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Leah M. Dunn, "Moving Toward the User-Centered Library: Learning Behaviors and Their Impact on Library Planning" (2011). *Proceedings of the Charleston Library Conference.*
http://dx.doi.org/10.5703/1288284314962

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# Moving Toward the User-Centered Library: Learning Behaviors and Their Impact on Library Planning

*Leah M. Dunn, Library Director, Hege Library, Guilford College*

Abstract:
Hege Library at Guilford College has been engaged in a set of planning activities funded by an LSTA grant from the State Library of North Carolina. Through these planning activities, the library hired a consultant to administer a learning behaviors survey to help align library services with the College's upcoming Strategic Long Range Plan for 2011-2015.

This presentation will discuss how the library administered a "Learning Behaviors Survey" for Guilford College with the goal of better understanding the existing learning geography of its campus and the place of the library in that geography. The Learning Behaviors Survey looked at 12 learning behaviors taken from the National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE) and studied the cross-section of the types of learning behaviors that Guilford College students *value* and asked the question of *where* on campus are these learning behaviors taking place. By taking this approach, the library was able to take an initial planning process that was geared towards planning for space allocation and expand its scope to look at what types of learning environments users value most highly and if the library is providing that type of environment.

I will discuss how the survey was administered, the results, and how data on user behavior can influence a variety of planning activities including space planning, information literacy, non-traditional library services such as ePortfolio support, library discovery tools, and strategic long-range planning.

The objective of this session will be to generate discussion on what types of user data are being collected by libraries, how it is being used to affect short- and long-term planning for libraries, and what this means for both assessment and determining the value of library services. Audience participants will be asked to share their experiences in collecting user data and how it is currently being applied to short and long-term planning processes in their libraries.

Attendees will benefit by discussing the changing nature of statistics and data on users and user behavior and its applicability in the current assessment and planning environment for libraries.

**Background**

Much has been written in library scholarly literature to support the notion of improved student engagement by creating collaborative learning environments in academic libraries. Libraries emerged as a notable "third place" with the groundbreaking work of Ray Oldenburg when he coined the term in 1989.[i] The literature has continued to support the notion of the academic library as a significant place for student engagement and learning outside the classroom in the years that have followed, particularly in the recent anthropological study conducted by Nancy Fried Foster and Susan Gibbons.[ii]

As Hege Library began to embark on space planning activities to address an aging 1980's facility that is print-oriented, with little room for group study, it began to look beyond just wall measurements and the location of power outlets to further include analysis of student behavior as the literature above has highlighted. The hope was to move from a collections-centered library to a user-centered one.

**Approach**

Through an LSTA planning grant administered through the State of North Carolina, Hege Library was able to hire library consultant Scott Bennett to lead us through this process. Using Bennett's Learning Behaviors Survey[iii] that he used in a research project in 2009, the library sought to identify the learning needs of its faculty and student population. Bennett also conducted on-campus interviews to delve further into user behavior and the identification of study and research needs. The survey conducted by Bennett asked about twelve specific learning behaviors that typically happen outside of the classroom. Ten of these learning behaviors were drawn from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and

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DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.5703/1288284314962

they are meant to focus on the behaviors through which students take responsibility for and control over their own learning. Some examples of these NSSE learning behaviors are:

- Students work with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments.
- Students discuss ideas from readings or classes with faculty members outside of class.
- Students work with faculty members on activities other than course work.

Bennett's survey includes two learning behaviors that do not appear on the NSSE survey because it is clear that this is a type of learning behavior that happens in libraries:

- Students work alone, as individuals, to understand class material and complete class assignments.
- Students, while working alone, work in close proximity to others working in the same way.

While NSSE focuses on the *frequency* in which they engage in various learning behaviors, Bennett's survey focuses on *how important* they are to participants and *where* they happen on campus.

The survey looked not only at learning spaces inside the library. It surveyed participants on many campus places where learning may happen, such as:

- Residence Halls
- Dining Halls
- Student Unions
- Outdoor spaces
- Libraries
- Computer Labs
- Learning/Information Commons
- & Others

**Results**

Survey participants were asked to identify the importance of the learning behaviors to them and if important, where on campus they were able to engage in that type of learning. The results were telling, with very few types of learning behaviors identified as being important outside of 'studying alone.' 89% of student respondents and 96% of faculty respondents cite 'studying alone' as an important learning behavior, higher than any type of learning behavior surveyed. This result is significant because 'studying alone' does not enter into NSSE as a feature of effective educational practice.

In another response, a high percentage of faculty respondents (79%) identify 'discussing class material with other students outside of class' as an important learning behavior, yet only 56% of student respondents do.[iv]

The results at Guilford College were not typical of results garnered from NSSE data from other schools around the country. Guilford College clearly underperformed in scoring the importance of collaborative learning experiences. Bennett concluded based on the relatively few types of learning behaviors that students say are important to them that students take "too-little advantage of socially-engaged learning behaviors." Overall, the survey suggested that of all the various learning spaces on campus—residence halls, dining halls, student unions, common spaces in academic buildings and recreational facilities, and libraries—none of them emerge as distinctly supportive of any particular learning behavior, although all of them are generally seen favorably. In other words, the library is no better or no worse than any other space on campus.

The survey caused us to ask some hard questions of ourselves. If socially engaging behaviors are not seen as important, do we create spaces that encourage their importance, especially if published research shows evidence of their effectiveness? Or do we create spaces for studying alone since that is what is valued highest?

In this case, the library chose to take a 'build it and they will come' approach. As a result of these findings, the library saw a prime opportunity to create new collaborative learning space where very little currently exists on the Guilford College campus. Its objective is to foster and facilitate collaborative learning behaviors in a way that has shown to be effective in a national setting. It was also clear from focus groups performed by the consultant that these are spaces that students would find valuable if

they were available. Hege Library therefore applied for a 2011-2012 LSTA Technology grant to create such space in the library. It was awarded a grant in the amount of $64,791.

**Discussion**

- What sort of user data does your library collect in addition to collections statistics, circulation and database use statistics?
- How does this data impact short and long planning at your library?
- Have any services been added or cut as a result of this type of data collection?
- I have talked a lot about space planning. How has or how could data collection of user behavior affect other types of library planning—for information literacy, non-traditional library services, discovery tools, campus strategic long-range planning or other types?
- How could such user behavior data feed into the campus-wide assessment performed at your institution?

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[i] Oldenburg, Ray. *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts, and How They Get You Through the Day*. New York: Paragon House, 1989.

[ii] Fried Foster, Nancy and Susan Gibbons, eds. *Studying Students: The Undergraduate Research Project at the University of Rochester*. Association of College and Research Libraries, 2007.

[iii] http://www.libraryspaceplanning.com/projects.htm

[iv] Bennett, Scott. Learning Behaviors/Learning Spaces Questionnaire. Final Report submitted to Guilford College, November 2010.