

Megan Wagner and Richard M. Cho

# 24/7 Study

## Conducting a focus to improve services

**M**any of us remember our own experiences with final exams during our college years: certain determination tinged with jitters, endless cups of coffee, and the lamp light illuminating the desk throughout the night. Final exams account for, for most classes, a substantial portion of students' final grade, and at a university that puts keen emphasis on student success, it is imperative that students encounter their final exams with proper preparation. One way the library can help is to provide them with an optimal place to study for exams, any time of any day.

To this end, a team of librarians at California State University-Fullerton (CSU-Fullerton) proposed a project to improve 24/7 Study services, to supplement the university's effort to improve the student success rate. In order to evaluate and assess the needs of students, we concluded that a focus group study that involves the student assistants of the library would be the most ideal approach. This focus group would help provide the specific details of student needs during finals, broached in an informal, conversational setting. Librarians involved also discovered there was no literature available on internal performance assessments of 24/7 services executed through a focus group study. This provided an opportunity to share our experience with other professionals seeking similar assessments of 24/7 Study services.

### Background

The Paulina June & George Pollak Library supports CSU-Fullerton's diverse and growing student population of approximately

40,000 students. Primarily consisting of undergraduate students, first-time freshman, and undergraduate transfer students, CSU-Fullerton is largely a commuter campus, with less than 1% of all undergraduate students living in campus housing.<sup>1</sup> Beginning in the fall of 2014, the campus implemented a comprehensive Student Success Initiative with the goal of strengthening student experiences, academic success, and improving various support services. In consultation with student leadership, this initiative included expanding library hours during the early morning and late evening, as well as providing 24/7 library access for the week prior to and during final exams. Between fall 2014 and spring 2016, this provided for the expansion of an additional 110 hours of library time available to students.<sup>2</sup>

Initially, the charge was seemingly simple: extend the library's operating hours. Data collected from preliminary student surveys and town hall meetings suggested that the biggest support the library could provide to help students succeed was just to be open. That being said, a library is not just a building. In order for extended hours to be successful, library administration quickly determined that additional support staff was needed,

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especially technical support, janitorial, and security services. With considerable use came considerable changes to the library culture and study environment during 24/7 Study. For example, group study rooms became highly desired locations, with library users frequently bringing mattresses, sleeping bags, microwaves, coffee pots, and all manner of food in order to reside in the room the entirety of finals week. Complaints began to surface on social media and to library administration about disruptive community members, fraternities, and other student groups disturbing library spaces with excessive noise, trash, buffet-style meals, and other distractions. Most importantly, there was a lack of understanding and no feedback mechanism from students on what services and support they needed to be successful during finals, aside from a physical place to study.

## Preparation

In September 2017, the 24/7 Study Committee needed direct feedback

to assess if we were meeting student expectations for an outstanding 24/7 Study experience. We wanted to find out how best to accommodate our students' needs and concluded that the most effective way would be to ask them directly by organizing a focus group.

The discussion evolved around the type of questions to pose during the focus group. Mainly, we were interested in our students' perspective on how best to serve them (available services, accommodations, concerns) during the 24/7 Study. In addition, this was an opportunity to gather data about students who currently use the library during 24/7 Study. To this end, we devised a preliminary

questionnaire for the selected students to complete before delving into a focus group conversation. In consultation with the library dean, we devised the questions as follows:

### *Demographics Questionnaire*

- Student age.
- Student major.
- On campus resident or commuter student?

- When are you most using the library during 24/7 Study?

(Check boxes for Monday through Sunday, morning/afternoon/evening.)

- How long do you usually spend in the library during 24/7 Study? (Check boxes for less than an hour, 1-to-2 hours, 2-to-4 hours, 4 hours or more.)

- Which library services do you utilize during 24/7 Study? (computer, printing services, student genius corner, circulation/reserves, group study rooms, general study space, stress buster zone.)



Focus group recruitment flyer.

### *Focus Group Questions*

• Tell me an experience you've had during 24/7 Study, or if this is your first semester, what expectations do you have for 24/7 Study in the library?

