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We Heard You! Designing an Engaging User Feedback Station

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We Heard You! Designing an Engaging User Feedback Station

Abstract

In November 2018, Lander University's Jackson Library replaced their rarely-used traditional suggestion box with a new feedback station installed in the printing area, including open-ended whiteboard prompts and public replies posted to all question/comment forms received. Since then, the library's users have shared hundreds of forms and whiteboard responses. How to install and manage a feedback station, challenges encountered, and actions taken in response to user feedback are discussed.

Keywords

user experience, user research, library spaces, academic libraries

We Heard You! Designing an Engaging User Feedback Station

User experience (UX) in libraries isn't just about your virtual presence. In a world inundated with requests to share feedback via online surveys, your library users may be more receptive to sharing their thoughts offline, at a time and place convenient for them. To paraphrase Nielsen & Norman's definition of UX: A library's user experience encompasses all aspects of the end-user's interaction with the library, its services, and its resources; excellent UX requires meeting the exact needs of the user without difficulties, as well as a simplicity and elegance that make the library a joy to use.

For years, Lander University's Jackson Library maintained a traditional suggestion box at the front service desk that received almost no input. In November 2018, the outlet was redesigned to include public replies posted to the suggestions received. Porter (1986) said of the suggestion box at Carnegie-Mellon University Libraries, "It remains a worthy technique, but if, and only if, the organization is willing to enter into a visible dialog with its users (p. 75)."

Inspired by Kuglitsch & Couture's (2018) UX program at the University of Colorado Boulder Libraries, we also introduced whiteboard prompts used in tandem with the redesigned suggestion box. When common concerns are identified through the suggestion box, asking focused questions on the whiteboard can provide a forum to seek some measure of clarification.

Method

Installation

For the location of the new feedback station, we identified a printing station directly off our main lobby. The location is high-traffic, and students often linger in the area waiting for printing jobs or stapling/hole-punching papers, yet it also allows for anonymity, as users can't be seen by staff from the front service desk. We moved the suggestion box to a table in this area and mounted a combination bulletin board/whiteboard directly above the table, labeled with the sign, "Jackson Library Questions/Comments." To demonstrate how the bulletin board would work, we pinned up a fake

example form written by one of our student workers: “How do I donate books to the library?” with a response written in the space below. On the whiteboard, we started with Kuglitsch & Couture’s (2018) suggested first prompt: “I wish my library knew that . . .”



Figure 1 Location of the new feedback station

We also installed a satellite station on the top floor of the library, on a side table in a lounge seating area, in an effort to capture any users who might not frequent the printing station. This consisted of just a pad of forms, a suggestion box, and a sign explaining that responses would be posted downstairs. Eventually, we discontinued this satellite station due to low usage.



Figure 2 Satellite station

Maintenance

We followed Porter's (1986) suggestions to send answers directly to users, if they chose to identify themselves and provide an email address, as well post all public replies in the display area, and to post replies to all forms unless content is obscene or criticizing a specific person.

Forms are often received regarding campus departments and locations outside the library, ex. Dining Services and Information Technology Services (ITS). These are shared with the relevant stakeholders and posted with the response that we have shared the feedback with that department. For outside departments that receive a large volume of regular comments, feedback is grouped and shared in periodic updates.

We started out by tallying the question/comment forms received in a simple Word document list of each topic and the number of forms regarding it, ex. "Too noisy (12)." Eventually, after fielding follow-up queries about exactly when certain forms were received, searching for response language to be reused for certain topics, etc., it was decided to start recording each form in a more detailed Excel spreadsheet log, including date received, date responded, the full question/comment message, and category tags. In the long run, the latter method is a time-saver.

We make sure that any whiteboard prompts are open-ended questions. Each new prompt is left up for three weeks, and the board is photographed once a day and erased when it becomes full to make room for additional responses. At the end of the three weeks, a report is compiled tallying the responses received.

Results

Since installation on November 13, 2018, the redesigned question/comment station received 44 forms in the first month, and 427 total forms to date.

