

LibQUAL+ Survey Analysis of Comments re: Physical Environment and Building Access *Summer 2003*

Many students and faculty offered opinions about building esthetics and environmental conditions; policies regarding access and use; study accommodations and facilities; and hours of operation. Here are their comments, and our responses:

I. Hours of operation

>> FACULTY / STUDENT COMMENTS:

- *"Library hours of operation are kind of short, especially at night . . ."*
- *"Closing early on Friday and Saturday nights causes problems for many students who are dedicated to their work and need to use the Library at these times."*
- *"It would be more convenient if the Library were open until midnight on Friday and Saturday nights."*
- *"I would like the Library to be open towards the end of the semester when the students work on weekends, too."*
- *"Increase hours of operation over breaks."*
- *"It's annoying to be studying around midnight and have to move when half of the Library closes. It should stay open all the time."*
- *"Open all areas 24 / 7."*

>> FACULTY / STUDENT COMMENTS:

For decades, the Library closed at midnight Sunday through Thursday evenings, and reopened at 8:00 a.m. the following day. Library hours significantly increased in January 2001 with "late night study hall", a recommendation of GT Undergraduate Student Government. We do this by keeping the West building continuously open from Sunday noon through Friday 6:00 p.m.. Two Security positions were created to staff the building. Attendance for late night study hall has increased dramatically, at times crowding the building beyond capacity.

In January 2003, we began opening the East building at 7:30 a.m. (recommended by a GT student). Beginning Fall 2003, we will keep both East and West buildings open continuously from Sunday noon through Friday 6:00 p.m. With the East building open all evening, students will have uninterrupted access to collections, study areas, and circulation and reserve services. We will achieve these extended hours by adding an additional Security staff, and two Circulation staff.

In recent years the Library has remained open throughout the weekend preceding exam week. Beginning Fall 2003, we will also remain open the entire weekend before *dead week* when that weekend is not Thanksgiving (another recommendation by a GT student). If attendance is significant, this special extension of hours will become routine.

We do not otherwise perceive a need to remain open across the remaining Friday and Saturday evenings of a semester, so perpetual 24 / 7 access is not envisioned at this time.

II. Building esthetics and environmental conditions

>> FACULTY / STUDENT COMMENTS:

- *“The Library is dated, stuffy and run down. Although there is new equipment and furniture, the old facility does not promote studying, nor does it make me want to study in the Library, or even go there when I need information.”*
- *“The Library is an unpleasant and overly institutional place to visit. I never go there unless absolutely necessary.”*
- *“The Library is not warm and inviting . . . it’s UGLY! There is no good display or section for periodicals (a reading room). I would like to see about 100 periodicals on display.”*
- *“Have rooms available for group study. The open tables we now have interfere with individual / quiet study. Or at least try to keep group tables within the first 2 floors of West building, and only individual study on the upper 2 floors. Or maybe invest in soundproofing the study cubicles?”*
- *“It’s not easy to find a place for group study on campus like the Library.”*
- *“Our library does not provide quality space for group projects or meetings. Many libraries now provide conference room / group study rooms for 5-10 students, equipped with computers.”*
- *“There aren’t many places you can go to study without hearing some loud member from a nearby group table.”*
- *“Invest in new, quiet, individual study areas. The group tables are the best places to work by myself, except for the noise from groups. The individual desks in the East building are undesirable because it’s more of a dungeon over there.”*
- *“There should be more designated “quiet please” areas. A library is supposed to be a quiet place to begin with. Group study areas are important, but the chatter noise should be restricted to those areas and the computer commons.”*
- *“I would use the Library a lot more often to study if it didn’t have such an austere, authoritarian feel to it.”*
- *“More modernized study areas like the computer lab would be awesome.”*
- *“One of the few aspects I would change is the scenery within the Library. I would appreciate some more decorative objects throughout the Library.”*
- *“The main library has many comfortable areas in which to sit, read, and study.”*
- *“The Library is nice, of what I’ve seen. It’d be nice to have a larger library or 2nd library, so there is more room to study (especially during finals week).”*
- *“The Library is often too crowded.”*
- *Sometimes I fear the Library is trying to serve the purposes that the Student Center should: giving people a place to congregate and do homework. It’s slightly annoying when people trying to do research can’t find a seat because they’re all taken up by people working on something without using the Library (resources) at all.”*

- *"I am very pleased with the renovations the Library has accomplished, however there is room for improvement as far as providing attractive study areas."*
- *"Turn the temperature accordingly. Some parts of the Library are either too hot or too cold. Also, general lighting (should be improved). Some higher floors are too dark to study in."*
- *"Bathrooms are not inviting at ALL! Too small. Too old. Too dirty."*
- *"The East building restrooms are horrible, simply horrible. I don't really like giant gaps in the doors, though I guess it does help to see if someone is in there . . . but there is far too much visibility."*
- *"Something must be done about the restrooms, poor lighting, dripping faucets, stained and broken ceiling tiles and poor water flow in the urinals resulting in unbearable stench. Most road-side gas stations have better restrooms."*
- *"We should be allowed to bring in food because lots of people enjoy eating while studying."*
- *"I have spent many nights at the Library and would be less distracted if there was some facility for a decent cup of coffee and food. Also, when we are studying late, we need coffee, and we need to bring it up to our desks. I understand why policy would restrict us from carrying open containers into the Library, but then shouldn't we be provided with them . . . and please, better coffee!"*
- *"I like the direction the Library is heading in. The other I was approached by a member of the Library improvement staff asking my group how we would react to the development of new group study areas on 2nd floor West. I found that to be very in tune with the needs of the students."*

>> LIBRARY'S RESPONSE:

Library renovation: The Library is in critical need of renovation. The West building opened in 1953, the East building in 1968. The cost of comprehensive remodeling, infrastructure modernization and furniture replacement is around \$25,000,000. Until last year, only modest funds were provided for improvements. In the intervening decades study space was converted to book shelving, secondhand and inexpensive furniture was purchased to "make do", and the original, clearly-defined arrangements of individual and group study spaces became muddled. Today our Library, with the exception of the new West Commons, is aesthetically unappealing, poorly furnished, inadequately cooled and heated, crowded . . . in short, in great need of a comprehensive make-over.

