# An Assessment of the Bass Library as a Learning Commons Environment

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# Introduction: Learning Commons

- evolved from Information Commons

- metaphor for both virtual and physical space

-  "third place" to nurture the diversity of human contact and to build a learning community beyond the classroom

- enrich campus life and embrace the life-long learning mission

# Problem Statement

- Learning Commons alone cannot change learning

- Managerial decisions in libraries should be based on assessment data

- Little evidence exists that assesses stakeholders' experiences and perceptions relating to the use of learning commons for studying, teaching and learning

# Value of Study

- Offers empirical information about learning spaces and the library's evolving role
  - As a learning commons
  - As a "third place" on campus

- Contributes evidence about learning environments for future space planning

# Literature on the Assessment of Learning Commons (LC)

- Plans, designs and implementations are well documented
- ***Assessment*** however is thinly covered in the literature
  - case studies
  - LibQUAL+ survey includes patron perceptions of "library as place" and library space factors
- Research has progressed from gathering quantitative data about usage to qualitative data on
  - user satisfaction,
  - collaborations to support teaching and learning,
  - explorations on the relationship of learning environments to learning outcomes.
- Gap exists in the literature on assessment of LC contribution to learning outcomes

# **Study Setting**: Yale University's Bass Library



Aiachicago.org

Barrandbarr.con

# Bass Library: **Collaborative Learning Center**

# Bass Library:
# Various learning environments

# Three Research Questions

1. *What are first-year student perceptions of the impact of library spaces on their learning experiences?*

2. *How do faculty perceive the impact of Bass Library spaces, classrooms, and course support services on teaching and learning?*

3. *To what extent does student use of the Bass Library's spaces foster a learning community and extend the concept of a Learning Commons?*

# Methodologies

1. Surveys:
   - Five-question instrument for 87 first-year undergraduate students
   - Three separate questionnaires for faculty who taught in classrooms, attended instruction sessions, or used support services
2. Two Focus Group Interviews
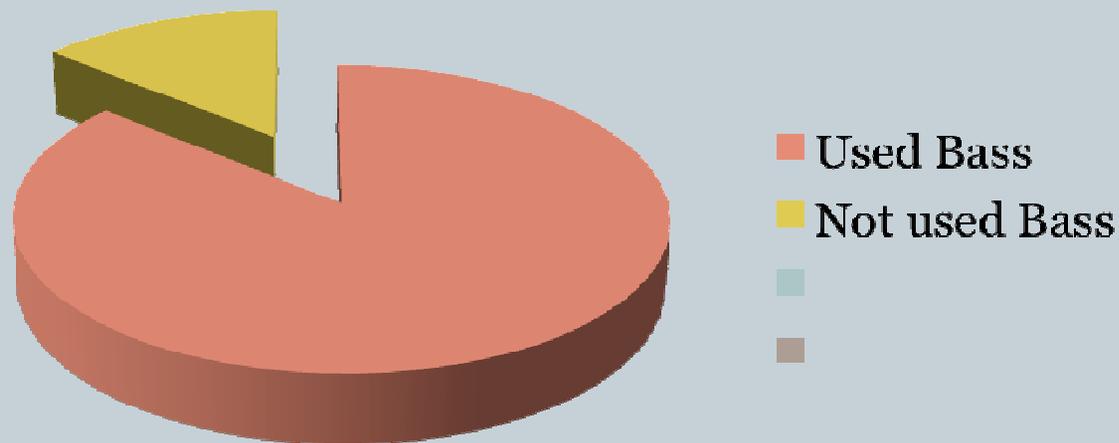   - Teaching Librarians
   - Course Supporters
3. Sweep Count
4. Observations of activities

# Findings 1: Student Perceptions

*Perceptions from survey of 87 first-year students:*

[86%] indicated that they had used the library before

[60%] have used resources and found them helpful

**Prior to Visit**



- Used Bass
- Not used Bass

# Findings 1: Student Perceptions

[75%] strongly agree or agree that these spaces support their learning and 13% disagree

**Students**



Legend:
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- No Opinion

# Findings 1: Student Perceptions

70 comments self-reported how they use these spaces:

- [88%] use the library for studying with
- [84%] identifying group study space preference

18 Other comments about use of Bass Library:

- *It's so full all the time! I guess that means everyone finds it useful.*
- *Great library; my favorite by far, keep it the same.*
- *I like the ambiance of the library and the fact that these resources are here for me.*
- *I will come here more often and use the resources*

# Findings 2: Faculty Perceptions

7 out of 42 faculty who brought classes for a research session responded to the survey [17%] :

- [100%] would recommend a session to colleagues
- [83%] increased satisfaction with student papers
- [71%] satisfied or highly satisfied with spaces

Written Comments:

*Students need more instruction with database searching and "hands-on exploration and repetition"*

