Innovative Library, Innovative Space: How SJSU Students Use It

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Abstract

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Library at San Jose State University is a unique combination of both academic and public library. The academic library has a special place on the college campus in the United States; usually, it is centrally located on the university as a primary place of convergence. The King Library offers space for everybody's use.

This presentation provided information on the initial analysis for data collected in a study of the "library as place" and SJSU students' perceptions regarding their sense of belonging towards the King Library building. The study had three goals: 1) Learn about the implementation of library services as a strategy for empowering student populations in academic libraries, 2) Identify the actual use of the library as a place by university students and 3) Make recommendations for future services that enhance the students' use of the library.

In order to achieve those goals, this study involved a mixed quantitative-qualitative research approach.

Introduction

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Library houses both the main branch of the San Jose Public Library as well as the SJSU university library. It is in this new library that both "town and gown" may share a facility dedicated to lifelong learning. The building itself houses 1.9 million items, has 8 floors, 6 classrooms, 36 meeting rooms, and 5 special collection rooms. The majority of these spaces are shared between the SJSU and the City of San Jose communities. Since this joint project was the largest of its kind in the country, from the announcement of the endeavor in 1997, the project made groundbreaking news in major library journals (Eberhart, 1999; Albanese, 2003; Eberhart, 2003; Crawford, 2003).

Details about the characteristics and philosophy of the project were published before and after the completion of the merged organization. Peterson and Breivik (2001) talk about the different organizations, institutions, and task forces formed between the City of San Jose and San Jose State University in the planning process of the joint-use project. This article mentions the challenges and planning of different joint-services. Kauppila and Russell (2003) describe the two distinct communities being served, the size of the collection, the planning process, and the management structure during the development of the joint library. Peterson (2005) gives a comprehensive report about the use of the space and building design after the first year; the joint-use facility has common use of the library space to engage the diverse community within the place. The author also describes how the building is a lifelong learning space.

Literature Review

De Certau (1984) defines places as spaces that have been transformed by the people who use them, "space is a practiced place" (p. 117). Further researchers (Hiss, 1991; Augé, 1995) extend this analysis and try to understand how this transformation actually happens. There are two basic needs that must be met in order for such a transformation to take place. First, the public space needs to safe for the individuals; and second, the place is transformed into a space when the individual adapts smaller niches to meet their private needs. The concept of space/place was extrapolated to the library in the early 2000s when a change in the library's paradigm occurred, specifically the academic library changed from a "book-centered" space to a "learning-centered" space (Bennett, 2009; Weise, 2004).

The characteristics of this learning-centered space include a greater emphasis on the cognitive processes of students, such as the importance of information commons, and also on the social interactions of students, such as cafes and coffees shops within the library, study/meeting rooms, and areas where eating and higher noise levels are acceptable (Given & Leckie, 2003; Ludwig & Starr, 2005; Pomerantz & Marchionini, 2006, Watson, 2010). In *The Library Study at Fresno State* (Delcore, et al., 2009), students were asked to identify features that would make an ideal library, and they imagined various spaces that would meet nearly all their needs, "quiet/loud, serious/social and individual/group" (p. 35). Bennett (2003) states that in "their behavior, students…have affirmed quite decidedly there is no contradiction in thinking of the library as both a social and a studious place" (Accommodating Students' Need for Learning Spaces section, para. 10).

Methodology

The authors of this study developed a 30 question survey, which can be roughly broken into four sections: demographics, frequency of use, services used, and use of space. Most of the questions on the survey were multiple choice, but two requested a written response. The survey was a combination of four instruments. The first was created by one of the authors, Molteni (2008), in a previous study of library as place, which is unpublished. The second component was an internal instrument created at the King Library by Rebecca Feind, Shannon Staley, and Lydia Collins (2008). This survey mechanism is partially described by Staley, Branch, and Hewitt (2010); however, the full instrument remains unpublished. The third component of the survey derived from Antell and Engel's 2006 article "Conduciveness to Scholarship: The Essence of Academic Library as Place." The fourth component came from a 2002 article published by Leckie and Hopkins in *The Library Quarterly*. Additionally, the authors designed new questions that specifically addressed the objectives of this study.

