

**Revising Library Procedures
to Prevent Stress and Distractions
at UBC Libraries**

for

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Table of Contents

Abstract	4
Introduction	5
Background on UBC Library Policies and Procedures	5
An Overview of the Issues from Current Procedures	5
Purpose of the Report	5
Background on Library Practices that Focuses on User Experiences	5
Research Methods	6
Limitations of the Study	6
Scope of Inquiry	6
Conclusion of Inquiry	7
Data Section A.1: Student Perceptions of the Current and Revised Library Procedures	7
Library Usage Profile	7
Libraries and types of spaces frequently used and visited	7
Libraries usage frequency	8
Perceptions of Noise Level Quality	10
Perceptions of Privacy Quality	11
Perceptions of Closing Procedures	12
Opinions on the Current and Proposed Revisions for the Library Procedures	13
Data Section A.2: UBC Libraries and its Current Environment	15
Silent Study Areas in UBC Libraries	15
Closing Procedures	16
Data Section B: Case Studies of Possible Solutions	16
Research on Noise and Privacy Interventions by Policy, Layout, and Zoning Changes	16
Research on Sound Masking	17
Research on Library Support for Late Night Procedures	17
Research on Applying Visual Cues	17
Conclusion	18
Summary and Interpretation of Findings	18
Recommendations	19
Appendix A: Student Survey Questions	20
References	22

Table of Figures

Figure 1. Survey responses on which UBC Libraries they use..... 8

Figure 2. Survey responses on what time they use libraries 9

Figure 3. Survey responses on how much they use the libraries on a weekly/monthly basis..... 9

Figure 4. Survey responses on how much time they spend inside the libraries..... 9

Figure 5. Survey responses on what type of spaces they use..... 10

Figure 6. How the respondents find the current noise levels in libraries 10

Figure 7. How the respondents easily find quiet study spaces..... 11

Figure 8. Respondents’ view on the importance of privacy in Libraries 11

Figure 9. Respondents’ satisfaction with the current privacy level they have on libraries 12

Figure 10. How affected are the respondents when they experience closing announcements..... 12

Figure 11. What type of announcements did the respondents experience 13

Figure 12. The respondents' preferred method of closing announcements 13

Figure 13. Overall experience in UBC Libraries 14

Figure 14. Respondents' support on revising noise policies to be more responsive 14

Figure 15. Respondents' support on revising the layout of study spaces to provide more privacy..... 15

Figure 16. Respondents' support on revising closing procedures to be less disruptive 15

Abstract

The University of British Columbia (UBC) Libraries play an indispensable role in facilitating academic success among students and researchers through their provision of resources and physical spaces that uphold the values of inclusivity and collaboration. However, the current library practices that pertain to noise policies, study space layouts, and closing announcements engender stress and disruptiveness among users. Revised library procedures can be implemented to create a more welcoming and productive environment. Parts of these revisions are strategies that have been adopted by other academic libraries, such as a noise policy with a focus on visual cues, adjusting layouts of the library spaces, and less disruptive closing procedures and announcements. Through an analysis of the feasibility of these proposed changes, this report endeavors to enhance the user experience of students in UBC Libraries. Three broad themes are examined: student perceptions of the current and proposed library procedures, the current environment and practices of UBC Libraries, and case studies from academic libraries that have effectively mitigated stress and disturbance among their patrons.

The student survey results suggest that while there is overall satisfaction with the current library procedures, there is a recognized need for improvement in areas such as noise, privacy, and closing practices. The examined current environment of UBC Libraries highlights the zoning layout, noise quality, and closing procedures as key areas for improvement. The case studies analyzed in this report demonstrate the potential benefits of changing library layouts, revising noise mitigation practices, and improving late-night services. Based on these findings, this report recommends:

- Implement guidelines to improve noise level, privacy quality, and closing practices that are more catered to user experiences. This can help enhance users' academic success and support student learning.
- Consider adopting solutions that have been proven and tested by other academic libraries, such as changing the layout and zoning of the libraries, using sound masking, and offering better late-night services.
- Focus more on visual cues for non-emergency announcements, such as library closures, to improve the user experience.
- To tailor adopted solutions, conduct regular surveys and assessments for the libraries to gather more accurate feedback from the students' experience throughout the space to identify the areas that require further improvement
- Provide training and resources to library staff to ensure that they are equipped to implement the changes effectively and efficiently.

Introduction

Background on UBC Library Policies and Procedures

The University of British Columbia (UBC) Library Policies and Procedures are established to follow the values of UBC Library's Strategic Framework. The procedures are separated into categories to focus on the values of different aspects of the framework, such as sustaining an inclusive environment, protection, and preservation of the libraries' properties, and building strong relationships with people. These procedures help the quality of the library spaces and resources for the students and researchers to use whenever they need them. Furthermore, the spaces are leaning on inclusivity and collaboration, which can help students prioritize their group assignments more productively.

