

Touchstone Tours UX Study - Final Report

Rationale

The UX team decided to undertake this study for several reasons:

- **Library Master Space Plan Refresh:** The library is refreshing the Master Space Plan and we want to ensure that feedback from our users is incorporated.
- **Relocation of the Ask Us Desk (AUD):** The AUD is moving locations within the library and collecting feedback from students will help to establish a baseline for assessment after the new desk is installed.
- **Construction of the Second Floor completed:** The Second Floor of the library recently underwent renovations including the installation of new carrels, a Scholars Studio, THINC Lab, Data Resource Centre (DRC), Media Studio, and Archival & Special Collections Reading Room and Exhibit Hall. What do users think of the renovations? How do they use them? What do they know about our new spaces?
- **Compare Results from 2016 Touchstone Tours:** We conducted Touchstone Tours in 2016, how does the 2018 library compare? Are we improving? Are we regressing?

Methodology

We asked participants to lead us (the UX Team) on tours of the library. Participants were aware that they would be participating in a study to help us improve library spaces but they did not know that they would be leading us on tours. So the information we collected was their first impressions, previous knowledge of the spaces, and personal opinions. We asked them prompting questions along the way to clarify and further explore responses. We also conducted brief interviews with a standardized interview script before and after each tour (see Appendix A).

Participants

Tours were conducted by 8 different students (6 undergraduates and 2 graduates). They were in various years (see below) from a mix of programs including: Biological Science, Biomedical Science (2), Criminal Justice, English, International Development, Neuroscience, and Veterinary Medicine.

Participants by Year of Study: 1st - 1; 2nd - 2; 3rd - 2; 4th - 1; Graduate Students - 2.

What did we learn?

First Floor

Students used the first floor to accomplish tasks such as printing, stapling, and to make use of various library services. A couple of the students used the more comfortable chairs on the first floor to nap. Several participants stated that they used the computers on the first floor to print, and they considered printing to be an important “service” provided by the library. Participants liked that library services (Writing, IT Help, RHD) are located on the first floor. Although there seemed to be an unlying assumption that there aren’t any service points on other floors. However, the positive reaction to the idea of co locating services is significant in light of the new AUD model.

“There’s nothing really like in any corners tucked away or anything. Everything is pretty out in the open, so you can see the Writing and IT Desk right when you walk in, it’s not like in a hidden room in some corner. Everything that you really really need is right there”

Participants also used the first floor to study independently, and meet/socialize/study with others, but many noted that it was difficult to find a place to sit.

“I just think it feels like there isn’t enough collaborative space for people to sit together at tables and do work because it is very competitive to try to find spots and it just seems weird to me that we should be competing for study space”

Most participants identified and were able to explain the AUD, IT Help Desk, and Writing Services. The IT Help desk had been used by several participants. One student, however, found the service intimidating due to the atmosphere created by “groups of people” behind the desk.

Participants were less likely to mention the Research Help Desk (RHD), despite the new signage, and had trouble explaining its purpose.

Researcher: Do you know what goes on there [RHD]?

User: Research Questions? I’ve never used it, I just use it online because I go to lib.uoguelph if I need to do any research for papers. I don’t know what goes on here to be honest.

Some participants noticed the Gryph Reads collection. It was referred to as “book club stuff,” “books that the library recommends,” “leisure reading,” and a “non-academic collection.” Several participants had taken out books from Gryph Reads. Others explained that they did not have time to read for leisure.

Ask Us Desk

Most participants were satisfied with the level of service provided by the AUD, and reflected positively on the location, aesthetics, and efficiency of service. However, one student did note that the location made it intimidating due to the amount of traffic around the desk.

Second Floor

The students we spoke to used the second floor primarily to work quietly in study carrels. Participants were not familiar with the Graduate Study Offices, even those that were graduate students. Few participants had used any specialized second floor service points. Overall, participants were confused by these spaces, and whether or not they could use them. There was a feeling among some participants that these spaces were geared towards graduate students.