The study included SJSU graduate and undergraduate students who participated in library instruction sessions given by the authors during the 2010-2011 academic year. The authors are academic liaison librarians for the departments of Nursing, Nutrition, Food Science and Packaging, Communicative Disorders, Social Work, Linguistics and Language Development, Communication Studies, Political Science and Public Administration. In addition, they also provide information literacy sessions for general education English courses required for all students at the university. In total, 744 surveys were collected.

The questionnaires were distributed to respondents in paper format. The library provides a variety of spaces where instruction may take place, only some of which include computers. Therefore, to assure uniformity in data collection, the authors determined paper format best met the needs of the study. The authors obtained a grant to hire a graduate student to input the survey responses into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and then export the data to SPSS. The tool Wordle (http://wordle.net) was employed to analyze word frequency in answers to questions with a written response.

Demographics

In the survey, perhaps the most important question asked was, "Do you use SJSU library's physical space?" And the results were resoundingly positive. 78% of respondents said yes. This presentation discussed which students use the library, what services and physical areas they use, and when and how often.

Results showed that the population of the survey was mainly female: 527 females (70.8%) and 217 males (29.2%). The data follows characteristics of the general university population for the 2010-2011academic year, which was 53.20% female and 47.66% male (SJSU, Office of Institutional Research, 2011). The larger proportion of females in the sample was because the survey was delivered to some departments that have a high female population, such as Nursing. The SJSU Office of Institutional Research (2011) reports that the Nursing School has an 85.23% female population.
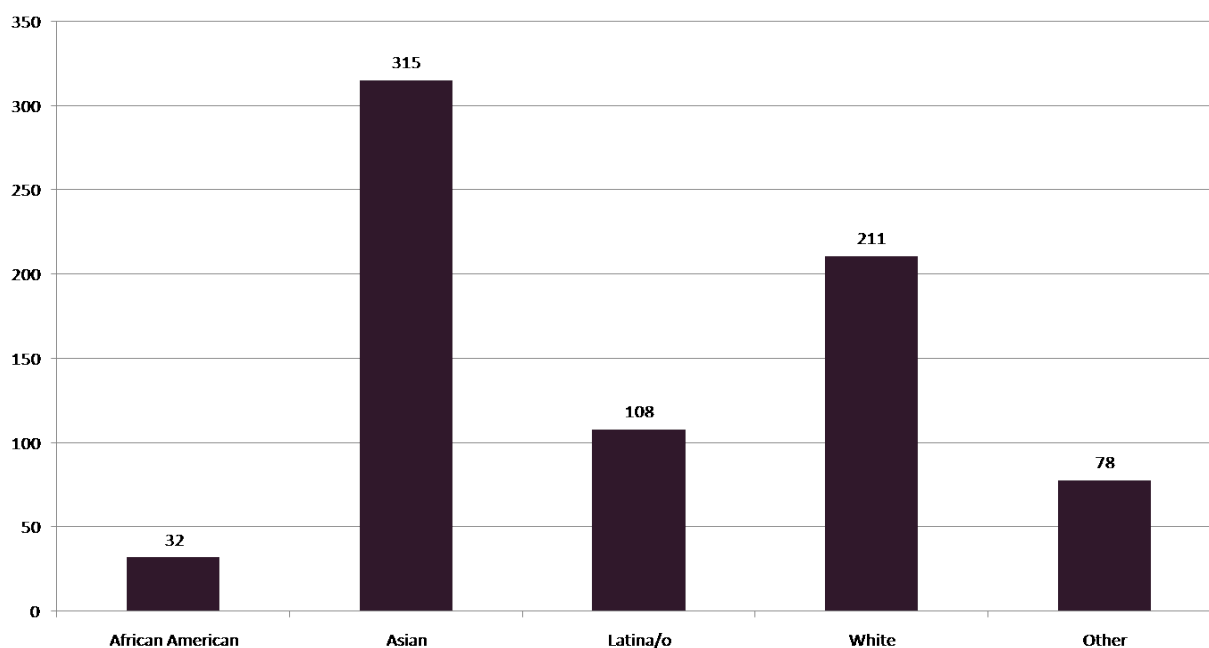

Figure 1: Ethnicity of survey respondents

When questioned about their ethnicity, students were asked to choose between African American, Asian, Latino/a, White, Other, or were allowed to fill in a line where they could define themselves in another category and describe it. The survey population was predominantly Asian in ethnicity, which coincides with the data collected by the university about the overall population of the campus (SJSU, Office of Institutional Research, 2011).

