Print Collections UX Study - Final Report

Rationale

The purpose of this study was to explore how Library users are engaging with our print collection to help the Collections & Content team make decisions about the re-location of the collection after the renovations.

Recruitment and Research Method

1. Interviews and Customer Journey Mapping. See Interview Guide below for the interview questions. **15 undergraduate participants** were recruited between March 8-24, 2017 via posters on stacks, at self-check, and an advertisement on the website. The students ranged from 1st to 4th year and are majoring in BAS, History & Theatre Studies, Business, Animal Biology, Biomedical Science, Environmental Science, and Equine Management.

2. Document analysis of interviews conducted with **11 faculty members** in early 2016 for a previous UX study exploring their use of the Library. From those transcripts, we have extracted relevant and representative quotes.

Findings

Overview

The students who chose to participate in our study included both heavy users* and non-users** of the print collection and points in between. We heard about a range of ways that users are interacting with our print collection.

- Most of the students we spoke to only check out a few books per semester.
- Some never sign out books, but use them while they are in the Library. These students plan to spend hours at a time in the Library.
- They are not concerned with finding one specific book. If they can’t find a particular item right away they will find a substitute.
  - Do you always need books right away? --- “I usually can wait, but I don’t like to. It’s frustrating...It’s almost enough not to bother.”
  - What happens if you can’t get a specific book right away? --- “I just find something else to write about, find some sort of substitute. It has never happened that that much importance lied on one book.”
- Students search Primo by keyword(s) or book title and then at this point, simply put the book on hold or go find it in the stacks. None of them knew about the “details” tab. Essentially users are evaluating books based on the minimal amount of information presented at Primo’s search results page.
Most of these students rated themselves as confident library users based on their ability to search Primo and locate an item.

*I need to pick up so many books* I will come with someone to the Library so they can watch my stuff."

**“I know my friends have taken books out and I always make fun of them. I’ve honestly never taken a book out.”

**Navigating & Accessing the Collection**

- Some students bypass the need to navigate by placing holds on all books they require, even if they are in McLaughlin Library. They don’t care which institution the book comes from as long as they have it in a few days. This also eliminates the sometimes burdensome task of searching in the stacks.
  - “So after the keywords and Primo, I put it on hold regardless of where it is. I would say that experience is pretty positive because most of the time I only wait like 2 days.”
- Most of the students we spoke to were confused about the meaning of the call number system.
  - “I found those signs so confusing like TX to whatever. What does TX and SN even mean?”
- Almost all students we spoke to use the “Where is it?” function to physically locate an item but there are puzzled about why this online map doesn’t point them to the exact location of their desired book. In general, users expect to know exactly where their book is located (ie. the exact shelving unit).
  - “It could be more specific, but I’ve never been to a library that is more specific. It is always kind of looking around a couple of aisles for a bit. The numbers really don’t make any sense. Pretty much there is no real order to them in my mind.”
  - “I press the button that says ‘where is this in the library?’ and then, I usually base it on how close it is to either washroom, because sometimes it’s hard when I look at the HK to whatever that number or letter is… I kind of just walk around…and sort of go through each aisle and then say ‘okay numbers are decreasing, I’m getting closer’. I feel like I’m the only one confused about the system.”

**Browsing**

- Most users don’t come into the Library with the purpose of browsing our physical collection. However browsing does occur when students are attempting (and often fumbling around) to locate a specific item. Often this leads to a serendipitous discovery, but they seldom enter the stacks with the intention to browse.
  - “The books here are sort of intimidating to me more so than a public library because I don’t know how to really discover. Like most of the
books don’t have any information on the spine or the cover so I’m never really intrigued and like ‘oooh what’s in that book?’.”

- Some users have the perception that our collection isn’t “fresh”; a perception that was also echoed by some faculty members (see “Faculty Perspectives” below). This directly affects their willingness to browse the collection as it is seen as irrelevant and out of date.

**Why choose print?**

- As we know from previous studies, and reiterated here, some students prefer online resources for convenience: books are heavy, electronic resources can be accessed anywhere at any time, navigating the stacks is tedious, electronic resources are easier to manipulate (take notes, highlight, search, etc.).
  - “If I had to go look for the print book and blah blah blah, I might just use the ebook just for convenience.”
  - “With this past assignment there weren’t any articles, so I had to go to books to learn more about that. So I prefer online. [But books] are the only option for me in those cases.”

- Other students are more comfortable with print.
  - “I don’t like to read ebooks; I prefer physical copy. If I find a match for a Google Book online I try to come in and take the physical book out instead because I find it easier to flip through and plus the preview doesn’t always give me what I want.”

- And others are format-agnostic.
  - “[I do use ebooks] a fair bit if I can get them, but I find them hit and miss. Some books are easy to access, but third party access, like through EBSCO can be clumsy. But it’s the content I’m concerned about rather than the format. Generally I like a physical book better than an ebook but if I can find it online, then it’s the research that matters.”

