

The LIU Libraries Ethnographic Study: Librarians-turned-Ethnographers Share their Experiences

Kim Mullins, LIU Post | kimberly.mullins@liu.edu

Eamon Tewell, LIU Brooklyn | eamon.tewell@liu.edu

Natalia Tomlin, LIU Post | natalia.tomlin@liu.edu

April 21, 2017, CUNY Graduate School of Journalism



The Research Team

Brooklyn Campus

Katherine Boss
Valeda Dent
Charles Guarria
Rachel King
Paula Patiño
Susan Thomas
Ingrid Wang
Gloria Willson

Post Campus

Mary Kate Boyd-Byrnes
Kathleen Burlingame
Thomas Dillman
Mellissa Hinton
Kimberly Mullins
Eduardo Rivera
Derek Stadler
Natalia Tomlin

Coding Team

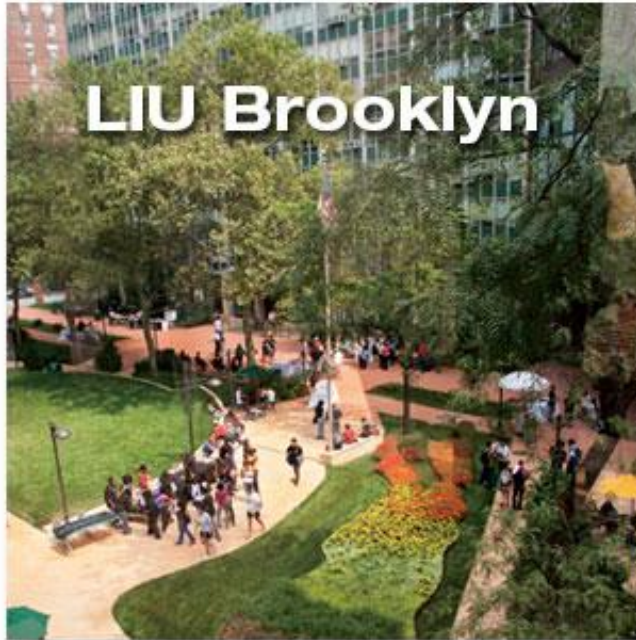
Valeda Dent
Edward Keane
Kimberly Mullins
Paula Patiño
Bhavya Teja Kolla
Eamon Tewell
Natasha Tomlin

Background and Methods

Ethnographic Research

- The study of a culture to improve one's understanding of it
- Involves smaller numbers of participants, but in thorough detail
- Qualitative methods, rooted in anthropology:
participant observation, reflective diaries, interviews

Our University



Why?

- Examine our local culture of student research habits
- Provide need-based services
- Make ethnography a consistent and ongoing practice

Previous Major Studies

- University of Rochester “Studying Students” Project
- Ethnographic Research in Illinois Academic Libraries (ERIAL) Project
- CUNY Undergraduate Scholarly Habits Ethnography Project

Our Study's Design



Our Study's Timeline

Summer 2012	IRB approval received
Fall 2012	Survey distributed
Spring 2013	Observations conducted
Spring 2013	Interviews conducted
Spring 2014	Coding process started
Spring 2016	Coding process completed

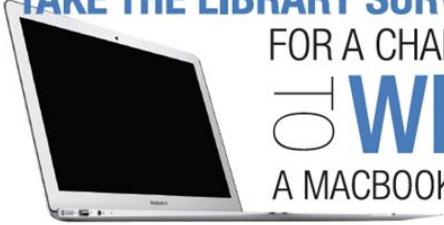
Survey

- 51 questions on tech use, library use, research and study habits
- Administered Fall 2012
- 1100+ responses
- Used survey data to create interview questions

PARTICIPATE
SO **YOUR**
LIBRARY
CAN INNOVATE

NOVEMBER 19TH

TAKE THE LIBRARY SURVEY
FOR A CHANCE
TO **WIN**
A MACBOOK AIR



WE WILL ALSO BE GIVING AWAY BARCLAYS CENTER NY NETS TICKETS, GIFT CARDS, AND MORE!

WHEN? NOVEMBER 19TH, 3-6PM
WHERE? LIBRARY LEARNING CENTER, 3RD FL.

Sample Survey Questions

“Have you had any library instruction while at Long Island University?”

“During the last academic year, how often was the Libraries’ website a basic part of your research process?”

“Which of these resources do you use most often?”

