

“Library as Place”

User Feedback and Opinions on Boatwright Library’s Building Facility

During the 2009-2010 fiscal year, Boatwright Library staff have collected various data on users’ thoughts and opinions about the library. One central trend in our analysis of this data has been numerous comments, observations and rankings about the building facility. This report reflects cumulative data about users’ opinions about the library building, including sufficient user space in the library, quiet and group study areas, appropriate chairs and desks, electrical power, study atmosphere, as well as equipment.

There are six sources of data in this report, including 1) Observation studies on quiet and group study areas in Boatwright 2) *StudentVoice* Survey on quiet and group study 3) Library Strategic Plan SWOT Analysis Survey 4) *Counting Opinions* National Library Survey 5) *MISO* National Survey (Merged Information Services Organizations) and 6) Library Suggestion Box. It should be noted that 1, 2 and 4 were also part of the library’s SACS plan for 2009-2010.

Section 1: Quiet and Group Study Space Observations and *Student Voice* Survey at Boatwright Library

Travis Smith

There is no question that Boatwright Library is a popular spot on campus. It appears to be *the* study and occasionally the social destination on our campus. The library is in the geographic center of the campus which makes it accessible to all students including undergraduate students, graduate students, and School of Continuing Studies students. Boatwright also offers a robust technological experience including laptop check out, desk top computers, and an extensive wireless computing environment. Boatwright is divided up into quiet study areas and group/collaborative areas. Preliminary measurements reveal that there are nearly the same amounts of quiet and collaborative study areas, at around 267 seats each.

Currently, as a result of perceived surge in campus popularity, space at Boatwright is becoming a premium. While popularity is something that all libraries strive for, there must be an assurance that core library users can find appropriate quiet study. During the 2009-2010 academic year, Boatwright Library’s Assessment Committee decided to assess quiet study and group study throughout the building. Two methods of evaluation were used: 1) an observation study and 2) a *Student Voice* survey.

Quiet Study and Group Study Observation Study and Results:

The observation study noted user behavior in the quiet and collaborative areas of the library. The study used a form that allowed an observer to record what he or she witnessed during an observation. The primary question to be answered was “are users using group and quiet spaces as intended?”

Observers wrote in key information such as locations, day, time, and number of patrons. Then observers were free to record observations from their perspective. Observations generally ranged in time from five minutes to a half hour depending on activity in the observation area.

The observation study took place over the two semesters of the 2009-2010 at Boatwright Library. In general, most patrons are using the quiet and non-quiet study areas as designed at Boatwright. Results revealed that the areas were being used for the intended purpose 80 % of the time. Beyond this information, the observation study revealed several other trends.

Observers noted that a number of users carry a lot of items with them. This includes multiple bags, purses, food, multiple forms of technology, as well as books and notebooks for class work. Generally, these items are crowded around a library user, limiting the useable work space for them and occasionally their work mates at a shared table.

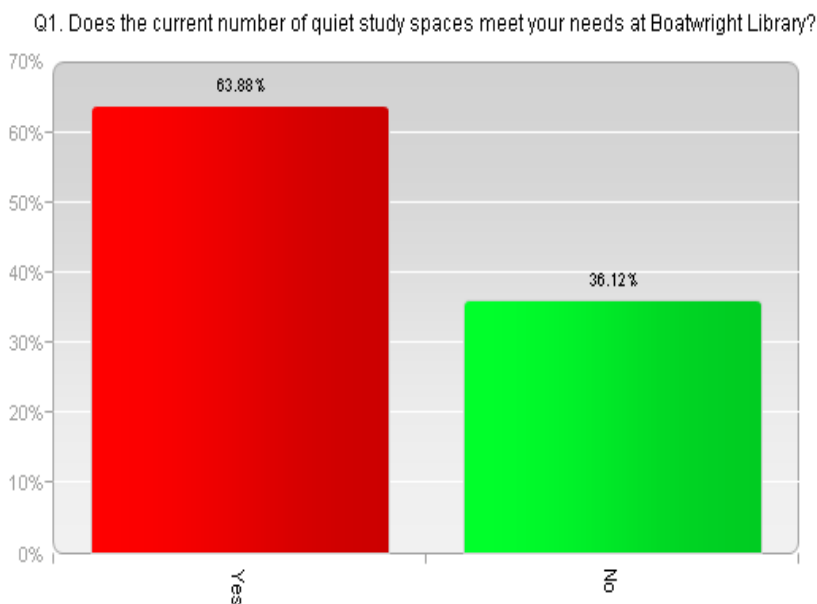
More than a few users have been observed using multiple computers. Generally, when this happens a user is using one computer for work (usually a library PC) and a personally-owned laptop for email or social media. In addition, some users will be using a third mobile device, usually a smart phone. It should be noted that all of these devices are utilizing the wireless network infrastructure of Boatwright and this may be the reason for frequent network slow-downs or the unavailability of IP licenses for library databases. Naturally, having enough outlets to power all of these devices is an issue too.

