

Wallace McCain Learning Commons

Guerrilla Assessment Report

1 February 2016

Executive Summary

The Wallace McCain Learning Commons (WMLC) opened on Oct 15th, 2015, and immediately became a popular spot for students to relax, work and study, individually or collaboratively. The WMLC has three functional areas: the bookable study rooms, the quiet room, and the general Learning Commons (LC) with computers, seats and tables.

Six weeks after opening, an assessment planning team consisting of the assessment librarian, the science librarians and the LITS service manager met to discuss their observations and experiences in the WMLC and the types of information that should be gathered from the users. Agreeing that we wanted to provide plentiful opportunities to facilitate easy user-participation, tailored to the three functional areas in a short period of time, we decided to use various, guerrilla-styled assessment tools (unconventional, low-cost, high return, flexible means of gathering user information and opinions). The results would identify timely changes and potentially inform more formal assessment in the future. A full guerrilla assessment plan was drawn up and is attached as Appendix A.

We decided to deploy question slips and whiteboards in the study rooms (see Appendices B & C), question cards with colored backing for easy retrieval in the quiet room and general LC spaces (see Appendices D & E). We also conducted six 1-hour observations in the spaces (see Appendix F). Navigators had already been tasked to do headcounts each hour for two weeks, and the Science librarians were already recording questions they answered while on shift in a LibAnalytics database. All raw data may be found in the Libraries' Share drive at S:\Library\Share\Assessment\Spaces\WMLC.

The clearest message from the feedback gathered was the overwhelming need for more ergonomic furniture (for the purposes of work, rather than reading or leisure) in areas designated for quiet. The empty space in the middle of the quiet room could be better utilized by adding different seating and work surfaces conducive to individual desk work. Potentially, some of the “comfy chairs” in the quiet room could be moved into the general LC spaces. These changes may help alleviate some of the demand for the study rooms, as users would then have other options for quiet and functional workspaces. Additional whiteboards, follow-up on cold complaints, and clear designation of quiet conversation in the general LC space will all help to improve user satisfaction with the WMLC. (See the Recommendations list at the end of this report for all suggestions.) Follow up assessment is recommended with the change to quiet room furnishings, as well as an overall reassessment of the entire WMLC in one year's time.

Results Summaries

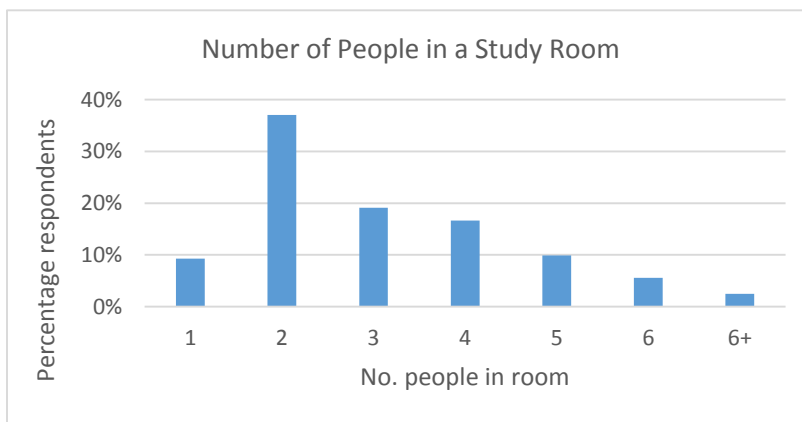
Bookable Study Rooms

Question Slips

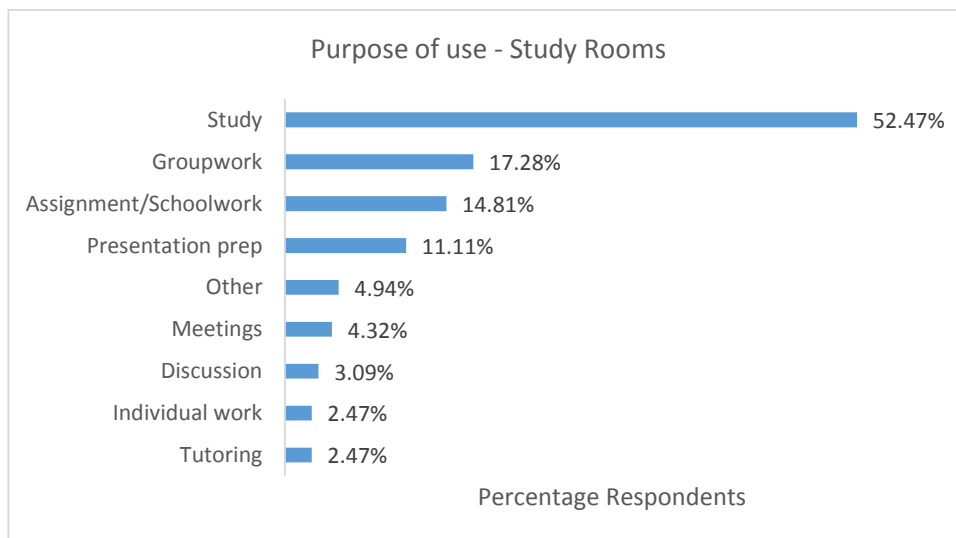
Total slips received: 165 - 3 “spoiled”= 162

The vast majority of respondents - 81% - booked their room online. Only 10% did not book their room ahead of time.

The most common answer for how many people were in the room was 2 (37%), followed by 3 and 4 (19% and 17%, respectively). 9% stated they were the only person in the room.



By and large, the rooms are most commonly used for studying (52% of the respondents). (12% of these respondents were individuals studying alone in the room.) The popularity of these rooms for studying may be related to the lack of functional, quiet space for desk work (see results for Quiet Study Room and General Spaces). 17% said they were using the study room for groupwork, 15% for working on assignments/schoolwork, and 11% were preparing presentations.