The majority of the students are between 18 and 25 years old (67.9%), followed by the student group between 25-29 years old (14%), then the 30-39 year old group (11%), the 40-49 year old group (4.4%), the 50-59 year old group (2.2%), and finally the 60-69 year old group (.5%). This is similar to the whole university, where the average age for undergraduates is 22 (SJSU, Office of Institutional Research, 2011).

The most significant class level in the survey was juniors (36.8%), followed by seniors (29.3%), graduate students (12.6%), freshman (15.5%), and sophomores (4.6%). An additional 1.2% did not

answer this question. The class levels of the survey population relates to the fact that the bulk of library instruction centers around the junior level 100W writing courses.

The highest concentration of students for the entire SJSU population are juniors and seniors for two reasons. One is due to budget fluctuation and restrictions. During the last three years, SJSU has reduced enrollment for undergraduate (freshmen) and graduate students. The second reason is that the median time it takes to finish an undergraduate degree is six years (SJSU, Office of Institutional Research, 2011).

In total, the students in the survey population were from 39 different majors. A large majority of the sample belonged to the Nursing School (30 %), followed by students from the School of Business (20%). The Nursing School has a curriculum focused on Evidence-Based Practice, with a course (NURS 128) for these topics and the librarian teaches in all sections. The School of Business also has a high representation in this survey even though neither of the authors is a liaison for this school. The reason is that there is a mandatory upper division 100W course with the goal of developing writing and research skills across all disciplines. Business does not offer its own 100W courses, instead, there are 100W courses in Communication Studies and Linguistics and Language Development that target business students. Both Communication Studies and Linguistics are included in the authors' liaison duties.

Frequency of Use

Asking students how long it took to get from home to the library was significant because this factor could be a potential barrier to use of the building and space. The majority of the students surveyed for this study claimed it took less than 30 minutes to get to campus, with 32.3% responding that it took less than 15 minutes and an additional 44.9% in the 15-30 minute group. 16.7% said it took 31-60 minutes, and only 4.8% stated that they commuted more than an hour.
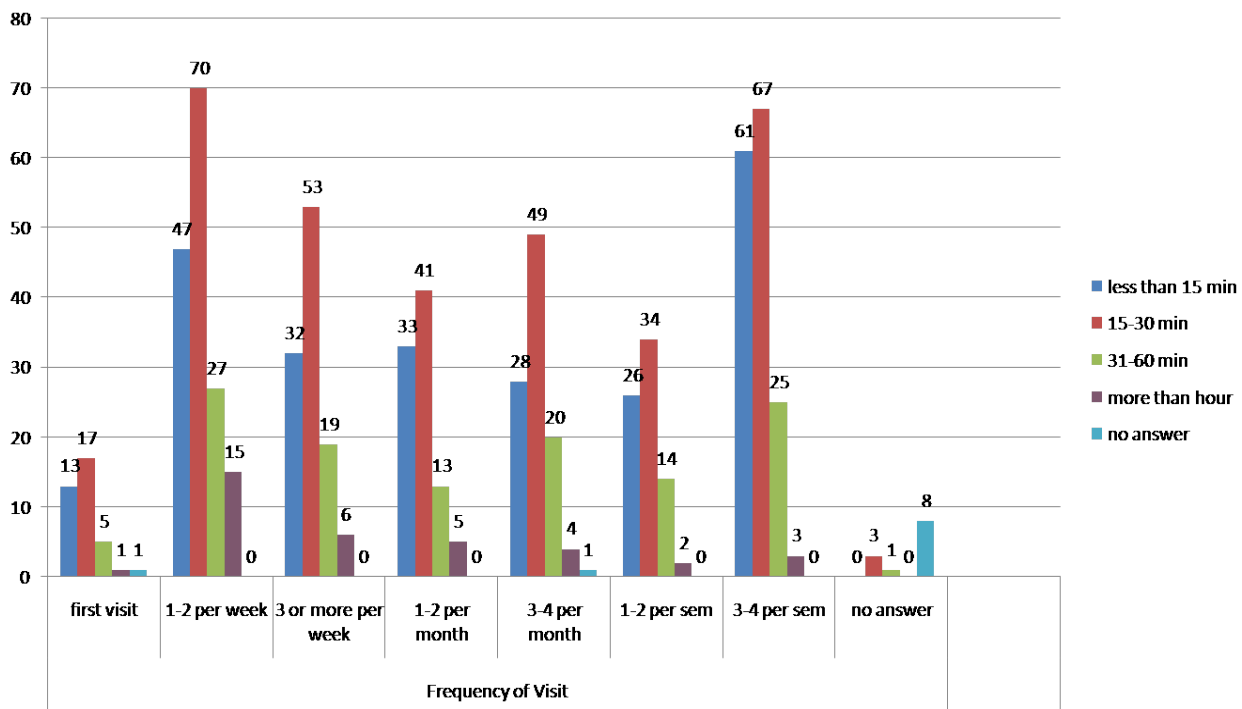

