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A Summary of Library Usage and Satisfaction



The Academic Affairs Committee of the Student Government Association

November 20th, 2011

The following is a summary of the findings from the University Library Survey, conducted by the Academic Affairs Committee of the Student Government Association from October 3rd through October 9th, 2011. Over 400 students responded to a questionnaire with questions ranging from their like of the library setup to their current usage of the library in general. However, the main focus of the library survey was to understand how students have adjusted to the change in library hours from a 24/5 schedule to a limited schedule. Overwhelmingly, even despite the caveat at the beginning of the survey that returning back to the old schedule would not be possible, students *demand a return to the old schedule*. By and large, all written feedback was highly critical of the change. When responses from commuter and electronic students are filtered out and only students living on campus are considered, the written feedback *is almost exclusively critical*. A formal summary of these overall findings (especially the written responses) will appear at the end of this report.

The first question asked was “What is your class standing?” The question, of course, is meant to help understand all the further data to come. However, the abundance of graduate students is striking and, if anything, goes directly to proving the above stated point; even the oldest students who (presumptively) have the most settled living situations and have had the longest time to adjust to a collegiate setting take issue with the library changes. It isn’t merely incoming Freshmen. It isn’t merely Upperclassman dissatisfied with change. It is everyone. As earlier mentioned, a large number (almost 35%) of students answering the survey were graduate students. Perhaps this is due – at least in part – to graduate students being more responsive to their emails and more responsive to questionnaires. The survey was sent out at random to students of approximately even ratios but it is also important to remember that “Graduate” is not broken down into first year, second year, etc. Because of this, it is understandable that they would have proportionally higher numbers. However, such a statistic may serve to hide the on-campus issues (such as a lack of a quiet study location) felt by undergraduates because Graduate students do not live on campus. Statistically, the breakdown is as follows:

Class	Overall Number (Out of Total)	Percentage
Freshman	64	15.31%
Sophomore	79	18.90%
Junior	49	11.72%
Senior	84	20.10%
Graduate	142	33.97%
Overall	418	-

The second question asked was “How frequently do you visit the library?” The purpose of this question is two-fold. First, we wanted to get an understanding of how frequently the specific students responding to the survey used the library to get a frame of reference. Not surprisingly, more-than 75%

of the students who responded use the library at least once per week on a weekly basis. No doubt these students have strong feelings about the library hours since they use it the most frequently. Secondly, we were looking to understand how often students overall use the library. As earlier mentioned, it is important to remember that the student usage for this survey and for the school on a whole may not be exact, we can reasonably assume that they are at least related as the results of the survey, overall, are indicative of opposing viewpoints. It is also important to remember that it is the opinions of the students who utilize the library the most are seen (by themselves certainly and perhaps by others) as the most knowledgeable of the changes and most qualified to speak on the issue. The overall statistical breakdown is as follows:

Amount of Usage	Overall Number (Out of Total)	Percentage
Daily	121	28.95%
Weekly	202	48.33%
Monthly	51	12.20%
Once a Semester	24	5.74%
Once a Year	2	0.48%
Never	18	4.31%
Overall	418	-

The survey was not solely aimed at library hours. The third question was “Are you aware that library hours have been extended on Sunday and the building now opens at noon?” We were, looking to understand student interest and the success of the Student Government Association and the Library in reaching out to students about the new hours. To be blunt, we were scored very poorly. Approximately 3 of 5 students said that they were not aware that the building is open sooner. Even more disheartening, perhaps, is that these are not merely any students but, by-and-large, the students who are interested and involved enough in the library to be voluntarily completing this survey. The takeaway is obvious. We need to do a better job getting the word out to students that the library is now open sooner. As you will soon see, one of the major concerns is that the overall and weekend time availability for the library are

too limited and yet we aren't successfully reaching out to the students even when hours have been extended. This will be discussed in the conclusion. The numerical breakdown is as follows:

Response	Overall Number (Out of Total)	Percentage
Yes	167	39.95%
No	251	60.05%
Overall	418	-