Noise is also an issue. There is some “whispering” that happens in the quiet areas while there is loud boisterous behavior in the non-quiet study areas. Perhaps this indicates that some enforcement of noise is needed. Noise is an issue that is also reflected in the comments section of the *Student Voice Survey*.

Student Voice Survey and Results:

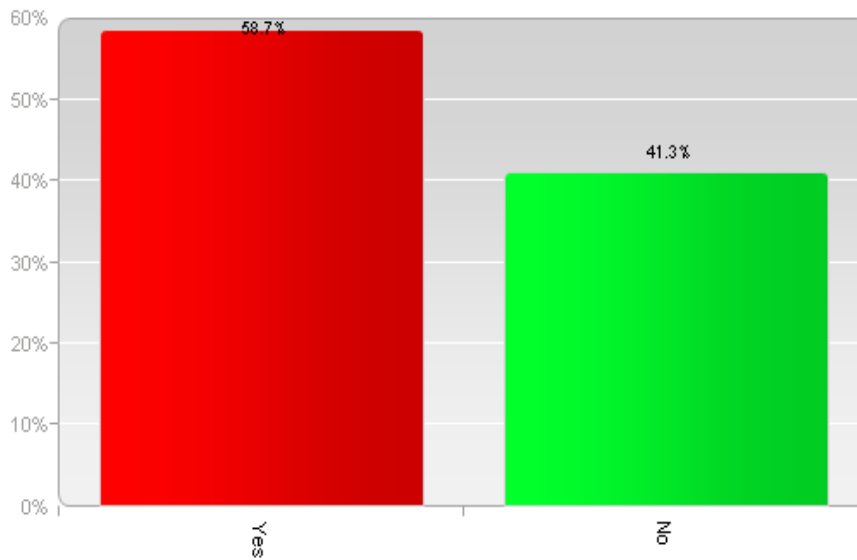
A simple five question survey was designed and sent out to all undergraduate students in April 2010 using *Student Voice*, a survey administration service that the University of Richmond utilizes for a variety of surveys. The brief survey was targeted to take three minutes or less. It consisted of two questions which asked about whether or not the surveyed undergraduates thought that the quiet and group study space was adequate. Respondents were then asked to rank order specific areas of the library from order of importance.

The survey was successful and elicited nearly 600 responses. Over 200 respondents also wrote in



comments. The survey revealed that 63.88% of those surveyed believe that there are adequate quiet study areas and 36.12% of those surveyed believed that there are adequate group study areas. Although these results are encouraging, we normally strive for at least an 80% satisfaction rating.

Q2. Does the current number of group study spaces meet your needs at Boatwright Library?



The rank-order section of the survey revealed that students found the computer areas to be the most important areas.

The comment section contained a wealth of information which backed up portions of the observation study. Complaints about noise and perceived rowdiness were prevalent and many of

those surveyed feel that these issues should be addressed. It was mentioned several times that the library staff itself should not be policing areas but rather a cultural change from the users themselves would be the most effective way for the library environment to change.

