

### An Introduction to the Issue

- Large numbers of patrons no longer use the library for research purposes
- Libraries have evolved into community centers where people go to work on group projects as well as to socialize
- Many libraries are tight on space, so how do you zone for each type of user?
- How do librarians control noise without looking “stereotypical” (the shushing librarians of the past)?
- How do you create a library policy that is “fair, easy to enforce, and widely recognized?” (Knecht, 2003)

**How do libraries meet the needs of this new type of patron, but still provide space for those who request peace and quiet?**

**What is the library for, past and present, and how can librarians, patrons, and overall design create spaces for each type of “noise level” patron?**

### What is the Library for?

- Provides a comfortable and quiet place
- Offers free services to all patrons
- Provides an area to research and learn
- Allows you to be alone, yet still be in a public place
- Promotes group and individual study
- Provides computers for research and access to networks
- Non-traditional purposes: meeting & socializing, grabbing a cup of coffee or snack, and attending cultural events
- Library needs to address the needs of many types of users: the active reader, the scholar, both those who are educated and uneducated, the poor, elderly and children (Tisdale, 1997)

### How They Made it Work - Case 1

#### Gould Library, Carleton College

- Noise levels were instituted on each floor, and then furnished appropriately to represent this noise level
- 4th Floor: majority of computer clusters and printers, tables & chairs for group work, several couches for lounging and a coffee shop. This floor contains the majority of the noise and socializing in the library.
- 3rd Floor: instruction & study rooms - talking permitted at a reasonable level, group study occurs here with less socializing
- 2nd Floor: tables & chairs, study rooms, talking allowed if there is a good reason for it
- 1st Floor: built for more serious study and students monitor the noise level
- Always is a place to send students depending on their needs



Source: pegasuslibrarian.blogspot.com

# A Balancing Act: How academic and public libraries struggle to find common ground between quiet and collaboration

Denice Buchanan • IST 511 • Spring 2008

### How They Made it Work - Case 2

#### Lydia M. Olsen Library, Northeastern Michigan University

- established a unique code of conduct with the following points:
  - The library should be used mainly for reading, research, and study. Since the library also is a place to socialize or grab a bite to eat, understand that there are certain areas where these activities are permitted.
  - Students need to be considerate of the needs of others who desire a quiet place. Asking someone to quiet down is allowed and encouraged.
  - Take note of where you are in the library: open areas are good for conversation, while areas that look like they should be quiet, should.
  - Those who wish to do group study should reserve a room to do so.

Source: library.nmu.edu

### A Changing Patron

- Patrons, especially students, are able to multitask: study, listen to music, instant message, and talk with friends simultaneously
- Patrons are generally not as courteous and respectful as in the past (Bell, 2008)
- Today's patron seems to be more acceptable of a higher level of noise than in the past - some people are even uncomfortable with silence

### Why is the Library so Noisy?

- Increased traffic with cafes, media centers: more people equals more noise
- More and more patrons, including children, have cell phones, and are not ashamed to have private conversations in public
- By the turn of the twentieth century, 1/3 of libraries had group study rooms, and in 1902, approximately 75% had children's rooms (Mattern, 2007): these are generally noisy areas that continue to grow
- Students do much more group work than in the past

**“Quiet in the library? It doesn't exist. Libraries are no longer the old image of pin-drop quiet.” David Mowery, chief for central library youth services at Brooklyn Public Library (DiMattia, 2005)**

### Noise is not Always a Negative

- What will be the draw of the library if patrons aren't coming for research purposes?
- Adding new technologies (media centers) is necessary if you want to continue to meet the needs of patrons
- Funds are obtained from taxpayers to build and maintain facilities: need to keep taxpayers happy by giving them what they want (Kniffel, 2004)
- Noise tends to make people feel comfortable, silence can be intimidating
- Teens are not quiet in general - kicking them out of library only creates a negative perception. You want to create an atmosphere that they are comfortable with so they will continue to use the library and take advantage of its services.

