Is Everything All Right At Night? Measuring User Response to Overnight Library Services

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A multiple methods study was conducted over three academic terms during the 2015 academic year at Santa Clara University Library to assess the impact and use of overnight library hours. A survey was conducted after midnight during the library’s open 24 hours, five days a week (2015). For each week of the quarter, the survey was further informed by patron counts conducted hourly by Library Staff at which point library activity was lowest.

Key Research Questions (RQ1) were posed:

- **RQ1**: What are students doing in the library after midnight, and what type of activity is reported? (Figure 7 and 8)
- **RQ2**: How many students make use of overnight hours? What is the pattern of use? (Figure 2)
- **RQ3**: What do students associate 24/5 library access with academic success? (This question comes from patron counts showing 24/5 and midnight library users are awake and working, not socializing or sleeping. The Library provides the space and the nighttime hours, but the outcome of the study and the choice to use those spaces and time are the determination of success. RQ3: The library’s role is not measured, and extended hours demonstrate the library’s commitment to student success.)

**Methodologies: Survey and Activity Counts**

Survey of Users after Midnight - A survey was conducted at SCU three times over the three primary quarters of fiscal year 2015.

The survey featured five demographic questions and 24 questions about overnight use, need, and purpose. The full survey is found in Chrzastowski and Nutefall (2016).

Heavily Patented Events:

- Student assistant librarians counted the number of users and their library activity.
- Activity categories: socializing, studying alone, laptop user, group study, sleeping, and other.

An app was used to record results, and the hourly counts were automatically sent to a server spreadsheet where they were compiled. Results are shown in Figures 1 and 3.

**Results**

**Figure 3 (RQ2):** Heat map showing patron counts by hour during the two weeks each quarter of FY2015 when the library is open 24/5. The darkest red depicts the highest counts, fading to green and then light blue, which depict the lowest counts. This visualization shows not only how use varies by hour end day of the week, but also by quarters. The highest sustained counts occur during fall quarter. The heat map can also show where counts were mixed (a light blue “O” among a sea of red).

**Figure 4 (RQ4):** Survey response to “What services do you use in the Learning Commons/Library between midnight and 2 a.m.? Check all that apply.”

**Figure 5 (RQ2):** Survey response to “If you weren’t in the library, where would you go during this time?” (after midnight), 2015.

**Figure 6 (RQ2):** Data showing why students make use of overnight library services.

**Conclusions**

General, most people are right after the SCU Library. However, we knew there were other people who were not as well aware of what overnight library users do outside the library. The survey results, coupled with activity counts, provided data that answers questions posed by the research. We learned not just how many students use the library after midnight but their favorite spaces and activities. We know students typically leave the library before 2 a.m., use laptops, and prefer a study area or desk to study. They require help with any traditional library services but do get them toward requiring technology. We recognize, with your help, to assist them in their work.

In addition, SCU students do associate 24/5 library access with academic success. Additional support for this comes from patron counts showing 24/5 mid-night library users are awake and working, not socializing or sleeping. The Library provides the space and the nighttime hours, but the outcome of the study and the choice to use those spaces and time are the determination of success. RQ3: The library’s role is not measured, and extended hours demonstrate the library’s commitment to student success.

**Acknowledgments**

Thanks to all study participants, with gratitude every day of every day the library is open. We would not have the data we do without your help. We also thank former staff member Rebecca Reiff, who managed the late-night survey, compiled the results, and created many of the figures used in this article. Special thanks to Judy Rodriguez for her graphic design expertise and to your poster.

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