A lack of space also emerged as a common complaint in the “additional comments” section. An example, “Expansion is needed because we actually like getting our work done here. I hate it when no space is available and a school our size, this shouldn't happen.” **Other comments included:**

- Please add more desks and tables in the nooks and crannies of the quiet areas. There is lots of unused space. I am always in the library and find that nearing the end of the semester it gets really crowded in my usual spots. Thanks!
- A lot of times the library is crowded and full. It can be hard to find space sometimes as well as available computers.
- B1 has sort of become a default group study space. People have become really loud there in the last year and relatively disrespectful.
- Boatwright is not quiet at all. It's more like a social spot. People call it “club boatwright”.
- Both areas are often quite full, especially once the semester picks up. There are not enough groups study rooms, and the group study areas are normally packed. It would be nice if there were more white boards. Another thing in general is that people--whether they are in a group or studying alone--like to be separated when they work. That is why groups prefer the study rooms over the open circles of chairs on B2. That is why people who study alone will not sit in a chair/at a table facing someone unless they absolutely have to
- Group study space is often limited. Most rooms are too small to accommodate large groups. It is not rare for group meeting to last more than 2 hours. The study rooms are poorly ventilated and are often hot.
- I can never find a table to study at and it's hard to not fall asleep in a comfortable chair.

- I feel as if we need more areas where people can work in groups without feeling like you are always distracting someone
- I find the most lacking combination of study areas is usually quiet + table - that is, there are most often not enough tables in quiet areas. I much prefer to work at tables, as most of my work involves writing or typing, and it appears to me that the tables are in general in more demand than the chairs (without tables).
- I think that there should be more areas for group projects where you can talk together without being limited to a rented space.

Section 2: SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) Analysis for Boatwright Library

Lucretia McCulley

As part of the library's creation of a five-year strategic plan in the spring of 2010, an outside consultant and facilitator, Susan Wilkes, worked with the University Librarian and strategic plan library committee to conduct a brief SWOT analysis with our stakeholders. A short survey was sent to selected groups of faculty, staff and students, including Arts & Sciences Academic Council members (department chairs and program coordinators); Business School department heads; the dean and associate deans of the Leadership School; members of the Library Committee; members of the Student Library Advisory Committee; all of the library's student workers; Heads of offices that work closely with students; and library staff. The survey elicited 41 student responses, 24 faculty responses and 16 staff responses. It is important to note that these numbers do not reflect library staff members, nor do the responses below. During our strategic plan process, we noticed that comments about the library building were mentioned quite frequently by students, staff and faculty. Survey participant comments to three of the questions on the SWOT survey provide an insight into user concerns about the building facility.

What do you wish Boatwright Library did better? Please select a challenge you believe is critical for Boatwright Library to address to be successful in the future.

- I would like to see more computers and more seating in the library, it tends to be very full whenever I try to go to do work.
- Provide faculty with working spaces for joint projects so that faculty can work together.
- The interior design of the building still needs fixing; traffic does not flow well in this series of endless wings.
- Provide ad-hoc teaching space for class projects that involve technology. I can book 320 or the Nostrae Filiae Room , but it's hard when a sudden inspiration strikes me or a colleague, to drop in with a few days' notice with an entire class. This is going to be an ever-greater need as more retirements enable a tech-savvy cohort of younger faculty to step up.
- More study rooms, more food options.
- I know we are a small school, but I wish our library had more space to study... I find myself going to the law library sometimes because Boatwright tends to be a hang out spot for people during the week nights and the quiet sections aren't really quiet. I guess I'm a fan of the academic intensity at the law library.

- Grow in space

If Boatwright Library were to select several high priorities for the next 3-5 years, what two things would you most want to see on the list?

- Faculty working spaces
- Enhanced quiet atmosphere
- Increase in private study area
- Reduction in noise/social interactions
- A better designed space
- Expanding study rooms and incorporating new technologies
- More technology, more study spaces
- Getting more shelf space
- Either get more computers or designate computers for printing only.

