

Western Libraries Modified Service Survey Report (Executive Summary)

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Background

In March, the COVID-19 Pandemic triggered a shutdown of all non-essential businesses in Ontario, including Western Libraries. The Library took this time to come up with plans and strategies to help ensure the safety of its staff and visitors, and in September, Western Libraries re-opened its physical locations with reduced hours, new signage, and physical layouts and a booking system designed to help ensure that the library wouldn't be crowded and would allow the people in the buildings to stay safe. Given that the policies and practices used to keep participants safe hasn't been used before (owing to the previous lack of a global pandemic), this survey was constructed to help gain some feedback on the experience of students, staff, and faculty this semester, so that we can better understand the effect that our new service model has had on our users.

Method

This survey was delivered through Qualtrics. The survey contained 19 questions, which consisted of broad demographic questions such as academic status, role, and faculty, as well as mostly qualitative questions around which libraries participants have used, which library services they use, and what experiences they have had with the library this semester.

Results

After reviewing the data received, three significant themes were apparent across multiple questions:

1. A significant number of users (between one-quarter and one-third) are concerned about COVID generally, and this is impacting how, when, and whether they visit the library. Common sentiments expressed were:
 - They are staying away from the library simply because they are staying at home and avoiding public spaces.
 - They do not live in London (taking classes online) and therefore do not travel to the library.
 - They visit the library but try to keep the visit as short as possible (ie: only to pick up books) in order to limit their exposure.
2. Frustrations with the current library policies centred very clearly around three main themes:
 - The library hours are too short or inconveniently timed (ie: all libraries are open at the same time or specialized libraries like Music or Ivey are open at the same time classes are being held).
 - The time limit on bookable study hours (2 hours) is too short.

- The health protocols in place (including booking study tables, filling out the Return to Campus Questionnaire, Checking in) are either too elaborate or cause anxiety. This is especially the case for simple tasks such as picking up books or using the photocopier/scanner.

3. Confusion over rules and regulations. It is clear that many respondents are avoiding the library (or campus altogether) because they do not know what protocols they must follow and they do not know what they are and are not allowed to do. Some users did not know:

- Which libraries were open
- How to book study space
- Whether they could just drop in or had to book an appointment
- Whether they were allowed to use the library at all

Actions

Based on our survey findings, Western Libraries has made the following adjustments to its survey model:

- Removed restrictions on pre-bookings, allowing users to book more study times per week
- Increased seat booking time slots from 2 to 3 hours
- Seats are now renewable after 3 hours
- Modified Library hours:
 - Weldon:
 - Tuesdays & Thursdays: Weldon is now open until 9pm
 - Saturdays: Weldon will be open from 10:30am to 5pm
 - Business, Law, and Taylor:
 - Increased regular weekday hours---these libraries will now be open from 10am to 4pm.

We're continuing to monitor library usage, and will continue to adjust our operation plan to fit the needs of our users while keeping health and safety protocols in place for all services. These health and safety protocols will help ensure that the safety of our staff and users remain our highest priority.