

**Evaluating Library Spaces**  
*University Libraries, University of South Carolina*

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FLIP CHART PILOT PROJECT – Thomas Cooper Library, Fall 2008

*prepared by*  
*Assessment Information Management (AIM) Team*

## **Executive Summary**

The University Libraries' Assessment Information Management (AIM) Team is evaluating library spaces and usage patterns to guide future building and renovation projects toward a more user-centric library environment. During exam study weeks of the 2008 fall semester, the AIM Team deployed flip charts around the Thomas Cooper Library to collect anonymous responses from in-library users as to: 1) why they were using a particular library space and 2) what they thought the space needed.

From December 2, through December 15, 2008, four flip chart stations positioned on different floors in the Library (mezzanine quiet area, main level large seating area, level 5 quiet area, and level 4) were available 24 hours for comments. Some observations:

- A total of 347 comments were collected

  - 43% were in response to the prompt, *I'm in this space because...*

  - 57% addressed the second prompt, *this space needs...*

- Main level and level 4 provided the most feedback

  - Comments were positive on these levels overall

- Many indicated they were "in this space" for studying and completing assignments

- The mezzanine is cold

- Main level users had some diverse space needs including sleep zones and entertainment

- Much of the feedback centered on two themes:

  - I'm in this space because...it's a positive environment*

  - This space needs ... more food (level 4 users clearly want something to eat!)*

Based on this small study, the Library building is generally perceived as a good environment for completing assignments and studying for final exams. Students seemed focused on "comfort issues" in their work / study space and they want more of those comfort needs filled: more food, additional seating, better temperature regulation, etc. When studying for finals, students may spend a long time in the Library and, as their comments indicate, they especially want to be comfortable.

This project was conducted at the end of the semester when the Thomas Cooper Library was open 24/7 and experienced its highest daily gate counts for the semester. The AIM Team intentionally chose this busy time to boost participation; however, we recognize students' reasons for coming to the library, their in-library activities, and the amount of time spent in the Library during this exam study period might vary significantly from other weeks of the semester. The AIM Team is exploring additional methodologies for further assessment of library spaces and usage patterns.

## Methodology

Four flip chart stations were deployed on different floor levels in the Thomas Cooper Library with two pre-written questions. Each station included a flip chart pad mounted on an easel with one (or two) colored markers attached by string to the easels to solicit write-in responses. Signs displaying the University Libraries' word-mark indicating "We need your input" were attached to the top of the easels.

The chart sheets were pre-labeled with the two written prompts 1) *I'm in this space because...* 2) *This space needs...* A flip chart setup was positioned at each of the following Thomas Cooper Library locations during the week of December 2 through December 15, 2008:

- Mezzanine – designated quiet study area
- Main floor – large group seating area
- 5<sup>th</sup> floor – designated quiet study area
- 4<sup>th</sup> floor – science reference/computer area (first week); 4th floor stacks area (second week)

Twice daily (at approximately 9:00am and 5:00pm), a member of the AIM team checked each chart station to determine if sheets needed to be removed. A sheet of chart paper was removed if it was either filled with comments or contained any offensive content. Each pulled sheet was coded with its chart station location and the date and time that the sheet was collected. At the end of the study period, each comment on each chart sheet was coded and transcribed into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet (see *appendix A*).

No individuals were selected, recruited, or identified for participation in this assessment project. All comments written on the flip charts were completely anonymous. It is a fact that all participants who provided feedback were actually *in* the Thomas Cooper Library. It is assumed that since we administered this study during the final two weeks of the semester, many – if not most – of the comments were contributed by undergraduate students.

## FINDINGS

The comments written on the flip charts were coded according to their location (level) and assigned to a descriptive category based on the general *focus* of the comment. Of the total 347 comments received, 105 (30%) were considered meaningless and were coded as miscellaneous. These excluded comments were largely mild profanities, general silliness, or anything unreadable.

Figure 1 depicts the distribution of response categories from all levels to the prompt, “I’m in this space because...” A total of 94 meaningful comments were collected.

