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Case Study at Nanjing University and Nanjing Technology University

Shwuing Wu, Montgomery College, Rockville, Maryland

Background:

In September of 2013, Montgomery College Libraries, the community college libraries of Montgomery County, Maryland, launched a three-year, multi-faceted ethnographic study. The study was initiated by Tanner Wray, the director of the Montgomery College Libraries. Nancy Foster, a well-known anthropologist, provided all the training and guidance of data collection and interpretation; and Jane Williams, the project consultant, was in charge of all logistic preparation and communication among the College's stakeholders, administrators, and the research team members. Rockville campus, the largest campus of the three campuses of Montgomery College, was the first to engage in this study. The research team, which consisted of librarians and Access Services staff, worked with Nancy Foster and Jane Williams to employ three different methods to learn what the library users and potential users needed, wanted and preferred in library spaces, services and programs. As a member of this research group, I witnessed how library staff was energized by this study, how the whole College, including administrators and stake holders were pleased by the library's effort to gain an understanding of how our students viewed the library and their eagerness to improve library services. The Rockville study was concluded in early 2014. I was intrigued by the whole process and many of the findings.

As a former research fellow and a chief librarian in a government research library in Taiwan (I worked for the Research, Development and Evaluation Commission, Executive Department, in Taiwan for nine years), I have a great deal of experience in conducting research. I am also familiar with how libraries were viewed and used in Taiwan. Most of the studies I did before involved a wide range of experts such as library professionals as well as high ranking subject specialists. Some of the approach and findings from the Rockville library study were different from what I experienced while living in Taiwan. Is this trend of seeing the libraries from users' perspective universal, or is it cultural? Are library users in colleges or universities around the world having same kind of vision, namely, that libraries should be multi-purpose? Has the meaning that libraries have for their users changed, not just in the US, but in other parts of the world as well?

I decided to choose a location that has a different cultural heritage but is economically similar or at least close to Rockville, Maryland, to see how students there use the libraries and how their academic libraries keep pace with the rapidly evolving world of librarianship in the US. After some research,

I chose the city of Nanjing in China to conduct this study, and the schools I chose were Nanjing University and Nanjing Technology University.

Nanjing University is one of the oldest and most prestigious institutions of higher education in China. It was established as a modern school in 1902 in the late Qing dynasty and became a modern university in the early 1920s. The main library of the Nanjing University has a collection of 4.2 million volumes, more than 100 multimedia networked-computers, with a floorage of 51,224 square meters.

Nanjing Technology University was founded in 2001, with engineering as its focus. The main library of Nanjing Technology University has a collection of 1.68 million volumes, with a floorage of 45,000 square meters.

Methodology:

The Montgomery College Libraries Rockville campus ethnographic study used three different methods to collect data: spot interviews, design workshops and reply cards. Due to some restrictions and limitations of practicality, the survey method was used for my study instead of one of the above three. I developed a questionnaire with nine questions: four multiple choice and five open-ended questions. The purpose of open-ended questions was intended to spark the enthusiasm and energy of students in order for them to think about their needs and wants as most of Asian students are less likely to demand what they need or want verbally. However, when the time came to conduct the study, Nanjing University Library strongly suggested that I change the open-ended questions to multiple choice questions. Therefore seven multiple choice questions were used for the study at Nanjing University Library, while nine questions (the original questionnaire I developed, the four multiple choice questions plus five open-ended questions) were used for the study at Nanjing Technology University Library. There was a cover sheet on every questionnaire to explain who was conducting the study and why the study was being done.

Survey questionnaires were distributed randomly inside the Nanjing University Library on the same day but at different hours. Students were instructed to complete the questionnaires and give the questionnaires back to the service desks. Seventy questionnaires were collected later that day.

Similarly, questionnaires were distributed randomly inside the Nanjing Technology University Library but on two different days and at different hours. Students were instructed to complete the questionnaires and give the questionnaires back to the service desks. Fifty questionnaires were collected at the end of that week.

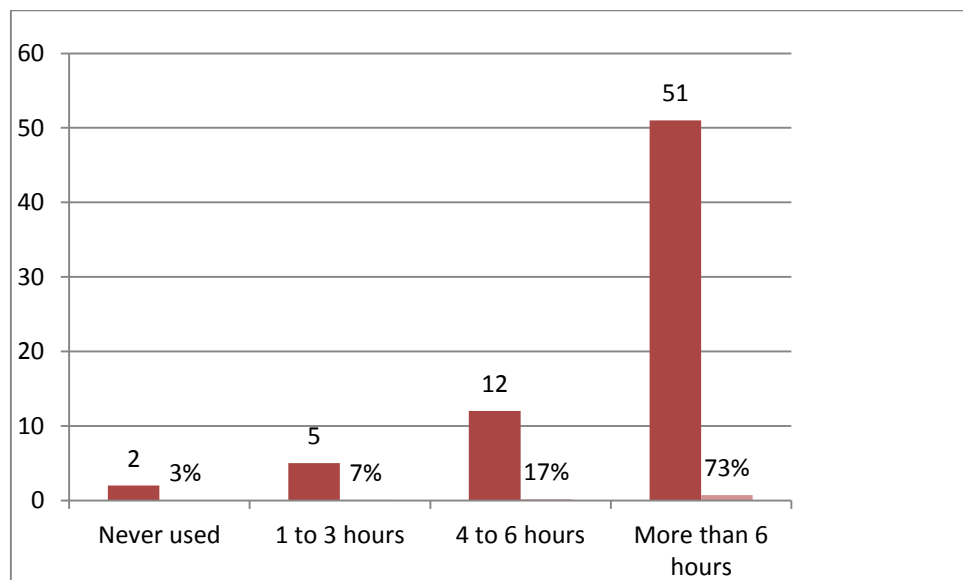
The survey questions in Chinese (the language of the questionnaires used for this study) for both Nanjing University Library and Nanjing Technology University Library are included in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

Findings:

Nanjing University Library Findings:

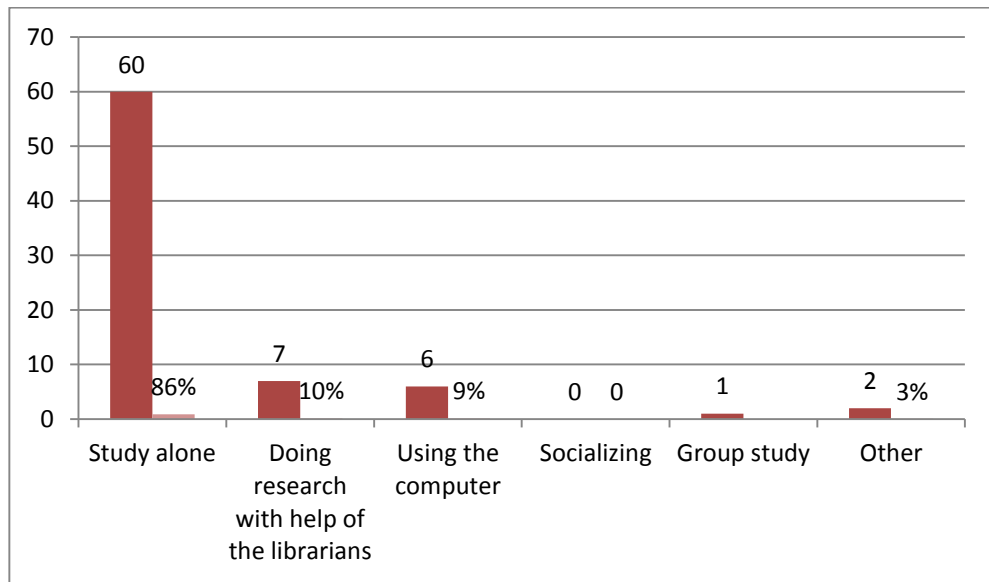
There were seven multiple choice questions on the questionnaires for the Nanjing University Library study. The findings of these survey questions are as follows:

Question #1: In the past seven days, how many hours did you spend in the Nanjing University Library?



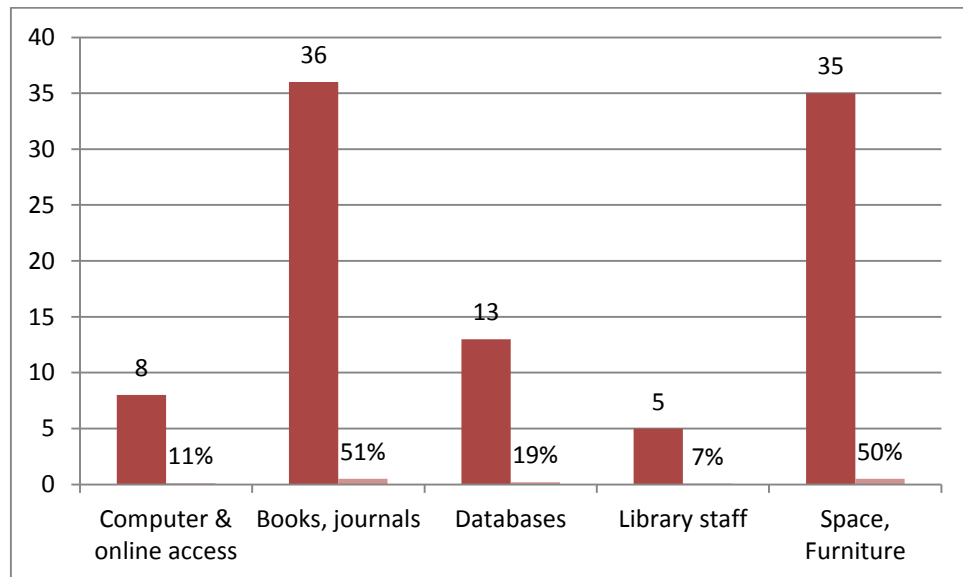
- 73% of students reported that they stayed in the library for more than 6 hours in the past seven days.
- 17% answered 4 to 6 hours.
- Only 3% of the surveyed students reported not having been in the library in the past seven days.

Question #2: The last time you were in the library, what did you do?



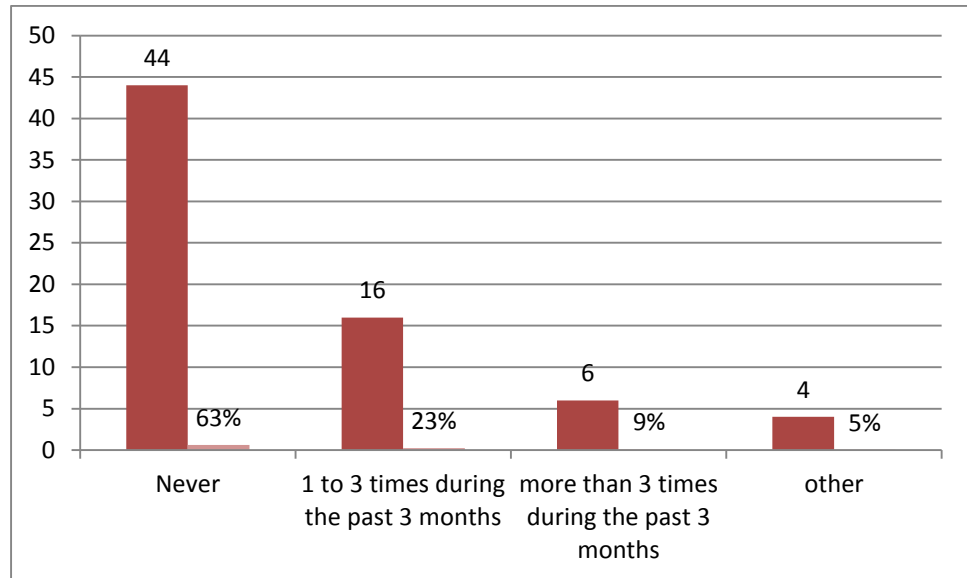
- 86% of students reported that they studied alone when they were in the library;
- 10% said they were doing research with help from librarians.
- None of the surveyed students used the library to socialize with their friends or classmates.