As a follow up to the Sunday hours, our next question was "How often have you visited the library on Sunday since it has established its new extended hours?" Given the above information about student's overall knowledge about the extended hours, the answers were unsurprising. Over half of the students responding said that they had never used the extended hours despite the hours having been changed in the fall of 2010. Less than 15% of responders said that they have used the new hours more than three times since the changes were made despite nearly 80% of the responders saying that they use the library more than once a week with almost 30% using the library daily. These responses merely reinforce the takeaway from the last question: we need to get to the word out about the extended Sunday hours. Although it may seem odd that a higher number claim not to know about the change than say that they "never" have attended, one possible explanation may be that students have utilized the library during the aforementioned time without knowing that the library hasn't always been open for that time period. The numerical breakdown is as follows:

Usage	Overall Number (Out of Total)	Percentage
More Than 5 Times	30	7.18%
4 or 5 Times	26	6.22%
2 or 3 Times	83	19.86%
One time	50	11.96%
Never	229	54.78%
Overall	418	-

The most positive news of the survey came in the next question, which was "To what extent are the library's hours adequate for your study schedule?" Over three-quarters of the students responding said that the library hours were either "moderately" or "significantly" adequate for their study habits with over 40% of the respondents saying that they were significantly accurate. Granted, that still leaves

a quarter of the student body who are strongly dissatisfied with the current hours but overall this was certainly a bright spot given the overall findings of the survey. Since the main focus of the survey was student satisfaction toward the hours it is a positive place to have a bright spot. However, this does not mean we can become complacent. The question was asking if the students thought the hours are “adequate,” far from asking them if they thought they were ideal. After seeing the overall results of the survey it appears quite clear that *while students may find the hours “adequate” that does not make them perfect*. There was a great deal of backlash, especially in the written responses, against the library hours as they stand now. The results must, therefore, need to be taken with a grain of salt because a strict reading of the question is not necessarily confirmed by the overall content of the survey. The numerical breakdown is as follows:

Satisfaction	Overall Number (Out of Total)	Percentage
Significantly Satisfied	176	42.11%
Moderately Satisfied	146	34.93%
Slightly Satisfied	59	14.11%
Not Satisfied At All	37	8.85%
Overall	418	-

The next question was another awareness question. The question was “How satisfied are you with the vending machines recently added to the library?” Similar to the extended Sunday hours question, students were overwhelmingly unaware of the presence of the vending machines. Nearly half of the respondents said they were unaware of the presence of the vending machines despite over three-quarters of the students saying that they use the library at least once a week. Thankfully, the students who are aware really appreciate the vending machines. Nearly **90%** of the students who knew about the vending machines were “moderately” or “very” satisfied with them. However, it is extremely important that we get the word out there about the vending machines. Especially during finals and mid-terms week when the library is open 24 hours a day, it’s imperative that students are aware that they don’t need to leave the library to get food. Much the same as the Sunday hours extension, both the library staff and the Student Government need to work together to make students aware that way they are able to utilize all the resources that they have available. This, no doubt, will help quiet some of the dissent amongst students who feel that the school isn’t doing enough to benefit students in the library. Everyone will benefit from having this extended communication. This will be discussed later in the conclusion of this writing. The numerical breakdown is as follows:

Satisfaction	Overall Number (Out of Total)	Percentage
Very Satisfied	76	19.10%

Moderately Satisfied	103	25.88%
Slightly Satisfied	18	4.52%
Not Satisfied At All	9	2.26%
Didn't Know They Were There	192	48.24%
Overall	398	-