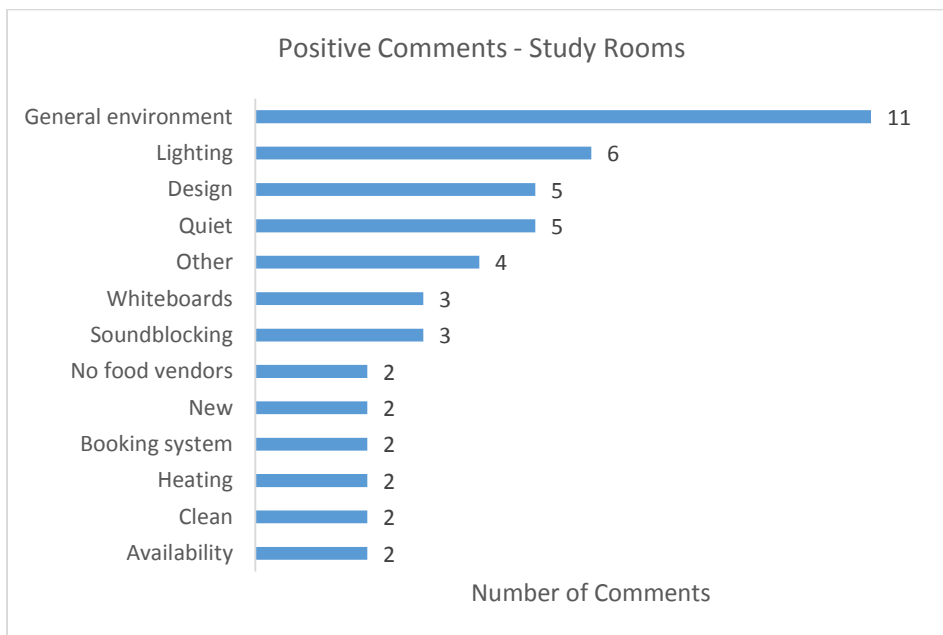


25 of the respondents added comments to their question slips. Because the feedback was similar to the responses to the whiteboard questions, the analysis team combined these with the comments received on the whiteboards (see below).

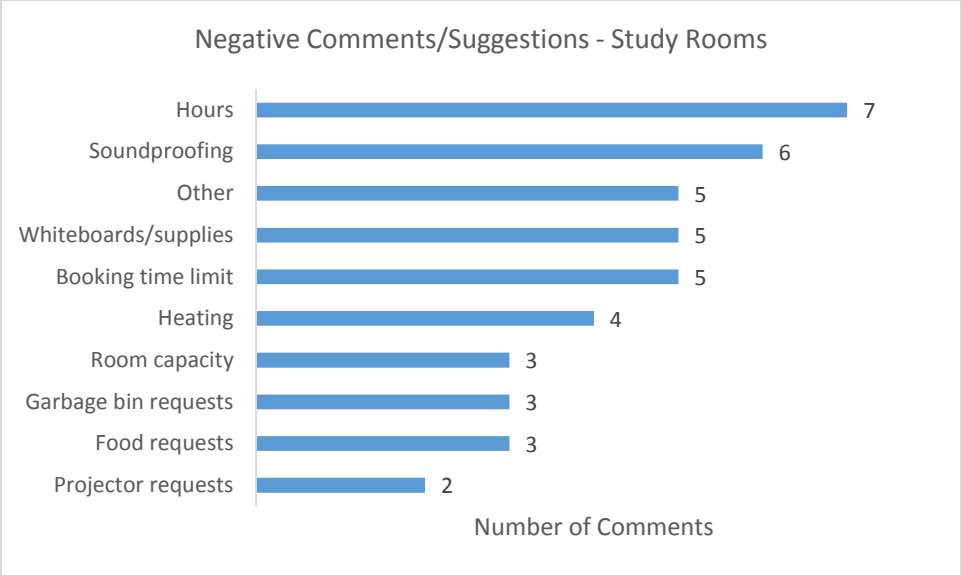
Whiteboard & Question Slip Comments

Total responses received:	55 on whiteboards (solicited)	25 by question slip (unsolicited)
	28 positive	5 positive
	27 negative	20 negative

What they liked: One-third of the positive comments were with regard to the general environment (e.g., comfy, nice environment, “I like it here”). Lighting received 6 positive comments, the design (open concept, view) received 5 as did the quietness.



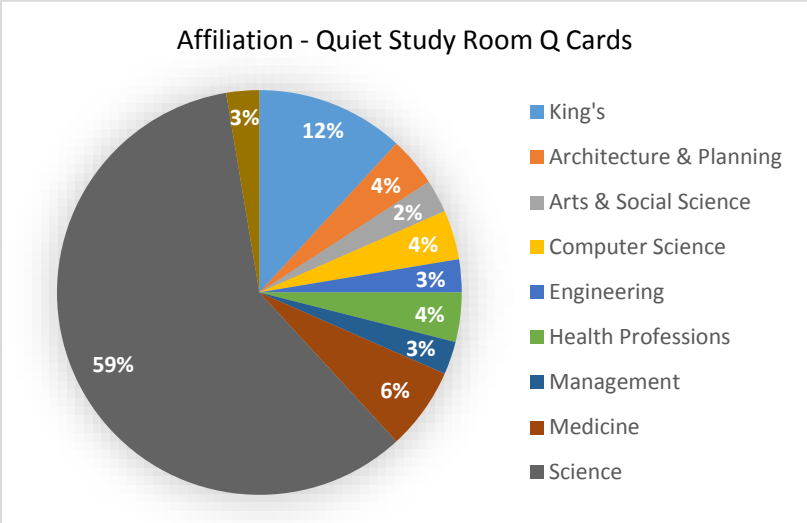
What they would change: 7 respondents indicated the hours were insufficient, 6 complained of a lack of soundproofing in the study rooms (although soundproofing also received some positive comments), 5 suggested extended booking timeslots (e.g., 3 hour time limit, rather than 2), 5 wanted more whiteboards or whiteboard supplies, and 3 questioned the stated capacity of the rooms.