List two adjectives or very short phrases that describe Boatwright Memorial Library now.

- Busy, sometimes small in capacity
- Crowded, useful
- Helpful, busy
- Popular, Crowded at times
- A little cluttered
- Cluttered and somewhat unclean in areas.

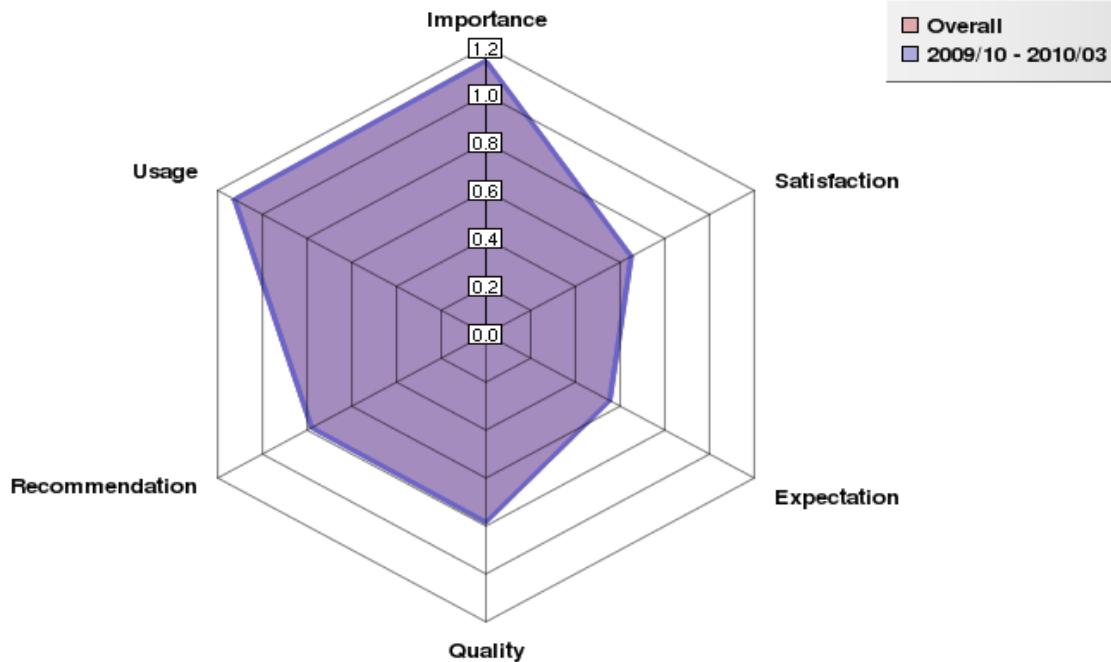
Section 3: Counting Opinions Survey Data

Travis Smith

According to the *Counting Opinions* survey data collected from October of 2009 to March 2010, respondents rated facilities services as high in terms of **use** and **importance** and only moderate to low in terms of **satisfaction**, **expectation**, and **quality**. This was the most disappointing area of the Counting Opinions survey.

Possible contributing trends to a poorer rating have been identified as not having enough workspaces, poor restroom conditions, and some dissatisfaction with equipment such as printers. Boatwright, in some ways, is struggling at certain times to meet the needs of being a popular campus destination.

SQUIRE



Users do, in general, seem pleased with quality of the seating workspaces; however there is not always enough to accommodate every user comfortably. Nearly 60 percent of respondents rated adequate seating as very important. In contrast only about 25 percent were satisfied with the accommodations.

Restrooms also emerge a stumbling block. From an observational stand point the restrooms in Boatwright Library are in poor shape. Respondents indicated moderate satisfaction. One comment classified the restrooms as being “like a dungeon”.