“Would you use text messaging to get an answer to a reference or research question from the LIU Libraries?”

LIU Post Survey Team



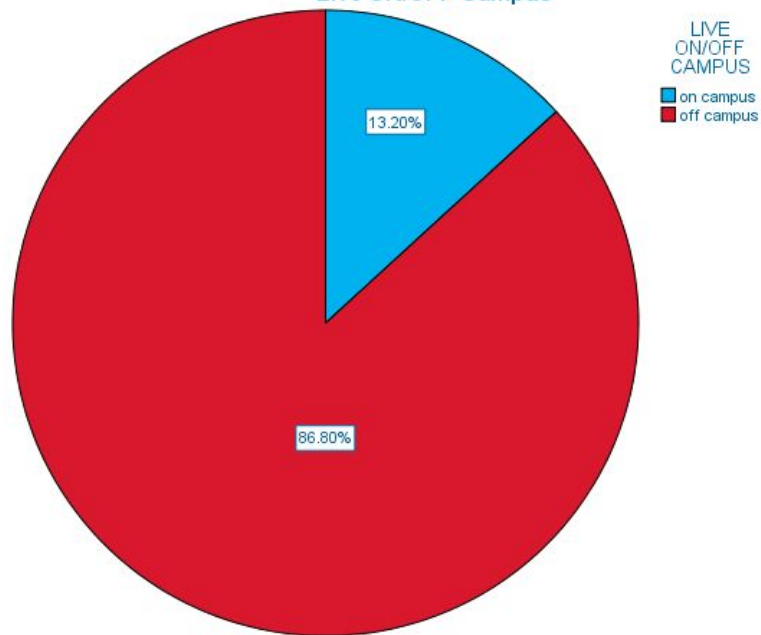
Survey Kick-Off



Survey Demographics

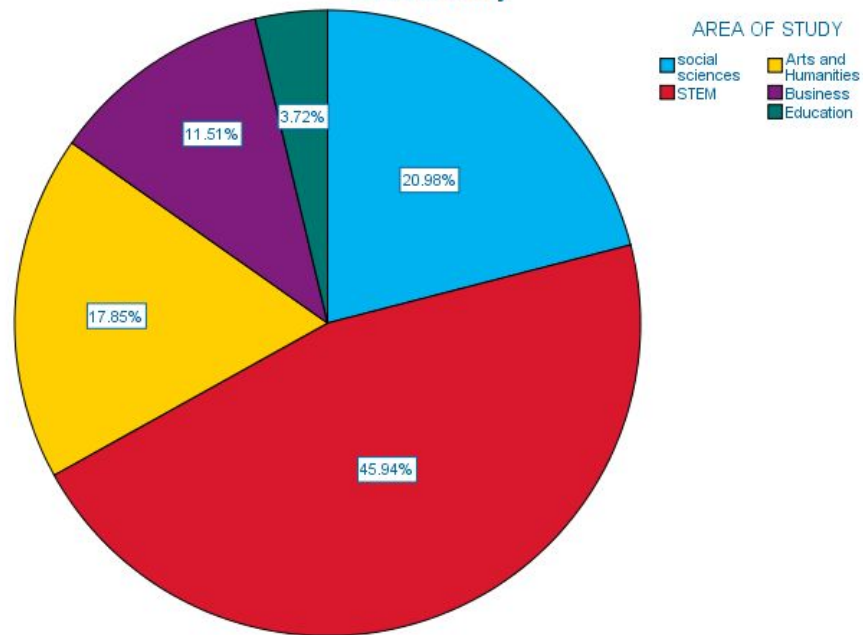
SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

Live ON/OFF Campus



SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

Area of Study



Observations

- 32 hours of unobtrusive observations completed
- Conducted Spring 2013
- Recorded field notes
- Recorded interpretations

Observation Recording Sheet

LIU Libraries' Ethnographic Study Observation Recording Sheet

Observer Name: [REDACTED]
 Location: Reference Room—tables along windows and carrels
 Date: 2/19/13
 Time started: 11:30am
 Time ended: 12:50pm

A - Activities are goal directed sets of actions-things which people want to accomplish
E - Environments include the entire arena where activities take place
I - Interactions are between a person and someone or something else, and are the building blocks of activities
O - Objects are building blocks of the environment, key elements sometimes put to complex or unintended uses, changing their function, meaning and context
U - Users are the consumers, the people providing the behaviors, preferences and needs