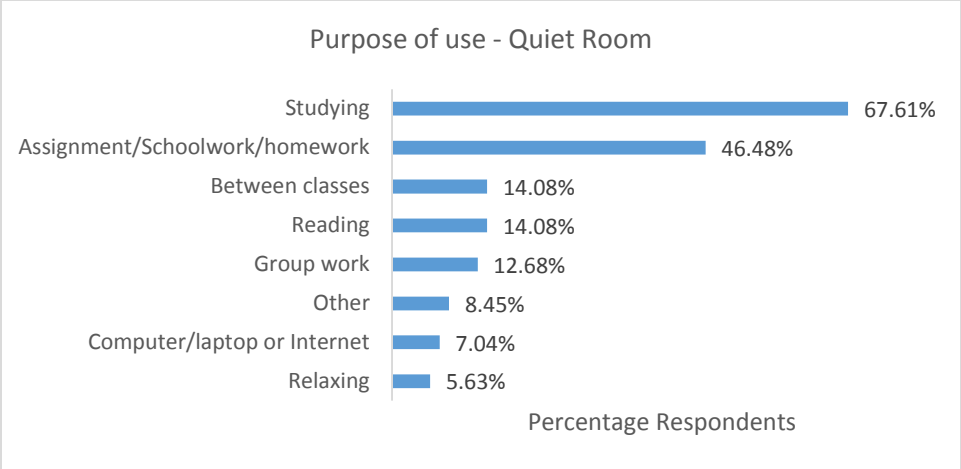
Quiet Study Room

Total question cards received: 77 (note: not every respondent answered every question)

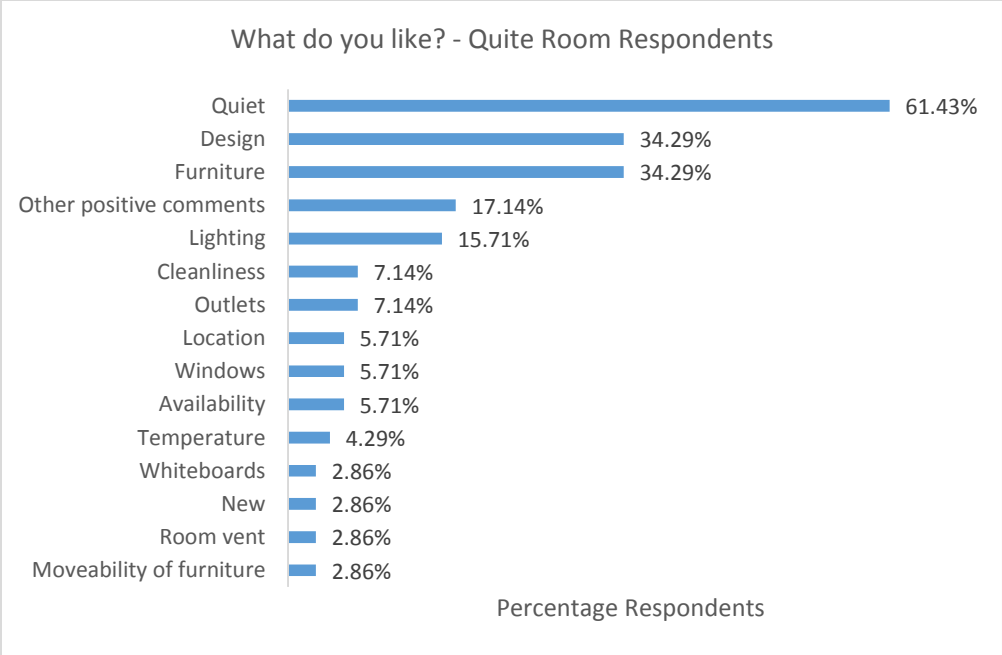
Respondent affiliation: 59% were Science students. 12% were from King's.



68% of the respondents said they use the quiet room for studying; 46% for working on assignments/schoolwork. Interestingly, 13% said they use the quiet room for groupwork. (Possibly they were referring to the general LC spaces.) 14% noted it was a spot they used between classes.



What they liked: As one would expect, the most common answer was the quiet (61%). The next most popular answers were the comfortable seating and the design/general environment (34% each). 16% noted the good lighting. It is interesting to note that 2 respondents (2.86%) said they liked being able to move the furniture around and 2 mentioned the positive effect of the “loud” air vent producing white noise (despite many others, 11%, complaining about it - see below).



Because staff had noted that users had moved the quiet room furniture from its original arrangement, a question regarding the furniture was included. When asked if they would change the type/placement of furniture, 59% of respondents provided complaints or suggestions regarding the ergonomics of the furniture for schoolwork. The following are just a few examples:

“Needs some more tables/chairs that you could do homework, write, and use laptop on. Take out some of the comfier chairs and add ergonomic working spaces. It hurts my back trying to use my laptop or write.”