**Do students need books IMMEDIATELY?**

- Most students we talked to prefer the convenience of having someone find a book for them over the immediacy (but frustration) of retrieving the book themselves.
  - “I put it on hold regardless of where it is. I would say that experience is pretty positive because most of the time I only wait like 2 days.”
  - I’ve never really been like ‘I need a book right now’.”
  - “I always plan the time it takes to get books from these libraries into my projects.”

- However, many students didn’t understand they could acquire books from other libraries in TUG or from interlibrary loan. If they had seen the RACER interface, they were puzzled or intimidated by it.
  - “There was one book I was looking for for a project and it was at the Kemptville campus, so would you be able to call that one in? I just wasn’t
sure. I thought because it was a different campus I wouldn’t be able to grab it.”

- “I used to work at a public library and I know you can take a book from another branch, but I guess I just assumed you couldn’t do that here.”
- “Using RACER I remember being intimidated and a little confused. TUG is okay, you just drop down and say it is here and whatever. But RACER is a little intimidating because it is a whole different system.”

- Library jargon may be a barrier. They never used the words hold, recall, or interlibrary loan. Instead they used words like order, call in, transfer and reserve.

**A library without books**

- We described a hypothetical scenario wherein the Library would withdraw all the books to accommodate for more study space. In this scenario, books would only be accessible by request from an off-site location. We hoped this extreme scenario would elicit students’ true feelings about the need for an on-site accessible print collection. The results were very interesting. Most users recognized that more study space is required while also expressing concern that a Library without books is “weird”. Even students who never or rarely use the collection told us that books are a defining feature of the Library.

Here are some of the responses:

- “It’s not really a library if there are no books in it. To me, that’s what a library means. Less books would be good. I mean, we need more study space, but at the same time...without books it would be a little sad. They add something to the Library. Makes it feel like an academic institution. I like them. They help block noise, so they’re pretty good.”
- “I couldn’t imagine getting rid of all the books and just having study space because there is something wrong with just an empty building for studying. It needs to serve a higher purpose. I definitely appreciate the need for more space, so as long as we have access to the books.”
- “I don’t think that would be a bad idea. I think as long as students know that if they want a book it is going to take a little bit of planning ahead of time, that shouldn’t be a problem.”
- “I think that’s okay because I’ve had pretty good experiences with books being here pretty soon after I put them on hold. I think that would only affect procrastinators, like myself sometimes... I think having more study space would be great, everyone is always like “The Library is so busy”.
- “I am for both student space and books. I know the space is really important because during exam times it’s really hard to find a spot. It is true though because I don’t see a lot of people using the book stacks...Can you just take away stuff that isn’t needed; minimizing the books somehow that you do have?”
- “I think that any other library of course needs books, but a university library is a place to study...We all try to find our own study spots on campus, but somehow we always come back to the Library, so during exams I can’t find a place to study, so there needs to be a balance.”
Faculty Perspectives

We interviewed 11 faculty members for an early 2016 UX study exploring their use of the Library. Often the conversation delved into their use of the print collection. Below are some excerpts from those conversations:

- **Participant 1 (25yrs at UofG, CBS):** “
  - Maybe once in a blue moon I need to go find a book, but nowadays we have a PD allowance and this book that I'm really interested in I'm going to just buy it or ask the publisher for a desk copy. So I have not set foot in the Library for a very long time.”
  - “In terms of where the University wants to be putting resources I'd be happy if they stopped buying the hard copy journal and I don't know if they still do.”

- **Participant 2 (10yrs at UofG, CSAHS):**
  - “I seldom come into the Library. I'll even admit that rather than getting students to use Course Reserves I will just stick the PDF up on Course Link to make it easy.”
  - “My use of books is scattered maybe 5-6 a year at most.”

- **Participant 3 (5yrs at UofG, CPES):**
  - “I used to use the website to find books and I barely ever use it now because I find that the interface is just awful. There's one to search for textbooks and to find out what's in the Library, there is another one for that. And then there is another one. It might have changed because honestly I just haven't used it in years because I just got so frustrated with the system.”
  - “I wouldn't necessarily expect the Library to have this week’s newest and most interesting stuff on user interface design or software design.”

- **Participant 4 (15yrs at UofG, CPES):**
  - “By and large I can access anything I need from home.”

- **Participant 5 (35yrs at UofG, OAC):**
  - “I know we don’t keep our book holdings up to date. They seem pretty old. But occasionally I'll go up and wander through certain sections and look for something. But not too often.”
  - “I loved when we had journals in print...All of the current issues were there and there were chairs and you could just go in and say ‘hmm I wonder what is in The Journal of Ecology’. Because I don’t do that on the web.”