An Overview of the Issues from Current Procedures

UBC Library Policies and Procedures are designed to promote inclusivity and collaboration, but unfortunately, their current practices surrounding the way the library is structured can cause stress and disruption for their users. The library's noise policies, study space layouts, and closing announcements may not be enough to create an environment that facilitates effective studying. Additionally, the library's focus on collaboration may lead to distractions for students who need to work on individual assignments or projects. As a result, these factors can negatively impact the user experience and academic success, which goes against the library's mission to support student learning.

Purpose of the Report

This report will explore the current state of stress and distractions in UBC libraries, identify specific procedures that may be contributing to these issues, and provide recommendations for how these procedures can be revised to better support the academic success and well-being of UBC students, faculty, and staff. The report aims to provide an evidence-based approach that can enhance the user experience and promote academic success while reducing stress and disturbances in UBC libraries.

Background on Library Practices that Focuses on User Experiences

To address the issues of stress and disturbance in UBC libraries, the libraries can adopt several strategies based on best practices and successful case studies. One approach is to revise noise policies with a focus on visual cues, such as color-coded signs in designated quiet areas, to indicate noise levels and create a more consistent and enforceable policy. Another strategy is to adjust the layouts of study

spaces to provide users with more private and comfortable areas for individual study or exam-taking. Finally, the library can explore new closing procedures that are less disruptive and more considerate of patrons, such as gradually dimming lights or using automated announcements. By implementing these changes, UBC libraries can create a more welcoming and productive environment that supports effective studying and enhances the user experience for all patrons.

Research Methods

An online survey was conducted among thirty-four UBC students at random by posting on various student groups on Facebook, WhatsApp, and other social tools that students used. The survey was designed to analyze the perspective of students, researchers, and users of UBC Libraries on their current policies and procedures being practiced. In addition, case studies of other academic libraries that have implemented similar changes have been reviewed to understand the challenges and benefits of different practices of library procedures.

Limitations of the Study

The primary limitation of this study is the small range of primary data, as the survey is limited to UBC students. Therefore, the results may not be generalizable to other UBC Libraries that the survey results might not have experienced. Further research may be required to obtain a larger range of primary data and collect more accurate representations of user opinions on the current practices in UBC Libraries.

Scope of Inquiry

This report proposal will only focus on the feasibility of implementing revised library procedures at UBC Libraries and address the following questions:

1. What are the current library procedures and practices of UBC libraries?
2. How are the users experiencing the current library procedures of UBC libraries?
3. What are the potential benefits and drawbacks of revising the procedures and practices of UBC libraries?
4. How large is the size of the population that demands less stress and disturbances in UBC libraries?
What is the demand to change the current procedures?
5. What are the perspectives and possible challenges on implementing these revisions to the UBC Library Team that manages these procedures?

6. What are the potential costs associated with implementing revised library procedures and practices, including expenses on hardware, software, and staff training?

The proposal will not address other issues or concerns related to library operations or services.

Conclusion of Inquiry

The report concludes by acknowledging the various benefits associated with revising the current library procedures to establish spaces that can enhance the user experience and academic success of their patrons.

Data Section A.1: Student Perceptions of the Current and Revised Library Procedures

This section reports survey responses from a random sample of UBC students and interprets their opinions on the current library procedures and environments focusing on their perceptions of noise level quality, privacy quality, closing procedures, and overall experiences. Additionally, their perceived impact on revising those categories as well and their other suggestions are collected.

Library Usage Profile

Thirty-four respondents were asked to note what UBC Library they used, their schedule, and the frequency they use these libraries to accurately identify which libraries are being evaluated by the survey answers about the users' experiences.

Libraries and types of spaces frequently used and visited

There were 112 responses from the 34 respondents on which libraries they have experience with. The answers from the respondents about the libraries which have the most usage is tabulated in the order below:

1. Irving K. Barber Learning Centre (28 responses)
2. David Lam Management Research Library and Canaccord Learning Commons (19 responses)
3. Music, Art & Architecture Library (19 responses)
4. Woodward Library (19 responses)
5. Koerner Library (18 responses)

Most of the respondents have used silent study spaces, amounting to 29 respondents, 24 respondents use group study spaces, and only 11 respondents use technology spaces. These responses suggest that the libraries tabulated above and the type of spaces they used will be reflected in the responses of the other aspect of the survey that evaluates their user experience.