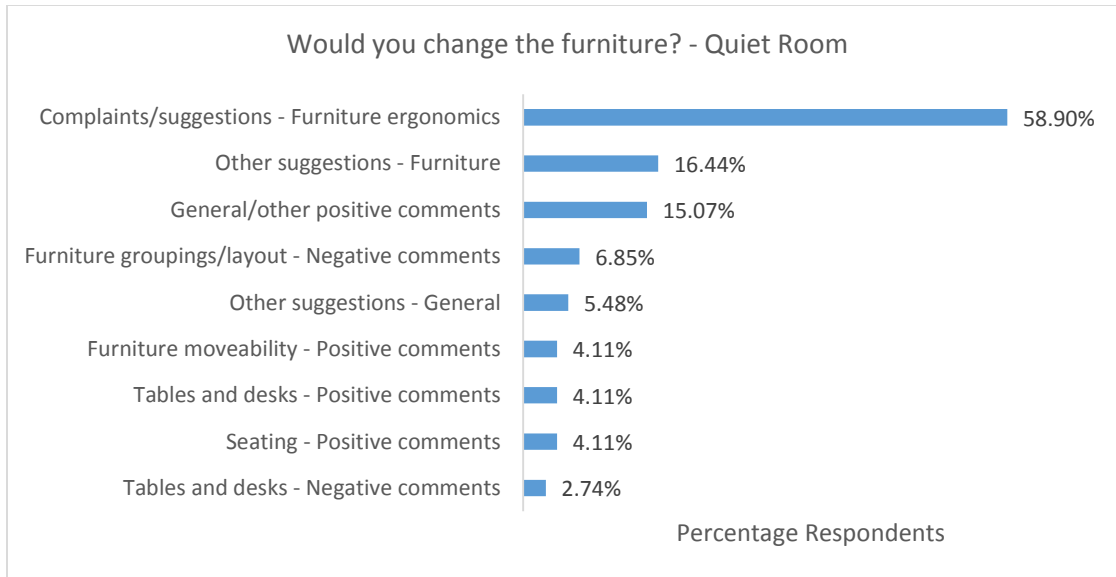
“Taller tables would be perfect. The ones now are a little too low. They are not useful to do homework on.”

“For doing work the tables are a little too short, it's uncomfortable to write.”

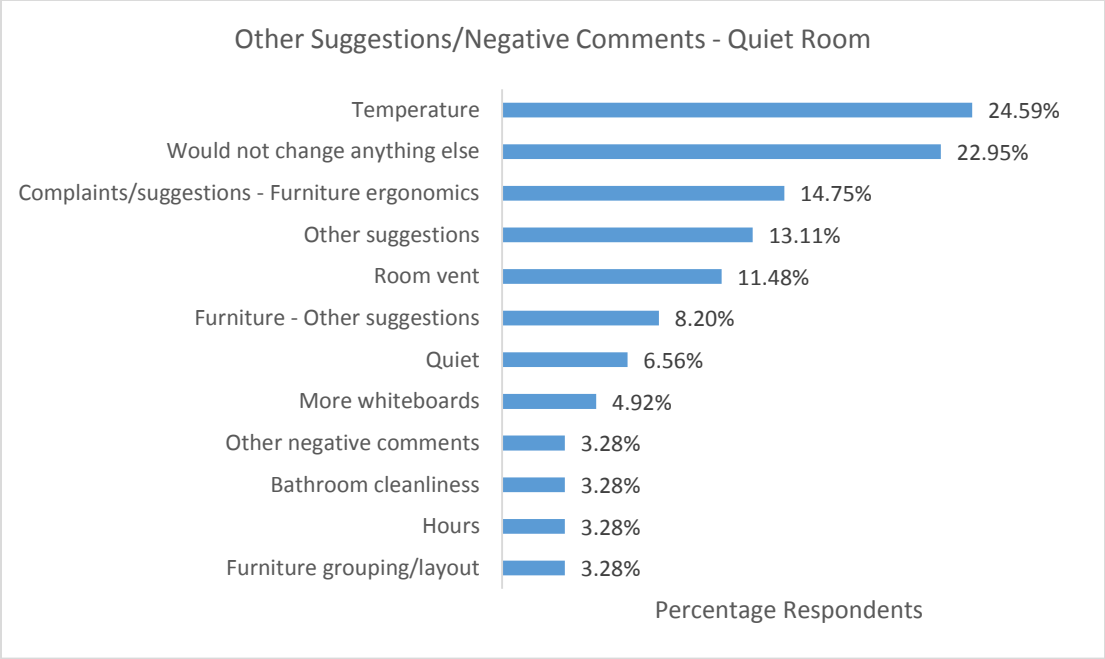
“If you are to keep the armchairs it should be a lounge space, if it is a quiet study space there should be desks.”

“Some belly level desks would help. I get pain from constantly leaning over.”

Overall, the respondents were asking for chair/work surface combos that are suitable for working. 3 respondents liked the comfort of the seats and another 3 stated they liked the movability of the furniture. This does not come as much of a surprise as, indeed, users have moved the furniture, most notably to the back shelf/bench so they can use it as a work surface. 2 individuals suggested the furniture not be placed in groups as this arrangement is more for discussion when, in fact, this is a quiet room.



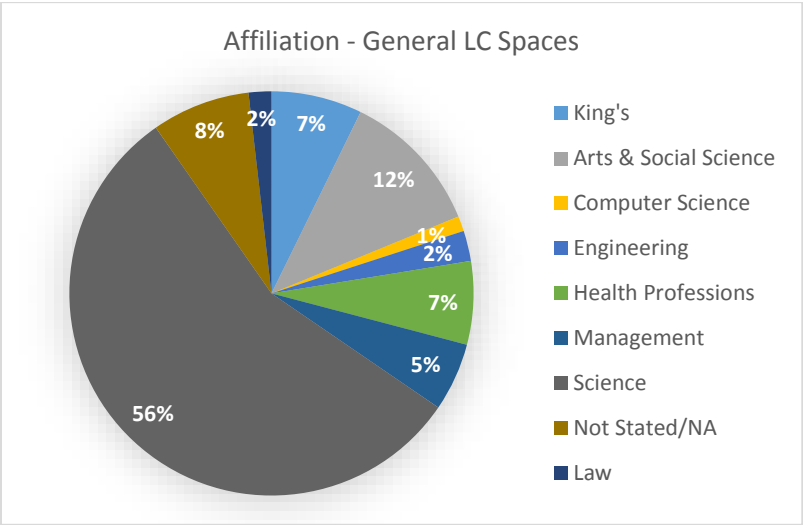
What else they would change: The most common response to this question related to the cold room temperature (25%). 23% said they wouldn't change anything else. 15% gave more complaints or suggestions regarding ergonomics of the furniture, and 11% complained of the loudness of the air exchanger. 3 respondents complained of people not following the quiet rule, while another requested the “Shh” text-messaging system.