Question #3: What library resources best help you do your work?



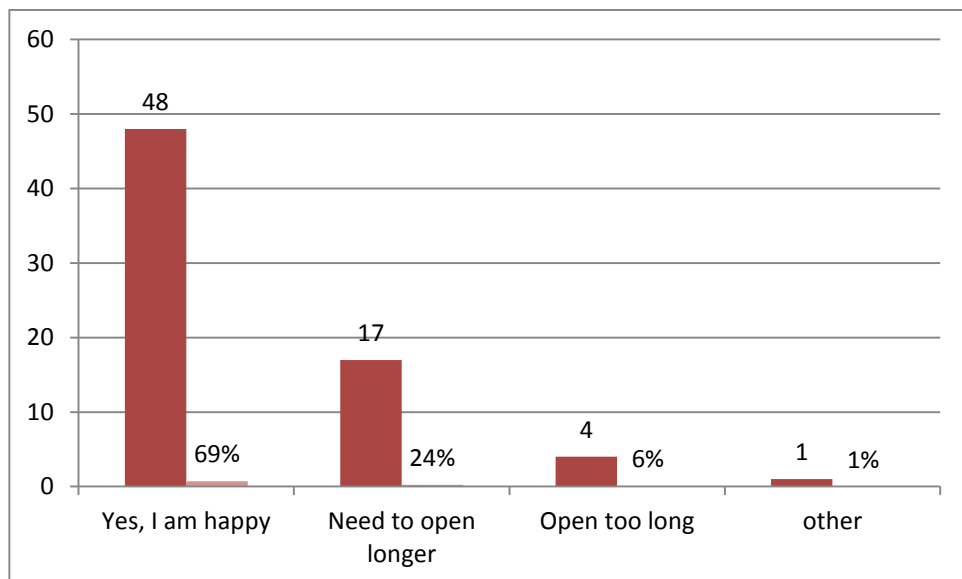
- Books, journals and library space were the top choices students reported to be most helpful for them to do their work.
- Only 7% reported that library staff was most helpful.

Question #4: Have you ever asked librarians to assist you to do your research?



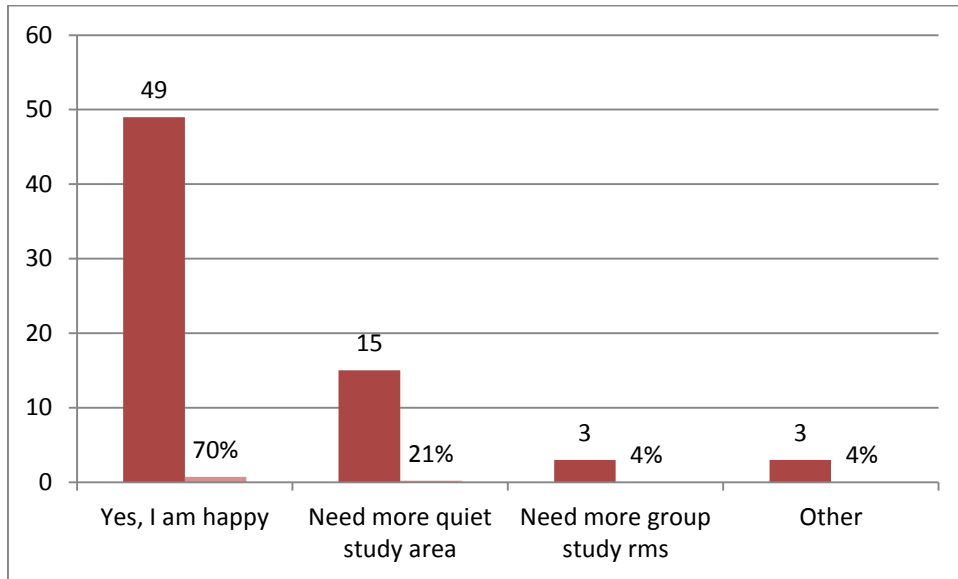
- The majority of students (63%) never seek help from librarians to do their research or homework.
- 23% said they had asked for assistance 1 to 3 times in the past three months.
- 9% said more than three times in the past three months.

Question #5: Are you happy with the library's opening hours?



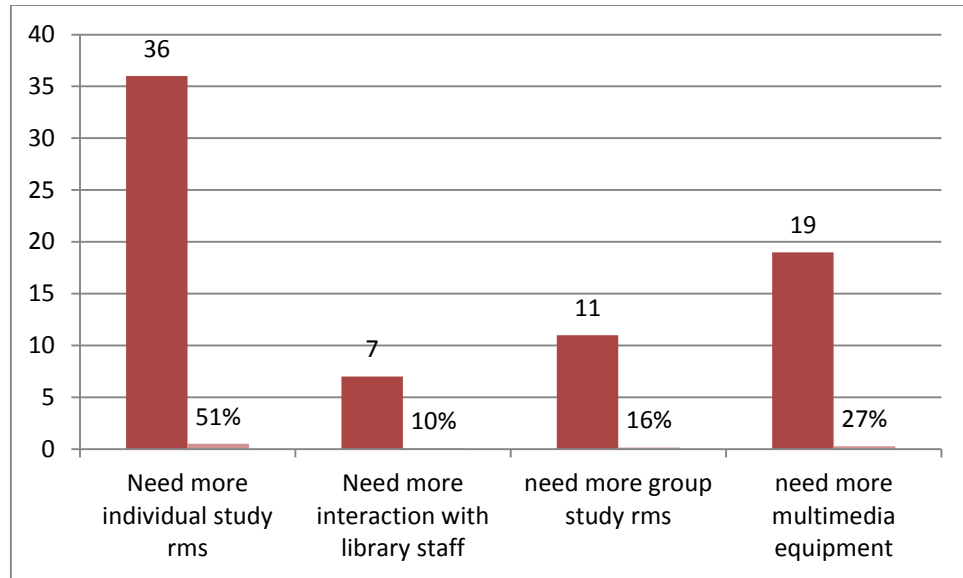
- 69% of students were satisfied with their library's hours.
- 24% reported the library should be open longer.