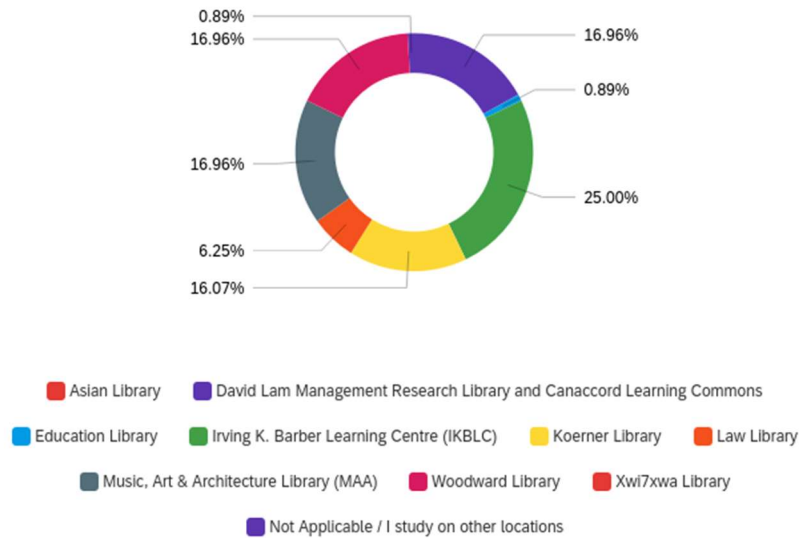


Figure 1. Survey responses on which UBC Libraries they use

Libraries usage frequency

This subsection determines the respondents’ time they use UBC Libraries, how long they spend in a day, and how much they visit in a week/month. Most respondents visit at least every week. Twelve out of 34 respondents visit 2-3 times a week (37.50%) , nine respondents visit 4-6 times a week (28.13%), and 6 respondents answered once a week (18.75%).

In terms of library usage timeframes, 27 out of 34 respondents visit in the afternoon (12 PM – 5 PM), 26 respondents visit at night (5 PM – 12 AM), and only four respondents go to libraries in the morning (7:30 AM – 12 PM). Most of the respondents use the UBC Libraries for 3-5 hours in one day (25 out of 34 respondents), followed by 19 respondents using it for 6-8 hours.

The collected data suggest that the sample of students may have an accurate response for the other aspects of the survey relative to their frequency of usage and the time they use UBC Libraries.

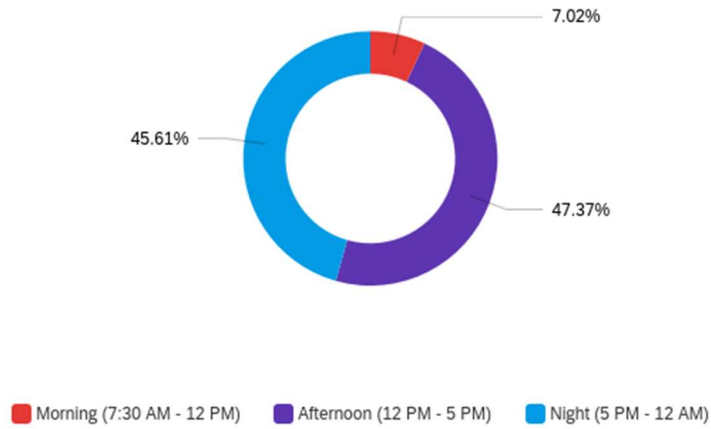


Figure 2. Survey responses on what time they use libraries

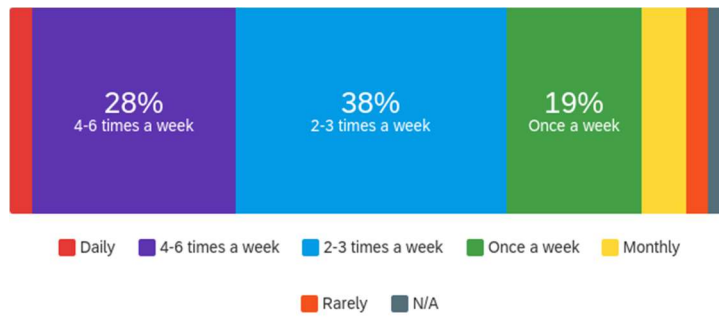


Figure 3. Survey responses on how much they use the libraries on a weekly/monthly basis