“I see it all of the time but I don’t know what function it serves. I guess it’s called the Scholars Studio...I have seen it before and around I just don’t know exactly what happens here. Or who it serves. It is nice though.”

The frosted glass signage used to identify most of the second floor service points was hard to see and overlooked by most of the participants.

“...the glass on the glass, I didn’t notice as much, but they look nice. So I like the way that they look, but I just didn’t pay attention.”

Most students did not notice the Media Studio, but because they could see into it (and sometimes it was in use), they could infer what the purpose of the room was. Reactions to the Media Studio were generally positive.

Researcher: Do you know anything about it [Media Studio]?

User: No, I just assume there’s people that...oh look there’s a green screen, that’s pretty cool, that’s pretty nice. People can use it for their media projects I guess, they have the equipment.

The Student Accessibility Services (SAS) Exam Centre was well-known by our participants. Many also pointed out the Whitelaw Room which they knew from attending SLGs or the Take a Paws event.

Most of the participants liked the look and feel of the second floor, citing its modern, functional and “open” aesthetic.

“I like that the glass, you can see what’s going on, it feels more inviting, it doesn’t feel like it’s too elite, even though it is.”

“I was here before the renovations happened and it looks really nice now. So I would say it is very clean, organized and busy.”

Archives - Exhibit Hall and Reading Room

Participants felt the Exhibit Hall and Reading Room looked inaccessible and “closed off”. They were confused about who could use the space, what the space was for, and even how to enter the space. Not surprisingly, most participants overlooked the signage.

“I don’t think people would pay much attention to that sign walking, they would be like ‘oh that’s cool’, but not really know they can go in there or whatever you know? It might be off limits. That’s what I would assume.”

All of the participants assumed the space was not for them. They assumed they weren’t allowed to enter the space. Several students expressed frustration about the Archival spaces being virtually empty, especially during exam season when space is at a premium. They felt these spaces could be put to better use as study space.

“I know a lot of the time me and my friends walk passed here and we always want to be like this could be a study space because during exams it gets really packed right and you start seeing all the possible places that could your study space but its not.”

Conclusions

When it comes to the library, the needs of the students we spoke to were very simple. The most pressing concern was having access to quiet study space.

“Honestly, the main thing I want out of the library is study space...like a reliable place for me to come and be able to find a place and study.”

All of the participants spoke of the difficulty of finding study space, but they were generally understanding of the problem. Several participants noted that the library was using its space effectively, and that there was not much that could be done to add more study areas. Those that had used the library prior to renovations noted a positive difference in terms of the quantity and quality of study space in the library.

“Yeah like there are a lot of spaces, it gets full, but what are you going to do, you can’t build another floor, I think it’s pretty maximized out.”

Aside from study space students wanted printers, staplers, outlets, USB ports, adequate lighting, access to services if they should they ever need them, and reliable wireless internet and cellular service.

Our participants tended to stick to areas that they are familiar with, making little effort to branch out and explore other parts of the library. This explains why some students did not know about, or had not seen, various specialized service points before despite being regular users of the library. They tend to beeline for their favourite study spot, using the same route every time.

Responses to: How does the library make you feel?

- Relaxed
- Focused
- Overwhelmed
- Smarter
- Motivated
- Not comfortable
- Productive
- Stressed
- Supported
- Crowded

Words Used to Describe the Second Floor

- Quiet
- Studious
- Efficient
- Calm
- Spacious
- Looks good
- Accessible
- Focused
- Open
- Cozy
- Crowded

Suggestions for Improvement

- Improve signage for specialized spaces on the second floor. Explain the purpose of each space and who is permitted to use them
- Improve signage for the Exhibit Hall. Explain the purpose, where the entrance is, and create a more inviting atmosphere.
- Create more quiet study space. This is a major concern for students. It is what they want and what they need most from their library.