2014 Law Library Assessment

Summary of Student Survey, Graduate Student Focus Group, Observational Study and Circulation Statistics

Prepared by the Libraries’ Assessment Resource Office

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The Law Library Assessment project was conducted to collect information on the library users' use of and opinions and perspective about library programs, collections and space. The project was composed of four parts: 1. library circulation statistics, 2. observations / an ethnographic study, 3. a student survey, and 4. a graduate student focus group. Another purpose of this project was to provide background data for the external review of the Law Library, to be implemented in April 2014.

1.0 Circulation statistics

These statistics show a long-term decreasing trend, as well as a low in 2009 when the library was under renovation. Consistently, the busiest months for circulation of physical materials are March and November.

2.0 Ethnographic / observational study

Data collected in this study included: the number of people who used the desk, for what general purpose, and how many people entered and exited the library.

The main checkout area was by far the most active part of the library. Other parts of the library were largely used as quiet study space as well by groups of students using the designated group study rooms.

Desk inquiries were largely quick and handled in a friendly manner. Desk inquiries consisted of group study room or carrel bookings, key returns, checking out library materials, and helping users locate books that were not on the shelves.

3.0 Student opinion survey

Student opinions about Law Library collections, services and space were collected with a locally-designed survey, which collected 136 valid responses, for an approximate response rate of 32%.

- Most respondents (91%) used the physical library at least once per week, while 63% indicated they use the library website at least once per week.
- The most popular reasons for using the library included silent study (93% of respondents), group study (74% of respondents), or to print or photocopy (74% of respondents).
- Respondents rated quiet study space, group study space, the library building and space, and ease of locating items in the catalogue and databases as the most important library characteristics. The least important characteristic was ease of locating items on the shelves.
- Respondents were most satisfied with the quality of staff service, the library building and space, and technology available to use, and were least satisfied with quiet study space and group study space.
- A slight majority of respondents (54%) had consulted with a reference librarian at the reference desk. Only 13% of respondents had consulted with a librarian in their office.
- Overall, a majority of respondents felt that all library characteristics covered in the survey were working well. The library characteristics that the largest number of respondents felt were working well were the overall library layout, and the computing workstations, while the characteristic that was felt to be least working well was the noise level, followed by library hours. The noise level issue was particularly related to study space on the second floor.
- The number one choice of one thing to change about the library was the temperature – respondents indicated that it was too cold. The second most common choices of characteristic to change was to limit space to Law students only, or to implement longer hours.
• There were several positive comments about staff and the library space and atmosphere left in the general comments section.

4.0 Focus group

Using a focus group format, the opinions of graduate students were collected. The questions asked in the focus group were about the following topics: study carrels and library space, librarian research assistance, use of print and electronic materials, use of interlibrary loans, and Law Library support for graduate students’ needs. The following themes were identified from the focus group transcript:

In terms of study carrels and library space, students who used the carrels identified them as an important part of their academic success. The presence of natural light in carrel workspaces was highly valued. Participants felt that the library was not highly used, and that it was previously used more (pre-2009).

Use of librarian research help varied, with only some participants having attended the reference desk for assistance. Only one was aware that they could book time with a librarian on an individual basis. Participants recommended having a sign for the reference desk that indicated where to find librarians at times when the reference desk wasn’t staffed. Most had used reference desk services at the McPherson Library, and were pleased with the service. They also liked the McPherson chat reference service, and wished it could be expanded to include more Law-specific information.

Both electronic and print materials were used by all participants, with a preference for print as a first copy then electronic for reference. Reading or browsing through e-books was not a preferred way to gather information. Participants acknowledged that there are far more books available thanks to electronic resources, and that there are no ‘recall wars’ on e-books. Physical materials used were mainly located at McPherson; there was a consensus that some physical materials are out of date. There also was frustration at not being able to locate materials on the shelf when they appear checked-in in catalogue.

All participants used interlibrary loan services, and were pleased the service, though all felt loan periods were too short, and that ILLO fines were too high.

Participants wanted and felt that they needed librarians to help with in-depth research. They specifically asked for more individualized attention, possibly in the form of a buddy program with librarians. They would like help developing a research plan at the very beginning of studies, so as to get help sooner and not waste time.

5.0 Conclusions

There are several conclusions which can be drawn from the data presented in this report:

1. The need for space is most critical for individual silent study, and secondly for group study space.
2. There are physical space issues regarding the HVAC system and resultant temperature of the library.
3. There is a need for better signage to zone areas as collaborative space, quiet space and silent space.
4. A greater flow of information from the Law Library to students is necessary for students to be aware of reasons behind such policies as ILLO fines and loan periods, or to understand how traces work for items they cannot locate on the shelves.
5. Physical collection use is decreasing, but the reserve collection remains important, and a well-maintained physical collection is important to students.