Question #6: Are you happy with the library's space?



- 70% of students reported that they were happy with the library's space design.
- 21% think there should be more quiet study areas.
- 4% said there should be more group study rooms.

Question #7: Please specify three things you are unhappy with in your library:

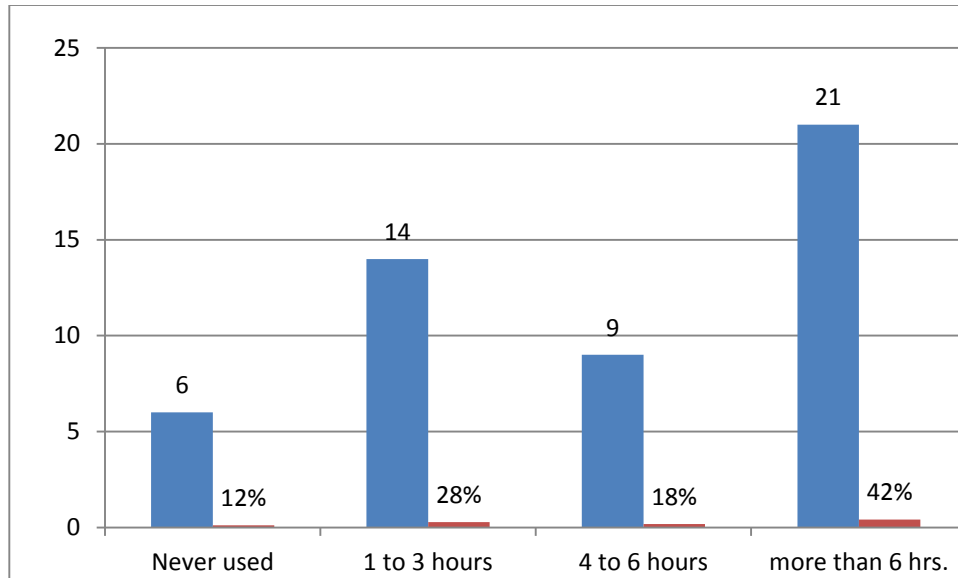


- 51% thought the library should have more quiet study rooms.
- 16% said there should be more group study rooms.
- 10% said there should be more interaction between students and library staff.
- 27% reported that the library needed to have more multimedia equipment.

Nanjing Technology University Findings:

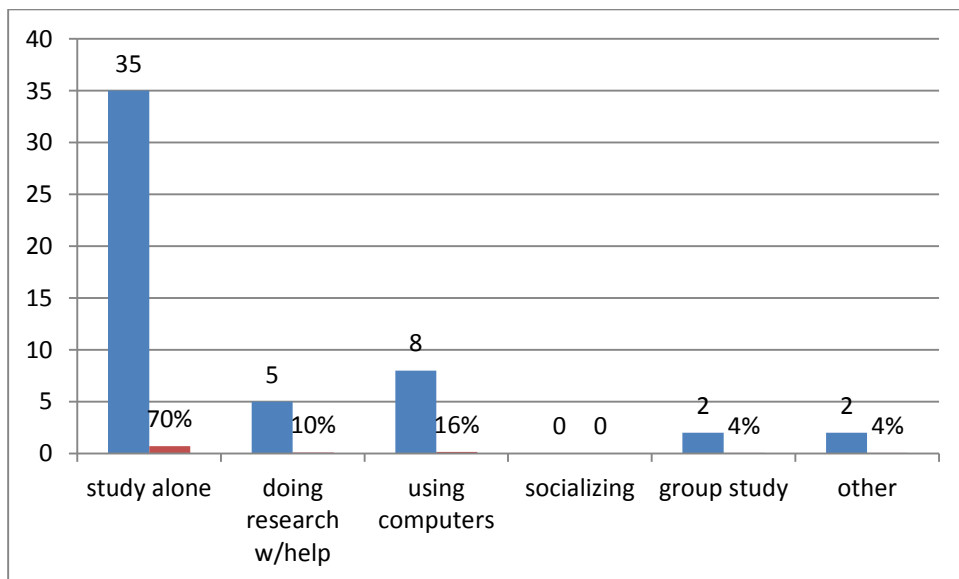
There are four multiple choice questions and five open-ended questions (total of nine) in the survey. The findings of these survey questions are as follows:

Question #1: In the past seven days, how many hours did you spend in the Nanjing University Library?



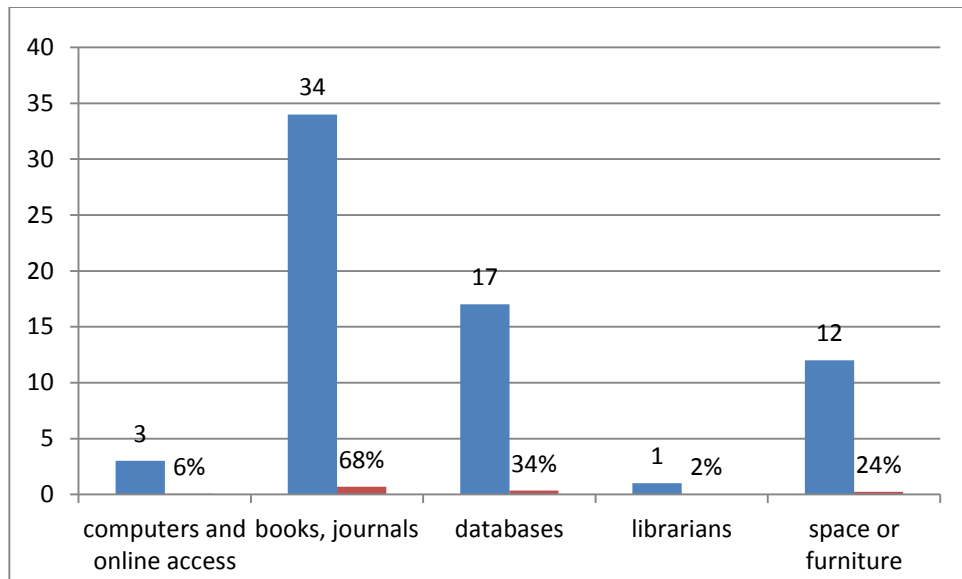
- 42% of students reported that they had stayed in the library for more than 6 hours in the past seven days.
- 28% reported 1 to 3 hours,
- 18% answered 4 to 6 hours.
- 12% of the surveyed students reported that they had not been in the library in the past seven days.

