has since been fixed.

“I don’t like how the power outlet is on the front of the fixture. Most computer chargers have a pretty bulky plug-in outlet part, so having it face forward cuts off a lot of desk space, unless you put your computer to the side. It would be WAYYYYY better to have the outlet on the side, just like the USB outlets are now. This would create so much more space.”

“Can’t charge Macbook because power adapter block doesn’t fit (the plug is positioned too close to the desk).”

The open space under the carrels means students are unintentionally touching and kicking each other under the table. This was a major concern of many students

“There is no boundary underneath the desk between you and the person across from you. This can make it kinda weird when you accidentally play footsie with a stranger studying across from you. Would be nice if there was a wall in between the two desks so no one’s feet would touch.”

“I don’t like that you can’t really stretch out your feet without accidentally touching someone.”

“Dislikes: the bottom of the cubicles being open allows for people to stretch their feet out and into your space; and if you sit in the middle of the row there is nowhere to rest your backpack against since there is no back wall/ no ground dividers.”
The soft seating in the lower level is not as functional or comfortable as it could be. Students said the back rest is too low. The way they are currently configured means they can only comfortably accommodate a small number of people at one time.

“Personally I don’t like that we have so many couches as they are rarely ever full and it is hard to work without a hard surface to write on”

Recommendations

The Library considers durability, cost, ease of cleaning, floor capacity, and fire safety when purchasing study furniture. These requirements can be difficult to balance with user preferences, comfort, and needs. In the future, we recommend the library consider the following:

1. **Keep offering a variety of different study spaces.**
2. **Large desk space/ extra shelf is preferred.**
3. **Partitions under all the carrels will help prevent “awkward footsies.”**
4. **Investigate more comfortable chair options.**
5. **Provide additional chairs at the bar tables.**
6. **Promote the variety and uses of the different study spaces.**
7. **Improve the signage indicating quiet areas.**
8. **Consider ergonomically-friendly options like adjustable chairs or, as one student suggested, exercise balls.**
9. **Explore implementing a system for students to report facility-related issues.**
10. **Investigate different soft seating options.**