Figure 2: Cross tabulation of students' frequency of visits and commute to campus

Comparing the commute to campus to the frequency of visits to the library, it became clear that, unsurprisingly, the shorter the commute time, the higher the likelihood of visits to the library. Although the 15-30 minute group (shown in red) was the most likely to visit, with the shortest commute of under 15 minutes (shown in blue) coming in second.

When asked how many hours they spend on campus per week, the highest number of students was in the 5-10 hours per week group at 43.5%, followed by the 10-15 hours group at 21.4%. At the lower end of the spectrum were the 15-20 hours per week group (13.3%), the 20-25 hours per week group (6.5%), and the 25-30 hours per week group (4.3%), but there was a slight increase again at the 30+ hours per week group with 11%.
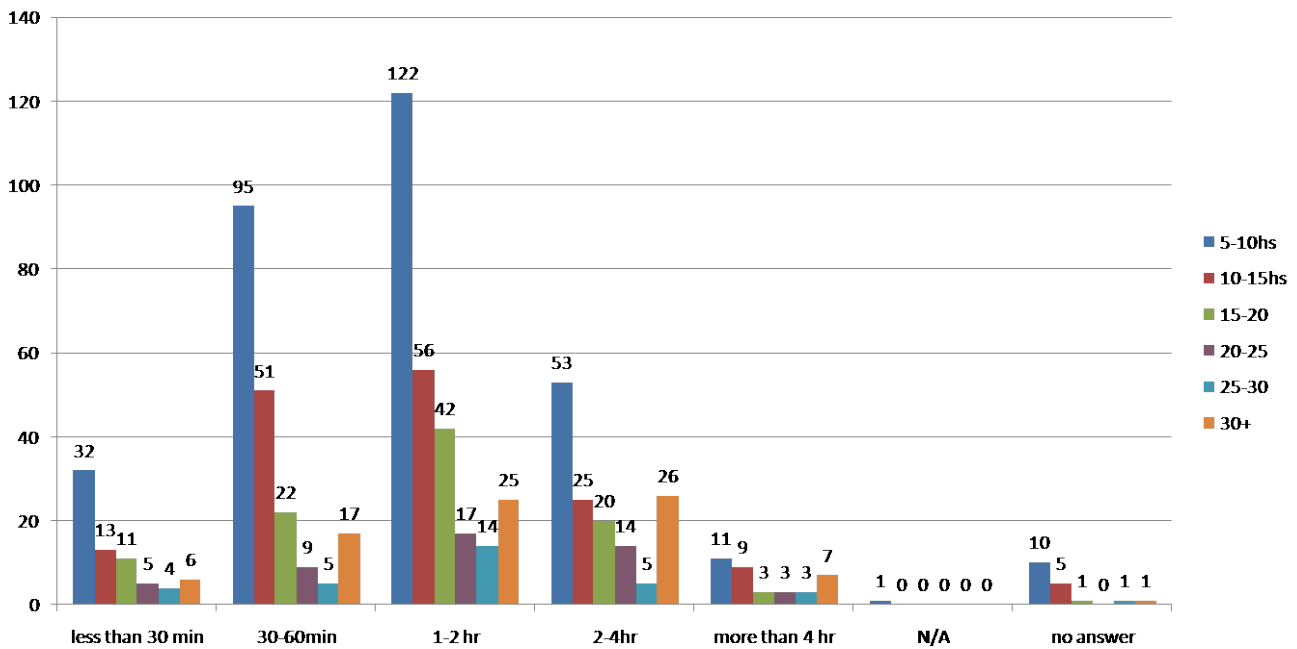

