2012

Participatory Design for Canaday Library – A First Floor Renovation

Melissa K. Cresswell
Bryn Mawr College, mcresswell@brynmawr.edu

Eric Pumroy
Bryn Mawr College

Participatory Design for Canaday Library – A First Floor Renovation

Melissa Cresswell
Director of Planning and Communication, Information Services
Bryn Mawr College
Bryn Mawr, PA
mcresswell@brynmawr.edu

Eric Pumroy
Director of Library Collections and Seymour Adelman Head of Special Collections, Information Services
Bryn Mawr College
Bryn Mawr, PA
epumroy@brynmawr.edu

Project Overview

This paper is an interim report on a project to gather information about student use of Canaday Library at Bryn Mawr College and student opinions of how they would like to be able to use the library in the future. This information is being gathered using participatory design methodologies and is intended to inform renovations to the first floor of Canaday. At the time this paper was written (May 2012), data collection was complete and analysis had begun and would continue through August 2012.

Bryn Mawr College is a small, liberal arts college near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, with 1,300 full-time equivalent undergraduates representing 45 states and 62 countries. Four hundred graduate students currently comprise the College's Graduate Schools of Arts and Sciences and Social Work and Social Research.

Canaday Library was built in 1969 and is the main library on campus. The first floor, by far the most heavily trafficked, is home to the circulation desk (fig. 1), the reference desk, the computing help desk (fig. 1), a computer lab (fig. 3), an exhibition space, the Writing Center, the reference collection (figs. 1-3), current periodicals, popular fiction, and a variety of staff offices. The seating and work space ranges from tables with computer workstations (fig. 3), to empty tables and clusters of soft seating (fig. 2).

Figure 1. Canaday first floor Circulation (L) and Computing Help (R) desks

Figure 2. Canaday first floor work and seating areas

Figure 3. Canaday first floor computer lab and reference collection

Timeline and Planning

The College is planning a capital campaign that is likely to include renovations to Canaday Library, particularly the main public floors, among its fundraising goals. A participatory design project was first conceived in fall 2011 to help inform the planning process, but the need to accelerate the project became evident in late fall when the College hired an architect to scope a renovation project. Longitudinal data from the Managing Information Services Organizations (MISO) Survey[1] already told us that the library as a space has become increasingly important to students and decreasingly important to faculty. With student input as top priority, we attended participatory design workshops hosted by the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) in September and December of 2011 to learn ethnographic methods for gathering input into the design process.

The timeline for this project (fig. 4) is relatively short. The detailed project description and sample instruments required by the College's Institutional Review Board (IRB) accelerated the planning process, and the project was approved in an expedited review in February 2012.
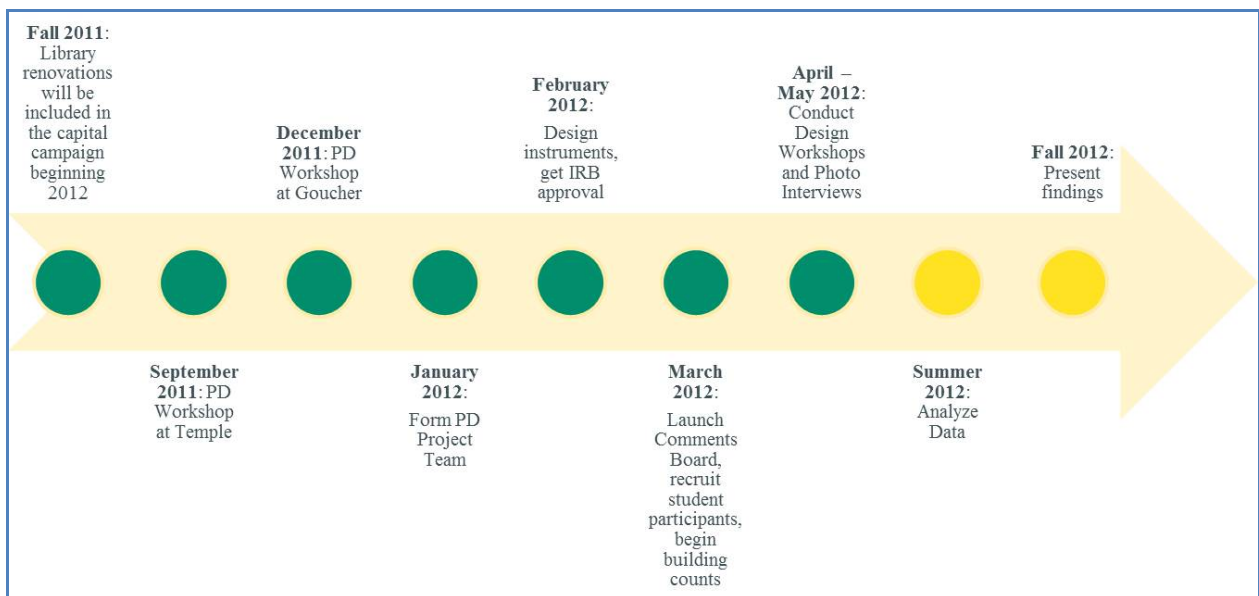