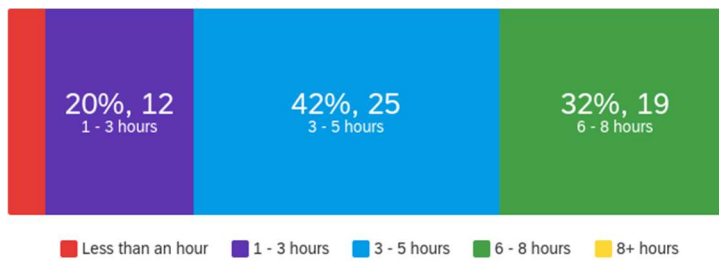


Figure 4. Survey responses on how much time they spend inside the libraries

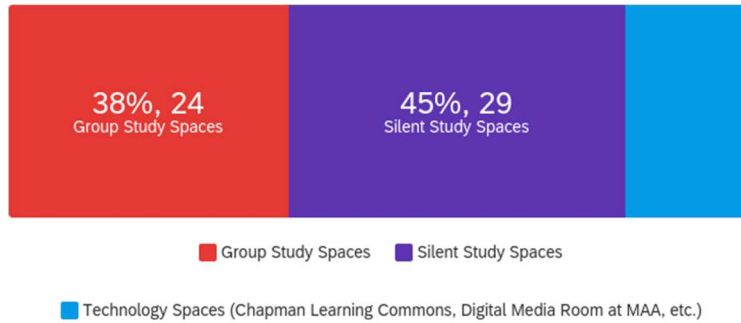


Figure 5. Survey responses on what type of spaces they use

Perceptions of Noise Level Quality

The findings portrays that the noise levels in UBC Libraries are perceived as largely distracting by most students, with only a very small proportion finding them pleasing. Specifically, 21 out of 34 respondents found the current noise levels to be distracting, while only 1 each found them very pleasing or pleasing.

In terms of finding quiet study spaces, a majority of respondents (20 out of 34) reported that it was either difficult or very difficult to find such spaces in the libraries, with only 2 finding it very easy or easy. 9 respondents were neutral on this question.

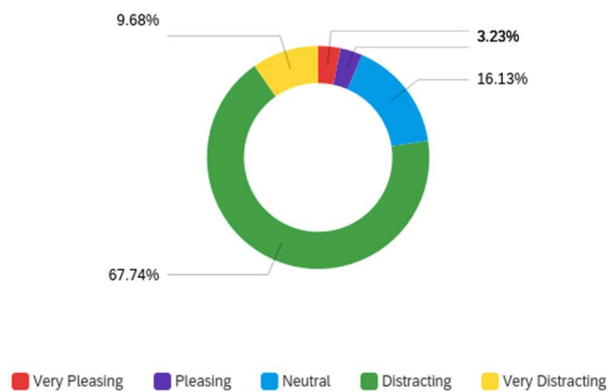


Figure 6. How do the respondents find the current noise levels in libraries

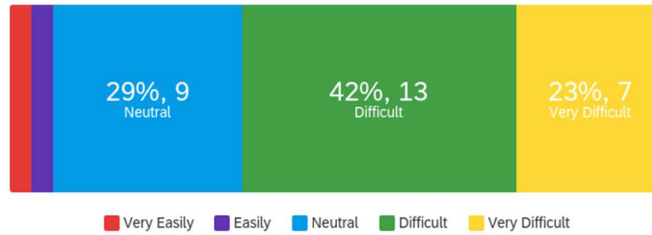


Figure 7. How the respondents easily find quiet study spaces

Perceptions of Privacy Quality

Privacy is an important consideration for students when studying in UBC Libraries, with most respondents (24 out of 34) indicating that it is either moderately, very or extremely important to them. However, a significant number of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with their current level of privacy in the library environment, with 20 out of 34 reporting that they are either somewhat dissatisfied or extremely dissatisfied with their level of privacy.

Furthermore, a small proportion of respondents (2 out of 34) reported being somewhat satisfied with their level of privacy, while none were extremely satisfied. An additional 7 respondents did not provide an answer to the question on their satisfaction with privacy in the current library environment.

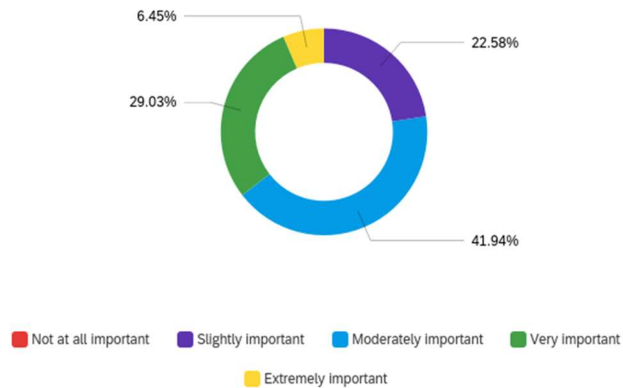


Figure 8. Respondents' view on the importance of privacy in libraries

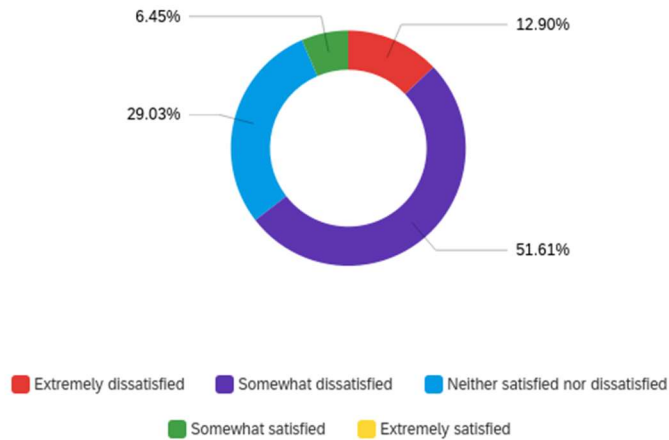


Figure 9. Respondents' satisfaction with the current privacy level they have on libraries

Perceptions of Closing Procedures

The responses show that many students are currently being notified of the library's closing time through PA/aural or verbal announcements, while a significant proportion of them find the current closing procedures to affect their experience to some extent. Moreover, most respondents prefer visual announcements as a means of notification for closing times in libraries.