Figure 3: Cross tabulation of students' hours on campus per week and hours in the library per week

However, when comparing the hours students spent on campus per week with the hours they stayed in the library, the data showed that students were definitely making time in their commuter schedule to spend time in the library. Across all groups, students were most likely to spend 1-2 hours per week, followed by the 30-60 minute group, and then the 2-4 hours group.

The data also revealed that those who spent the least amount of time on campus per week (5-10 hours—blue column), were also the group most likely to spend time in the library across all time periods.

Students typically came to the library by themselves (48.7%) or with one other person (34.7%), with only 15.5% coming with two or more people. This contrasts slightly with the activities student claimed they used the library for—shown in the next section—which are to use the group study rooms that require two or more people in order to use. Of those who did come to the library with other people, it is significant to note that the majority (50.4%) stated that these were friends rather than classmates (22.6%). This strongly supports the idea that students consider the library as a social as well as a studious space (Bennett, 2003; Delcore et al., 2009).

Services Used

Students were asked what activities they engaged in while in the library. They were given a chart with 25 different options to choose from and they could also add their own responses. Students were also asked what possessions they brought with them while using the library building or services. Again, they were asked to choose from a chart or add their own responses. Students were allowed to choose more than one option on both of these charts, so there was overlap in the answers.
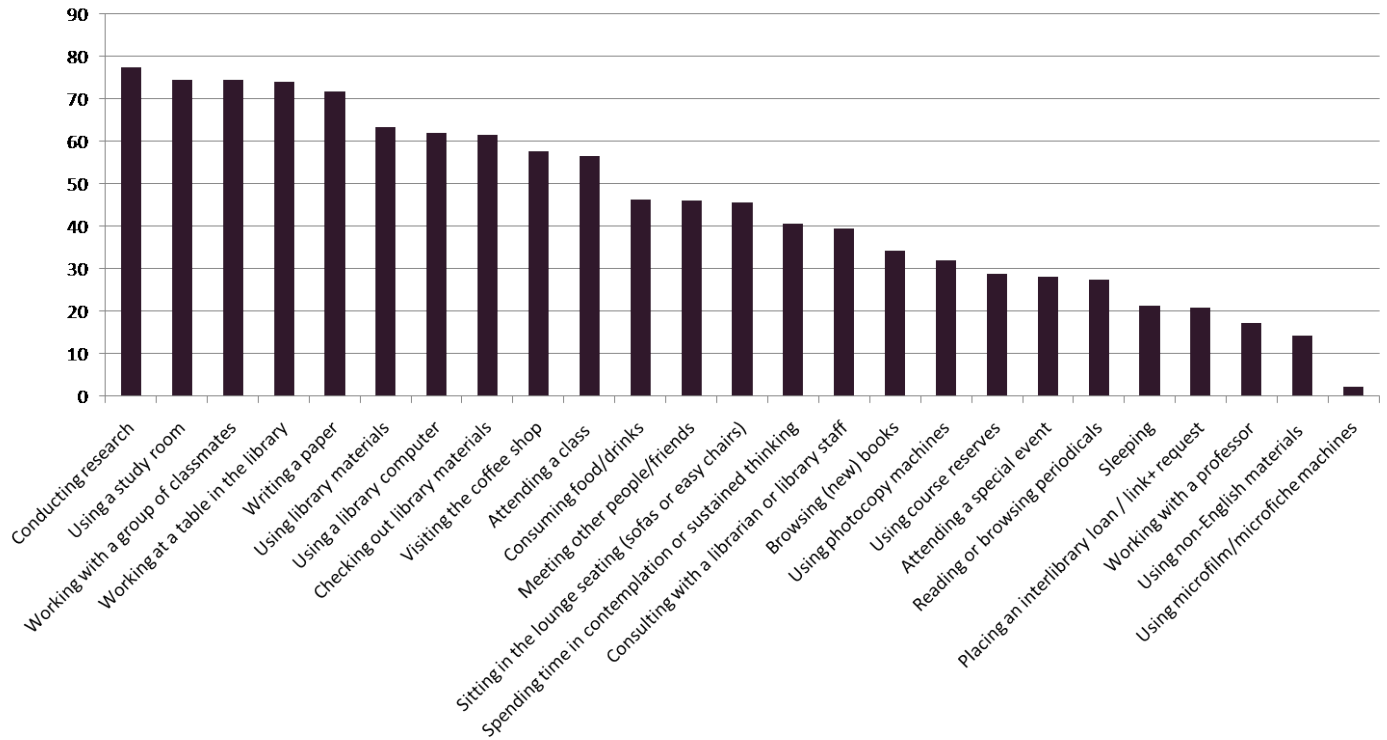
Figure 4: Activities students engaged in in the library, arranged by popularity