The next question asked students “Where do you prefer to study when the library is closed?” This is an important question for all of us trying to understand what alternatives students have sought since the library hours have been adjusted. Far and away, students said that they study at home or in their dorm room, with nearly **70%** of all responders indicating one of these as their primary alternative location. This is to be assumed, of course, as one of the major issues most students complained about with the library hours reduction is that *there is currently nowhere on campus that is open 24 hours a day with the exception of the residence halls that students can study at.* Many of the respondents who chose “other” (a full 10% of respondents) indicated this in their responses and another 8% said that they studied either in the residence hall study lounges or a friend’s room. However, it is important to bear in mind that *not all dormitories have study lounges* and, for reasons such as roommates with different sleep schedules, excess noise, trouble concentrating, and many others, *not all students can study effectively in their room, and even fewer can do so at any hour of the day.* This information will be discussed in the conclusion of this document. The other glaring figure is that **10%** of the respondents say that they only study in the library. While this may not seem like many, extrapolated to the entirety of the Seton Hall community this accounts for literally *hundreds* of students whose sole study area is the library, for whatever reason. As such, these students must restrict their study habits to the current hours. This will also be discussed in the conclusion of this piece. The numerical breakdown is as follows:

Location	Overall Number (Out of Total)	Percentage
Residence Hall Lounge	26	6.53%
Home/My Room	278	69.85%
Dining Hall	4	1.01%
Friend’s House	7	1.76%
Other	42	10.55%
I Only Study In The Library	41	10.33%
Overall	398	-

Next, we asked students to estimate how much they would envision themselves using the library if it were to be open later than one in the morning. The specific wording of the question was “If the library were open past 1:00 a.m., how often would you use it?” The wording of it is intentionally vague as we did not want to lock ourselves into giving a specific time that it may, potentially, be open until. The need of the questions is obvious; all of the complaints about the library hours are bluster if no one is going to use the library any more. No serious discussion can be had about extending hours if such a proceeding cannot be justified (at least to a certain extent) economically and we understand this. However, the students overwhelmingly say that they would take advantage of extended hours. Granted, there is a block of students (slightly less than a quarter) who responded that they would “never” see themselves using the extended hours, but this left **75%** of the students responding that they would use it at least once in their career at Seton Hall. Perhaps more importantly, **nearly half** of that remaining group said that *they would use the library more than once a week* and **nearly half of all responders to the question overall** said that they would use the library at least once a week. The most popular response was more than once a week. These numbers, while lacking the authority of a study conducted after any change that could take place, still carry with them the weight of the voice of the student body and it would be a serious miscalculation on our parts and on the part of the university administration to ignore it. The numerical breakdown is as follows:

Amount of Usage	Overall Number (Out of Total)	Percentage
More Than Once A Week	144	36.18%
Once A Week	45	11.31%
More Than Once A Month	43	10.80%
Once A Month	18	4.52%
Once A Semester	36	9.05%
Once A Year	5	1.26%
Less Than Once A Year	10	2.51%
Never	97	24.37%
Overall	398	-

The last multiple choice question asked was aimed at plausible and practical solutions to the current dilemma faced by students. It read “What is your primary reason for going to the library?” With it we were also trying to establish a baseline of what the limited library hours truly means to students. Does it mean that they don’t have access to books and resources when they need them? Are they

lacking a place to study? To they need to use the printers? While we found that these reasons, among others including group projects and a combination of the three main issues listed, are all concerns that students have, the majority of students (56.28%) use the library primarily as a quiet place to study. This, taken in conjunction with the earlier assertion that not all students are able to study effectively in their rooms, presents a serious issue for students in their ability to fulfill their primary obligation; to be a student. Again, this reality will be discussed later during the conclusion. The numerical breakdown is as follows:

Reason	Overall Number (Out of Total)	Percentage
To Use The Printers	61	15.33
To Have A Quiet Study Place	224	56.28
To Use Books, etc.	74	18.59
Other	39	9.80
Overall	398	-

There were also two sections of the survey that were not multiple choice questions but were instead open response: the first was a subsection of question five which looked at overall library satisfaction and the second was just a general forum for students to contribute any other thoughts or opinions that they may have. Both were aimed at not only helping to crystallize our understanding of the problem as it stands but also to give students the chance to truly share their feelings and opinions in their own words and not be confined to what we thought were appropriate answers. In both, the overall number of respondents and the percent of the total responses of each may be somewhat different because some “answers” were merely blank spaces. Also, it is important to note that both questions were originally set up as yes/no questions and so many students did not elect to complete them. However, these non-responders were not included because they may have chosen not to respond for a variety of reasons (whether they thought their above answer(s) sufficed, had no further complaint, were merely in a hurry) and so they were not included in the percentage-based results to follow.