Question #2: The last time you were in the library, what did you do?



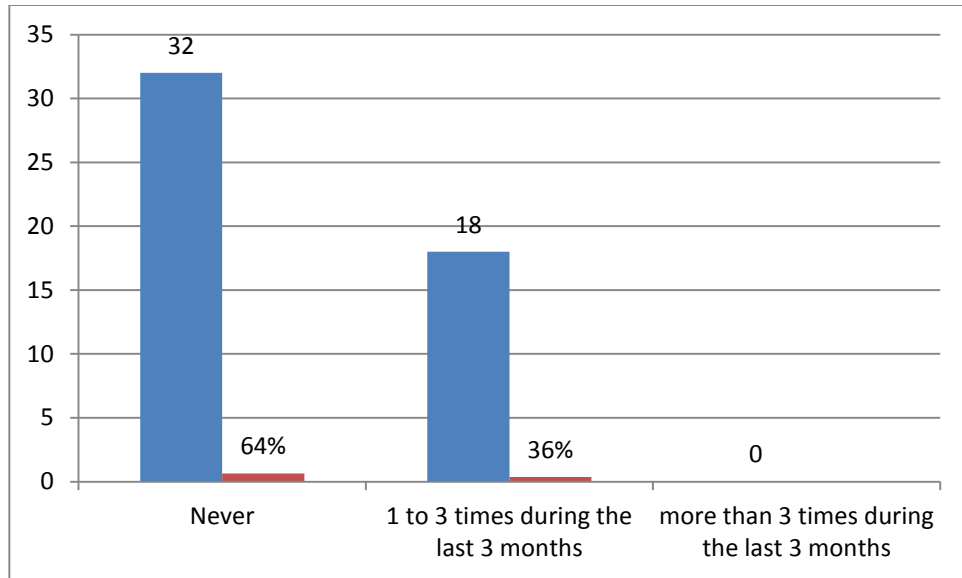
- 70% of students reported that they studied alone when they were in the library;
- 10% said they were doing research with help from librarians.
- 16% reported that they were using the computers.
- None of the surveyed students used the library to socialize with their friends or classmates.

Question #3: What library resources best help you do your work?



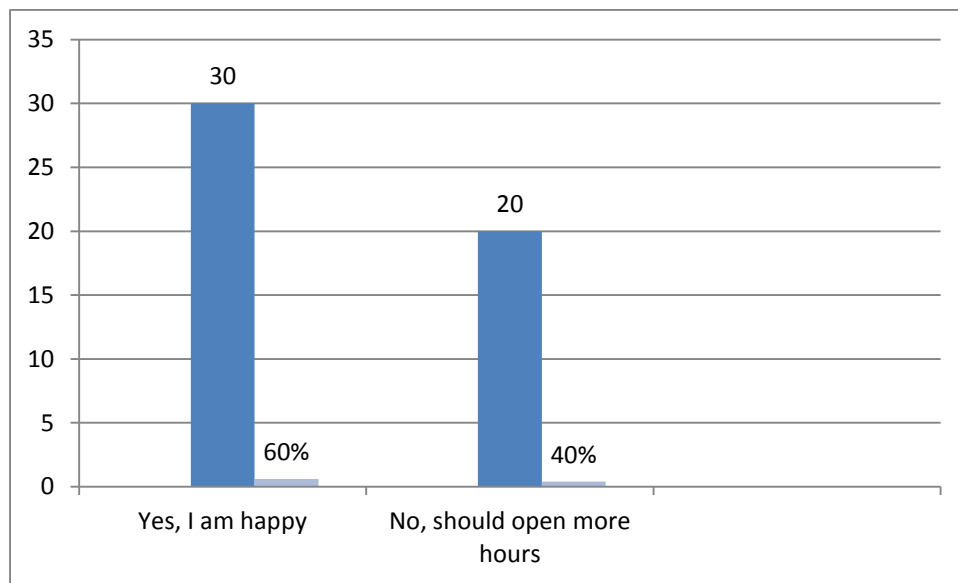
- The majority of students (68%) reported that books and journals were most helpful for them to do their work.
- 24% answered library space or furniture helped them most.
- Only 2% reported that library staff was most helpful.

Question #4: Have you ever asked librarians to assist you to do your research?



- The majority of students (64%) never seek help from librarians to do their research or homework.
- 36% said they had asked assistance 1 to 3 times in the past three months.
- No surveyed students said they had asked help more than 3 times in the past 3 months.