What I Saw/Raw Data (A, E, I, O, U/Spradley)	What I Thought/Interpretation
<p>Every table is occupied with more than one student.</p> <p>Three guys are sitting on the window ledge, with four of their friends at the first table. Many men come and join and leave the table over the course of an hour. Three of the men are wearing suits and talking on the phone. Most of them have iPhones. At the largest, the group totals 10 men. Most of them stand around and talk as they join the group – they have coopted the table but rarely use the chairs. (12:25 – four of the men are now sitting, but have not unpacked very many materials from their bags, they are mostly talking).</p> <p>Lots of talking. Furniture moved - computer chairs have been rolled from the computer area to the tables.</p> <p>(12:12 – there has been significant turnover, one table is now free, and another table is all new students.)</p>	<p>The Reference area along the windows is often used for collaborative study in groups, this type of collaboration often requires a lot of discussion and can get loud – need spaces where students can work in groups and not disturb people trying to study quietly.</p> <p>Furniture is often moved and rearranged – new investments in furniture should be modular, portable, and resistant to carving/graffiti.</p>

Interviews

- Recruited interviewees during the survey stage
- Conducted 30 one-hour semi-structured interviews
- Included “show me” questions
- Videotaped and professionally transcribed audio

Sample Interview Questions

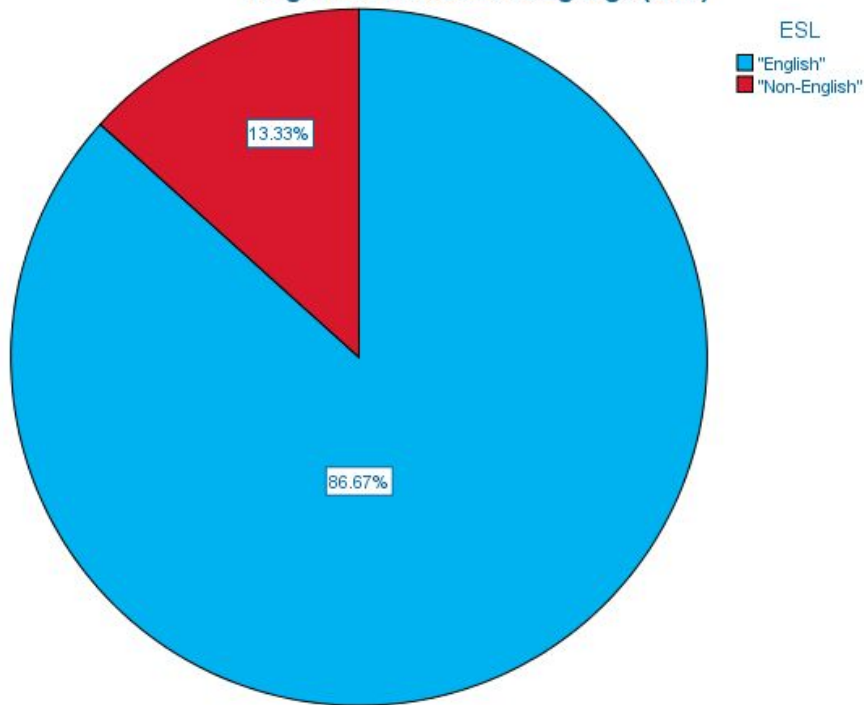
“When you get an assignment for a class, what is the very first thing you do?”

“Do you seek help from library personnel?”

