

Laptop Loan Interviews 2023: Guerilla Assessment Report

BACKGROUND & METHODOLOGY

In March 2023, the Dean of Libraries and the Associate Dean Library Services requested an assessment of the laptop lending program, within a short timeframe, to inform decision making surrounding the continuation of the program and the refreshment of laptops. The Libraries have been experiencing a great demand for laptop loans with an ongoing waitlist of would-be-borrowers. The overarching question was: What are students' reasons for borrowing laptops and should the Libraries continue this program?

Due to the timeline of new laptop purchasing, a fulsome assessment study was not possible, so a plan was made for a guerrilla-style assessment using interviews at the time of laptop returns to inform a questionnaire which would garner many respondents. The Coordinator of Assessment met with the Director of Access Services and the Acting Director of ATS to get further insight and staff supports for the assessment study. Plans were put in place quickly and many thanks go to Service Point staff who mobilized accordingly. This assessment would not have been possible without their support and professionalism. As the interviews got underway, the richness of the response data became clear, posing difficulties with capturing similar in a questionnaire. The Coordinator of Assessment therefore recommended the interviews be continued as the sole method of this study. Interviews were conducted April 14th – May 19th, with a two-week extension for the Kellogg. Coding of the response data was performed in Excel. A Word document of the interview questions is attached to this report.

RESULTS SUMMARY

A total of 42 interviews were conducted: 2 at Kellogg, 3 at MacRae, 7 at Sexton, and 30 at Killam.

Windows/Macs: 29 borrowed Windows laptops, 13 borrowed Macs. 5 of the Windows borrowers wanted a Mac, and 2 of the Mac borrowers wanted a Windows laptop.

Borrowing frequency: 13 were first-time borrowers; 29 were repeat borrowers - roughly 2/3rds had borrowed either four or five times, "numerous", "several", "multiple" times, or "constantly".

Awareness of availability of LC workstations: All respondents were aware of the workstations.

Sufficiency of loan period: While 29 indicated that the loan period was acceptable, 4 of these suggested longer would be better – an additional 10-15 days or a full term loan. Of the 13 who said the loan period was insufficient, 3 requested full term loans, 1 requested several months, 1 suggested 2 months minimum, and 2 requested 2 months. Renewals and waitlists may be posing a problem as 2 stated they could not renew (one said their work was interrupted because of this), and 1 said the wait was too long.

Reasons for borrowing a laptop: The main reason for borrowing laptops was related to personal finances – either they could not afford to buy a laptop, or they couldn't afford to repair the one they owned - and borrowing laptops was preferred over using the workstations. Details are as follows:

Ownership: 13 respondents said they didn't own a laptop and 9 said it was due to financial reasons. 24 mentioned that they already own a laptop, but 15 said it was broken and 7 said it was due to financial reasons that they did not repair it or buy a new one. Of the 9 who already own a working laptop, 3 needed Windows/Mac (the opposite of what they owned) and 1 needed the webcam on the loaned laptop. The remaining 5 simply preferred the loaner laptops over their own. (An additional 3 who did not indicate if they owned a laptop or not, said they borrowed our laptops for financial reasons.)

Preference for laptops: 9 said they would rather borrow a laptop than use the workstations. 1 said they have a mixed delivery of classes (Zoom, Teams), 1 said it was too noisy in the LC, and 1 said they needed privacy for calls or presentations. 14 respondents indicated they use a laptop for the flexibility of working from home or elsewhere.

What if there wasn't a laptop lending program: Many respondents gave several answers. Half (21) said they would use the workstations but many of these expressed reluctance. 13 said they would buy a laptop (and again, many expressed reluctance), 4 weren't sure, and 2 said they would borrow elsewhere. 1 who had a laptop but preferred the loaner laptops said they would use their own if they couldn't borrow. 1 already had a laptop on order. 1 said they would use a lab. 1 said they would use their cellphone.

Additional comments: 12 praised the program, indicating that it helped them a lot. Of those who made requests for improvement: 8 struggled with the wait period (particularly for Macs) and/or said there should be more laptops, 2 stated that the lack of renewals was troublesome, 2 suggested more information would be helpful (the specs and available programs as well as shutdown and logout instructions), 2 requested a mouse to come with the laptop. One-of suggestions included tablets and pens, 360 swivel screens, touchscreens, and Minitab, Python and Anaconda installations. One person said the grace period was too short.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this guerrilla assessment study support the continuation and expansion of the laptop lending program. The demand is high and is mostly based on financial reasons and the desire for flexibility to work from home or elsewhere, and in private for quiet and for online classes and participation. On this point, it may be possible to decrease the number of workstations or begin a phase-out, replacing them with laptop plug-in stations with screens, keyboards and mice to support ergonomic requirements as per the results of past assessment studies. (An analysis of computer usage data could determine the current demand for workstations.) The number of additional laptops should be determined by the size of the waitlist, with an increase to the ratio in favour of Macs. Additional offerings as requested under "Additional comments" should be considered. Different loan periods should be available (daily, weekly, monthly, and full term). Beyond the Libraries, on-campus laptop hardware repair services should be resurrected. Brainstorming discussions to determine sources of additional funding to support an expanded loan program could be supported by an analysis of demographics of borrowers performed by Dal Analytics, potentially identifying departments that could help support their students' needs.

Linda Bedwell
Coordinator of Assessment
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Laptop Return Interview

We are evaluating our laptop lending program. Do you have the time for a few questions? It takes about 5 mins.

Your answers are stored separate from your loan record, so no personal identifying information is attached.

You can opt out at any time.

Questions

1. You are returning a Mac/Windows laptop?

Follow up: Was that your preference? Would you have preferred the other?

2. Was this your first time borrowing a laptop from us?

Potential prompt: (If not) How many times have you borrowed a laptop?

3. As an alternative option, are you aware of the availability of our computer workstations in all our library locations?

4. What are your reasons for borrowing a laptop?

Potential prompts: Are there specific programs on the laptops that you need?
Do you already own a laptop but prefer these?
Is it for financial reasons? (to borrow rather than own)
Is it a preference over the computer workstations?

5. If our laptop lending program did not exist, what would you do?

Potential prompts: Would you use the computer workstations?
Would you purchase a laptop?

6. Was the loan period sufficient?

7. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about our laptop lending program?