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Is Everything All Right At Night? Measuring User Response to Overnight Library Services

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Introduction

A multiple methods study was conducted over three academic terms during the 2015 academic year at Santa Clara University Library to assess the impact of overnight library hours. A survey was conducted after midnight during the library hours were open from 2:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m., five days a week (2015). For the last two weeks of the quarter, the survey was further informally patronoust around the library floor in which notable activity was found.

Key Research Questions (RQs) were posed:

- RQ1: What are students doing in the library after midnight, and what type of work are they performing overnight (Figures 1 and 2)?
- RQ2: How many students make use of overnight hours? (Figures 7 and 8)
- RQ3: What services do students use in the library after midnight? (Figure 4)
- RQ4: Do students associate 24/5 library access with academic success? (Figure 5)
- RQ5: What does “success” look like in overnight hours? How will we know if an intervention improves it? (Figure 3)

Methodologies: Survey and Activity Counts

Survey of Users after Midnight

- A survey was circulated 12 times over the three primary quarters of fiscal year 2015.
- Figure 3 provides an overview of the 15-question online patron survey, which was conducted after midnight during the two weeks that the library was open for the entire week.
- The survey featured five demographic questions and 10 questions about overnight activity, needs, and intentions. The final survey is found in appendix 1 and 2 (2016).

Heavily Patented Counts

- Student assistant volunteers counted the number of users and their library activity.
- Activity categories: socializing, studying, leisure, waiting, library PC use, group study, sleeping, and other.
- An entry was only recorded on nights when the hourly counts were automatically sent to a single spreadsheet when they completed. Results are shown in Figures 1 and 2.

Results

Figure 2 (RQ1). Heat map showing patron counts by hour during the two weeks each quarter of FY15 when the library is open 24/5. The darkest red depicts the highest counts, fading to green and then light blue, which depicts the lowest counts. This visualization shows not only how use varies by hour and day of the week, but also by quarters. The highest sustained counts occur during fall quarter. The heat map can also show where counts were missed. (right side of “O” among a sea of red)

Choice of Patron Activity (heavily count midnight 2:00 a.m. /10 days per quarter). Total count for three quarters of FY15 was 13,862 between midnight and 7:00 a.m.

Figure 3 (RQ2). Survey responses to “What are your favorite types of library spaces? Please choose your top four (1 = ESL / 4 = ESL). Note this survey was administered after midnight, as these responses surprisingly reflect user’s preferences during that time of day.

Figure 4 (RQ3). Survey responses to “What services do you use in the Learning Commons/Library between midnight and 7 a.m.? (Check all that apply) (1 = ESL)

Do students associate 24/5 library access with academic success? Do their self-reported grade point averages confirm their opinion?

Figure 5 (RQ4). Survey responses to “How much do you agree or disagree with this statement: ‘Having the ability to use the Learning Commons/Library during the 24/5 period (2:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.) has made a positive difference for me academically?’ (1 = ESL). The majority of students (75%) agree the overnight hours have self-reported a GPA of between 3.5 – 4.0. While it is not possible to draw a causal conclusion from these data, it might be assumed, based on the self-reported GPA, that students who believe they are already doing well academically know that 24/5 required a GPA over 3.5 also use the library during overnight hours.

Conclusions (RQ5)

Overall, students use all hours of the SCLC Library. However, werouch survey data still provide a better understanding of what overnight library hours are like in the library. The survey results, integrated with activity counts, provide data that answer questions posed by the research. We know not just how many students use the library after midnight but their favorite spaces and activities. We know students typically view the library before 7:00 a.m., use laptops, and prefer a studying or quiet setting to study. They require free, any time, traditional library services but do trend toward requiring technology, Wi-Fi connectivity, and either assistance in their work. In addition, SCI students do associate 24/5 library access with academic success. Additional support for this comes from patron counts showing 24/5 paid library hours can draw and maintain, not just existing or learning, the library provides the space and after- midnight hours, but the removal of the study group and the changes in how those spaces and time are used determines success. SCI’s (the library’s role is nonmonetary), and extended hours demonstrate the library’s commitment to student success.

Poster Source


Acknowledgments

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