• What services or support would you like to see during 24/7 Study that are not currently offered?

• What would you like to see changed?

• What challenges do you face during 24/7 Study?

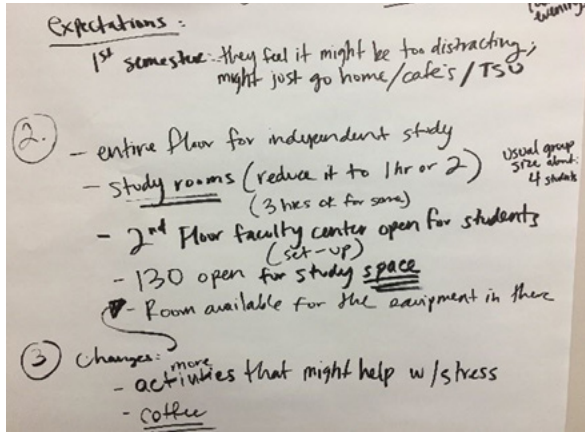
• Is there anything else you'd like us to know?

## Recruitment

The Pollak Library is one of the largest em-

ployers of students on the CSU-Fullerton campus, with students employed in a variety of areas: circulation, access services, reference, exhibits, information technology, library administration, digital print services, systems, special collections, and technical services, as well as various academic and cultural resource centers located in the library. The goal was to recruit students from all areas of the library to incorporate diverse student perspectives

Focus group notes.



and glean as much feedback as possible. A focus group recruitment flyer was created to promote attendance. Visiting key library units that employ students during overnight hours was indispensable and helped emphasize the high value and importance of student opinions. To promote involvement, we also requested support from the library to fund pizza and refreshments as incentives for student participation.

### Conducting focus group study

On November 8, 2017, a month prior to 24/7 Study, we conducted the very first 24/7 Study focus group with great success.

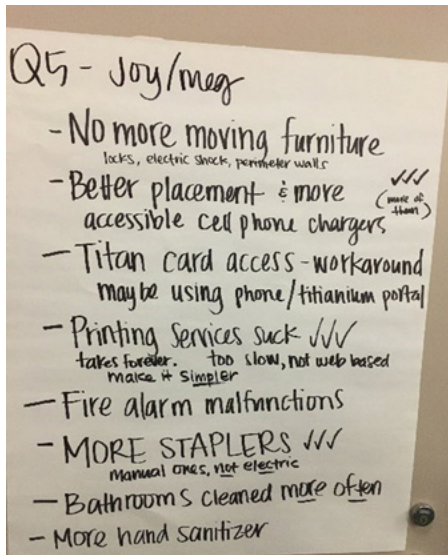
Twenty-one students participated, forming three groups of seven students, with two librarians (one to moderate and one to transcribe) per group. We prepared whiteboards

and Post-It Easel Pads throughout the room to transcribe student responses. Voice-recording the focus group was not recommended because the data management plan for sound-recording requires more stringent

Institutional Review Board protocol. The students enjoyed complimentary pizza and drinks while completing the preliminary survey and were fully engaged in the focus group questions. All student participants had experience using the library

during 24/7 Study and were very candid and knowledgeable about common student concerns. When the hour was up, the boards were filled with anecdotes, wishes, complaints, and further questions.

After the focus group, the preliminary data was input into Qualtrics, and visualizations were generated. We also organized the qualitative data from our focus group conversations and listed them based on the frequency of the same concerns expressed. During the next 24/7 Study Committee meeting, the team analyzed the data and divided the findings into categories,



More focus group notes.

including obtainable recommendations, unobtainable recommendations, library partner recommendations, and big picture lessons.

## Response aggregation summary

The big picture lessons learned from the 24/7 Study focus group were varied and wide-ranging, with both expected and unexpected results. While some responses highlighted opportunities to improve, many requests remained out of reach for the library to provide.

