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Experimenting with UX techniques to understand student experiences of using the Library

Suzanne Tatham

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Experimenting with UX techniques to understand student experiences of using the Library

Suzanne Tatham @suzannetatham

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What do students say about the Library?

“There’s a space I like to work where it’s sort of cocooning me in books and it’s perfect for not being distracted”

“The Library’s the place where I spend the majority of the time that I spend on campus”

“You can feel very at home in the Library”

“It’s a thinking space and a creative space and a comfortable space”

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A ‘third place’

Understanding what it means to feel at home in the Library and how library design can contribute (Mehta & Cox 2019).

Five dimensions to understand “homeness”:

- **Rootedness**
- **Appropriation**
- **Regeneration**
- **At-easeness**
- **Warmth**

Priya Mehta & Andrew Cox (2019): At Home in the Academic Library? A Study of Student Feelings of “Homeness”, New Review of Academic Librarianship, DOI: 10.1080/13614533.2018.1547774

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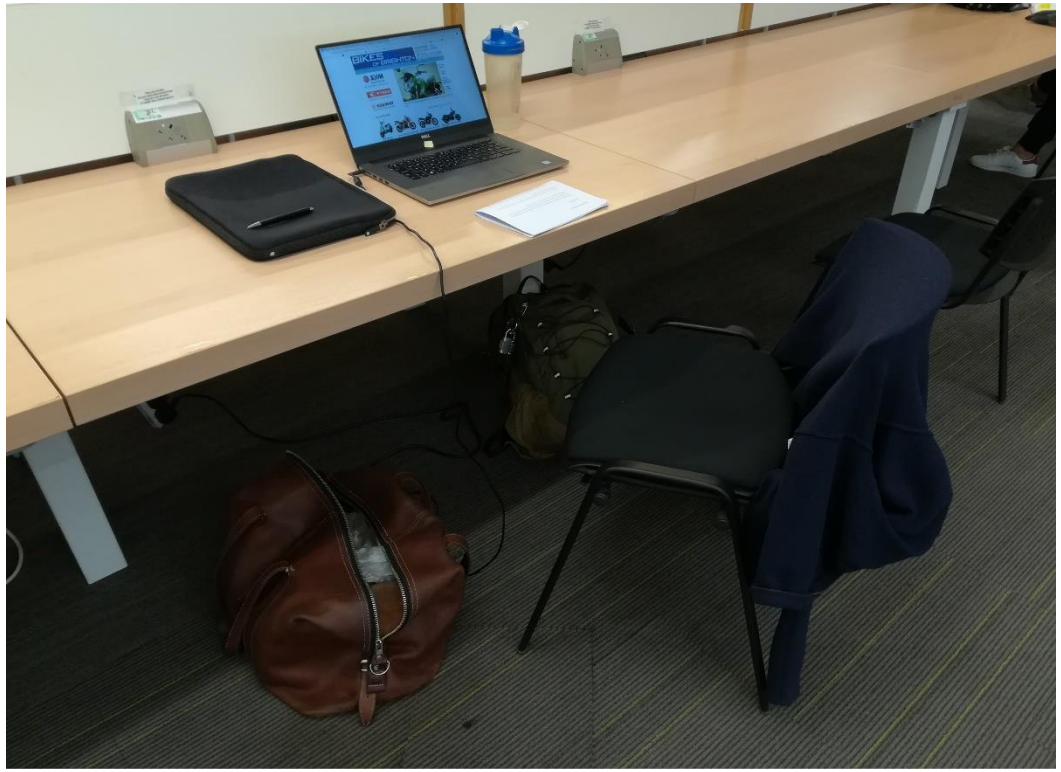
Rootedness

“Knowing a place intimately enough to move around the space fluidly” (Mehta & Cox)

Using belongings to root themselves to their chosen space

Hours spent in the Library – another measure of rootedness



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Hours spent in the Library by School in 2018

TOTAL VISITS: 175,921

ACADEMIC SCHOOLS PERCENTAGE OF VISITS

Business School	32%
Law, Politics, Sociology	32%
Global Studies	31%
Psychology	31%
History, Art History, Philosophy	31%
Life Sciences	30%
Education and Social Work	29%
Media, Film, Music	27%
English	26%
Maths, Physical Sciences	26%
Engineering and Informatics	21%

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Appropriation

Spreading out – colonising desk space

Being territorial

Rearranging the furniture

Altering the space to suit their needs

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Regeneration

“Students value a space where they can retreat from their desk” (Mehta & Cox)

Restorative activities such as eating, resting, sleeping and wellbeing

This could be a cafe or a sleep pod, or could just be a space away from their study area like the jigsaw table that they have in the Library at the University of Brighton.