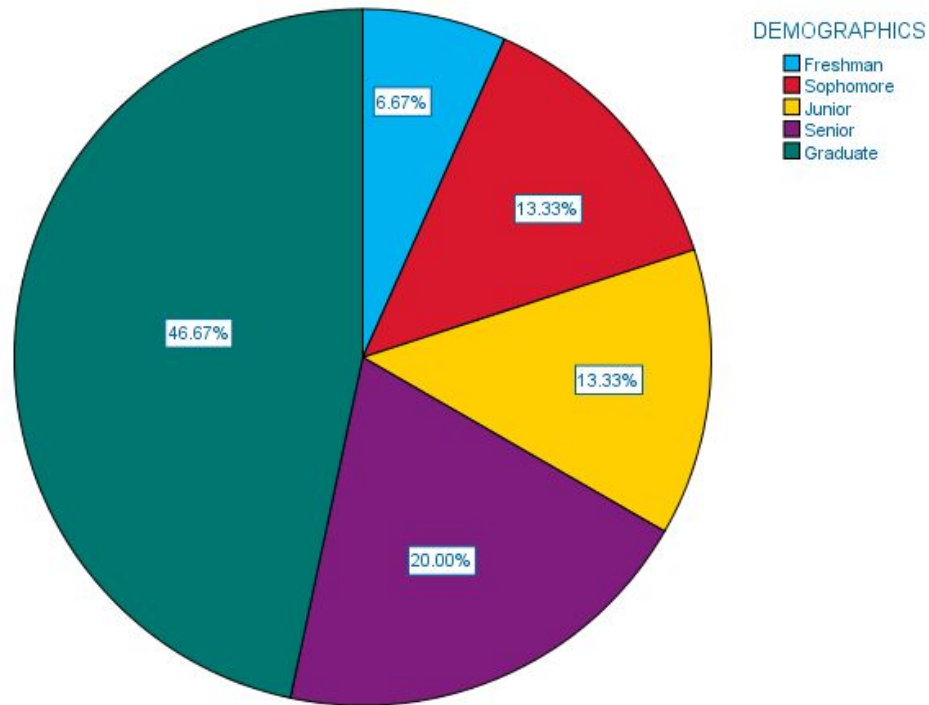
“When you study in the library, do you prefer to be around other students, or have more of your own personal space?”

Interview Demographics

English as a Second Language (ESL)



Students Status

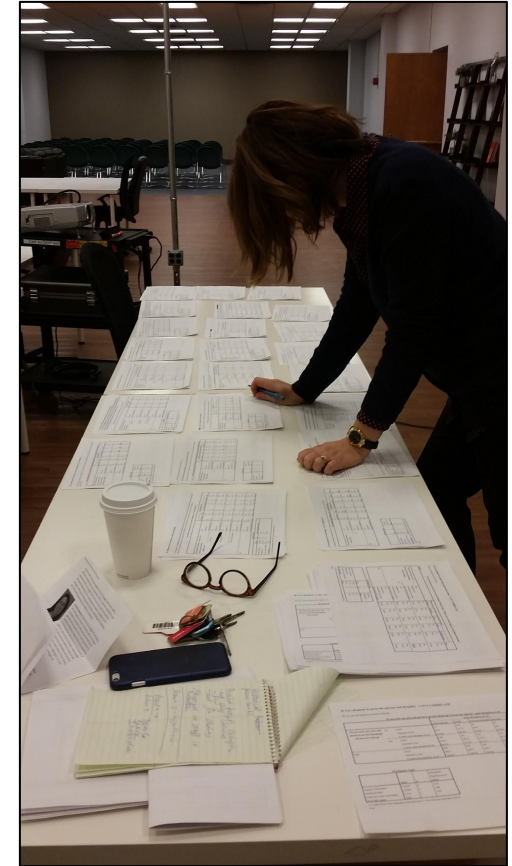
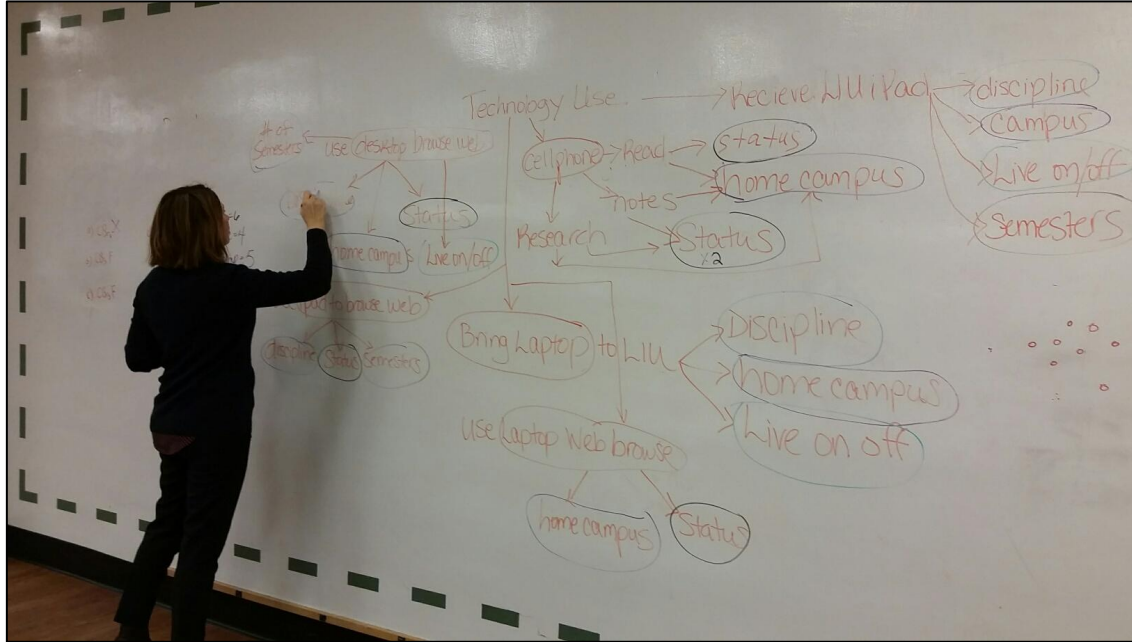