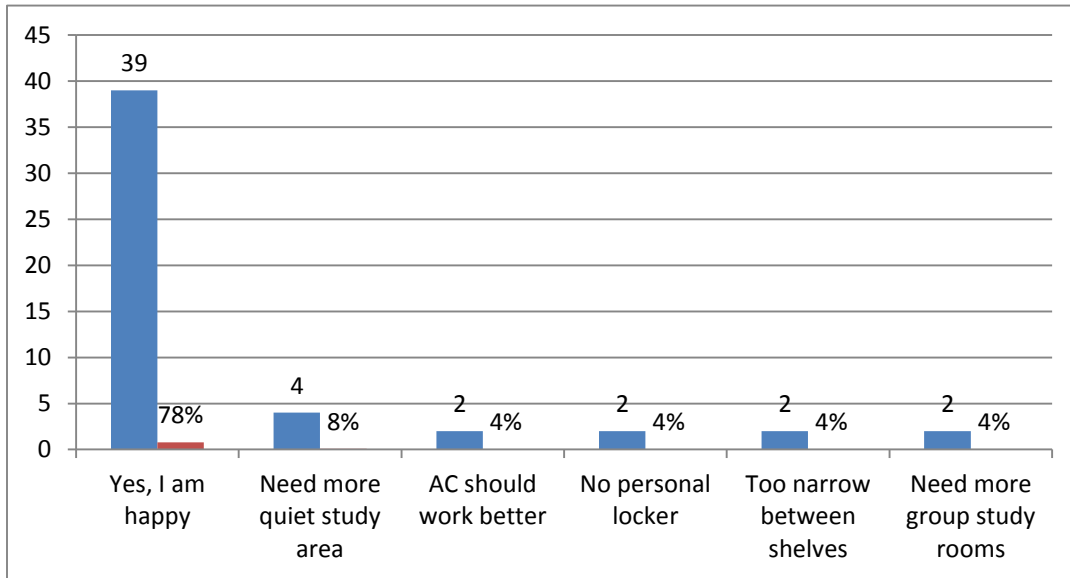
Question #5: Are you happy with the library's opening hours? If not, why?



This is an open-ended question. However, there were only two answers expressed.

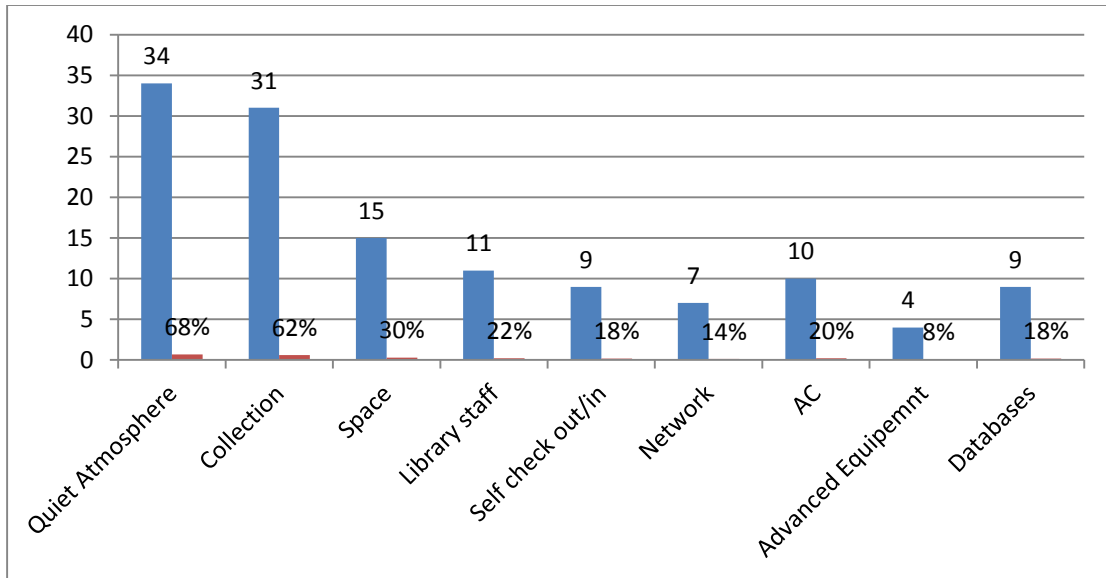
- 60% reported they were happy with the library's opening hours.
- 40% thought the library should be open more hours.

Question #6: Are you happy with the library's space? If not, why?



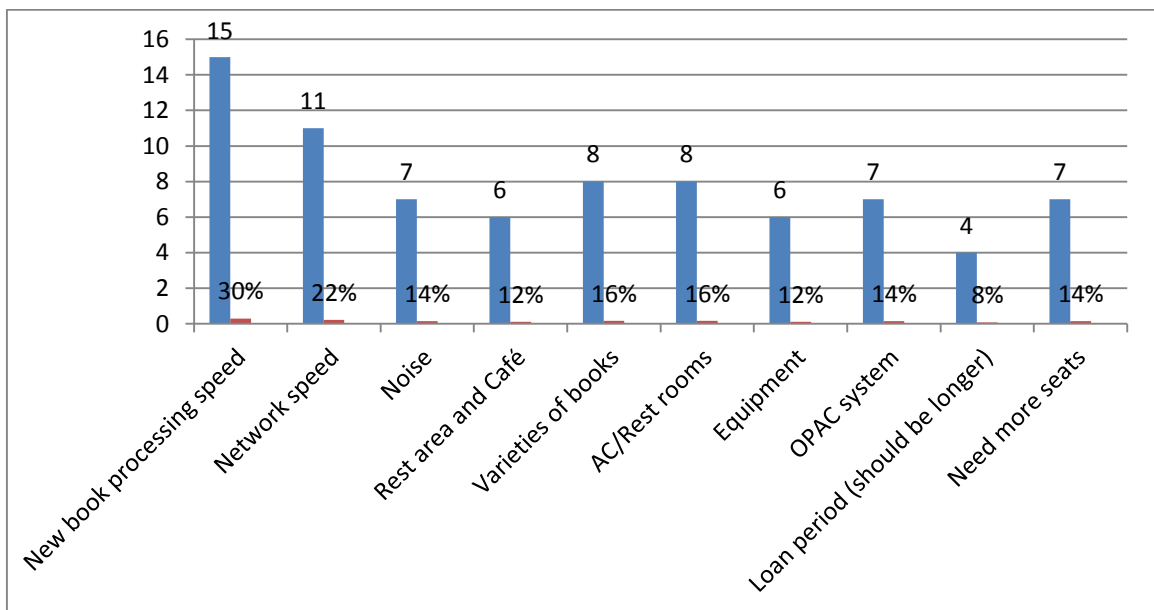
- 78% of students reported that they were happy with the library space design.
- 8% thought there should be more quiet study areas.
- Since this is an open-ended question, students' responses also include the library's air conditioning, personal lockers, and so on.