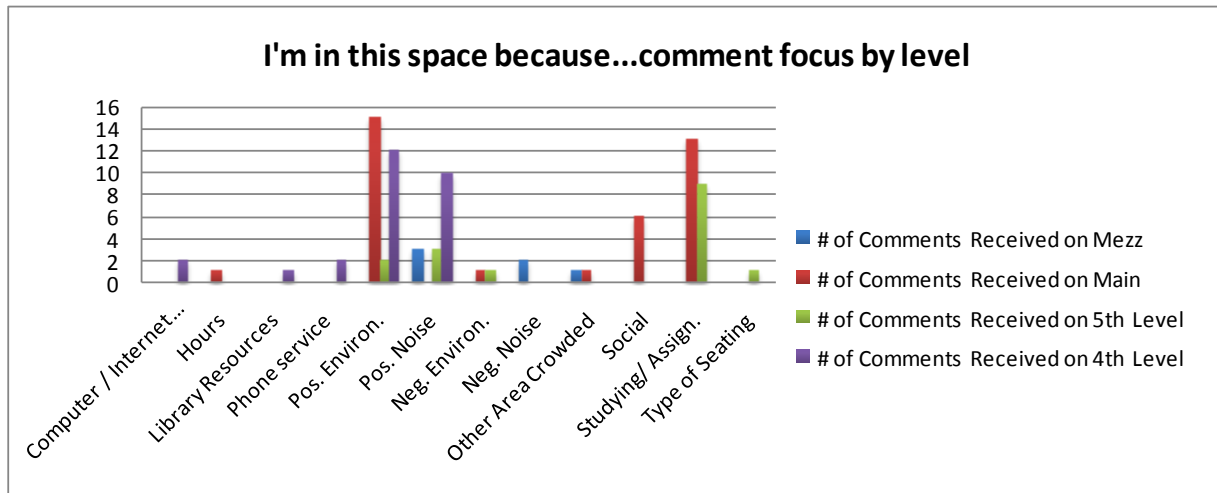


Fig. 1: All levels, *I'm in this space because...*

Figure 2 depicts the distribution of response categories from all levels to the prompt, “This space needs...” A total of 148 meaningful comments were collected.