Data Analysis and Findings

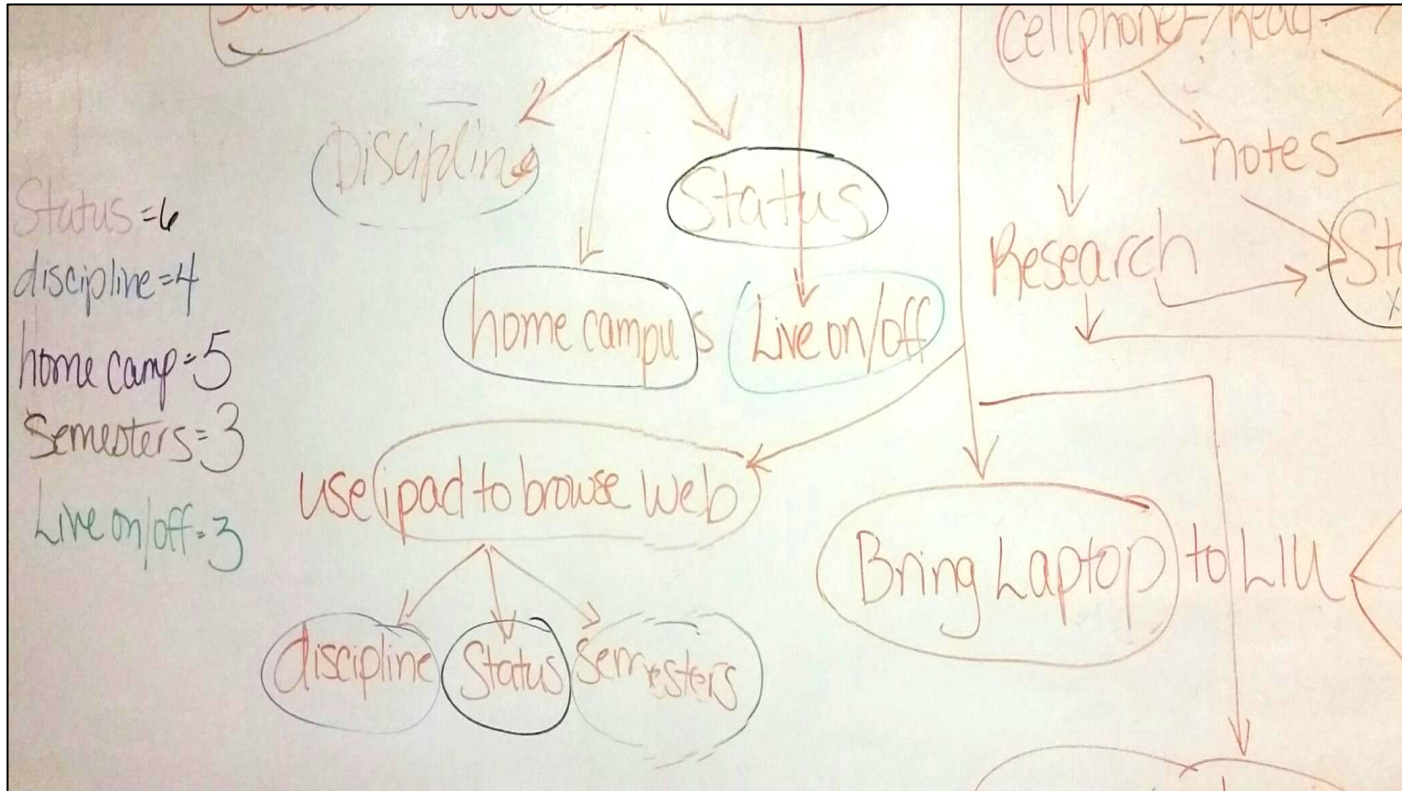
Survey Analysis

1. Library staff and graduate student entered data into SPSS
2. Quantitatively analysed closed-ended questions using proprietary survey software
3. Performed content analysis for open-ended questions
4. Graphically depicted major themes to identify areas of focus
5. Themes further analyzed