Question #7: Please specify three things you are most happy with about your library:



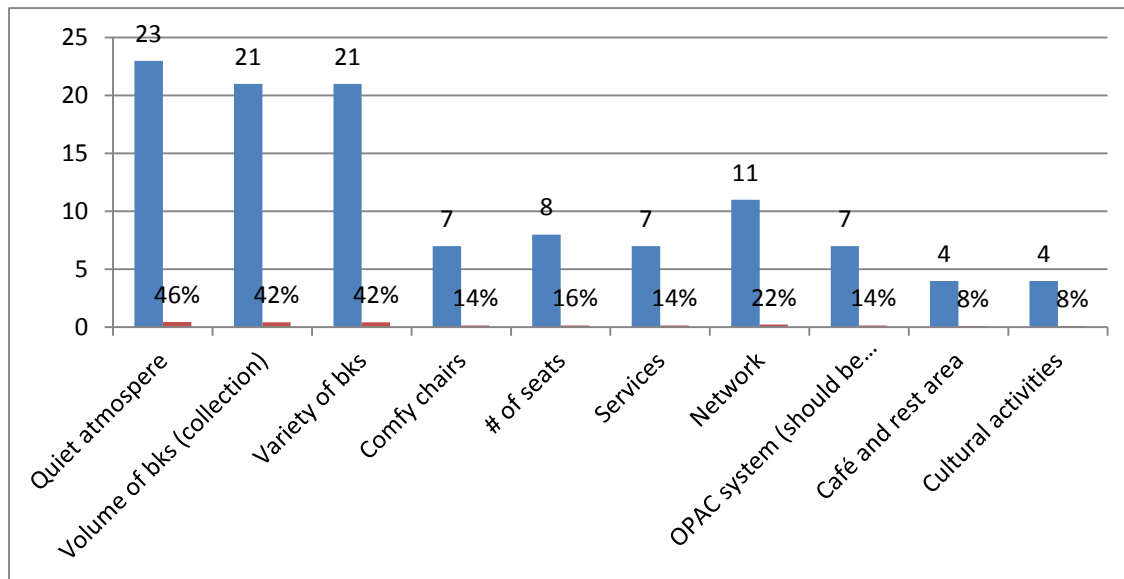
- The majority of students, 68%, reported that they liked the quiet atmosphere in the library.
- 62% were happy with the library’s collection.
- About 20% of students responded that they were happy with the library’s AC, databases, space, library staff, and their self-checkin/checkout system.

Question #8: Please specify three things you are most unhappy with about your library:



- 30% of the students were not happy with the new book processing time. They reported that new books took too long to be available for students.
- 22% were not satisfied by the library network speed.
- The rest of responses included noise control, restrooms, the variety of books, air circulations, etc....

Question #9: If you were asked to design your library, what would be the three most important things you want to put in the design?



- Nearly half of the respondents answered that a quiet atmosphere is most important to a library.
- 42% thought the variety of books and volume of books were important.
- 22% replied network speed.
- 14% reported that comfy chairs or furniture is crucial for an ideal library.

Although the studies were done in two different universities, the responses from students at these two universities were pretty similar and consistent. They all wanted the library to be a quiet study place. Most students went to the libraries for studying alone (the combined percentage of "study alone" from these two universities is 79%). It is no surprise that "Quiet Atmosphere" was rated as most important on the questionnaire.

Students from both universities also reported that the interaction between students and library staff was rare. The combined percentage of "Have never asked librarians for help with research" was 64%. The lack of interaction

between students and library staff also reflects on the fact that students reported "books or journals" and "library space" are more important than library staff.

Conclusion:

Both Nanjing University and Nanjing Technology University are four-year residential universities. Students are required to live on campus. Both campuses are very big, and have many student facilities, such as student activity centers, dining halls, athletic fields, basketball courts, playgrounds, etc... it is not surprising, therefore, that no students surveyed responded that they came to the libraries for socializing. From my observation and talks with library staff in both universities, students view libraries as strictly quiet study halls, and that no noise should be allowed inside the library. A quiet atmosphere is the most important component of a library. This view can be proved by this survey result.

It is interesting to note that the interaction between students and library staff was low in both Nanjing University and Nanjing Technology University (32% and 36% respectively) while more than 60% of students in both universities reported that they had never asked for help from library staff. The Montgomery College Rockville campus anthropology class' ethnographic study also asked this question, but its result showed that 60% of students responded that they have asked library staff for help. (Anthropology Class Report, p.18). This could be due to cultural differences since Chinese students are, in general, less likely to approach librarians for help. But it could also be because both Nanjing University Library and Nanjing Technology University Library have many self-checkin/checkout machines, self-service touch screen study room reservation stations, and very large up-to-date touch screen monitors to display the library floor map, current news, library new books, etc., while Montgomery College Rockville campus library has no such facilities, or at least not yet.

The result showed that students from both universities were very satisfied with their library hours and the space in their libraries. And this is understandable since both libraries are open for long hours and both were very new and have large floorage.

A few interesting findings from the Nanjing Technology University survey on these open-ended questions included such diverse responses as 30% of students were not happy with their new book processing speed and that 16% not happy with the restroom sanitary conditions and air circulation inside their library. These phenomena came as a surprise to the library staff. As a result, the Nanjing Technology University Library staff has expressed an interest in

improving these conditions now that they knew what is needed to be improved from students' perspective.

Overall I found students at both universities were open to expressing their opinions. Some of the students showed great interest in filling out the survey. From the survey results and my own observations, I found the traditional image of "library" still stands in China (at least in the libraries I visited). The library, in their eyes, should be quiet. The library should house large volumes and many varieties of books.

While we found students want the library to be multi-functional (different zones for different purposes) in our MC Library Rockville campus study result, this trend or request was not obvious in my Nanjing study. However, the sample was small. The other difference I observed was that none of the furniture was moved from one area to another area during the entire time I was observing, while in MC Library Rockville campus library students often move chairs or even tables everywhere inside the library.

Other insights I gained from this project were that library employees in these Chinese universities have the same level of education. All library employees are required to have at least one master's degree (not necessary a library degree). They do not have so called "Professional" and "Non-Professional" categories in their library's organizational chart, everyone is called "librarian". This personnel policy was adopted in 2008, the reason being that in this informational age, everyone in the library should be an information specialist.

