

Prototyping Spaces, Spring 2019–Fall 2020

Purpose

One of the Libraries strategic goals is to “[Develop and advocate for new and evolving library spaces that address student enrollment growth and changes in scholarship and learning.](#)” This project -- focused the Government Publications, Maps, Microforms & Newspapers space in one of the main libraries on the UW Seattle campus -- represented a new model for rapidly testing and modifying space configurations based on user and staff input. In previous projects, staff expressed uncertainty about what they were allowed to change and feared that they might make the wrong decision; this approach responds to user feedback iteratively and gives staff the agency to experiment boldly with their spaces, knowing that any changes can be further refined.

Key Resources

The previous space assessment work in the Government Publications, Maps, Microforms & Newspapers (GMM) that informed this rapid prototyping project is available on this [UW Libraries Tableau Dashboard](#).

Methods

- Staff from Assessment, Libraries Facilities, and GMM developed and piloted 3 alternative layouts for the space and 1 baseline/control layout throughout Spring 2019. Additional, longer-term prototypes were designed for Fall 2020 but the first one was so successful that staff decided to keep it throughout the Fall term.
- Staff conducted hourly space counts from April-June 2019. Space counts provide an understanding of typical occupancy, study type, and equipment used. Counts were done on the 3 alternative layouts, as well as 1 “control” layout.
- Weekly whiteboard prompts were posted throughout the space for additional user feedback.

Results

- Users engaged with the whiteboard feedback more than usual, with some even drawing their ideal configurations unprompted. Project team staff believe seeing

and experiencing the changes throughout the quarter was more generative than hypothetical questions about what students might like to see in a space and demonstrated to respondents that their feedback was being used.

- The time of the quarter was perceived to be a stronger factor on use of the space than we had anticipated. While we did not collect feedback during finals week, the third layout still saw very high weekend and group study use due to the approach of finals.
- Key themes across the whiteboard polling included the balance of group/individual spaces, sharing group furniture, and proximity to windows.
- Use of the space never exceeded 50% of capacity, and average use tended to be in the 10-15% of capacity range. All four layouts saw a relatively high percentage of individual study.
- Plants were very popular, particularly on larger tables. Plants placed on a narrow table received the only negative feedback (“blocking the way”).

Actions & Improvements

- Both students and staff were enthusiastic about the final arrangement, which increased occupancy, provided new seating by the windows, and increased access to outlets.
- Staff agreed that this was a model that they were interested in exploring further, particularly as part of the furniture refresh process.



(Above) Three different layouts in the same area in GMM.