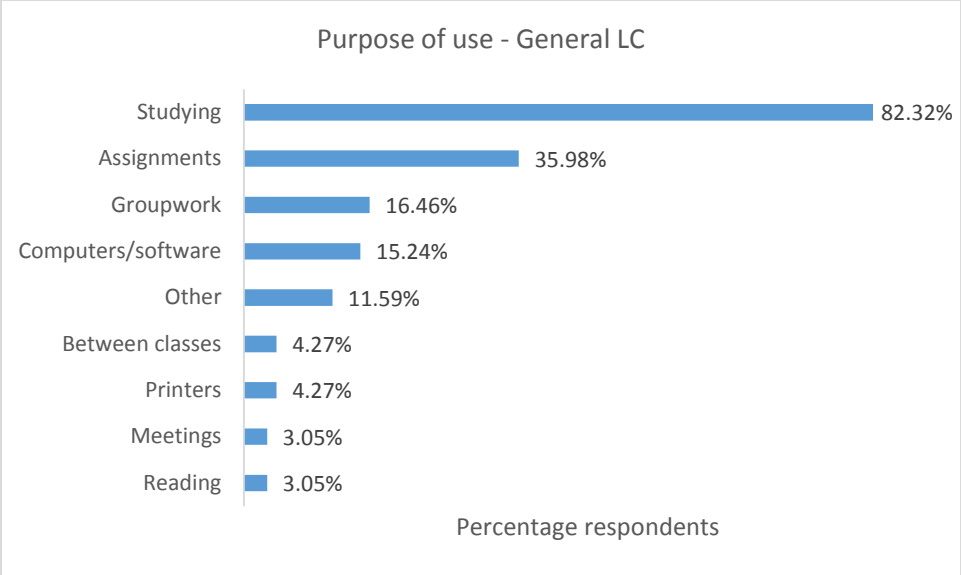
General LC Spaces

Total completed question cards: 165 (note: not every respondent answered every question)

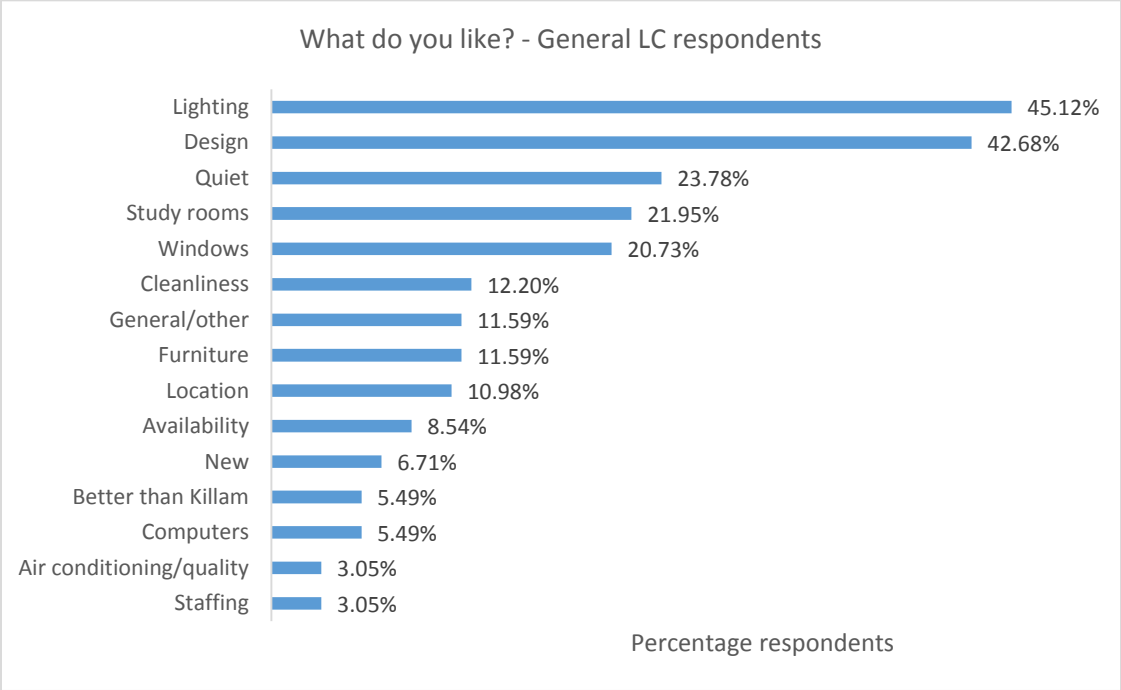
Respondent affiliation: 56% declared they were Science students. 18% were from Arts & Social Sciences, Management and Computer Science, combined (i.e., the other faculties generally served by the Killam LC). 7% of the respondents were from King's.



The vast majority, 82%, said they used the general LC for studying. 36% said for assignments/schoolwork, 16% for groupwork, and 15% for the computers. Based on observations, this last number seems rather low and may be attributed to a lower number of computer users filling out the question cards.