- **Participant 6 (30yrs at UofG, COA):**
  - “I use the print collection a great deal because I work with Scottish History and we have this excellent Scottish collection both in the stacks and in the archives.”
  - “I almost always use online unless I happen to be in the journals section of the Library. I might flip through the journals.”

- **Participant 7 (30yrs at UofG, CBE):** “
If there is some book we’d really like to see in the collection we don’t know who to talk to [at the Library]. I’ve given up trying to do it. We don’t know who they are. We are not told.”

Participant 8 (5yrs at UofG, CSAHS):

“I regularly get books through the Interlibrary Loan service both Trellis and RACER for both my own research and also tracking down books for teaching.”

“I find it really annoying that all of the books are held by Guelph but only in electronic versions...I’m not going to sit and read a 300 page book on my computer. It’s bad for my back, it’s bad for my eyes, it’s just terrible.”

“It seems like every new acquisition is an ebook and it just doesn’t work for me. I mean when I was doing my PhD I found so many sources just by wandering through the JX and the JZ section. I knew exactly where to go and I wouldn’t have found if I had just relied on the website. I go to our Library and it rarely happens… It’s much more rare here for me to find something else and how am I going to scan the electronic holdings? How do I do that?”

Limitations

Participants self-selected. We did not actively seek out students who conform to particular criteria (e.g. heavy users, non-users, etc.)

No graduate students participated in this study. Would their responses be different?

Our study can not make any claims about how a student’s major correlates with their use of the print collection; however many students offered us their opinion that science students don’t need print books.

“I’ve never used the collection for science. They usually provide the articles, or you go in Primo.”

“I study sciences so it is mostly journal articles that I’m looking for anyway.”

“I don’t think many people in my program or anyone in sciences would really know. They don’t have to use books that much.”

Recommendations

Students will adjust and be flexible to whatever decision we make about relocating the books. Although they told us a library is not a library without books, they do not (for the most part) require immediate access to the collection in this building. Furthermore, they find navigating and accessing the print collection time-consuming and frustrating. If someone else could retrieve all their books, that would suit most of them!

If we wish to promote easier navigation and browsing of our physical collection, add subject specific language to the call number signs both in the stacks and in the stairwells. E.g. L: Education; H: Social Sciences, etc.

Users want the “‘Where is it?’ function to be more specific; down to the individual shelving unit.
There is a general sense that our collection is old and therefore irrelevant especially to those in subjects where new information is critical to their work. There is an opportunity to weed older and rarely used books to both change this perception and promote easier navigation of the collection.

The Library could improve visibility and clarity on the website about how borrowing from TUG and interlibrary loan work. Students wanted to know (and didn’t know where to find out) how to place holds or requests, how to select which book to choose, that there are two systems for doing this, how long it would take, how much it costs.

Online browsing is a desired feature.
Appendix A: Interview Guide

1. We would like you to map out a recent experience using the library’s book collection. [Show blank journey map]. We’d like you to start from the beginning of this experience. What was the journey that led you to the stacks. For example, did it start with an assignment? A research question? A book recommendation? Where were you (in the library? At home? In class?) Place this starting point on the map.
   a. What did you do next? (E.g. search Primo, search google, ask at Ask Us, etc.)
      - Prompt (if applicable): Describe how you used Primo.
   b. Continue to map your journey step by step.
   c. How did you know where to find the book(s)?
   d. Did you find the book(s) you were looking for? What did you do?

2. Which floor(s) did you visit? What did you do there? What topics were you looking for?

3. The Library may decide to send all the books to off-site storage to allow for much more study space. Do you have any comments on this possibility?

Prompting or follow-up questions:

1. Your year and program
2. How confident are you using the library? How would you describe yourself on a spectrum from “I am very confident” to “Not at all confident?” Why?
3. How often do you check out books in a semester?
4. Have you ever requested a book from another location? (ask about Annex, WLU/UW, Racer). Do you know what these are?
5. Tell us about your needs and expectations about how quickly you need to get your hands on books.
   ○ How far in advance (of an assignment/project) do you usually check out book(s)?
   ○ Do you always need to get them right away or can you wait until they come from another location?;
   ○ If you had to get your books only by request, how would this impact your experience? (e.g. no open stacks or books are all off site)
   ○ How long do you generally need book(s) for?
6. Do you use ebooks as well as print books?
   ○ How do you choose which format to use?
   ○ If you download ebooks, what do you do with them (e.g. save them on your computer, print them, read them right away)
7. Do you browse the bookshelves?
8. Do you use the book collection other than for your research and assignments?
   ○ Do you use the collection for pleasure reading?
9. When you take out a book, what do you do with it? (read it immediately, let it pile up, etc.)
10. How could the library improve your experience doing assignments or research?