

Asking, Listening, Observing: Learning about Student Research through Ethnography

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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

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.

Observations

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

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	
<i>A - Activities are goal directed sets of actions-things which people want to accomplish E - Environments include the entire area 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</i>	
What I Saw/Raw Data (A, E, I, O, U/Spradley)	What I Thought/Interpretation
Every table is occupied with more than one student.	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.
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).	Lots of talking. Furniture moved - computer chairs have been rolled from the computer area to the tables.
	Furniture is often moved and rearranged – new investments in furniture should be modular, portable, and resistant to carving/graffiti.
(12:12 – there has been significant turnover, one table is now free, and another table is all new students.)	

Interviews

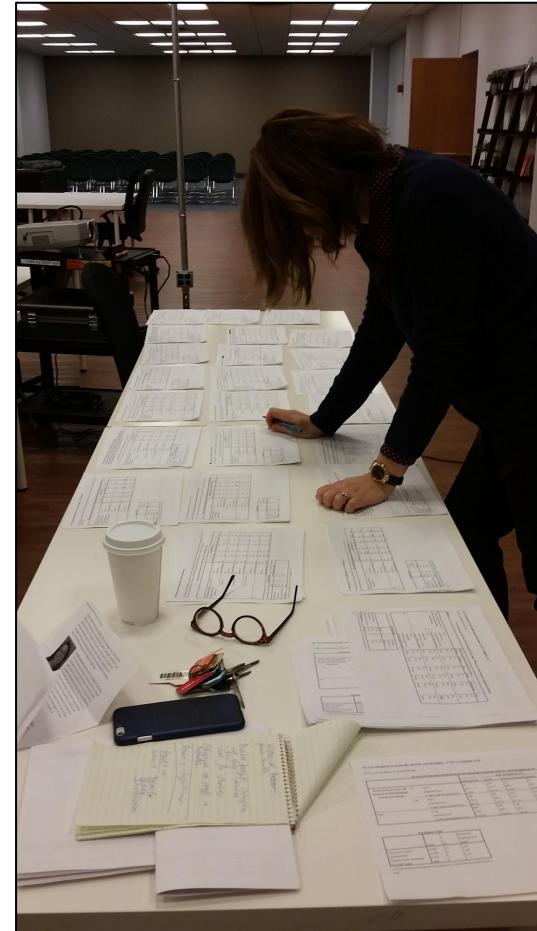
- Recruited interviewees during the survey stage
- Conducted 30 one-hour semi-structured interviews
- Included “show me” questions
- Videotaped and professionally transcribed audio

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

Data Analysis and Findings

Data Analysis

- Interview transcripts and observations reviewed to identify potential codes
- Codebook developed iteratively
- All applicable data entered into SPSS
- Thematic and statistical analyses performed



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	CPPSNODE
	RESSTRAT	Textbook Acquisition	TEXTBKAQ

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

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



A screenshot of the LIU Brooklyn library website. The header includes links for ADMISSIONS, ACADEMICS, CAMPUS LIFE, ATHLETICS, ALUMNI, KUMBLE THEATRE, MAKE A GIFT, and A-Z INDEX. The main content features a large image of a historical map, a news & events section, and a search bar.

A screenshot of the LIU mobile library app interface. It shows a list of services: Location & Hours, Databases, Catalog, My Library Account, Ask a Librarian, and Research Guides. Each service has a plus sign icon to its right.

A screenshot of a mobile device displaying a research topic entry form. The screen shows a header for an iPad at 2:03 PM, a "Choose Topic" section, and a text input field for "Enter a topic of interest". Below it is a "List 3 facts you already know about the topic:" section with three empty input fields. Further down are sections for "List 3 questions that you would like to know about subject:" and "List Keywords and Phrases:", each with three empty input fields. At the bottom are buttons for "Continue" and "Choose Topic" with a magnifying glass icon.

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, anthropology)

Questions?

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