

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

Eamon Tewell, LIU Brooklyn | @eamontewell

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

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

# 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

# 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

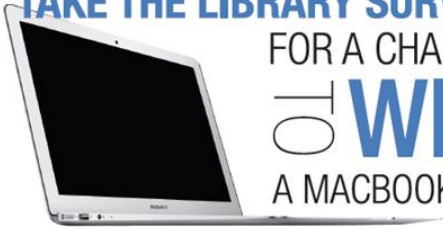
- 51 questions on tech use, library use, research and study habits
- Administered Fall 2012
- 1100+ responses
- Used survey data to create interview questions

PARTICIPATE  
SO **YOUR**  
LIBRARY  
CAN INNOVATE

NOVEMBER 19TH

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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!

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**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

*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
Every table is occupied with more than one student.  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.  (12:12 – there has been significant turnover, one table is now free, and another table is all new students.)	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.  Furniture is often moved and rearranged – new investments in furniture should be modular, portable, and resistant to carving/graffiti.

# 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?

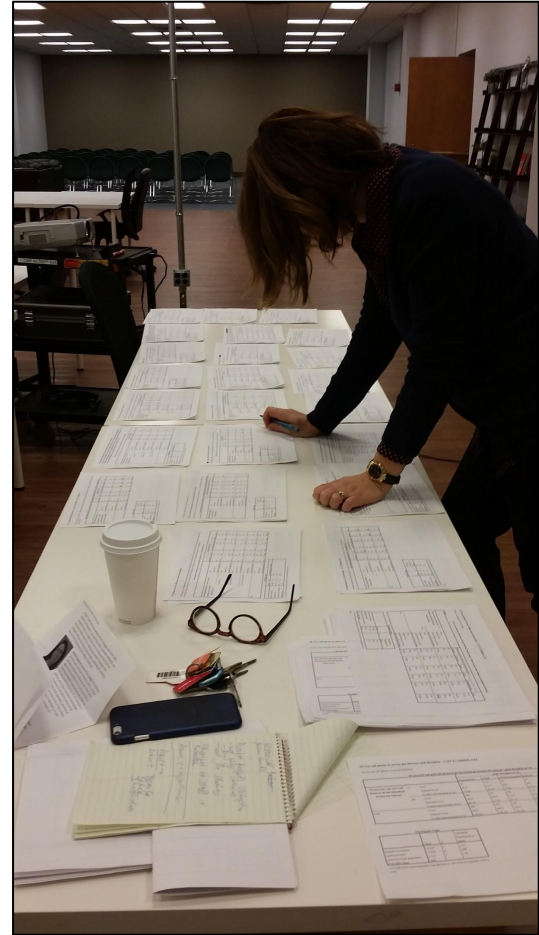
Interviewee: → I've browsed through, but I haven't really for any particular reason.

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

<b>Student Research Strategies</b>	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

# 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

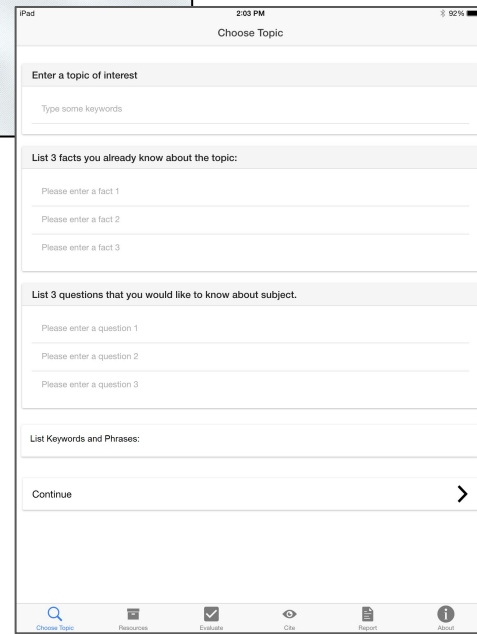
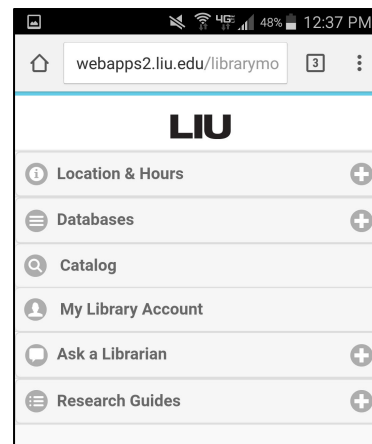
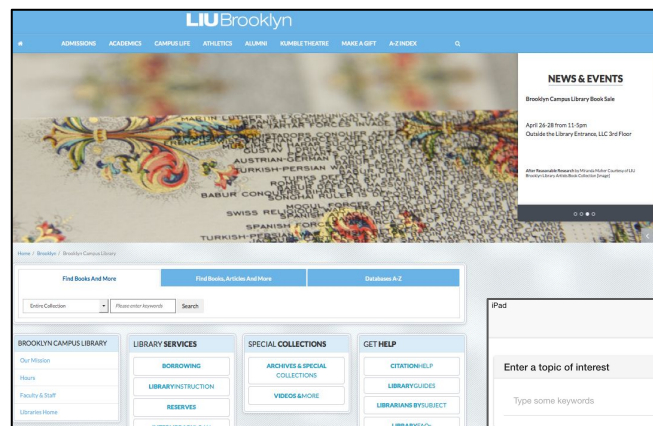
- Actively browsed for materials as means of discovery (i.e. shelf browsing, catalog subject headings)
- Began assignments with resources from the open web
- Multitasked using technology

**Actions Taken  
and  
Lessons Learned**

# Actions Taken

<b>Instruction</b>	Revised core and library curriculum, performed syllabus analysis for various departments
<b>Space</b>	Group study areas, natural light, “Genius Bar” setups
<b>Reference</b>	Extended hours, website redesign, Skype by appointment
<b>Technology</b>	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, anthropology)

# Questions?

Eamon.Tewell@liu.edu  
@EamonTewell

Kimberly.Mullins@liu.edu

Natalia.Tomlin@liu.edu

Slides: [tinyurl.com/acrlLIUethnography](https://tinyurl.com/acrlLIUethnography)