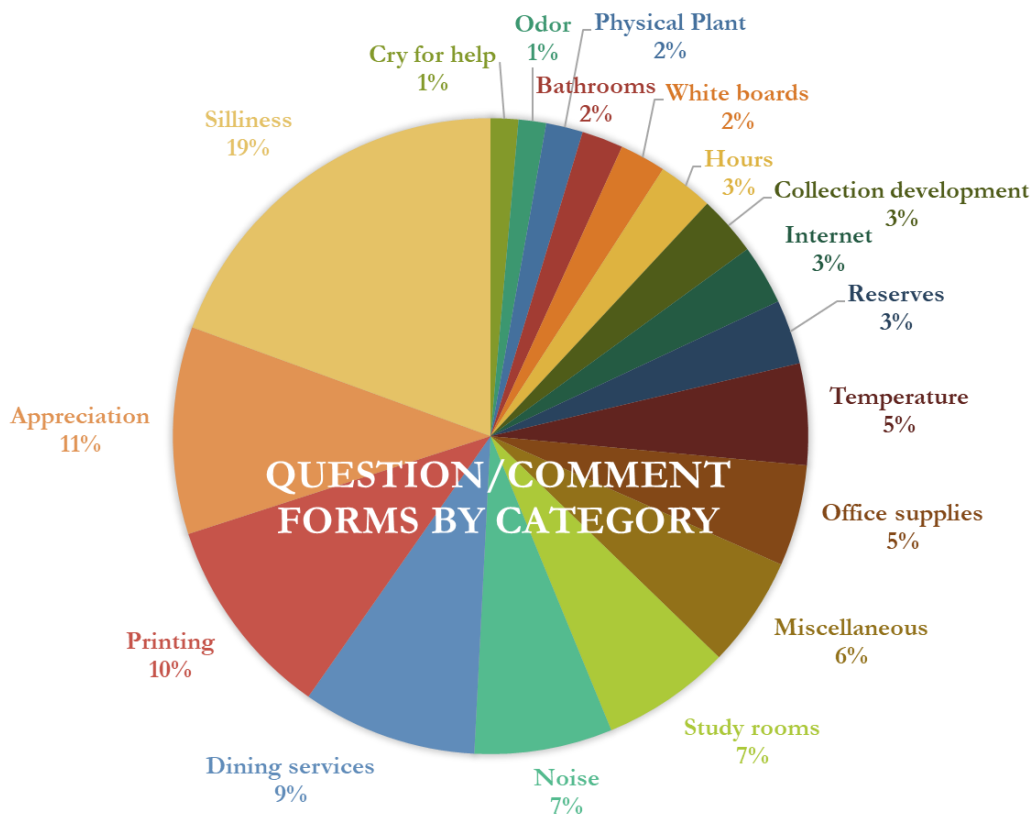


Figure 3 Question/comment forms received by category

Discussion

The first major issue we identified through the new feedback station was a large volume of noise complaints. We had not previously been aware that this was a significant problem. To address the

complaints, we started by borrowing another research technique suggested by Kuglitsch & Couture (2018) and conducted a reply card study, leaving out small cards on seats throughout the building and collecting any completed cards each morning. This helped to identify noise trends over hours and locations in the building. Next, we rearranged furniture to zone noise organically, and installed a lot of additional signage identifying noise level zones, on table tops, walls, doors, etc. Since making these adjustments, our noise complaints have dropped steadily each semester to only two complaints in spring 2020, and we have also received forms thanking us for making it quieter in the building.

More actions we have taken in response to feedback include improving the restrooms, reducing our study room booking limits and creating official reservation policies, installing re-shelving book drops, developing areas of our print collection, making amenities such as tissues, hand sanitizer, and disinfecting wipes available, installing air freshener dispensers, adding new reserve items such as box fans, blankets, calculators, and phone chargers, adding print station supplies, and placing work orders as needed with the Physical Plant. At the one-year mark, we mounted a large poster in the feedback station reporting our actions taken in response to the feedback we've received, to close the loop with our users and show how their input mattered.

Challenges

A few overly hostile comments were received regarding the noise complaints and a building hours reduction. These forms were posted with responses as usual, and a request that any further



Figure 4 One year report poster

discussion of the user's concerns take place through contacting the library staff directly, with a business card attached.

A few months after the new station was installed, there was an increase in silly comments and jokes that grew to be too many to feasibly respond. On April Fool's Day, these unanswered forms were posted to the bulletin board along with a fake Notification of Disciplinary Action letter for "misusing the Library Services feedback outlet." After this, joke form submissions decreased.

Limitations

One major limitation of this user research method is that the channel is limited to physical library visitors, and feedback tends to center around the physical space. The location of the feedback station itself may skew the feedback topics, for example, we receive many printing and office supply requests, likely because we installed in the printer station.

The other major limitation of this method is anonymity—no demographic information is collected on participants, and there is limited ability of ask for clarification. Internal stakeholders may dismiss feedback as a vocal minority, or that it could all be written by one person.

Conclusion

We have found the technique valuable as a finger on the pulse of what's important to our users and an idea generator. While we do pay attention to how many times a given issue is brought up, since the feedback collected is anonymous, free-form, and ongoing, we don't treat the data as a numbers game.

Your users' input will be proportional to your amount of input. If responses are thoughtful and posted in a timely manner, users will continue to engage in the dialogue. If you're having fun with it, your users will too!

References

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