Survey Analysis



Survey Analysis



Codebook

- Added codes identified during coding process (six versions)
- Resulted in 459 codes at question, unit, and thematic levels

Student Research Strategies	RESSTRAT	First Source Consulted	FIRSTSRC
	RESSTRAT	Search Engine Use	SEARCHENG
	RESSTRAT	Evaluating Sources	EVALSRC
	RESSTRAT	Shelf Browsing	SHELFBRW
	RESSTRAT	Catalogue Browsing	CATBRW
	RESSTRAT	Keyword Search	KEYSEARCH
	RESSTRAT	Copy and Paste as notetaking	CPPSNOTE
	RESSTRAT	Textbook Acquisition	TEXTBKAQ

Observation Coding

1. Combined into one document and analyzed for frequency counts
2. Read field notes and coded the text
3. Library staff and graduate student entered data into SPSS
4. Statistical analysis performed

1	POST LIBRARY
2	ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY
3	OBSERVATION NOTES
4	April 3, 2015
5	OBSERVATION #2
6	Bliss area had all single carrels occupied, there was no interaction between students, everyone was
7	reading or working on their laptops. One student was using iPad and laptop.
8	
9	OBSERVATION #6
10	Periodicals reading room area had one group of 5 students and one group on 2 students. Both groups
11	were talking among them-selves. The group of 5 had 2 laptops on the table. One student in the group
12	was using headphones. Students had water on the tables. They were sitting by the window tables. One
13	girl walked in with the coffee and joined the group. The group with only 2 students was sitting at the
14	computer stations. One student got up and went to use printer or Xerox machine. He asked someone at
15	the reference desk for change. Another student walked in and went to sit by the computer station.
16	

Location Code	Day Code	Time Code	Unit Code	Theme	Sub Theme
PSBLIS	W/H	2-3P	BEH	TECHUSE	LAPTOP
			BEH	TECHUSE	IPAD
			BEH	STUDYHAB	INDPREF
			BEH	LIBSPA	NOCARREL

Location Code	Day Code	Time Code	Unit Code	Theme	Sub Theme
PSPERREAD	W/H	2-3P	PPL	LIBSPA	NUMBERSTUD 1-9
			BEH	STUDYHAB	TALK
			BEH	TECHUSE	LAPTOP
			BEH	TECHUSE	HEADPHONES
			BEH	STUDYHAB	MAKECOPY
			BEH	LIBSVUSE	LIBINT

Interview Coding

1. Transcripts coded individually, by pairs and as a team (4 coders)
2. Paired teams and entire team reconciled coding to ensure inter-coder reliability
3. Library staff and graduate student entered data into SPSS
4. Statistical analysis performed

040887b
Interviewer/Interviewee/Cameraman

Interviewee: → Yeah. Yeah, as long as I remember my Dropbox password. I have my phone with my KeePass on there.

Interviewer: → Yeah, the KeePass, that's a great app. That's awesome. Have you ever taken books out of the library? In addition to your articles, do you use books very often?

Interviewee: → No.

Question Code	Unit Code	Major Thematic Codes	Subthematic Codes
USELIBBK	BEH-NO	LIBCOLUSE	BOOKS
STRESSTRAT	BEH	TECHUSE	MOBAPP

Interviewer: → Why is that, just out of curiosity?

Interviewee: → Usually because any—I've collected an extensive amount of books from when they leave them out upstairs just to get rid of them, so if I ever need to use a book to find a direct reference, but it's usually I pull from here, the articles.

Interviewer: → Okay, so you have your own little personal library someplace.

Interviewee: → Yeah.

Interviewer: → That's pretty cool. In addition to—well, we have the print books, the stacks. Have you ever been in the stacks? Have you ever navigated for your note?

Interviewee: → I've browsed through, but I haven't really for any particular reason.

