Purpose of Study

Library users have varying affective responses to architectural styles. What are they? How can they be assessed? What should librarians do with that information?

We measured student perceptions and preferences for traditional as compared to modern library spaces at the University of Louisville and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary to assess if students:

• Saw some library spaces as having transcendent inspirational qualities;
• Preferred those spaces for anticipated future use; and
• Saw those spaces as advancing the institutional mission.

We conducted this study to:

• Inform upcoming library renovations at our institutions;
• Validate/expand a previous research study and address the limited amount of empirically-based research literature in the area of the affective qualities of library spaces;
• Compare results between the two institutions; and
• Identify generalizable data that could help informs other institutions.

Findings

We conducted the survey with four laptop computers (one for each version). We incorporated coded means analysis of word pair responses to measure abstract qualities associated with the spaces; and then administered the survey with four laptop computers (one for each version) at both institutions.

Our modifications to the original study included:

• Shortening the survey instrument and moving it from print-based to online;
• Administering the survey at a research university and a theological seminary for comparison purposes; and
• Seeking valid sample sizes with 312 completed surveys at U of L and 165 at Southern Seminary.

Additional design elements included:

• Creating a normed pool of traditional and modern library exterior and interior images;
• Utilizing the split-randomization method to create four different survey versions each with different images;
• Incorporating coded means analysis of word pair responses to measure abstract qualities associated with the spaces; and
• Administering the survey with four laptop computers (one for each version) at both institutions.

Findings & Conclusions

Confirmed that transcendent qualities can be identified in that:

• Students at both institutions clearly found the traditional spaces inspirational and the modern spaces secular; and
• Traditional spaces were seen as more scholarly and studious while modern spaces were viewed as more energized.

Validated Jackson/Hahn findings that students would prefer traditional spaces or that those spaces would be viewed as more supportive of advancing the institution’s mission statement.

• Both the traditional and modern spaces were seen as helping to advance the university mission.
• Students expressed a desire for improved spaces regardless of whether those spaces were modern or traditional.
• Demographics such as degree level sought and age have some bearing on how students perceive and might use library space.

Whether looking at traditional or modern spaces, students indicated their primary use of space would be for independent study.

U of L students were slightly more likely to use the modern spaces and Southern Seminary students were somewhat more likely to use the traditional spaces.