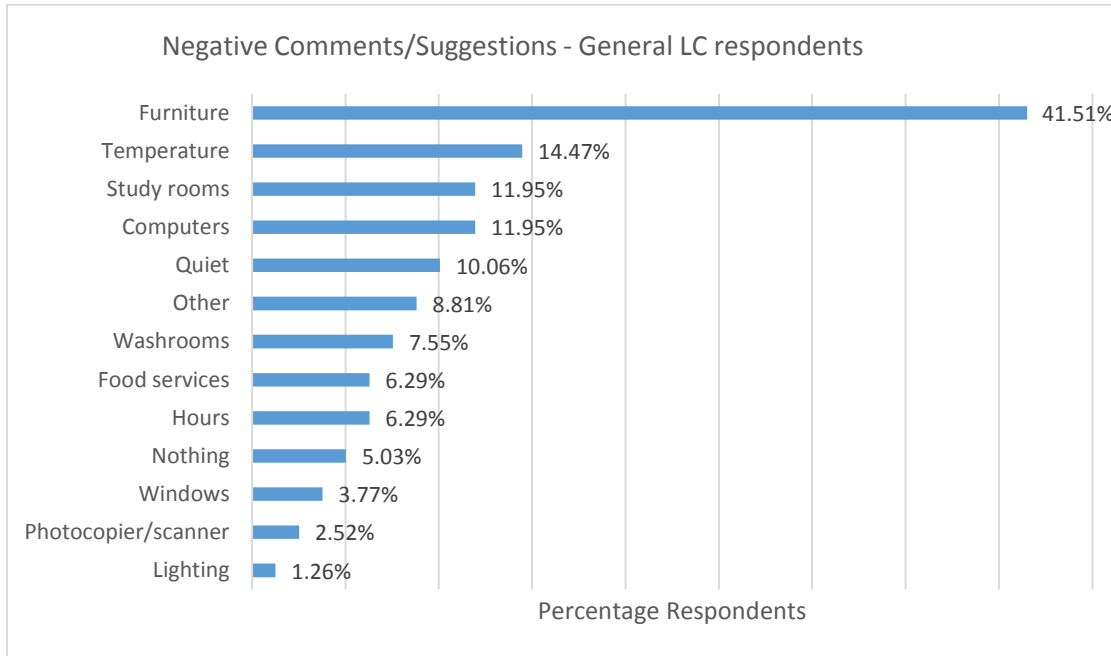


What they liked: The top two answers were the lighting (45%) and the design/general environment (43%). 24% liked the quiet, 22% the study rooms, and 21% noted the windows. Cleanliness, furniture and location also were mentioned by 11-12% of respondents.



What they would change: The most popular answer was in regard to the tables and seating (42%). The next common answer was a complaint about it being cold (15%). 12% complained about the computers, and 12% had negative comments about the study rooms. 10% had requests about the noise level – roughly half wanting quiet to be enforced and the other half wanted conversation to be

allowed. Only 6% stated they wanted longer hours, and there were a few comments about food – some wanted it allowed, while others didn't. Some washroom-related requests pertained to cleanliness. (This also appeared in quiet room cards.)



Other Assessment

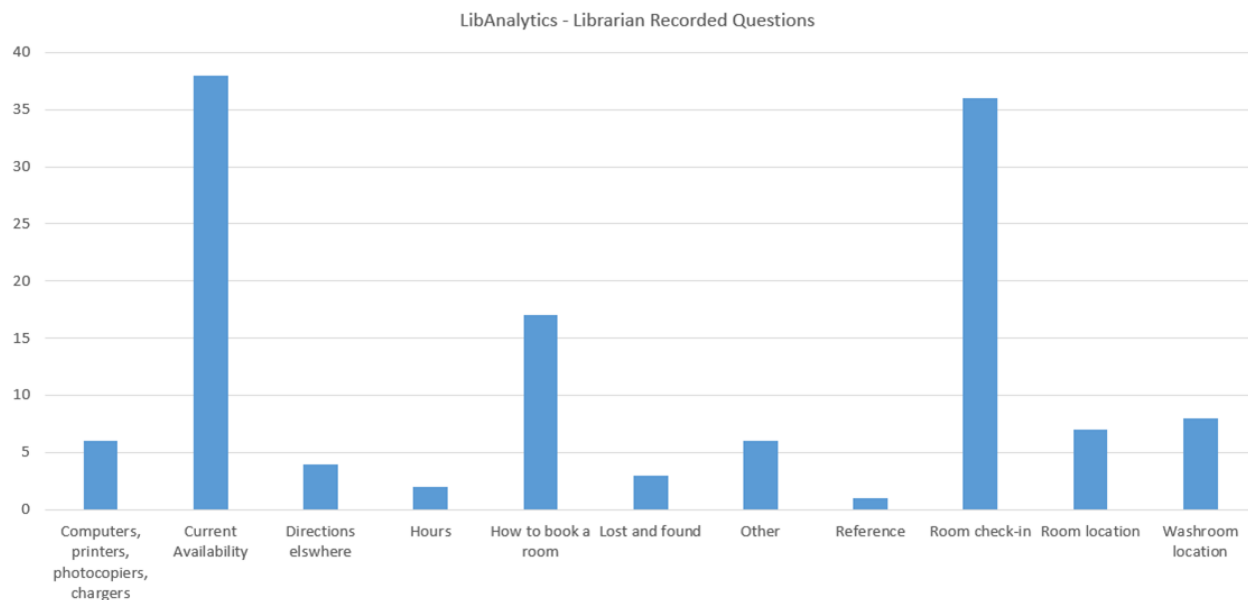
Headcounts

It appears that the WMLC is busiest Mon-Wed, after which the number of users diminishes at the end of the week. On Sunday, the number of users again begins to rise. Afternoons are the busiest time of day.

