Student Focus Group Report

Marvin K. Peterson Library

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UNH Library – Student Focus Group

Executive Summary

A focus group was facilitated as a follow-up to the UNH Library Student Satisfaction Survey held last year and to delve into more qualitative data concerning student’s opinions, feelings, and ideas about the Marvin K. Peterson Library. The meeting was held in a conference room in the library and included both graduate and undergraduate students. Those who participated in the focus group spoke anonymously about the aspects of the library they most value, the physical environment of the library, their major frustrations, the in-library-use laptops, and newly-introduced printing system in the library. Students were encouraged to speak candidly and if they had any additional comments or questions they were allowed to do so.

Results of the focus group were recorded and kept anonymous. Overall, the group shows that students tend to be satisfied with the Marvin K. Peterson Library. They have minor frustrations concerning the physical layout with the facility and some frustration with the library hours. However, the group also demonstrated that students are pleased with the new printing system and enjoy aspects such as Jazzman’s Café, and the different dynamics of each floor of the library.
Introduction

The Marvin K. Peterson Library provides the library population with opportunities to give feedback to the University of New Haven via satisfaction surveys. Due to the ever-changing realm of academia and increasing size of the student body at this university, the student focus group has been introduced to delve further into student opinion about what is and is not working at the library. Considering the library has newly introduced a new printing system and other services such as in-library use laptops, receiving candid opinions from the students themselves can provide useful information for a library staff that often makes changes to their facility based on student feedback.

Conducting and facilitating focus groups can ensure that the information and resources that the library offers can be tailored to the changes that are constantly arising within academia and student demographics. Furthermore, the feedback given in these focus groups will aid Chief Librarian, Hanko Dobi, in making well-informed decisions. With this data, the library staff will be in a better position to serve the students at the University of New Haven.

Methodology

The focus group questions were designed with the help of Chief Librarian, Hanko Dobi. The participants were given five questions including a warm up concerning different aspects and services of the Marvin K. Peterson Library:

1. What aspects of the library do you most value? (Warm-up)
2. How do you feel about the physical aspects of the library?
3. What are your major frustrations with the library?
4. How do you feel about the library hours?
5. What do you think of the new printing system?

After the questions were determined, an invitation was sent out to the undergraduate and graduate student body via email ensuring that all information discussed at the focus group would remain both anonymous and confidential. The meeting took place on November 18th, 2009 in the Marvin K. Peterson library. All participants were briefed on how the information was to be used and the group was in discussion for about 1.5 hours.

Findings and Results

6 UNH students attended the focus group meeting. Much like the student survey, students were generally satisfied with the library. The group also uncovered certain aspects of the library that we not covered in the survey such as the physical environment of the library in the survey. Furthermore, the focus group gave students a chance to give better insight around certain services such as the in-library use laptops and the new printing system.
UNH Library Focus Group Report: Results

The following are summaries to student responses to the questions asked in the focus group.

What aspects of the library do you most value?

The computers

While most students in the group admitted that during busy hours finding a computer is rather difficult, for the most part the library offers to the student body a sufficient amount of desktops including the Mac computers that are provided. As a follow-up question, students were asked about the in-library use of laptops provided should they need them if a desktop computer is not available. The focus group explained that they have used the laptops in the past, and some stated that they did not know that laptops were available for student use.

Library Layout

Students expressed their appreciation for how the library’s floors were utilized. That is, the bottom floor caters to group work, the middle for computer work and a café, and the top floor strictly for quiet, independent studying. Though group members expressed concerns about certain floors (see: How do you feel about the physical environment of the library?), the students feel that the outline of the library offers them many different options on how to conduct their work and studying.

Jazzman’s café seems to be a perk for most students as well. The layout gives them a place to eat as well as get some group work done. They also expressed their liking for the improved taste in the coffee due to the switch to Starbucks.

The Printing System

Though this area of the library will be discussed later in the report (see: What do you think of the new printing system?), the new printing system has become one of the most valued aspects of the library. Students of course express some dislikes about the new system but are satisfied with how well “printing traffic” flows with the extra printers available to keep things moving. Having an option for color also seems to be appreciated by the UNH student body.
How do you feel about the physical environment of the library?

*Seating*

The focus group discussed first the computer chairs on the main floor of the library. Students feel that most of the computer seating is sufficient; however, the old, wooden chairs should be replaced. They explained that the newer computer chairs are more comfortable and adjustable while the wooden ones provide little to no comfort – not just at computers but for the other two floors as well.

*Top Floor Arrangement*

Students explained that the top floor quiet study area provides them with an excellent place to do individual work, but some feel they should be offered a different variety of desks. The hutch-like desks do not cater to all the students’ study habits and therefore should be alternated or sectioned with open areas to study.

*Main Floor Study Rooms*

The study rooms on the main floor provide students with an area to have group meetings and to get group work done without being too loud for others using the computers on the same floor. Students commented that though others cannot hear them outside the rooms, they can easily hear other groups in the adjacent areas. The focus group suggested that the library somehow sound-proofs the walls inside the rooms to make sure that students within the meeting areas are not disturbed by others.

*Bottom Floor Study Area*

Most of the students in the focus group said they often use the bottom floor area to do group work and overall enjoy the space they are allowed to work in including the way the room is set up. They suggested that more couches were available and possibly newer ones. The couches currently on the bottom floor seem to be rather uncomfortable for some students.