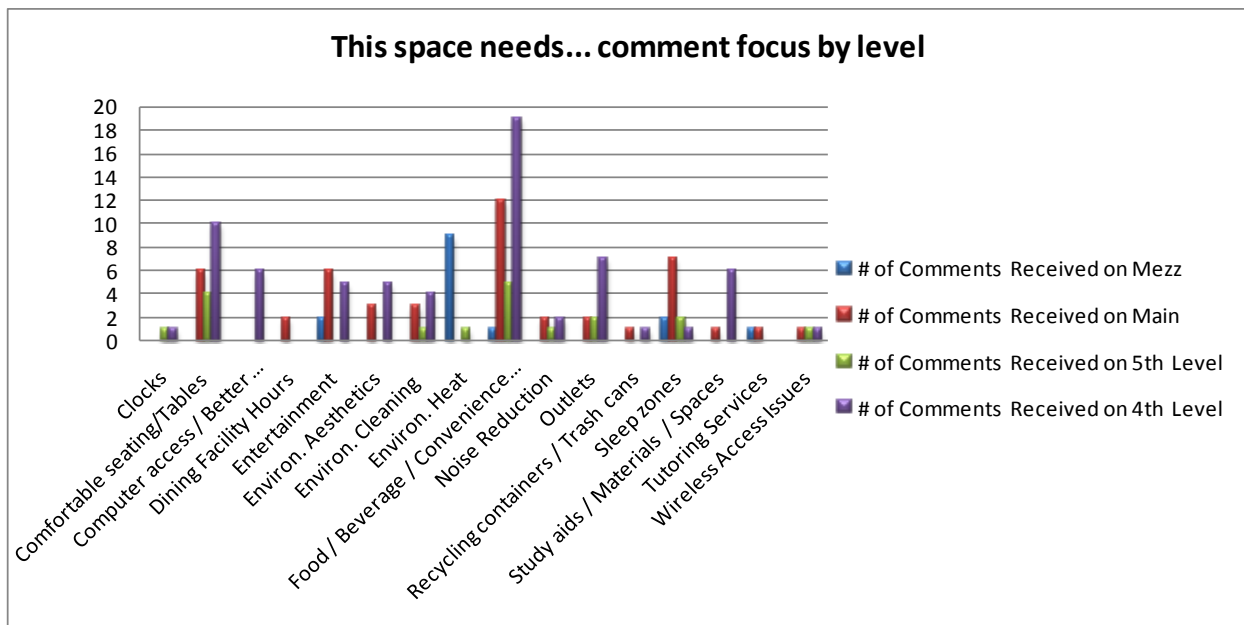


Fig. 2: All levels, *This space needs...*

Each of the figures below summarizes feedback to the prompt “I’m in this space because...” by location:  
 Figure 3 – Mezzanine level; Figure 4 – Main level; Figure 5 – 5th level; Figure 6 – 4<sup>th</sup> level.

I'm in this space because... Mezzanine

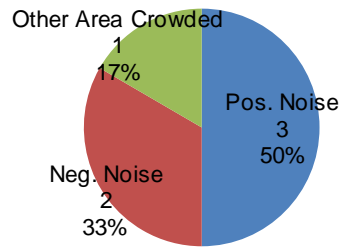


Fig. 3

I'm in this space because... Main Level

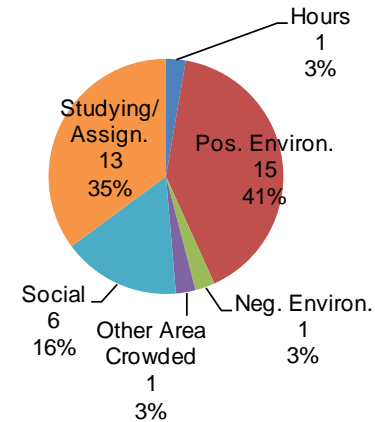


Fig. 4

I'm in this space because... 5th Level

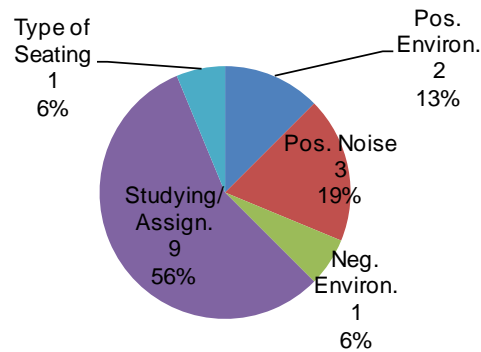


Fig. 5

I'm in this space because... 4th Level

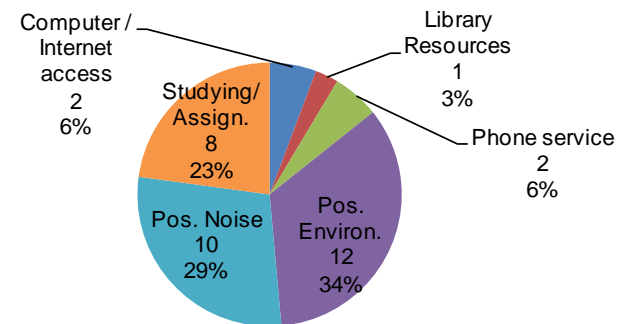


Fig. 6

Each of the figures below summarizes feedback to the prompt “This space needs ...” by location: Figure 7 – Main level; Figure 8 – Mezzanine; Figure 9 – 5th level; Figure 10 – 4th level.

