

# What makes a successful informal learning space?

*Exploring Learners' Informal Learning Space Behaviors, Attitudes, and Preferences*



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## What was found?

### DESTINATION

*Where learners go to study*

- ▶ On campus spaces designed for informal learning are popular
- ▶ Habit plays a part in selection of spaces, including specific seat preferences
- ▶ Proximity to formal learning session is important

"I'm a creature of habit"



### IDENTITY

*The ethos of the space and how it should be used*

- ▶ Range of atmosphere preferences from "studious, relaxed & informal" to those typified by "buzz & activity"
- ▶ Layout of space more important than designation (e.g. signage)
- ▶ Important that spaces live up to their expectations, particularly quiet & silent study areas



### RETREAT

*Privacy & quiet study*

- ▶ Importance placed on spaces available with no distractions & where others cannot see learners' work
- ▶ Home offered privacy, and associated with being cozy, comfortable & being able to sit how you like
- ▶ Not all learners choosing to work individually wish to be in a quiet environment

"My own little space, no distractions"



### RESOURCES

*Access to technology*

- ▶ Access to all forms of modern technology is important
- ▶ Plentiful and visible electrical sockets encourage & validate learners' use of personal technologies to support learning
- ▶ Books, journals & e-journals all valued resources used alongside technology



### COMMUNITY

*Social interactions, support and sense of common purpose*

- ▶ Social interaction is important for study & relaxation
- ▶ Preferences expressed for working in close proximity to friends & peers to create a sense of community for co-support and breaks
- ▶ Planned & unplanned serendipitous meetings
- ▶ A shared learning environment is motivational



"I came in to revise, my friends were already here so I joined them"

### CONVERSATIONS

*Collaboration and interpersonal communication*

- ▶ Learning centres often first choice for group work – viewed as neutral territory and familiar to all
- ▶ Important learners have the opportunity to talk, share ideas, discuss & debate
- ▶ Learning spaces should support interpersonal communication from both learning & social perspectives



### TIMELY

*Just in time and on demand access to spaces & their resources*

- ▶ Spaces often used for quick tasks before and between other activities as well as for longer periods of study
- ▶ Long opening hours important with 24-hour access considered essential to some learners
- ▶ Flexible booking systems essential to support planned or last minute requests
- ▶ Preference for not having to leave building for refreshments



"I don't have time to walk all the way across campus"

### ERGONOMICS

*Work spaces & physical attributes*

- ▶ Large personal work spaces a common preference, with larger tables & space to spread out personal belongings and refreshments
- ▶ Mixed preference on seating - from relaxed and comfortable to formal
- ▶ Sound levels can be a source of frustration
- ▶ Easy access to food & drink creates a homelier environment



## Going forward...

There is an almost limitless combination of learning space preferences. And so going forward, librarians need to consider:

- ▶ Developing a portfolio of interrelated campus spaces which offer a coherent whole
- ▶ Delivering a coherent, but diverse range of spaces at building, floor and area level
- ▶ Creating a versatile space which encourages learners to reflect on their learning preferences and translate these preferences into space selection