	24-Nov	25-Nov	26-Nov	27-Nov	28-Nov	29-Nov	30-Nov	1-Dec	2-Dec	3-Dec	4-Dec	5-Dec	6-Dec	7-Dec
8.30am	35	56	17	12			15	12	12	14	13			23
9.30am	45	75	56	29			42	29	45	53	38			48
10.30am	64	92	94	74	10	29	77	81	68	85	69	36	18	79
11.30am	82	110	102	87	27	54	119	108	124	103	98	57	40	114
12.30pm	122	85	98	101	39	68	111	122	114	93	99	68	49	120
1.30pm	118	102	122	112	41	77	109	125	141	104	103	73	77	112
2.30pm	94	87	100	105	73	94	125	109	114	96	102	68	105	125
3.30pm	91	111	95	106	82	99	134	111	122	110	105	96	126	134
4.30pm	104	97	113	61	56	91	125	117	127	99	84	96	117	127
5.30pm	87	106	79	55	49	98	119	122	113	92	62	91	107	118
6.30pm	82	89	76	46	42	55	113	95	123	89	54	68	95	117
7.30pm	101	93	40	45	43	47	117	90	104	78	49	69	60	86
8.30pm	74	87	40	26	31	40	75	95	79	72	38	57	52	84
9.30pm	51	54	32	16	24	35	50	70	57	40	32	46	42	59
	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Monday

LibAnalytics – Librarian Questions at Service Desk

Questions recorded by the Science librarians on their Mon-Wed, 1-3pm shifts, are largely study room related. Only 1 research assistance question was asked since the WMLC opened. The assessment team recommends raising awareness of the research assistance service and to continue tracking these statistics.



Observations

Sample observation notes are attached as Appendix F, and mirror some of the findings above, including the inadequacy of soundproofing between study room 8 and the quiet room. On most occasions, the observer noted that all study rooms were occupied, with perhaps 1 person in only 1 or 2 study rooms – not enough to initiate a policy of two or more per room, especially since it was observed that the furniture in the quiet study room is inappropriate for extended quiet desk work, requiring proper chairs and tables at desk height.

The general LC spaces cannot be quiet, even if they were to be zoned as quiet. The steady flow of foot traffic, often noisy, through the WMLC to/from the outside door limits the amount of quiet that could be expected and encourages chatter within these spaces. Generally, arrangements for quiet workspace (i.e., tables, chairs and quiet-designation) in the WMLC is currently inadequate, possibly placing a higher demand on the study rooms. The online study room booking system and observations show that these rooms are booked solid. While we have no measure of turn-aways, the likelihood is high that this is a considerable number.

Recommendations

An overall, follow-up assessment study should be conducted in about one year's time, following the recommended changes. A focused assessment study should be conducted on the quiet room immediately following the suggested furniture changes.

Study Rooms

- Although most of the study room users booked online, there are a number of queries at the service desk and several turn-aways. Since this study, signs with the booking URL have been placed on all the study room doors. Further promotion of the online booking system should be considered.
- Until adequate, ergonomic furniture designed for work is provided in quiet workspace, there should be no policy limiting single-user bookings of the study rooms.
- Consider trialling extended bookings (i.e., 3 hours).
- Consider adding more whiteboards; however, screens were added to the rooms during the week of Dec 21st.
- Revisit/edit the stated room capacity of each study room in the booking system. Users need space to spread their work out. Comments and observations noted that some rooms appear cramped.
- Thanks to this study, the problem of sound blocking was pinpointed to a construction issue between rooms 7 and 8. The contractor has been notified and is awaiting parts to fix the problem.

Quiet Room

- The plea for more ergonomic furniture (for the purposes of work, rather than reading or leisure) was clear. The empty space in the middle of the quiet room is currently underutilized. Seats and tables designed for seated work could be added to this space or some of the “comfy chairs” could be moved into the general LC spaces. This may also alleviate some of the demand for the study rooms, as users will have other options for quiet and functional workspaces.
- Consider a “Shh” texting service specifically for the WMLC.
- Investigate ways of quieting the room vent/air exchanger.
- One individual requested that the traditional male/female symbols not be used for the gender neutral bathrooms. For the purposes of communicating inclusivity, the assessment team recommends this change.

General LC

- Furniture again came up as an issue in the general LC, highlighting a need to pay closer attention to the ergonomics of furniture for work, rather than leisure. Following through on the recommendation to add furniture to support work in the quiet room could alleviate the

demand for the same in the general LC, where quiet is not possible due to through-traffic and computer use.

- The quiet conversation designation should be made more clear via signage. It appeared that respondents, as well as the observers, thought that the current signs indicated a quiet zone. (Update: the signs have been replaced and reflect the correct designation for quiet conversation.)
- Facilities Management should be advised of the cold temperature complaints gathered in this study so they can follow up with testing/improvements.
- If hours are to be extended, Mon-Wed could be the evenings to pilot this change.
- Due to the very low number of research assistance questions, the presence of the librarians and this service should be promoted.

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Assessment Librarian

on behalf of the Planning & Analysis Team:

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Guerrilla Assessment Plan

Wallace McCain Learning Commons

Nov 30th - Dec 6th, 2015

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With support from: Carol Richardson, Michele Charlton

Bookable Study Rooms (16)

- Question Slips

- 1) How did you book this study room? (online/in person/I didn't book the room (it was empty))
- 2) How many people are in your group? (it's ok to say 1).
- 3) What are you using this space for?

These question slips and a box will be placed in 13 of the 16 study rooms (rooms without the wheeled whiteboards - see below). Navigators will collect the completed slips at the end of the day and bring them to the Killam. Librarians will shift the question slips and wheeled whiteboards between the rooms (see below) according to their Doodle schedule.

- Wheeled Whiteboards

- 1) What do you like most about these new study rooms?
- 2) What would you change?