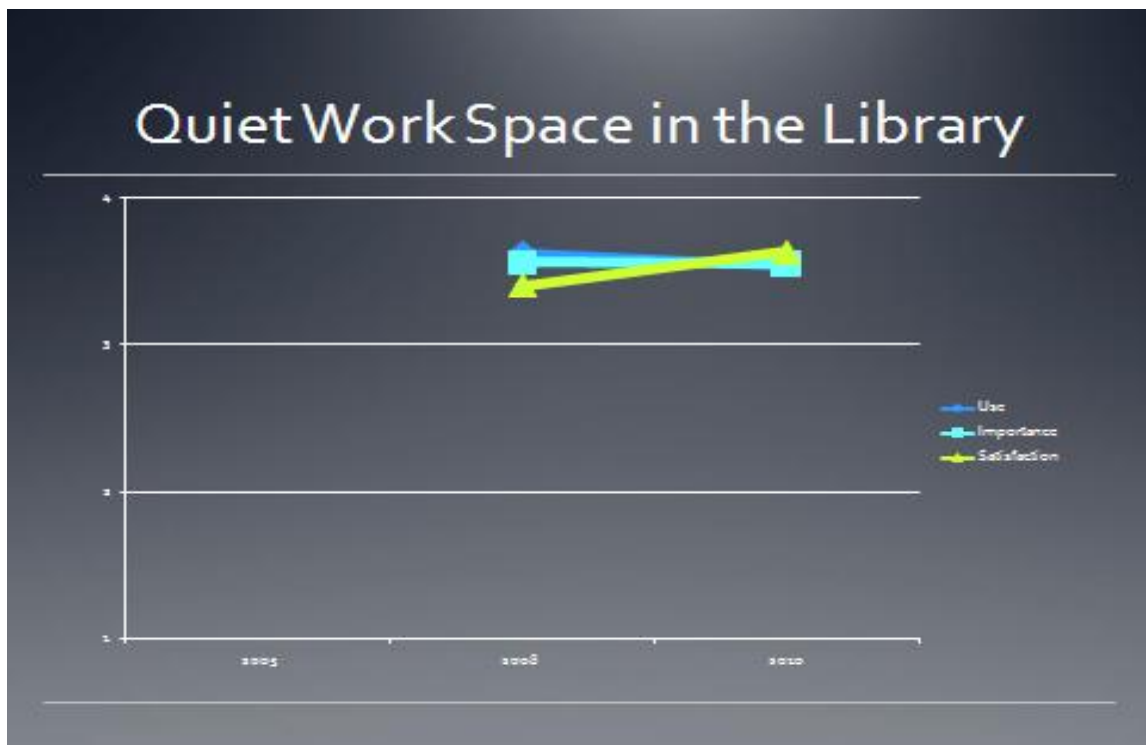
Respondents, through selected comments, indicated the following:

- Seating, workspace, and restrooms (items the respondent was least satisfied with)
- More seating
- I know there is not much that can be done, but the library gets so crowded. It would be nice if there were more tables and computers available
- How quickly the library gets crowded; the furniture seems worn out in many places and air quality is only so-so. More space would be an ideal remedy.
- Restroom renovation
- Increase the study space
- More chairs, tables, computers

Section 4: MISO Survey Data

Lucretia McCulley

The MISO (Merged Information Services Organization) Survey is a web-based quantitative survey designed to measure how faculty, students, and staff view library and computing services in higher education. Information Services has distributed this survey at the University of Richmond every two years since 2005 (2005, 2008, 2010). Many of the questions on the survey focus on library services, including questions on quiet space, group study space and public computing. The survey was distributed to 701 students and 387 responded (55.3% response rate). The slides and data below show student ratings on quiet space, group study space and public computing. All three questions rate very highly in **importance** and **use**. The survey also shows that satisfaction has remained steady for the past five years, but it ranks on the low end when compared to other satisfaction measures and items on the survey. We look forward to receiving any relevant user comments related to these particular questions from the MISO Survey in the near future.