*Space has not influenced my pedagogy, but now I can "leave basic research instruction up to the library."*

# Findings 2: Faculty Perceptions

12 faculty who received course support responded

- Several faculty want more hands-on practice:

*"It can be exciting to see this material in action, but imagining how it could work in your classroom and figuring out the multiple steps for implementing a new approach to teaching with technology can be daunting."*

- Need for "one-stop shopping" online portal for questions and referrals

# Findings 2: Faculty Perceptions

Few faculty acknowledge impact of space on pedagogy:

- Bass Library "*has enhanced my informal interaction with my students,*" and "*it provides a much better locus for meeting students for conferences…*"

- Recommend CLC promote services and provide more training with technology, "but not too high tech," i.e. "PowerPoint, Office," "GPS in the humanities," "SmartBoard," "even lesson plans using technology…" "expand café"

# Findings 3a: Teaching Librarians

*1/3 Teaching librarians participated in focus group interview:* [5 of n=15]

Transformed spaces influence services and teaching:

- Proximity to CLC services, media, IT, video editing
- Spaces, training, time to consult with expert colleagues enhance collaboration and planning with faculty thanks to Research Education Librarian
- Increase relevance for student learning by offering more interactive learning sessions tailored to needs
- Need more time for set-up and tables need wheels

# Findings 3b: Course Supporters

Course support staff (media, technology, language study) participated in focus group [13 n=23]

Positive impact of CLC spaces with co-location of units for joint consultation with faculty which supports "relationship building"

Need to enhance spaces:

- Reliable and up-to-date equipment in both rooms
- Need wheels on tables to reconfigure room
- Re-design the service desk; Create more workspaces
- Improve signage and room scheduling

# Findings 4: Sweep Counts and Observe

*Students' use of Bass Library and Seat Preferences:*

Observations of people using Bass Library spaces total= 8,751 in 37 sweep counts over one week.

37 Hourly counts were combined into types of seating for totals and percents by identifying whether students prefer to work alone, work alongside others, or work in groups.

# Seating Patterns Observed in Bass Library
## Total People = 8751 in 37 Sweep Counts

| Group Study Rooms & Computer Use | Working Alongside Soft Seats | Working Alongside Wooden Tables | Individual Study in Rooms or Carrels |
|---|---|---|---|
| 25.36% [n= 1561 + n= 658 Computer] | 21.35% [n= 1868] | 29.05% [n= 2543] | 24.24% [n= 2121] |

# Findings 4: Observations of Use

Preference for work alongside others:

- at wooden tables create privacy with laptops
- gravitate to soft seat clusters to read

Preference for individual study rooms or carrels:

- for reading, writing, or using laptops

Preference for group study rooms:

- for language or chemistry review, chess club, LSAT, tutoring
- using whiteboards, laptops or computers and LCD projectors, watching videos, reading, writing, and talking.

# Findings 4: Observations of Use

Peak Use of Bass Library and Thain Café:

- Use grows steadily during the day with

- Peak times late afternoon [3-5 p.m.] and evening [8-9 p.m. and 11p.m. to midnight]

- In Thain Café students, faculty, library staff, and campus workers congregate to study, meet, socialize, take breaks, or work individually, in pairs, or in small groups throughout the day and evening.

- Student summed up the essence of the Thain Café as

    *"This is a great place to study and be seen."*

# Discussion of Findings: Summary

- Student responses confirm that the Bass Library is a popular place to be, to study, and to see and be seen.

- Observations of student activities confirm use of spaces as designed and intended use of CLC for teaching, learning, and technology assistance

- The projected "Learning Commons" design features support multiple learning behaviors, i.e. working alone, alongside or in groups

# Discussion of Findings: Summary

- 100% of faculty value assistance and research education through CLC but welcome more assistance with pedagogy and integrating technology.

- Librarians and course supporters in CLC note greater faculty engagement with research education, experimentation with technology, and participation in interactive teaching sessions which impact student learning

- Spaces and instruction influence student learning but faculty are not conscious of changes in pedagogy.

# Discussion of Findings: Summary

- Faculty satisfied with increased quality of student output and participation.
- Students use spaces productively and purposefully
- *"Students more respectful in using these spaces."*
- *"This is the best place to study."*
- Value Library for learning, technology, information resources and assistance
- Spaces for "doing" activities of teaching and studying universally acknowledged as inviting, flexible, and aesthetically welcoming community environments

# Conclusions and Recommendations:

- Practical assessment model using faculty, students', librarians' and CLC partners' perceptions of the impact of spaces on teaching, learning, and technology

- Recommend further study of learning outcomes LC

- Findings contribute to the emerging conversations about collaborations and impact on student learning.

- Librarians help influence learning and help shape the "third place" on campus by creating a welcoming learning community outside of the classroom.

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