Method

- 7 participants led researchers from the UX Team on tours of the library. The participants were undergraduate students from various colleges at the University of Guelph.
- Participants were recruited through an ad on the library website that asked for users help in improving library space.
- We asked participants to talk aloud as they walked through the space. We asked prompting questions along the way which included:
  - What are you seeing?
  - Have you used this space before?
  - Have you had any frustrating or confusing experiences at the library?
  - What is important to you in a library?
  - How can the library improve?

Findings

1. Choosing a study space is very personal.

All of the participants provided in-depth, well thought out rationale for choosing their preferred study space. And all of these decisions proved to be very subjective. Some like the carrels with high walls, some like to study at the open tables so they can spread out their stuff, some like to study with their friends, some need total silence to be productive.

   “I almost feel like the basement is a secret spot that they don’t tell people about because it is so quiet down there”

2. Most participants mentioned the Ask Us Desk, IT Help Desk and Writing Services.

Very few participants noticed the Research Help Desk or Data Resource Centre. All of the participants commented on the Ask Us Desk, IT Help Desk, and Writing Services.

3. Making a Writing Help appointment continues to be a challenge.

   “The issue that I have is that I have 9 am classes sometimes so I can’t get to the library the day of the 9 am classes to sign up [for a writing appointment]. Not sure if undergrads have that issue since they have 8:30 classes, but for me by the time I get here the grad thesis Thursdays are all full.”

4. Most participants bypass the main hallway, across from the Ask Us Desk.

   “Usually I just go straight to the basement”.

   “We can go up to the other floors now. I don’t go that many places so I don’t really know. I really just go to the place I like and don’t explore. I don’t even know what the other floors look like. I like the 1st floor and that is all I really go!”
5. Participants did not distinguish between the various functions of the Ask Us Desk.

None of the participants knew that there were different locations at the Ask Us Desk designated for specific questions. For example, to get a textbook on reserve you go to the right side of the desk. Participants do not distinguish between Ask Us Desk staff and expect anyone at the desk to be able to answer their question.

6. Participants find out about our services primarily from in-class marketing and word-of-mouth.

“My RA told me, the SLG leader came into my class, it was on my course outline, my prof mentioned it, my friend went to one and I heard about it waiting in line at the Ask Us Desk.”

“Usually like at least once per semester, a Library representative comes into my classes and that is always cool because they always say there are so many resources at the Library, but they never really say what they all are so maybe something more around that.”

7. Participants are mostly satisfied with our services.

Participants were most familiar with the Ask Us Desk, IT Help Desk and Writing Services. Most of their experiences at these service points have been positive.

8. Most participants noticed the Gryph Reads Collection but few knew it by name.

The presence of Gryph Reads really excited some users. Most were unaware it was a leisure reading collection and very few knew it was called Gryph Reads. A few users brought up how challenging it is to browse the collection (it’s not organized by subject), and others mentioned how difficult it is to search the catalogue.


Most students want to be able to come to the library and have guaranteed access to study space. They don’t want to waste time walking around the library “competing for a spot”, especially during exam season. They also want a variety of space; carrels on quiet floors, group study rooms, tables where they can talk with their friends, and soft seating where they can relax between classes. Some participants mentioned the importance of friendly library staff. To some, the library can be an overwhelming institution so having warm and welcoming frontline staff is crucial for a positive experience.

“I would say the Ask Us Desk, having friendly workers at the desk is the most important as well as having study space and definitely there is a lack of knowledge of study space, so maybe getting that word out. Maybe I’m just not very observant though.”

Student Recommendations

We asked students how the library could improve and here are some of their responses:

1. More information and support for finding and using subject-specific databases
2. Extending building hours, perhaps even making the library a 24 hour space
   • “I know a lot of students would like that. I know I personally would not be studying past 2 am either way but I understand that would be important to a lot of students.”
3. Creating a dedicated space for graduate students
4. Showing the human side of the library
   • “Things that excite me are the events or themes that librarians are excited about like when we have library news and events and things ... like research and presentations going on. I find it exciting because it brings a new element into the space.”