Students also explained that the amount of electrical outlets provided is somewhat minimal (see: What are your major frustrations with the library). Focus group members would like to see more spaces to plug in their laptops while studying on the bottom floor.
What are your major frustrations with the library?

*Overall Loudness*

As seen earlier, students are satisfied with the physical layout and coffee offered by the café. However, focus group members explained that at times the machines used to make certain beverages at the café are often disrupting – not only to those at Jazzman’s Café, but to the whole main floor. The students acknowledge that the university cannot simply stop serving certain items on the menu but still identify the disruption as a frustration with the library.

Aside from Jazzman’s Café, members explained that sometimes students on the main floor can get too loud. They made clear that some talking is fine, but when people gather at a single computer or take phone calls on their cell phones it can be too distracting. Focus group members stated that courtesy in the library should be promoted more.

*Outlet Access*

Despite students being satisfied with the ample amount of computers offered by the library, many still rather bring in their own laptops to study and get work done. One major frustration they explained was the minimal amount of electrical outlets offered in the library. For the top floor, outlets are very few and far between and most students find that the hutch desks are taken by other students who need their outlets for their own laptops.

For the bottom floor area, there are only a few places to plug laptops in and they are often being used. A few students explained what type of hazard this has for those who are charging their laptops at a desk with the cord stretched across areas that students often walk. The focus group stated that they would like to see more available electrical outlets and for now remains as a major frustration at the library.

*Food and Beverages*

Focus group members believe that food and beverages should be allowed in more areas other than Jazzman’s Café. Places such as the top and bottom study areas and study rooms should allow food and drinks since there is no electrical equipment that would be at risk. The members of the focus group acknowledge the hazard posed by having food near the computers, but other than the computer areas and maybe students with in-library use laptops, they believe college students are responsible enough to handle a food or drink in the library.
How do you feel about the library hours?

Friday Hours
The Friday hours seem to be what frustrates students the most. A few students stated that they do not see the reason in closing the library at 4:30 on Fridays especially since the university offers weekend classes. For example, one student explained that he has a class Saturday morning. If he needs to get work done for that class on Friday and normally works until about 10 p.m. on class course work, he loses over 5 hours of work time with no other places on campus to go and get work done. Furthermore, most of the weekend classes start before or at the same time the library opens. If a student has to print class notes or a paper prior to class that morning, he or she cannot turn to the library to get the material needed for their weekend class.

24/7 Availability
As a follow-up question, students were asked about having the library open 24 hours. Members of the focus group expressed that a library open would be helpful from time to time, but the only frustration they have with the availability of the library resources is the Friday hours. Some students stated that the only access they need at late hours is the main floor of the library: desktop computers and the printing system. The focus group members feel that if they were allowed to use solely the main floor of the library at times when the library is normally closed (Friday evenings), they would be more satisfied with the library hours.
What do you think of the new printing system?

Price per page
Focus group members believe that the price per page is manageable, but possibly too high. Students are also worried that some professors may teach classes that require students to print out a considerable amount of papers for their course. They would like to make sure that teachers are aware of the new system and adjust accordingly.

Furthermore, students believe that there should possibly be an adjustment in money for printing according to their course credits and other demographics. For instance, a commuter student who is only taking 6 credits in a semester/semester should have less money for printing than a resident student taking 12 credits.

Appropriate System
Surprisingly the focus group found the new printing system appropriate for the library. As seen before, the students are satisfied with how well traffic flows through the printing lines and do not have to wait for a library user who is backing up the lines. They feel that because printing costs money, no matter what the price, will make library users stop wasting paper on certain items that do not necessarily have to be printed out.
As the 2009 student satisfaction survey showed, students at the University of New Haven are generally satisfied with the library. The focus group uncovered new information for the library staff to consider when making improvements to the library and conceiving a new satisfaction survey for students. The qualitative data taken from the focus group meeting allows one to see that students are generally satisfied with the library however would like to see changes in library hours, food/drink restrictions, seating, and layouts of certain areas of the laptops including outlets for laptop users. Interestingly enough, the focus group also uncovered a potential reason why in-library use laptops were not being used often: some students were unaware that in-library use laptops were available. This could be the case that some library users are unaware of the new service offered by the library.

The information gathered in the focus group gives the library sufficient data to make certain changes in the library but also gives a significant stepping stone for further research on library user satisfaction. This information can be used to tailor a more narrow survey for students in the next year as well as give future focus group meetings more direction. This being the first focus group concerning the library, the questions were more general. In focus groups to come, they can be given more direction to uncover more data that a survey may not.
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Recommendations

As the facilitator for the focus group, follow up questions were given throughout the meeting to promote students to give any suggestions they could make and stressed that Chief Librarian, Hanko Dobi often makes changes to the library based on student opinion. The suggestions made by students should be considered in the future changes to the library as the staff and librarians deem reasonable. All feedback taken from this focus group should be taken into account for the following satisfaction survey in order to gain more quantitative data to ensure that the frustrations, values, and suggestions are of the student majority opinion before carrying out or dismissing changes to the library.

Consulting the 2009 Student Satisfaction Survey, one can see that almost 40% of the graduate students were dissatisfied with the current library hours. Due to this and gathering some data from graduate students, the library may want to consider offering a graduate student lounge. Most graduates are aware of the current student lounge but find it unsatisfactory. As something to consider for the next survey, the library may want to look into the option of solving library hour problems with graduate students. Since the library is one of the few places on campus that students can access computers and printing services, offering a small area (part of the main floor) certain hours of the week can potentially increase the library hours satisfaction for both undergraduate and graduate students.