Appendix A

A wheeled whiteboard will be placed in three study rooms with the above two questions written on it (markers will be provided). Every two hours (as available between 11am and 5pm) the librarians will take a picture of the whiteboards and erase the answers, then shift the boards into the next set of three study rooms (e.g., from rooms 1, 2 & 3 to rooms 4, 5 & 6), replacing them with the question slips and boxes from the new rooms they are put into. Mick will place a camera at the service desk.

Navigators will snap photos of the whiteboards and erase the answers at the end of the night (they do not have to move the boards). The navigators will return the camera to the Killam at the end of the day for safekeeping when they come back with the keys after closing. They will then take it down in the morning when they pick the keys up before opening. (The librarians will not be erasing and moving the white boards on the weekend so they may get very full.)

Large Quiet Study Room

- Question Cards

- 1) What do you like about this quiet study room?
- 2) Would you change the type/placement of furniture?
- 3) Anything else you would change?
- 4) What are you using this space for?

(If I can make room on the card without it looking too busy, I will see if I can add something like: If you are a student, please tell us your program/major (e.g., Engineering, Biology, Sociology, King's student)
(Update: Done!)

Question cards with coloured backing will be printed – **hopefully by Tuesday**. These will be placed question-side up at/near every individual workspace in the quiet study room. Instructions at the bottom of the card will ask the respondent to turn the card upside down when complete. This will reveal the coloured back to aid in the retrieval and replacement with a new card. Retrieval of these cards will not be scheduled. If librarians and navigators could do this as often as they are able or when they shift/photograph the whiteboards that would be great. A box will be placed at the service desk for librarians and navigators to place completed cards in. Linda will periodically retrieve cards from the box.

All other spaces

- Question Cards

- 1) What do you like about this new space?
- 2) What would you change?

3) What are you using this space for?
(Again, I will see if I can add the demographic question.)

These question cards will have a different coloured backing and will be placed question-side up at/near every workspace you would expect to find a person. Instructions at the bottom of the card will ask the respondent to turn the card upside down when complete to aid in retrieval/replacement as above.

General

- Navigators are currently doing hourly headcounts the weeks of Nov 23rd & 30th. This data will be reviewed to determine when the space is busiest/at capacity.
- Linda will conduct observations - one hour, four times during the week, at various times of day. Additional observers are welcome (please let Linda know if interested). Notes will be discussed and analyzed at a future meeting. A brief but very insightful explanation of participant observation: <http://www.sr.ithaka.org/blog/the-art-of-observation/>

Prepared By:

Linda Bedwell
Assessment Librarian
(text: 817-4155, office: 494-2680)

Appendix B
Question Slip – Study Rooms

Welcome to the new Wallace McCain Learning Commons. Please help us improve this space by answering a few questions.

1) How did you book this study room?

___ Online ___ In person ___ I didn't book the room (it was empty)

2) How many people are in your group? (it's ok to say 1).

3) What are you using this space for?

Thanks! Please place this slip in the box to the right.

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Appendix C
Sample White Board – Study Rooms

Welcome to the Wallace McCain Learning Commons!

What do you like most about these study rooms?
→ They're new! and very nice and bright
→ **AMAZING LIGHTING**
→ comfortable study space

- Soundproof

- What would you change?
→ Longer times to book
→ Contract

- Longer hours

→ chair • ROOM CAPACITY NEEDS TO BE REthought (too small)

Room Capacity is for 3 people. So if you need a bigger room, book ONE!
- concerned student

Thanks for your feedback!

Appendix D
Question Card – Quiet Study Room

**Welcome to the new Wallace McCain Learning Commons.
Please help us improve this space by answering a few questions.**

1. What do you like about this quiet study room? _____

2. Would you change the type/placement of furniture? How? _____

3. Anything else you would change? _____

4. What are you using this space for? _____

5. If you are a student, please tell us your affiliation (Dal/King's) and programme/major.

Thanks! Please place this card upside down. Someone will be along shortly to collect it.

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Appendix E
Question Card – General LC Spaces

**Welcome to the new Wallace McCain Learning Commons.
Please help us improve this space by answering a few questions.**

1. What do you like about this new space? _____

2. What would you change? _____

3. What are you using this space for? _____

4. If you are a student, please tell us your affiliation (Dal/King's) and programme/major.

Thanks! Please place this card upside down. Someone will be along shortly to collect it.

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Appendix F
Sample Observation Notes

WMLC Observation Notes – Wednesday, Dec 2nd, 7:30-8:30pm

Quiet room:

10 people, roughly 1/3 capacity

All on periphery

At least 7 are on laptops, 3 are plugged in

All individual study/work, except 2 are very quietly smiling and talking

Only 2 chairs are in centre (space in the middle is not being used)

Bright feeling – kinda feels odd for the night

Very quiet! Someone entered and made sure to close the door softly

Air exchanger very quiet – but turned on at end of observation. It ramps up and gets louder but not as bad as previous day.

2 using tables as footrests, one has feet on shelf at back of room

Central area:

No one in chairs in middle

Both tables in use, 3 per table. One table is a group together but not clear if it is groupwork. Other table – one alone, the other two (face to face) are exchanging glances.

One person at table & chairs by wall on the other side has lots of work spread out.

2 people just came and sat down at table and chairs. Eventually they took the study room after it was vacated. I don't think they checked in at desk. It didn't appear they came from that direction. Are folks aware that rooms are to be booked?

Somewhat regular traffic and people noises as they walk through. Some are very disruptive. This space would not be useful to folks expecting quiet .

Computer room (left):

2/3rds full.

Tables all being used. At least 2/3rds full.

No one here is talking but convos from outside the space can be heard

No one at walk-up terminals

All individual work and computers

Appears to be all individual work at tables

Other computer room:

Appendix F

1/3rd full

Quiet, except can hear loud convo from study room behind me. Not very disruptive for computer work.

Screens are kinda far from you.

People walk loudly, talking as they go to door (walk throughs).

There is not a very clear log-off on the screen

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