The first open response was included in the survey because we felt that, since the survey was aimed at understanding students’ beliefs about and feelings toward the library hours, it was important to try to elicit more feedback for this question. A total of 149 students chose to explain their answer and of those **91 students**, or **61%** said that they want the library hours to be increased, either in general, on the weekends specifically or during the week specifically. This confirmed our hypothesis that students do care about the library hours and that they do want to see them increased. It is important to note that

a higher percentage indicated this here (and many quite passionately) than in the general survey. Our opinion of this finding is that these students are more indicative of the normal library user because *these students took the time to write out exactly what they thought*. While this does not necessarily mean that these are the only voices that need to be listened to, these represent the students most passionate about the issue. The answers were subdivided into various sections and then tallied based on general criteria. For example, “Comfort” includes students who primarily wrote about the overall conditions (food, chairs, quiet) of the library. These results are as follows:

Issue	Overall Number (Out of Total)	Percentage
Increase in Hours	91	61.07%
Electronic Issues	4	2.69%
Comfort	9	6.04%
No Issue	32	21.48%
Overall	149	-

The second open response question and final question of the survey was a sounding block for students to give any further feedback for the survey in general and we simply asked how the library could better suite their needs. Similar to the first open response question, the results were at first scattered and then grouped based on their main issue into different categories. Also similar to the first open response question, the largest number of question responders listed an increase in the number of library hours as their most important concern. As with earlier respondents, there was still a block of students who said that they had no further issue but (most likely because this question was specifically aimed at students who feel that an improvement needs to be made) the number of such students who answered as such declined from the previous answer. The other statistically-significant note with these findings is that **over 10%** of the responders listed the lack of print credits as their primary concern. The statistical results break down as follows:

Change Desired	Overall Number (Out of Total)	Percentage
Extended Hours	84	40.58%
More Comfortable	40	19.32%
More Print Credits	21	10.14%
Better Layout/Structure	18	8.70%

Nothing/NA	36	17.39%
Overall	207	-

Potential Sources of Error

This survey, as with any other summary of findings, has potential points where the reliability and the validity of the information may be called into question. Below are a list of reasons why anyone looking at the data may be wary of accepting the conclusions to follow and – more importantly – why we adamantly believe that such an objection does not, in truth, take away from our findings.

1. **It is a survey.** As with any other survey, there are issues with and questions about how much it truly reflects the thoughts and beliefs of the target group. We were limited by the technological system (Student Voice) that we used to compose the survey to only sending it to approximately 3,500 students (including graduate and electronic students) or less than half of the total enrollment. Of course, not everyone who got the survey completed it. We had a return rate of about 12%, which was consistent with what we had been expecting. It is also important to consider that the students who complete the survey are students who a) check their email as it was sent via email and b) care enough to complete the survey. However, we firmly believe that this still represents a fair cross-section of the study body. We saw answers all over the map in terms of individual feelings toward the library and, as such, writing this off as a survey consisting only of hard-core library attendees is not valid. This is especially true because of the number of graduate students (as indicated by the first question) as well as commuters and electronic students (as indicated by open response answers) who chose to complete this survey despite not having the same needs and beliefs – we think – as the residential student population.
2. **It may underestimate the number of students who truly want a 24/5 library.** The reason for this is simple. Accompanying the invitation to take this survey, per a discussion had with Dean Grieco, was an e-mail that said in bold font that this survey was meant to be taken under the assumption that funding does not exist for a 24/5 library and so students should answer the survey within the bounds of current (or about current) levels of funding. Because of this, many students may well have heeded the warning and not indicated in their responses that they wanted a 24/5 library. However, this gives even more weight to the stunning level of students who responded via open response that they want a 24/5 library and should not, in any way, detract from the conclusions to follow. We also want to make it clear that, although such a statement was included in the survey, *we in no way desire to settle for less than a 24/5 library. We still see a return to the old library hours as the ideal solution.*
3. **It includes a large proportion of non-residents.** This survey, between graduate students and students who otherwise do not live on campus, was completed by a large number of students