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At-easeness

Feeling safe

Putting your feet up

Making yourself comfortable

How comfortable do students feel in your library?

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Warmth

Emotional and physical comfort

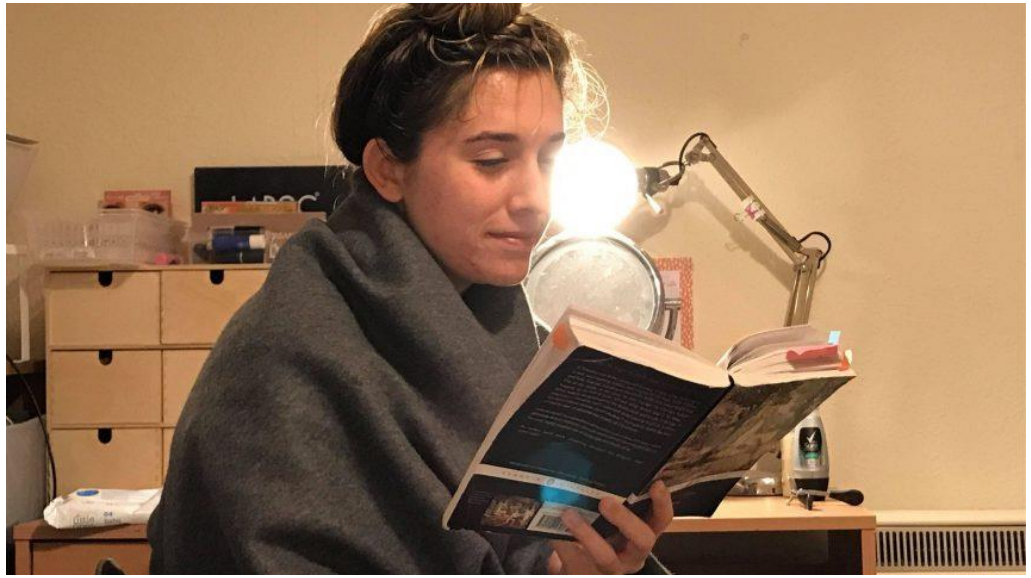
How cold is that Library? Crowdsourced document: https://wonkhe.com/blogs/crowdsourcing-study-advice-how-cold-is-your-library/

Uruguay's National Library - bring a hat and plan to wear it

BNF in Paris - the recommendation is to bring a shawl

Washington DC Library - dress like an onion for the heat

Vanuatu – recommendation is you purchase a local woven fan as it's unbearably hot



https://thetab.com/uk/stand/2017/11/27/the-library-is-giving-out-free-blankets-to-cold-students-19235

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Other aspects of “homeness”

Noise levels

Crowdedness

Comfort of furnishing

Cleanliness

Lighting

Window views

Ability to move furniture

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Ethnographic Research in the Library

Following a select group of Foundation Year students throughout their first year at university.

Ethnographic methods included observation (both participant and non-participant) and semi-structured interviews.

Anthropologist Hanna Malka commissioned by the Library to carry out the study.

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The study explored the following questions:

What do foundation students actually do in the library?

Are there any significant differences in library use between foundation students and direct entry first year students?

What barriers do students face, in terms of how they feel about coming into the library and how they react to the space itself?

How do they prefer to access library resources?

What are some of the reasons why students don’t enter the library?

What was their previous experience as users of public and educational libraries?