For activities students engaged in, the most significant were conducting research, using a study room, working with a group of classmates, working at a table in the library, and writing a paper.

The most significant comments students made in addition to the options on the chart included studying or doing homework, reserving a room for group work, printing papers, and using the library's wireless internet. Several students mentioned taking advantage of the services in the Adaptive Technology Center in the library which is controlled by the campus-wide Disabilities Resource Center.
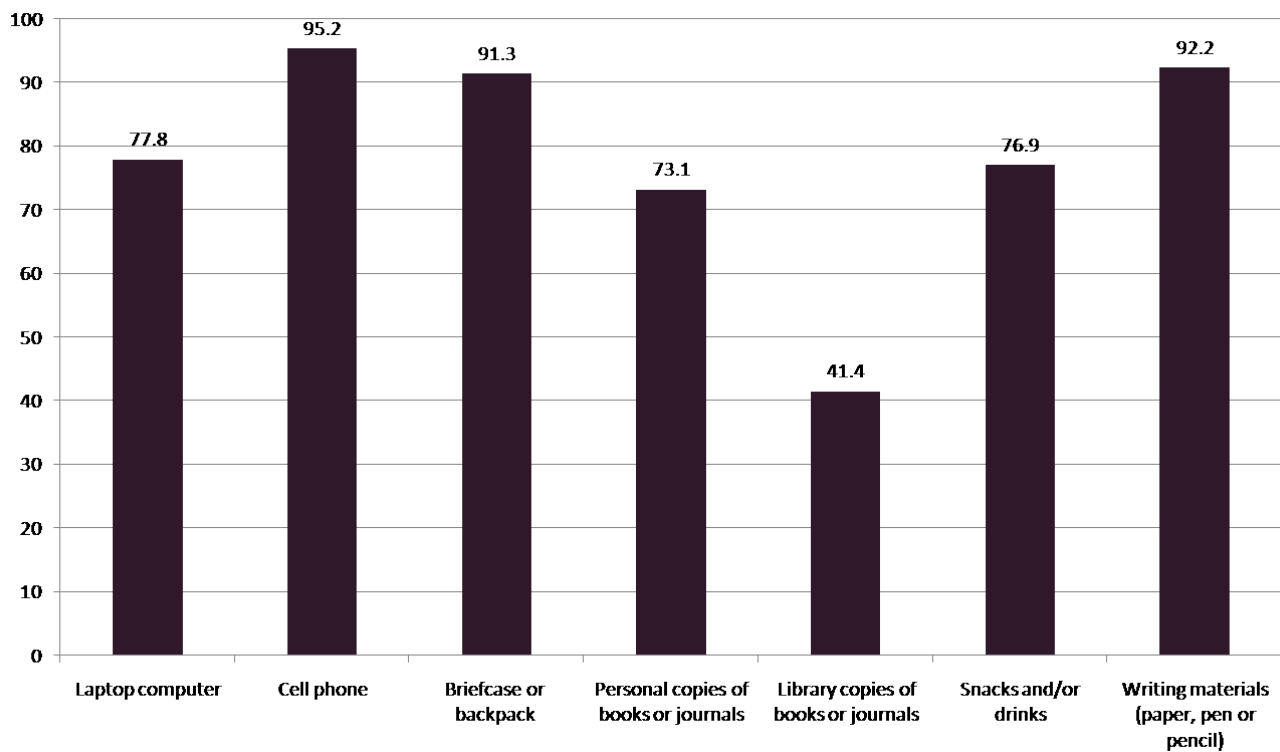
Figure 5: Possessions students brought to the library