Specifically, 20 out of 34 respondents indicated that they are either extremely affected or affected by the current closing procedures, while only 6 out of 34 reported being unaffected or very unaffected.

Additionally, 20 out of 34 respondents preferred visual announcements as their preferred method of notification for closing times, while 8 out of 34 preferred verbal announcements, and 5 out of 34 preferred PA/aural announcements.

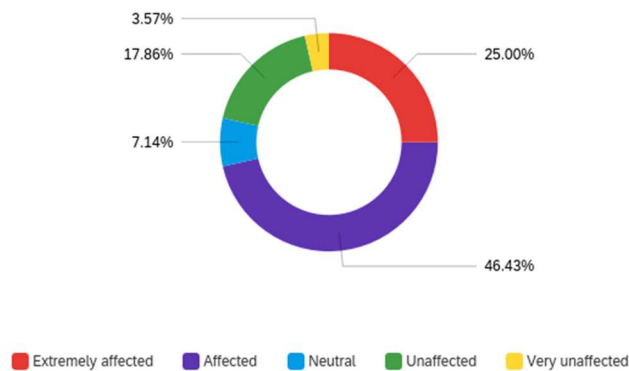


Figure 10. How affected are the respondents when they experience closing announcements

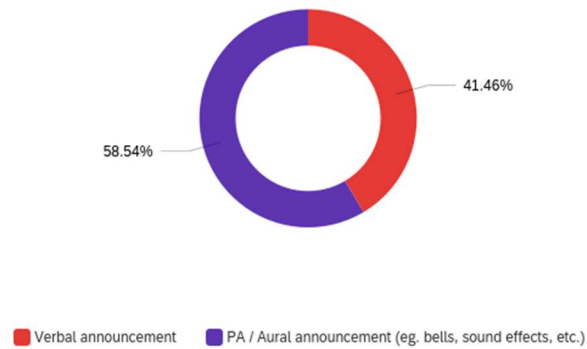


Figure 11. What type of announcements do the respondents experience

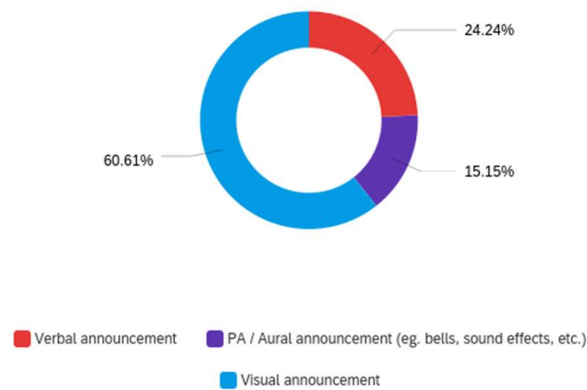


Figure 12. The respondents' preferred method of closing announcements

Opinions on the Current and Proposed Revisions for the Library Procedures

It can be concluded that most students are generally satisfied with their overall user experience at UBC Libraries. Although, most respondents showed support for revising the noise policies/procedures and changing the layout of study spaces in libraries to provide more privacy. Moreover, a significant proportion of respondents supported the idea of changing the closing procedures in libraries to be less disruptive.

Specifically, 13 out of 34 respondents reported being satisfied with their overall user experience at UBC Libraries, while 11 out of 34 indicated a neutral stance. Additionally, 25 out of 34 respondents showed

REVISING LIBRARY PROCEDURES

14

support for revising the noise policies/procedures in libraries to be more responsive, while 21 out of 34 supported changing the layout of study spaces in libraries to provide more privacy. Furthermore, 19 out of 34 respondents supported changing the closing procedures in libraries to be less disruptive.