who do not live in the residence halls. It is our opinion that these students have different needs of and desires for the library than do residential students. The reason for this is twofold. First, students who live on campus are (with very limited exception) closer to the library than students who are not on campus. As such, it is far more feasible for them to get to the library, especially at later hours of the night. Because of this proximity, it is reasonable to assume that their usage (again, especially late at night) is proportionally higher-than that of students who live off campus. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, students who live in the dorms have a limited ability to study. Since nearly all students have a roommate, they may be limited by distractions or by the roommates' sleeping habits in terms of their studying schedule. While this may also be the case for some students who do not live on campus, one of the main issues is the lack of a quiet, 24/7 study space for students to use at their leisure and we believe that this problem is (primarily) unique to students who are living in dorms. Similar to the second point, however, this does nothing but strengthen our conclusions and our resolve to fix the issues at hand.

Conclusions

Finally, we come to the conclusions. While this report is specifically aimed at relaying a summary of our findings as the Academic Affairs Committee of the Student Government Association to the staff of the library, the conclusions are aimed at both the library staff and the university administration. We believe that these are the most helpful and accurate takeaways from the survey as a whole.

1. **Students want and would utilize a library with extended hours.** Without first making any claims, it appears obvious that students desire and would use an increase in library hours, particularly if the library were to stay open later. This much seems easily apparent from question number nine, where more than a third of students (34%) say they would use the library more than once a week and more than half of students saying that they would use the library at least more than once a month. Overwhelmingly, the written feedback asserts that students want a library with longer functioning hours. It is important that, although question number five does indicate a high number of students found the library hours adequate, it is wrong to correlate "adequate" with "positive," especially given the content of the written responses, the number of off-campus students who completed the survey, and the mere nature of the term "adequate." Such a reductionist approach fails to encapsulate the true issue and is a siren song that we must avoid falling for.
2. **We need to communicate better with the student body.** This is extremely apparent from the responses about the extended Sunday hours (question three) and about the vending machines (question seven). Currently, students do not clearly understand all that the library currently has to offer. It is our belief that better communication can help to assuage any current resentments (at least on a limited scale) that students have and can help to make students' overall library experience more positive. This can be done through a joint public-relations campaign where we raise awareness about the Sunday hours and the vending machines through signs, word of mouth, announcements and other communications.

3. **Finally, we need to be proactive about making a change.** This is the biggest takeaway of the survey. These results need to be a wakeup call to the administration to make a change. Students have said overwhelmingly that they do not have a place on campus where they feel comfortable studying at any hour of the day. This is an insult bordering on a mockery. We are an educational institution and yet nowhere on our 54-acre campus is there room for students to study, to be students, at any hour of the day? Given the current structure of housing and the guest policy it also makes group work later-than one in the morning nearly impossible unless all of the members are fortunate enough to live in the same dorm. While students no doubt appreciate having a full-service library all-day during finals and midterms, as one student put it, it is important to remember that “for college students, it’s ALWAYS crunch time.” We can’t simply wait until finals and midterms roll around to have the flexibility, if not of a library that is open non-stop than at least one that is open later, which so many college students around the country already have. Not only does it rightfully frustrate students, many of whom feel that they are being short-changed, but it weakens the credibility of the university as a whole. Seton Hall must pursue the creation of a location where students can go to study at any hour (at least of the workweek) free from the restrictions of housing and of the realities of dorm life and the most desirable and obvious location for this is the library.