The arrangement of the Nanjing University Library service desks was mostly facing the entrance rather than facing toward the students; In fact, all the libraries that I visited in Nanjing had security desks in which you had to show ID and check in before you entered. The persons stationed at the desk were library employees, not uniformed security personnel.

The opportunity of being able to go to Nanjing, China to get firsthand knowledge about how students there view and use their college libraries was extremely valuable. I was able to witness how modern and advanced their university libraries were, and how much money and effort they had put in to their hardware settings (buildings, equipment, structure, and etc.). On the other hand, I also witnessed their service model, and how much they needed to improve their customer service in order to match up with their hardware settings. Interestingly, this is true not only with libraries environment in the Nanjing City, but also in many government agencies and organizations as well.

Further study:

One of the things that impressed me most while I was participating in the Rockville campus library's ethnographic study was seeing the creativity and enthusiasm students showed when they participated in the Design Workshop drawing. Some students drew a very detailed map inside the library, including a roof top garden, glass walls, different study zones for different purposes, etc. Some designs from the Architecture Departments students may become the blue print for our future library design. Since all the libraries I visited in Nanjing, China, are very big and some spaces inside the libraries are not very well utilized, it would be interesting to see if any of the libraries I visited and studied in Nanjing would do such a participatory study to find out whether the space and design inside the library really fits their students' needs and desires.

Appendix 1:

Survey questions in Chinese for Nanjing University Library

亲爱的南大同学们，您好！

在网际网路及移动装置日趋普及的时代，图书馆在辅助学习及研究的功能亦将受到影响。

近年来美国图书馆界对学生对图书馆需求做过许多调查研究，敝校也从事过类似研究，有些调查结果我们感到十分意外。由於中美文化不同，学生对图书馆的功能和需求也可能有所差异。本问卷之研究目的在於发现中美大学生对大学图书馆的使用和需求是否雷同或不同。

请您以图书馆使用者的立场，以大约十分钟的时间填答本问卷。调查结果亦将提供贵校图书馆参考。

感谢您的填答。

美国蒙哥马利大学

图书馆资讯组 黄淑英

南京大学图书馆使用者行为之研究问卷

1. 请问在过去的一星期中，您在学校图书馆里的时间有多少：

- 从未使用
- 一到三个小时
- 四到六个小时
- 超过六个小时
- 其他〔请注明〕

2. 请问上一次您到图书馆时，您在图书馆里做甚麽：

- 一个人静静的读书
- 找图书馆员帮忙找研究资料
- 使用电脑
- 社交，聊天
- 跟同学讨论功课

- 其他〔请注明〕
3. 你认为图书馆内设施或服务对你帮助最大的是甚麽？
- 电脑及网路
 - 书籍或期刊
 - 图书馆资料库
 - 图书馆员
 - 图书馆提供的空间或座位
 - 其他〔请注明〕
4. 你曾经请图书馆人员协助你找寻学术或课业研究资料吗？
- 从来没有
 - 有过。在过去的三个月内，我请图书馆员帮忙的次数是一到三次
 - 有过。在过去的三个月内，我请图书馆员帮忙的次数超过三次
 - 其他〔请注明〕
5. 您对您学校图书馆开放的时间满意吗？
- 满意
 - 开放时间太长
 - 开放时间太短
6. 您对您学校图书馆空间的设计满意吗？
- 满意
 - 不满意，希望有更多个人读书间
 - 不满意，希望有更多小组研习间
7. 请问您认为您学校图书馆最应该改进的地方或设施是：
- 增加个人安静读书的座位
 - 增加与图书馆工作人员的互动
 - 增加小组研习的讨论室
 - 增加新科技功能的多媒体设备

Appendix 2:

Survey questions in Chinese for Nanjing Technology University Library

亲爱的同学们，您好！

在网际网路及移动装置日趋普及的时代，图书馆在辅助学习及研究的功能亦将受到影响。

近年来美国图书馆界对学生对图书馆需求做过许多调查研究，敝校也从事过类似研究，有些调查结果我们感到十分意外。由於中美文化不同，学生对图书馆的功能和需求也可能有所差异。本问卷之研究目的在於发现中美大学生对大学图书馆的使用和需求是否雷同或不同。

请您以图书馆使用者的立场，以大约十分钟的时间填答本问卷。调查结果亦将提供贵校图书馆参考。

感谢您的填答。

美国蒙哥马利大学图书馆资讯组 黄淑英

南京工业大学图书馆使用者行为之研究问卷

1. 请问在过去的一星期中，您在学校图书馆里的时间有多少：

- 从未使用
- 一到三个小时
- 四到六个小时
- 超过六个小时
- 其他〔请注明〕

2. 请问上一次您到图书馆时，您在图书馆里做甚麽：

- 一个人静静的读书
- 找图书馆员帮忙找研究资料
- 使用电脑
- 社交，聊天
- 跟同学讨论功课
- 其他〔请注明〕

3. 你认为图书馆内设施或服务对你帮助最大的是甚麽？
 - 电脑及网路
 - 书籍或期刊
 - 图书馆资料库
 - 图书馆员
 - 图书馆提供的空间或座位
 - 其他〔请注明〕

4. 你曾经请图书馆人员协助你找寻学术或课业研究资料吗？
 - 从来没有
 - 有过。在过去的三个月内，我请图书馆员帮忙的次数是一到三次
 - 有过。在过去的三个月内，我请图书馆员帮忙的次数超过三次
 - 其他〔请注明〕

5. 您对您学校图书馆开放的时间满意吗？如果不满意，为甚麽？

6. 您对您学校图书馆空间的设计满意吗？如果不满意，为甚麽？

7. 请列举三项您觉得您对学校图书馆最满意的地方：

8. 请列举三项您觉得您学校图书馆最应该改进的地方或设施：

9. 如果让您来设计您心目中理想的图书馆，您觉得最重要的头三项设施或服务是甚麽？