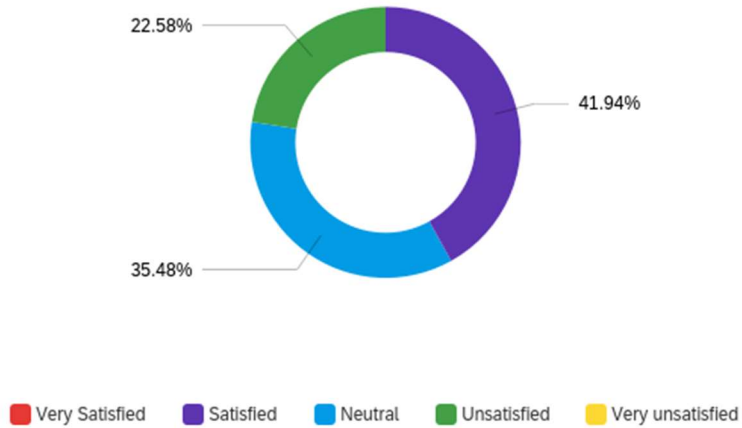


Figure 13. Overall experience in UBC Libraries

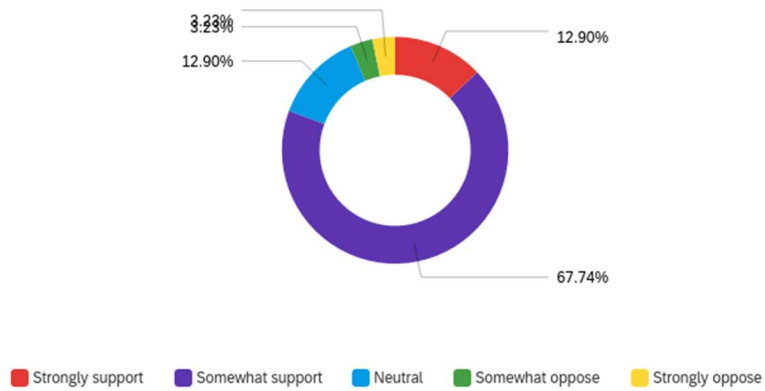


Figure 14. Respondents' support for revising noise policies to be more responsive

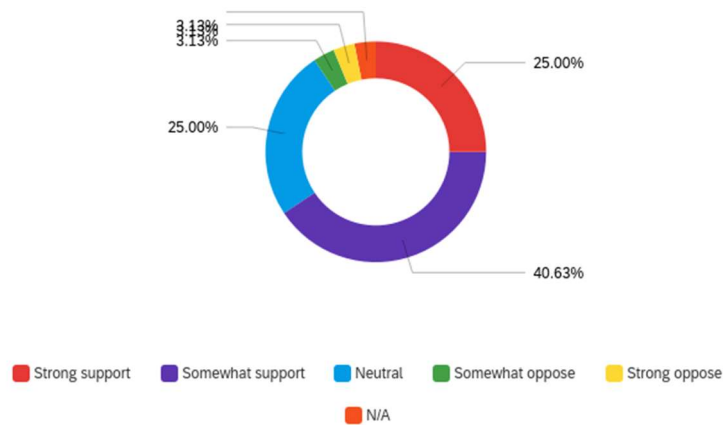


Figure 15. Respondents support revising the layout of study spaces to provide more privacy

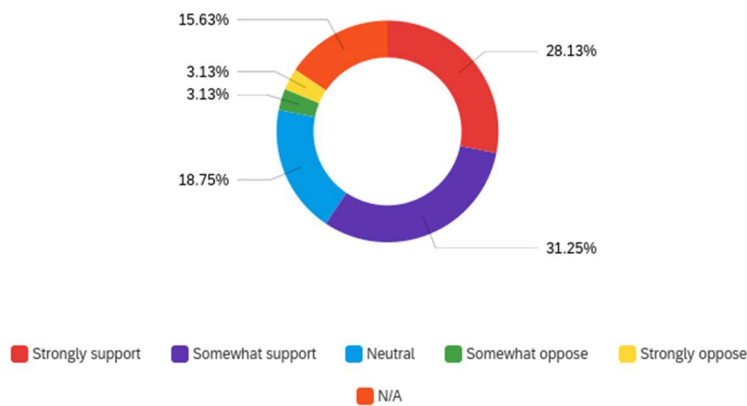


Figure 16. Respondents support revising closing procedures to be less disruptive

Data Section A.2: UBC Libraries and its Current Environment

Silent Study Areas in UBC Libraries

Silent study areas on nearly all UBC Libraries across campus are spaces where users are required to be respectful and keep unnecessary noise or distraction to a minimum. However, some of these spaces are not consistently monitored or there are visual or aural sources of distractions that can inhibit the students' experiences.

One case study that portrays this issue is the Nass Reading Room in Irving K. Barber Learning Centre (IKBLC). The space was renovated to cater to a silent study area with high dividers and dedicated individual-use spaces ("Nass Reading Room in IKBLC," 2021). However, there are two group study rooms (rooms 460 & 461) with glass partitions. These rooms create audible noises and visual distractions absorbed into the quiet study space and disrupt the users of the Nass Reading Room. The lack of not having other solutions for the noise being prevented also does not help the students that use this space.