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Feeling overwhelmed

Surprised by the amount of “socialising”

Slightly intimidated by groups of students “taking up a lot of space”

Would feel more comfortable with partitioned study areas

Similarities with study of First Generation Scholars which recorded “feelings of being placed somewhere slightly outside the rest of the student body in a separate “special” group” (Lowery-Hart and Pacheco 2011).

The big open area on the first floor…I mean, the noise is sometimes deafening! And when there are so many people there, in that large space, it’s just quite overwhelming really.

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Not yet “proper university students”

Difficulties in trying to form routines.

Feelings of social distance and disconnection on campus.

Feeling that they still needed to learn how to be proper students and work harder to pass their year with good enough grades to gain access to their preferred degree course.

Unconfident about appropriateness of approaching Library staff and other students about noise.

We’re not exactly ‘in the same place’ as the others

In any case, we are just on the foundation year, maybe it’s not right for us starting to tell others what to do.

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Non-participant observation

Can be revealing and informative

Captures mood and atmosphere

We can use it to test our assumptions

"A mixed group of students is gathered around a low table that is nestled among bookshelves along the main corridor on the first floor. Two of the students have laptops open, there are notepads, printed papers and phones on the table, and they are discussing animatedly.

One student is telling one funny anecdote after another, asking about plans for weekend and showing the things he needs to do for his module. Another student is reading something on the laptop.

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End of year reflections

What would their ideal study environment look like?

“Like a comfy office. Not too quiet, but not too noisy either. Furnished with those nice low comfy seats and tables that the library already has on the ground floor lobby and first floor. I really like the colours and the furniture of the library.”

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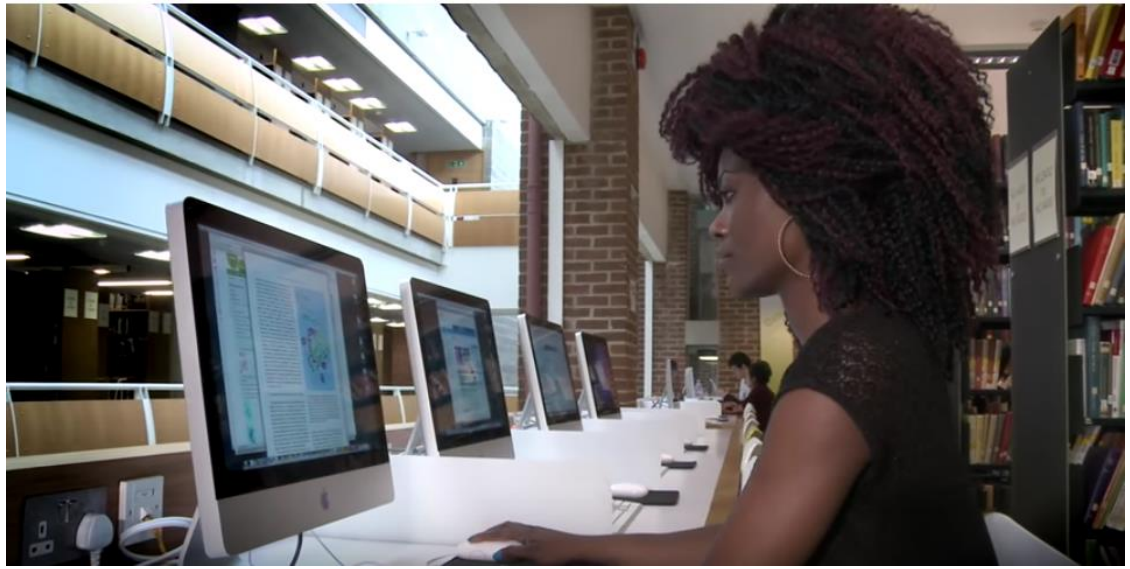
Student recommendations

“I quite like the library. It’s just busy. Maybe there could be more computers and a bit less books!

There are so many completely ancient-looking books there, does anyone really need them? Or maybe they could be put in a cellar and you could ask for them if you really need them. And then there would be more space for computers!”

“There could be big signs above the shelves so you could see from further away where you need to go. They could even say the subject, like ‘Politics’ or ‘Law’, so it’s more obvious.”



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