Several important findings were consistently desired by student participants, including more independent and quiet study spaces available during 24/7 Study. In collaborative spaces, students preferred using small group study areas with modular furniture, flexible design, and mobile white boards. Contrary to popular belief among librarians, there was very limited student interest in expanding library reference desk services outside of normal semester operating hours. Participants also reported severe difficulties locating available power outlets in the library, often resulting in students crowding areas with power strips and moving charging stations and furniture. Students also unanimously desired a larger security presence and additional janitorial support during overnight hours.

Not surprisingly, almost all student participants reported the biggest concerns they confront during semester finals are getting enough sleep, eating, and maintaining a healthy work/study balance. Many responses highlighted opportunities for the library to improve the 24/7 Study environment in light of these common concerns. Unfortunately, some suggestions collected during the focus group were at odds with current library policies and challenged the established guidelines for 24/7 Study. This included requests for the library to provide free food, coffee, scantrons, and designated locations to sleep and eat during overnight hours.

In light of the guidelines introduced to shape the environment during 24/7 Study, students were pleased with the addition of the clean-up stations, and the group study room reservation system received overwhelmingly positive remarks. Regarding library programming, students unanimously voted the Therapy Dog Program (sponsored

through the Pet Prescription Team to help reduce stress) as the most popular 24/7 study event. It was suggested that the library partner with Associated Students during finals to help arrange visits from the school mascot, Tuffy Titan, who is often seen roaming the campus giving out big elephant hugs and high-fives during finals to boost morale.

## Conclusion

Once the focus group concluded and the data aggregated, the committee shared its findings with the dean's council to establish which recommendations and suggestions were within the library's ability to accomplish. Many of the universal suggestions for improvement made by students were echoed among librarians and library staff (includ-

### Best practices for conducting focus groups

Based on our experience, we recommend the following best practices when conducting focus groups.

- Prepare ahead of time and have clear goals for the focus group study.
- Be open and accommodating to different ideas and perspectives.
- Create a team of allies, including librarians and library partners.
- Moderators should set the proper tone and encourage participation.
- As much as librarians always want to, do not use this forum as an opportunity to inform.
- Engage in active listening (e.g., nodding head, eye contact, leaning forward).
- Give verbal affirmations like "I see," "Sure," or "Thank you."
- Follow up with unclear comments or vague suggestions (e.g., "Can you give me an example?" or "What might that look like?").
- Aggregate data in a simple and organized manner.
- Make sure to follow up with an improvement plan.

ing expanding security and janitorial support). Student feedback in support of these efforts was especially helpful in providing cause and sound reasoning for further resource requests. Additionally, some suggestions were easier to accommodate than others. For example, it was clear from a lack of student awareness that advertising was needed for the IT department's portable battery checkout program, which may resolve the power outlet issues expressed by many students. The library made additional conference rooms and instruction spaces available as extra quiet study space wherever possible to accommodate increased demand. Box fans were purchased to encourage air circulation on the stuffy group study room floors. Additional wet wipes, hand sanitizer, and whiteboard pens were offered in high-traffic areas. Lastly, librarians were able to partner with Associated Students to arrange for dual programming, including a pizza event and regular visits from Tuffy Titan for free hugs and scantrons in the library.

Another upside to conducting a focus group study is that students realize the library wants to listen to their opinions and strives to meet their demands. In the future, we hope to conduct a follow-up survey, asking students if they noticed any differences since the last 24/7 Study and continue to gain feedback on needs. It is important to continue to listen to our students, to whom the main purpose of the academic library is devoted.

## Notes

1. "Student Profile at a Glance," CSU-Fullerton, Office of Assessment and Institutional Research, Fall 2017, accessed November 6, 2018, [www.fullerton.edu/data/institutionalresearch/facts/profile.php](http://www.fullerton.edu/data/institutionalresearch/facts/profile.php).

2. "Putting Student Success Initiative Funds to Work at the Library," CSU-Fullerton, Paulina June & George Pollak Library, accessed January 29, 2018, [www.library.fullerton.edu/about/student-success-initiative.php](http://www.library.fullerton.edu/about/student-success-initiative.php). *FL*

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