Question Code	Unit Code	Major Thematic Codes	Subthematic Codes
USELIBBK	BEH	LIBSPA	STACKS
USELIBBK	BEH	LIBSPA	SHELFBRW

Survey Findings

- Majority were not taking advantage of University iPad program
- 75% received some type of instruction on how to utilize the Library and its resources
- Used Google and the Libraries' databases equally to complete their work

Observation Findings

- Came and went while studying; left personal items
- Seated in groups but worked individually and “cocooning”
- Space used for both academic and non-academic tasks

Interview Findings

- More likely sought assistance from peers or professors than librarians
- Print resources often favored
- Some research and study habits were mutually informative

Triangulated Findings

- Actively browsed for materials as means of discovery (i.e. shelf browsing, catalog subject headings)
- Began assignments with resources from the open web
- Multitasked using technology

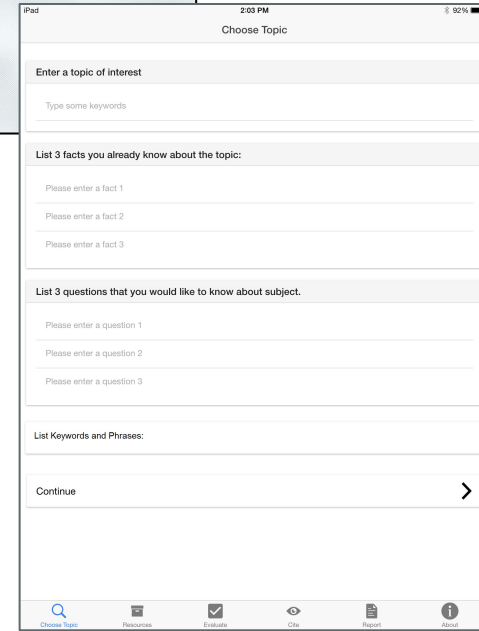
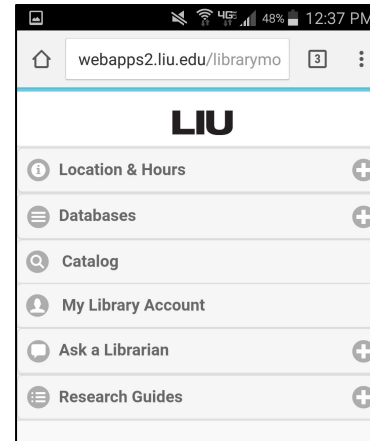
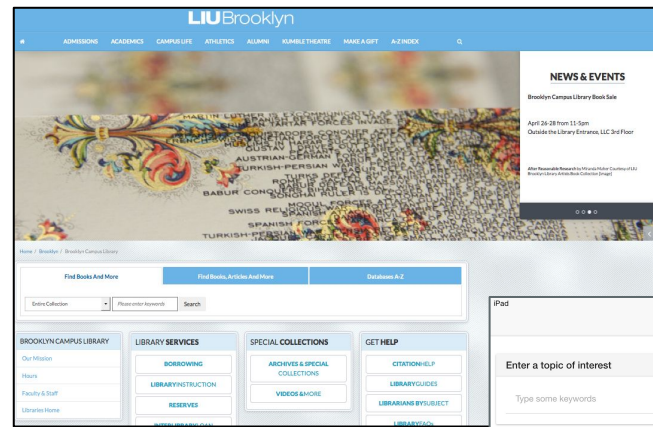
A solid blue square background with white text centered inside.

Actions Taken and Lessons Learned

Actions Taken

Instruction	Revised core and library curriculum, performed syllabus analysis for various departments
Space	Group study areas, natural light, “Genius Bar” setups
Reference	Extended hours, website redesign, Skype by appointment
Technology	App development, dissolved iPad program, added electrical outlets

Actions Taken



Challenges

- Time! Four years from start to finish
- Maintaining continuity in the project
- Sifting through the data; huge number of variables makes it almost impossible to exhaust all possibilities

Advantages

- Gained a more complex understanding of library use that could not come from stats and numbers
- Meaningful data to support requests for resources
- Adds a critical lens to what students say and do AND what we think students say and do
- Framework to build upon for future studies & comparisons

Takeaways

- Estimate the amount of time you need, then double it
- Find motivated team members willing to learn as they go
- Find supporters, such as your dean, director, or teaching faculty
- When possible, invest in professional services and resources (i.e. statistical software, transcription, data entry)

Thanks!

Kimberly.Mullins@liu.edu

Eamon.Tewell@liu.edu
@EamonTewell

Natalia.Tomlin@liu.edu