### Libraries of the Past: Where did the Idea of Quiet in the Library Come From?

- Reading rooms generally were moved to higher levels of the library to be further away from the noise of the city streets (Tisdale, 1997)
- Claude Héméré, librarian at Sorbonne (University of Paris) from 1638-43, required that appropriate behavior in the library included reading, writing, and even the handling of books to be performed in complete silence (Mattern, 2007)

### Why Should the Library be Quiet?

- Potentially the only quiet place on a college campus for study - becomes an escape
- Quiet is a distinguishing feature of the library, otherwise it is no different from a coffeehouse or bookstore
- Patrons need a place for contemplation, thinking and reading - many patrons prefer these activities to be in silence (Mattern, 2007)

### How They Made it Work - Case 3

#### Seattle Public Library - opened May 23, 2004

- Library creates different zones for different types of activities
- Betty Jane Narver Reading Room - 10th floor: Architecture creates atmosphere for reading: light needs to be reflected instead of transmitted like it would on a computer. The ceiling and some walls are covered with white “pillows” that help to absorb any noise
- Charles Simonyi Mixing Chamber - 5th floor: Houses 400 computers, the general reference desk, and is a first stopping point for starting multidisciplinary research
- The Norcliffe Foundation Living Room - 1st floor: Includes an informal reading room, houses the fiction collection, a cafe and store, and group work areas
- The architectural design of the library is a way to give patrons visual cues as to how you are supposed to behave and how noisy you should be



Sources: Mattern, 2007 and www.spl.org

### How They Made it Work - Case 4

#### Salt Lake City Public Library - opened February 2003

- “America's Unquietest Library” (Graham, 2003)
- City did not have a central gathering place, so the new library became a place where everyone was welcome

#### Busy to Quiet Vertical Zoning

Locate active and noisier activities on or near the ground floor and quieter study and contemplative activities on or near the top level to minimize disruption.



- Designed to accommodate noisier types of patrons
- The Main lobby, called The Urban Room, is placed away from main library proper since it tends to be a noisy location

- The Canteena, an area for teens, is placed away from quiet areas, but it connected to the cafe.
- Individual preview rooms were created where patrons can listen to audio and video without disturbing other patrons
- The Browsing Library, located on the first floor, contains popular fiction and a cafe
- More active and noisier areas of the library are located on the lower levels allowing for reference and study-oriented areas on the upper levels



- Library is generally not quiet in many areas but patron traffic has tripled since opening - may be a sign of hard economic times (people go to the library instead of buying a books). (Graham, 2003)

Source: Mattern, 2007 and www.slclpl.lib.ut.us

### Taking Steps to Resolve the Problem

**“We don't demand quiet. We demand an atmosphere where no one's ability to use the library is infringed.” James R. Johnson, Joliet, Illinois Public Library (DiMattia, 2005)**

- Zoning - by floor level or area
- Improve signage on what volume of noise, if any, is acceptable in each area
- Get patrons involved - ask questions! What do you want to see in your library? (Bell, 2008)
- Make sure group study rooms are being used for correct purposes - don't drive those who want silence there, rather the other way around (Bell, 2008)
- Encourage students to police each other (peer pressure from other students may keep noise-makers at bay). It may be harder for a librarian to enforce without the students support. Students generally listen to their peers first. (Knecht, 2003)
- Create new codes of conduct to include new technologies as they change and evolve
- Smaller libraries who don't have unlimited space could denote the times when the library is most active as “noisy hours” and then alert their community of such times.

### In Conclusion:

Noise is not necessarily a bad thing, but is something that needs to be orchestrated for. With constant changing technologies and the repurposing of the library, noise will continue to flourish and grow. Instead of trying to eliminate noise, libraries need to be conscious of the problem and be prepared to work with it to fulfill the needs of their many patrons.