Figure 4. Participatory Design Project Timeline

Methods

In January 2012, we recruited four colleagues to join the project team and chose four methods for collecting data. We used a blanket email to recruit students for design workshops and photo interviews. During April and May, seven students participated in photo interviews, and ten students participated in design workshops. Each was compensated with a $25 Amazon gift certificate. A combination of project team members and student employees videorecorded these conversations using Kodak Zi8 Pocket Video Cameras and tabletop tripods. Further information about the project team and instruments used is

---

[1] http://www.misosurvey.org/

available on the project website.[2]

In addition to the photo interview and design workshop, we mounted a comment board (fig. 5) as an easy, low-investment way to gather casual comments from library users. We publicized the board, which hung in Canaday from spring break through graduation, with posters across campus (fig. 6) and on the Information Services Facebook and Twitter feeds. We collected more than 380 comments, approximately 60 of them unique, and all have been transcribed by a student employee in preparation for analysis.
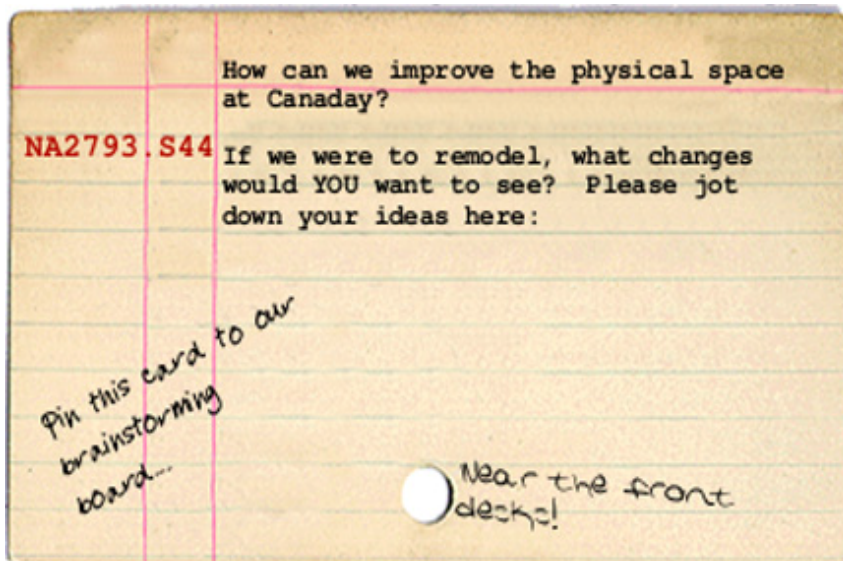

