

“Something for Everyone”: A Multi-Method Space Assessment of the Cabot Science Library

Overview

Background

Two floors of the Cabot Science Library at Harvard University were renovated and re-opened in April 2017. The User Research Center at Harvard Library conducted a multi-method space assessment in October 2017. Cabot Library is open 24/5 and sits in the Science Center, a hub of classrooms, lab spaces, large lecture halls, and faculty offices, with a café and a large outside courtyard.

Before



After



Goals

- Gather feedback from new and returning students.
- Learn how and why students are using the renovated space.
- Evaluate usability of key areas in the library.

Methods



On-the-spot reply card surveys

Approximately 400 surveys distributed across 7 days at 9 different times, including evenings and weekends. 241 surveys returned, 89% undergraduates.



Observation

The video conference room was observed at 7 times during the survey distribution week.

Wayfinding tasks with wearable eye tracking glasses

8 participants (5 graduate, 3 undergraduate) participated in a one-hour session to complete 4 wayfinding tasks.

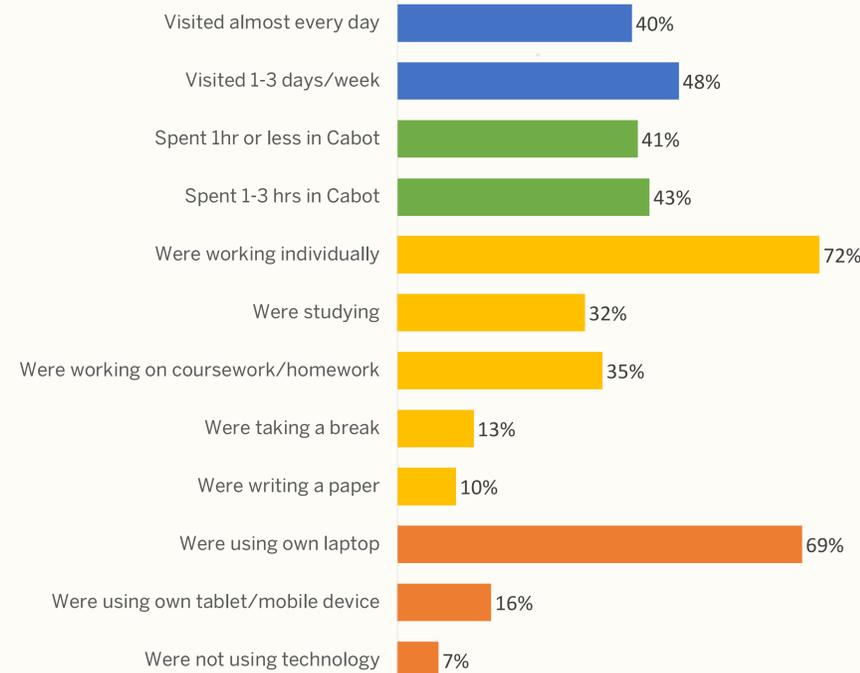


Interviews

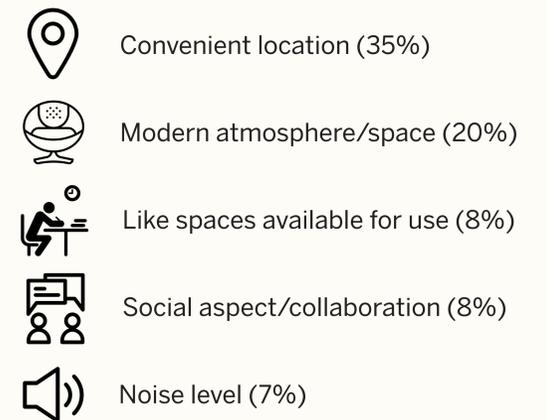
Follow-up interviews with wayfinding participants and one interview with a security guard.

Results

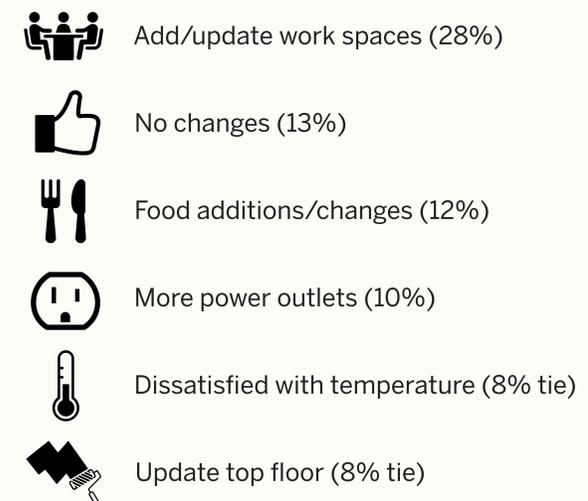
How were students using Cabot?



Top 5 reasons for choosing Cabot



Top 5 suggested changes



Wayfinding Tasks

Task	Success indicators	Avg. time on task	Avg. number of floors visited
Find a bathroom	50% found first floor bathroom	01:41 (range 01:24–02:39)	1.9
Find reserve books	57% referenced signage	01:51 (range 00:55–02:51)	2.1
Photocopy a picture	80% spent at least 4:00 on task	06:37 (range 02:14–12:02)	1.4
Find the “Discovery Bar”	All participants gave up or were unsure	04:10 (range 01:37–06:26)	2.4

Conclusions



Students generally pleased with the renovation, but convenience (location) is primary reason for using the space.



Getting help is problematic – security guard (not a library employee) fields most questions; overall lack of staff visibility.



Recommendations include bringing library staff to the first floor during peak areas and adding signage to indicate key areas.



Signage (or lack thereof) and prior knowledge critical to wayfinding – many key areas are hard to find.



Space has heavy usage, but not necessarily for the “new” features; identity is unclear.