Closing Procedures

The closing procedures in UBC Libraries vary from different locations, which makes some more disruptive than others. Following are some of the observed libraries and their procedures tabulated below:

- The IKBLC uses verbal announcements by the staff going around spaces and shutting lights off.
- The MAA Library, which is inside IKBLC, uses a PA announcement that can also be heard from other spaces in IKBLC.
- Woodward Library uses bells in every 5-10 minutes and flickers the lights on and off.
- Koerner Library also uses bells to remind students about the time.

The closing procedures in UBC Libraries are not standardized, library users need to be aware of the specific closing procedures in their preferred libraries to help make their clean-up process smoother and more efficient.

Data Section B: Case Studies of Possible Solutions

This section provides a summary of the existing research and implementations surrounding tools and interventions for public and academic libraries to enhance the user experience of their patrons.

Research on Noise and Privacy Interventions by Policy, Layout, and Zoning Changes

The University of Limerick's Glucksman Library created noise management interventions between 2007 and 2014 when the library faced noise problems. In response, a noise management policy was created, and all staffed service desks were removed from library floors and centralized on the ground floor. The library also increased patrols by staff and security, increased signage, and comprehensively zoned all areas of the library as silent, quiet, group, or phone. Silent zones were relocated to naturally quiet areas, group tables were moved out of main reading areas, and desks were moved away from stairwells and replaced with shelving. The library also employed a student noise monitor, clarified, and communicated the policy regarding access for non-University of Limerick users, and issued staff badges to facilitate patrolling. These interventions were resource-intensive in terms of staff time and effort but

resulted in a positive impact on library users and staff, as demonstrated by the increased desired scores for quiet space from 2007 to 2014 (Phillips and Morris, 2017).

Research on Sound Masking

Sound masking, which involves adding ambient sound to a space to reduce the intelligibility of unwanted sound, can be an effective tool for creating a more comfortable and focused environment for students in academic libraries. Several libraries have implemented and examined its results in creating a quieter and more productive study environment such as Williams College Schow Science Library. They provided practical recommendations for implementing sound masking systems in academic libraries, including considerations for system design and installation, as well as tips for managing user expectations and addressing technical issues (Cambridge Sound, 2017).

Research on Library Support for Late Night Procedures

Academic libraries at times provide late-night or overnight service hours, where libraries do not close for the time being when there are demands from their patrons. UBC Libraries have implemented this in IKBLC during final exams.

Other academic libraries that have implemented late-night services were the Memorial University Libraries: Grenfell and Queen Elizabeth II Libraries. The difference between the IKBLC service compared to these is that they have additional services and programs to address mental health concerns among students. The Grenfell library introduced "Late-Night Hours" during the last three weekends of the semester, remaining open until 2:00 am on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday evenings. In addition to extended hours, the library provided complimentary coffee, tea, hot chocolate, and healthy snacks like popcorn to students. These snacks and beverages gave students a chance to take a break from studying, interact with peers, and relax (Rose et al., 2015).

The QEII library partnered with its cafe to provide a limited number of free coffees for students during the exam period. This initiative allowed students to take a short break, recharge with a free cup of coffee, and return to their studies (Rose et al., 2015).

Research on Applying Visual Cues

Controlling noise levels in libraries is essential to maintaining a productive and pleasant environment for patrons. While traditional methods of communicating important information, such as using a PA system or sound announcement, can be effective, they can also be disruptive and interrupt patrons' concentration, especially during study or reading time. To address this issue, libraries can adapt the technique of visual cues used by a second-grade teacher, as discussed in an article on the NEA website. The teacher used visual cues in the form of face signs to control classroom noise levels and form

quiet lines, and this method can be adapted for libraries to control noise levels and to indicate closing time or other important information (NEA, 2020).

By using visual cues, such as face signs, libraries can communicate desired noise levels or closing times without disrupting patrons' concentration. For instance, holding up a face sign with a small smile can indicate an appropriate noise level for study or reading time, and holding up a face sign with a crying face can indicate closing time. This method is less disruptive and more effective in managing noise levels and communicating important information than traditional methods of using a PA system or sound announcement.

Conclusion

Summary and Interpretation of Findings

The University of British Columbia (UBC) Libraries offer a variety of services to their patrons that facilitate student collaboration and inclusivity. While most respondents report satisfactory experiences in these libraries, certain aspects could be improved upon to enhance academic success and support student learning. Firstly, respondents generally support revising procedures related to noise level, privacy quality, and closing practices, to create a more user-friendly environment. Secondly, privacy has been identified as an important yet under-addressed issue, as students are not encouraged to provide feedback for the improvement of the library environment. Thirdly, closing procedures are an issue for some students, especially when they are in deep focus. Libraries could incorporate more visual cues in addition to audio cues when closing to be less disruptive. Overall, students are generally receptive to revising the procedures in UBC libraries, and even minor changes to these issues could bring about major improvements to students' overall experience.