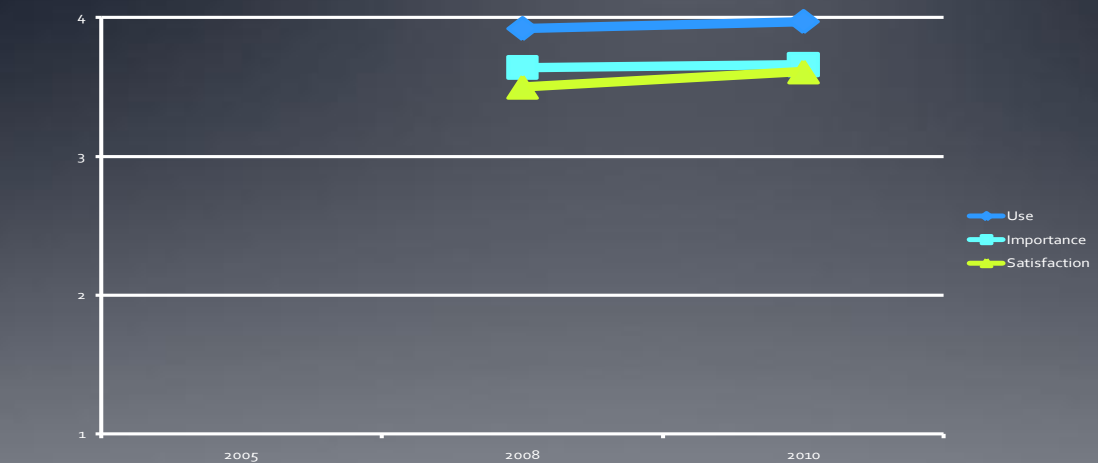
Use is flat (3.54); Importance is flat (3.55); Satisfaction is up .23 (3.63)

Group Study Spaces



New question for 2010. Use: 2.97 Importance: 3.41; Satisfaction: 3.67

Public Computing in the Library



Use is flat (3.97) – this is the highest use mean for any item in the MISO Survey at Richmond (it's a 1-5 scale) Importance is flat (3.66)

Section 5: Library Suggestion Box

Lucretia McCulley

The library's physical suggestion box (in addition to the library's website suggestion box) was reinstated in January 2005, upon the request of the Richmond College Student Government. On average, we receive around 50 written suggestions through the box each academic year (September – April). All questions are promptly answered and posted within 24-48 hours. The overwhelming majority of suggestions deal with equipment and building requests, such as heat/cooling in the building, printer issues, supplies (staplers, etc.). In particular, there have been several suggestion comments in the past three years that focus on the poor quality of restroom facilities in Boatwright, as reflected in other surveys in this report. Specific comments include the following:

“The bathrooms are terrible and smelly.”

“The women's bathroom on the 2nd floor smells worse than a latrine! It usually appears clean, but the smell is very bad.”

The concerns and comments that appear in the suggestion box emphasize that the building facility is very important to the students and that they expect to have working equipment, creature comforts and a well-run facility.

Conclusion and Next Steps:

Data from all of the above assessment tools has provided a wealth of knowledge and first hand user accounts of how students, staff and faculty are using Boatwright Library. As mentioned above, a major trend in our overall assessment data from the past year focuses on building concerns and improvements, particularly with survey respondent comments. As a response to this trend, we need to move forward with solving small issues that will improve the environment in Boatwright as well as planning for further assessments to give us additional data for a possible larger addition or renovation to the library building.

Small solutions include reviewing library policies that address the acceptable use of library space which is conducive to study within Boatwright Library. Library staff will look at acceptable study room use and noise levels and how policies can be enforced without burdening staff and offending students. In addition, work is underway to add temporary tables and electrical power, if feasible and safe, during peak exam times. We are also looking at ways to better divide quiet and collaborative areas.

In order to gain further ideas and data from users about building space, the Library Assessment Committee has formed a small ethnographic team to continue the culture of assessing user space. The team will move forward to refine the observation form so that more frequent observations can take place year round. The data can then be examined and analyzed in real time. In addition, the team hopes to conduct focused interviews with students in regard to future space planning. This data will provide thoughtful and long lasting implications in future library building planning.