Of the possessions brought to the library, over 90% of respondents said they brought a cell phone, backpack or briefcase, and writing materials such as paper, pens, and pencils. Possessions student brought with them that were not on the chart can be grouped under several categories, the first being music, iPods, and headphones. Materials that assisted with various class assignments were included, from drafts of research papers and homework assignments to syllabi. Textbooks were mentioned by multiple students, which indicates students group these into a category separate from the "personal copies of books" that were offered as an option in the main question.

Use of Space

The "Use of Space" questions looked at what places students used most often and had adapted as personal spaces within the library. Additionally, it was important to investigate which features of the library students liked the best and least, in order to discover further barriers to use as well as what the library is currently doing right in terms of the space offered.

There were a number of questions with simple yes or no answers. Students were asked if they used the library just to relax, study, work, or socialize and 80.1% said "Yes." They were asked if they write their papers in the library and 64.1% answered "Yes." Also, when asked if they use the library's electronic resources remotely, 76.6% said "Yes."

The final set of questions were open-ended and meant to uncover the students' favorite and least favorite aspects of the library's space. The authors used Wordle to create a word clouds for each question that made the words mentioned the most often larger than those mentioned less often in the responses.

Figure 6: Word cloud for students' favorite location in the library

Students were asked to identify their favorite floor or location in the library. The majority of students had a favorite floor (57.5%), with the 8th, 7th, 6th, 2nd and 4th floors being the most popular. The silent study floors in the library are the 6th, 7th and 8th, with the bulk of the academic material located there. Located on the 2nd floor are the majority of the computers students can use. The 3rd floor, which makes an appearance in the word cloud, has most of the material from the public library.

Figure 7: Word cloud for students' feelings toward the joint library

Students were then asked this question: "The King Library is a very particular building in that it serves both SJSU students and the San Jose general community. What is your experience or feeling, as a library patron and student, about this combination?"

The answers were mixed, many of the students mentioned the presence of homeless people who make them feel uncomfortable, the other half mentioned the diverse community and the space for studying.

Figure 8: Word cloud for students' one word description of the library

However, when provided the opportunity give the best word to describe the library, the response was generally positive. Many students commented on the size of the library, and also that they find it resourceful, convenient and helpful.

Figure 9: Word cloud for the feature students liked best about the library

Regarding the best feature of the library, many comments mentioned the study rooms, and again, the resources, the quiet environment, and the space.

Figure 10: Word cloud for the feature students liked least about the library

Regarding the worst feature, the presence of homeless people remained a strong theme. Students also mentioned that they would like more open hours, more outlets for laptops, and that the library can get crowded.

Conclusions and Recommendations

It is important to return to the main question—and the main point—of this survey. Students use the library—78% of the survey population said so. There were some aspects of the library they did not care for, and some suggestions and improvements that can be made, but the overall feedback from the questionnaire was relatively positive.

A few recommendations that can and should come out of this study would include possible solutions to the issues that students brought up. One would be noise and crowding issues, as well as having to deal with the homeless population that is common in many downtown areas of large cities.

The biggest recommendation the authors have is that some real estate needs to be carved out of the library that is dedicated to students. Consider this: there are roughly 30,000 students at SJSU. The city of San Jose has a population of just over 970,000 as of January 1, 2012 (City of San Jose, Population and Housing Data, 2012). Students are going to be outnumbered by public patrons, so the library must take that into account. Because of the unique joint-library setting, there may need to be a unique solution; for example, not just the "learning-centered" space suggested by Bennett (2009) and Weise (2004), but specifically a "student-centered" space where only students can go. Currently, the library is setting up a computer lab in one of the few areas of the open-concept library that is enclosed. The lab is scheduled to open in Fall 2012.

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