The Commons: Physical Library Spaces in the Digital Age

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HOW THIS PROJECT EMERGED

The Reading Room
(Harry Potter Room)
Rutherford South

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As university libraries offer more digital resources and online services, the physical space of the library has transitioned from being a repository for physical materials to being learner-centered and facilitating communication and collaboration

(Bilandzic & Johnson, 2013; Lougee, 2007; Stark & Samson, 2010).

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Motivations for academic library space redesign

LITERATURE REVIEW

2. Library commons evolution and implications

LITERATURE REVIEW

3. Relationship to university pedagogy

LITERATURE REVIEW

4. User perspectives on University of Alberta Library Services

LITERATURE REVIEW

5. Assessment of physical space & commons case studies

Use of the observation method (Bryant et al, 2009; Harrop et al, 2013)

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To ascertain the ways in which university students make use of and interact with a physical space in an academic library at the University of Alberta

1. How are students using the space & what needs are being met?

2. What students needs do library staff intend for the space to meet?

Cameron Common

Seating: 96 (+46 in adjacent study rooms)

Photo by Greg Stechishin

Fireside Lounge

Seating: 32

Fireside Lounge

Seating: 32

METHODOLOGY & DATA COLLECTION

Micro-ethnography

- Non-participant observation
- Descriptive field notes
- Descriptive codes (Asher & Miller, 2011)

Observation Schedule	
Cameron Common	
Day	Time
Wednesday October 7	8:00 – 9:00 am
Friday October 16	12:00 – 1:00 pm
Wednesday October 21	8:00 – 9:00 am
Sunday, October 25	8:00 – 9:00 am
Sunday, October 25	12:00 – 1:00 pm
Tuesday October 27	4:00 – 5:00 pm
Wednesday October 28	12:00 – 1:00 pm
Wednesday October 28	4:00 – 5:00 pm
Sunday, November 1	4:00 – 5:00 pm
Fireside Lounge	
Day	Time
Friday, October 16	8:00 – 9:00am
Monday November 2	4:00 – 5:00 pm
Tuesday November 3	12:00 – 1:00 pm

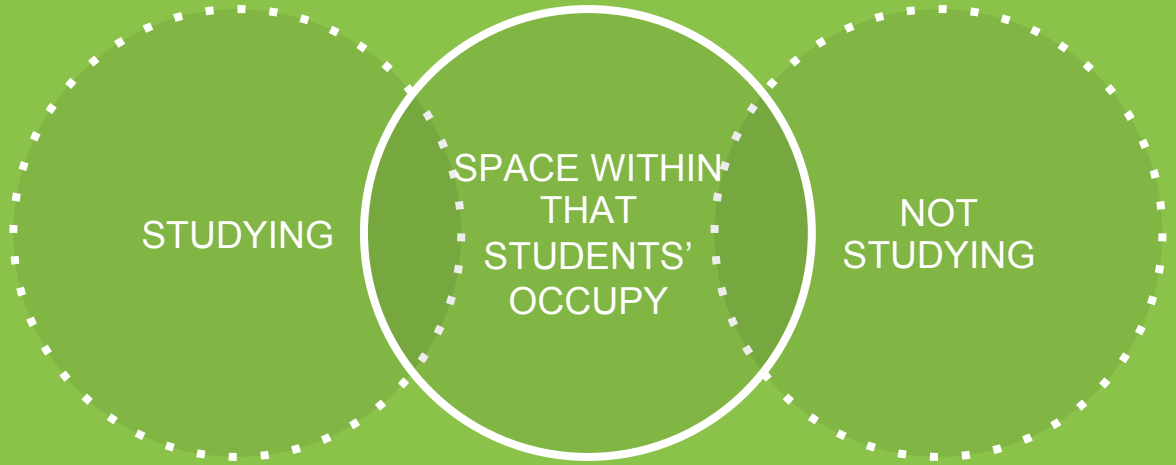
METHODOLOGY & DATA COLLECTION

Semi-structured interviews

- 2 Cameron Library staff members (John and Paul)
- 2 students from the SLAC committee (George and Ringo)
- Informed by observation

THEMES & CONCLUSIONS

Librarians' thinking about library space often leads to binaries
(Mirtz, 2010)



1. MOVEMENT WITHIN THE SPACE

- Individuals find and claim personal, private space in open areas

Photo by Greg Stechishin

1. MOVEMENT WITHIN THE SPACE

- Comfort and agency within the space
- Modular, moveable furniture

“

[in regards to The Fireside Lounge and its dividers] “I like how people are free to move them as they want […] It really feels like it was designed for students because students can do what they want with the dividers”.

George (student)

2. INDIVIDUAL, COMMUNAL STUDY (Gayton, 2008)

- Sitting alone or with other students
- Various ideal location for individuals
- Role and moderation of ambient noise

“

Enjoys Cameron Common because “I like to see people moving, it really helps sometimes, although some people they feel distracted because of that. I don't [laughs]”

Ringo (Student)

3. GROUP, COLLABORATIVE STUDY

- Group size, arrangement, and conversation
- Frequently sharing laptops, collaboration apps

“

Two students are both looking at a word document on their laptops and have books with titles such as “Rise of Early Modern Science” She says "I'm going to copy and paste this all into a Google doc so we can both edit it at the same time".

(Cameron Common, 4-5pm, October 28).

4. ENCOUNTERS & SOCIAL SPACE

- Planned and unplanned meetings
- Shift from collaboration to socializing

“Yes, they are social spaces absolutely […] I think we need to respect the fact that work and study and play are very fluid and I think that those types of common spaces […] enable students to move in that from work to study”.

Paul (librarian)

5. TECHNOLOGY, RESOURCES & LIBRARY MATERIAL USE

- Common personal materials, utilization of outlets and chargers

5. TECHNOLOGY, RESOURCES & LIBRARY MATERIAL USE

- Relationship of furniture to resources used
- Preference for electronic library materials

“we get questions at the service desk about where - we get those questions quite a bit – to sit in a comfortable chair to read”.

Paul (librarian)

5. TECHNOLOGY, RESOURCES & LIBRARY MATERIAL USE

- Relationship of furniture to resources used
- Preference for electronic library materials

6. REFRESHEMENTS

- Proximity of CAB vendors to Cameron Library
- No explicit food or drink policy
- Students' are respectful of the space

“

Likes the Fireside Lounge because “it's close to a Starbucks so I can grab a drink whenever I need”

George (Student)

TAKE-AWAYS

Librarians' intentions correspond to students' perceptions and observed behaviour and needs

Main floor of Cameron: simultaneously collaborative, communal & social

Students' create their own meanings for the new spaces

THANKS!

Any questions?

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CREDITS

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- Presentation template by SlidesCarnival

SlidesCarnival icons are editable shapes.

This means that you can:

- Resize them without losing quality.
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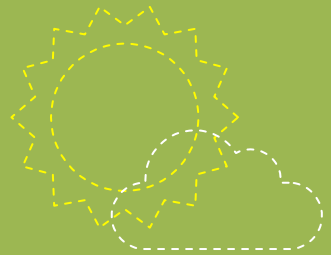
Isn't that nice? :)

Examples:



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