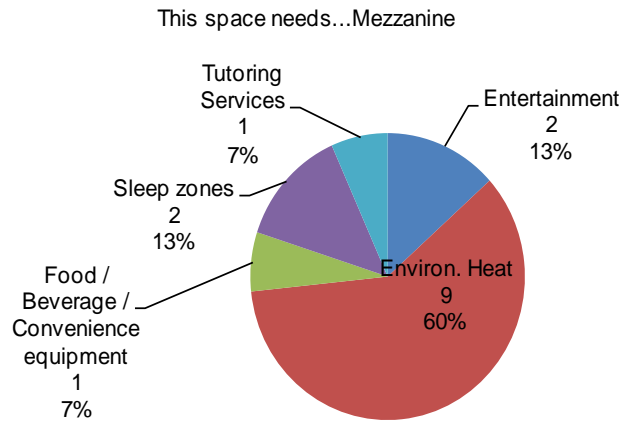


Fig. 7

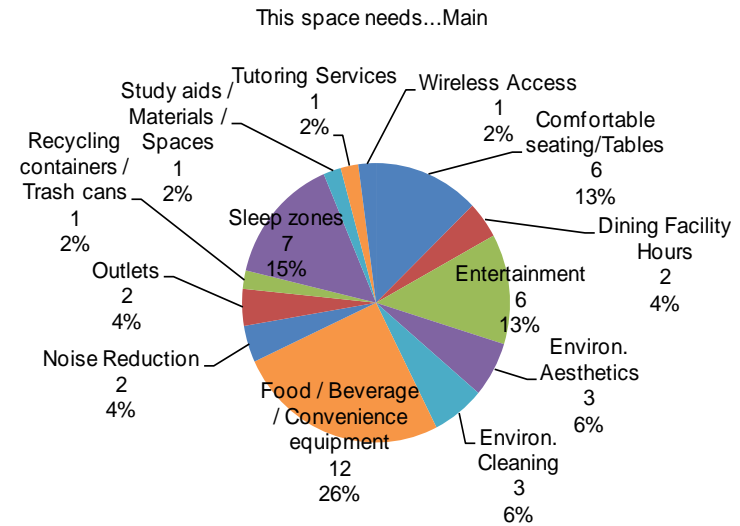


Fig. 8

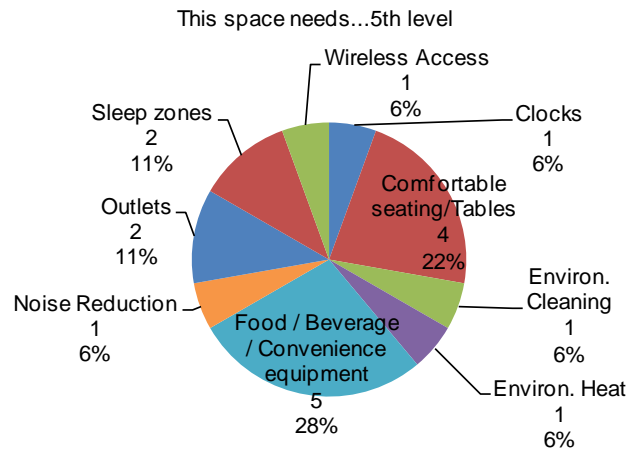


Fig. 9

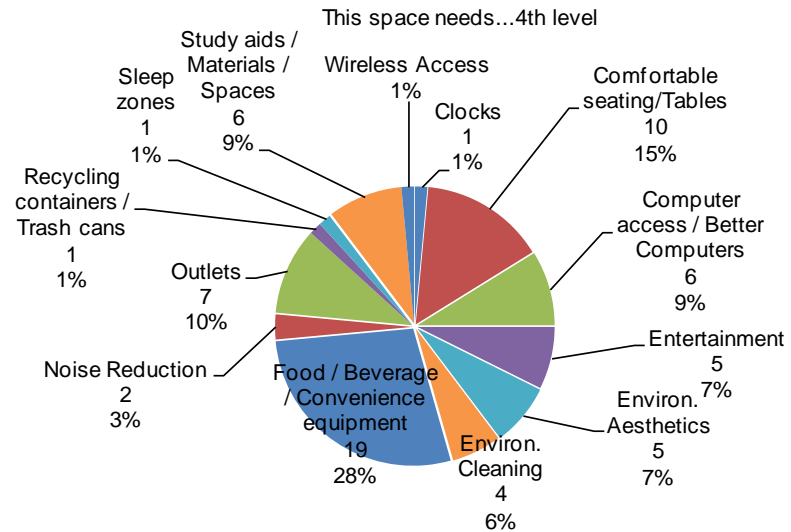


Fig. 10

## Conclusion

This project was the AIM Team's first assessment exercise. Due to the limited scope of this pilot, these findings are not necessarily conclusive and additional assessment data will be needed. As the University Libraries' continue moving towards the goal of creating more user-centric environments, the Team will be exploring options for related follow-up assessment activities.