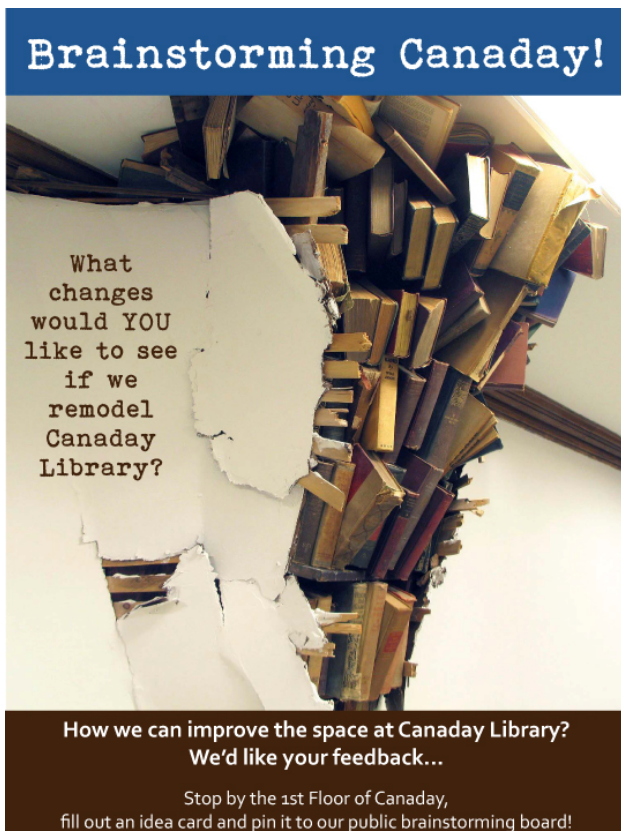**Figure 5. Cards used for posting to the comment board**

Figure 6. Poster advertising comment board

We also wanted to gather quantitative data on how the library is being used to help us understand and flesh out what the students were telling us through the comment cards and interviews. For about six weeks, from shortly after spring break until the end of finals week, we had circulation student workers count the number of people on each floor several times a day, every other day. The guidelines for the count were set up to answer a number of questions we think are critical for understanding how students use the building. Specifically, we wanted to know who uses the building, how the use changes over the course of the day and evening, where students work, how often they engage in group work, and the percentages of students using their own computers, the library's computers, and no computers.

Preliminary Findings

The last of the photo and design interviews were completed only in late April, but we already have some preliminary results about what students want. Most of the findings were not surprising: students want more natural light, big tables where they can spread out their work, private group study spaces, more comfortable furniture, plants, color, and, more broadly, space for both social interaction and quiet work, and the ability to study alone, but with others. We also had some surprises. Many students don't have or want the latest gadgets; few students mentioned coming to the library for books, although they expect them to be here; and there is very little active use of the study carrels on the upper floors, instead almost all of the activity is concentrated in the two areas where the computers

are located.

Because the data collection was only recently completed, the analysis of it is only just beginning. Over the next two months we will be reviewing the interviews and comment board notes to identify major themes, and will code the videos with NVivo. The building counts were done by hand and they are still being entered into an Excel spreadsheet, but once that work is completed, we will develop queries to extract the critical data. Later this summer we will share the preliminary findings with the rest of the Information Services staff for comments and discussion.

Lessons Learned

Even while the study was in its early stages, discussion about the scope of library renovations was going on within the College, which meant there was a need for us to report findings as early as possible. Because we had used multiple methods to gather student thinking about the library, we were able to triangulate among the results to offer observations with a reasonable degree of confidence.

We have come to appreciate how quantitative data can help inform the gathering of qualitative data. Because of the time pressure to conduct the study this spring, we did both the building counts and interviews simultaneously. We wish now that we had done the building counts earlier, because they told us that the quiet study floors were almost completely unused in the evenings, something that we had not understood, and therefore did not pursue in the interviews. Now we are considering a follow-up project, probably this fall, consisting of either photo or video interviews and design workshops focused on quiet areas, so we can get a better idea of why students find them unattractive and what could be done to make them more usable.

Finally, we found that the project has been valuable even if there are no major renovations to the building in the next few years because it has given us a much sharper view of the students' academic life and how the library figures in their work. We now know that there are some important changes that we need to make in the building to make it a better student space, and whether those changes are big or small and incremental, they will be made.