There is reason to be optimistic! Both our President and Provost understand our dilemma, and are committed to making improvements. Still to be determined is whether the improvements will be incremental over several years, or achieved in one giant operation. The 2nd option would be profoundly difficult for every one . . . presumably requiring the book / journal collections to be moved to off-campus storage, and a large percentage of both buildings being off-limits for long stretches of time. We think incremental improvements may be the way to proceed. We expect to decide in the next year (2003-04) how we will go about transforming both buildings. In the coming year we will receive funds to completely refurbish restrooms.

Uncomfortable temperature: Sustaining comfortable temperature in both Library buildings borders on rocket science. Each building has its own (in some instances "antiquated") systems for heating and cooling, with concomitant peculiarities. One irritant is that thermostats do not exist to automatically regulate temperature as it is affected by changing weather. On an average

of twice a week, the Library summons Facilities to adjust temperature. If temperature becomes uncomfortable late Friday or any time over the weekend, corrective action must wait until Monday. We attempt to be vigilant and place calls as soon as we perceive a problem. Sustained improvement can only come with the modernization of HVAC. We consider HVAC improvement a high priority, and something that would be addressed in a near-future renovation.

Group and individual study accommodations: We are in the process this summer of delineating group and individual study zones in East and West buildings, along with making these distinctions apparent to our users. Plans are in hand to renovate the 2nd floor West into an expansion of the Library West Commons to accommodate groups. These exciting new rooms and group work spaces, infused with 50 workstations, will seat 240 students. Renovation of 2nd floor West may occur in Spring 2004 and open Fall 2004. Subsequent renovation will likely target 3rd and 4th floors West. The goal will be to create superior accommodations for individual study and research, a kind of “scholar’s sanctuary”.

III. Furnishings

>> FACULTY / STUDENT COMMENTS:

- *“More study furniture and study cubicles.”*
- *“More study cubicles, newer furniture.”*
- *“Things I’d love to see: round tables and chairs, in cheerful / bright colors, in the lobby areas at opposite ends of the snack machine corridor -- and no more of that sad line up of single chairs aimed at the snack machines. Add a good microwave, and some wall decorations or hanging lights over the tables, and people might find it a very nice place to bring their lunch and meet and talk.”*
- *“Those wooden chairs sure get uncomfortable after a few hours.”*
- *“Library furniture is generally from the wrong decade and not very comfortable. Newer chairs in study areas roll a little too easily.”*
- *“I am usually in the Library for group study, and it is often difficult to find a place to study, as one student will take up a huge table (and no one wants to join the lone person as they might interrupt them). I understand that a desk is often inadequate, but it would be an improvement to have a larger variety of tables and desks. I suggest that larger tables be reserved for groups of 3 or more.”*

>> LIBRARY’S RESPONSE:

Library chairs, tables and free-standing study cubicles are a mishmash of styles, comfort and condition. As the Library enters a renovation phase for both East and West buildings (see response above), we are determined to “get the furniture right”. When we designed the Library West Commons last year, we committed to purchasing ergonomically sensible, esthetically pleasing furnishings with lifetime warranties. In the process of selecting furniture for 1st floor West, we consulted ergonomics and design experts, and tested all pieces before making final selections. Last semester as we developed a plan for the 2nd floor West renovation for group study, we tested a large number of chairs and other furnishings before making final selections. A similar, rigorous process for acquiring furniture will be followed as we make improvements to other areas of the Library.

When the West building opened in 1953, it was furnished with exceptionally durable, comfortable and functional chairs and tables. Newspaper and journal articles from that era praised the furnishings, esthetics and architecture of the new building. Today we take our cue from that

original success. We recognize the long-term value of selecting furniture wisely, with the comfort and productivity of students in mind.

IV. Cell phone usage

>> FACULTY / STUDENT COMMENTS:

- *“I’m getting tired of people talking on cell phones.”*
- *“Library West Commons is not a very quiet place since people use their cell phones or talk loudly to each other.”*
- *“I would greatly appreciate if the use of cell phones were forbidden in order to prevent rude people from disturbing others.”*
- *“It is difficult to find a quiet place to study. People are often talking (on cell phones or to each other) in nearly all the suitable study areas.”*

>> LIBRARY’S RESPONSE:

We hear you. The majority of students who come to the Library to study expect all spaces to be free of ringing cell phones and the conversations they carry. We believe there is no practical way to accommodate both cell phone users and students who require and expect a quiet environment. We believe that “QUIET” is a valuable commodity that we should guarantee for all users. For this reason, we are restricting cell phone conversations to the Library rotunda and vending machine hallway. We will require that cell phones be set to “vibrate” while in the building. Library staff will intercede if cell phones and attendant conversations ensue. We believe that cell phone users will be more likely to practice this behavior if fellow students assist Library staff with enforcement. For every phone that rings, for every conversation that ensues, someone nearby should gently remind the transgressor of the house rule. Effective, August 17, 2003, the Library will post signs that indicate we are a cell phone-free zone, that phones in the building should be set to vibrate, and that conversations are restricted to the rotunda and beyond.