Secondary research conducted on the current environment of UBC Libraries suggests that the zoning layout, noise quality, and closing procedures are areas of focus for improvement. Case studies from other academic libraries have demonstrated the benefits of changing library layout and zoning, using sound masking, providing late-night services, and relying more on visual cues for non-emergency announcements, such as library closures. Such studies underscore the importance of enhancing user experience and illustrate how UBC Libraries can best serve their students and researchers while adhering to the libraries' guiding principles.

Recommendations

Creating a set of guidelines that can be implemented across all UBC libraries is challenging due to varying levels of success in catering to user experience. Nonetheless, tested solutions can be provided that can be tailored to each UBC Library's unique spatial envelope. Please consider the recommendations tabulated below:

- Implement guidelines to improve noise level, privacy quality, and closing practices that are more catered to user experiences. This can help enhance users' academic success and support student learning
- Consider adopting solutions that have been proven and tested by other academic libraries, such as changing the layout and zoning of the libraries, using sound masking, and offering better late-night services
- Focus more on visual cues for non-emergency announcements, such as library closures, to improve the user experience
- To tailor adopted solutions, conduct regular surveys and assessments for the libraries to gather more accurate feedback from the students' experience throughout the space to identify the areas that need further improvement
- Provide training and resources to library staff to ensure that they are equipped to implement the changes effectively and efficiently

By implementing these recommendations, UBC Libraries can improve their services and create a more inclusive and collaborative environment that supports student learning and academic success.

Appendix A: Student Survey Questions

Student survey link: https://ubc.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9GP4k69IcnDFRWu

Q1 - Which UBC Library do you go to? Check all that apply. [Multiple Choice – Asian Library, David Lam Management Research Library and Canaccord Learning Commons, Education Library, Irving K. Barber Learning Centre (IKBLC), Koerner Library, Law Library, Music, Art & Architecture Library (MAA), Woodward Library, Xwi7xwa Library, Not Applicable / I study on other locations]

Q2 – How frequently do you use libraries for studying? [Multiple Choice – Daily, 4-6 times a week, 2-3 times a week, Once a week, Monthly, Rarely, N/A]

Q3 – What time do you usually go to libraries? Check the time frames applicable to you. [Multiple Choice – Morning (7:30 AM - 12 PM), Afternoon (12 PM – 5 PM), Night (5 PM – 12 AM), N/A]

Q4 – How many hours do you stay in libraries? Check all that apply. [Multiple Choice – Less than an hour, 1- - 3 hours, 3 – 5 hours, 6 -8 hours, 8+ hours, N/A]

Q5 – Which type of study spaces do you preferably use? Check all that apply. [Multiple choice – Group Study Spaces, Silent Study Spaces, Technology Spaces (Chapman Learning Commons, Digital Media Room at MAA, etc.), N/A]

Q6 – How do you find the current noise levels in libraries? [Multiple Choice – Very Pleasing, Pleasing, Neutral, Distracting, Very Distracting, N/A]

Q7 – How easily do you find quiet study spaces in libraries? [Multiple Choice – Very Easily, Easily, Neutral, Difficult, Very Difficult]

Q8 – How important is privacy to you when studying in libraries? [Multiple Choice – Not at all important, Slightly important, Moderately important, Very important, Extremely important, N/A]

Q9 – How satisfied are you with your level of privacy in the current library environment? [Multiple Choice – Extremely dissatisfied, Somewhat dissatisfied, Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, Somewhat satisfied, Extremely satisfied, N/A]

Q10 – How does the current closing procedures in libraries affect your experience? [Multiple Choice – Extremely affected, Affected, Neutral, Unaffected, Very unaffected, N/A]

Q11 – How are you currently being notified when the library is closing? [Multiple Choice – Verbal announcement, PA / Aural announcement (eg. bells, sound effects, etc.), Visual announcement, N/A]

Q12 – How do you prefer to be notified of closing times in libraries? [Multiple Choice - Verbal announcement, PA / Aural announcement (eg. bells, sound effects, etc.), Visual announcement, N/A]

Q13 – How would you rate your overall user experience at UBC libraries? [Multiple Choice – Very Satisfied, Satisfied, Neutral, Unsatisfied, Very unsatisfied, N/A]

Q14 – How do you feel about the idea of changing the current noise policies/procedures in libraries to be more responsive? [Multiple Choice – Strongly support, Somewhat support, Neutral, Somewhat oppose, Strongly oppose, N/A]

Q15 – How do you feel about the idea of changing the layout of study spaces in libraries to provide more privacy? [Multiple Choice – Strongly support, Somewhat support, Neutral, Somewhat oppose, Strongly oppose, N/A]

Q16 – How do you feel about the idea of changing the closing procedures in libraries to be less disruptive? [Multiple Choice – Strongly support, Somewhat support, Neutral, Somewhat oppose, Strongly oppose, N/A]

Q17 – Do you have any other suggestions for improving the library experience at UBC? [Optional, Fill in the Blanks]

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