JONES ARCH

The Library

Academic Library Database

Our academic library database encompasses over 70 institutions and includes general contextual information, programming information, and detailed seat count and type analysis. We bring this data to bear on the design and planning recommendations that we make for our current library clients by identifying their peer group and drawing comparisons. Each institution is of course unique, so we use this peer group assessment as a benchmarking tool and a way to ask questions about why/how/what our client may need. We find that our balanced approach, in which we bolster anecdotal information and observations with empirical evidence and analysis of peer institutions, resonates with our higher education clients from librarians, to trustees, to administrators, to faculty and students.

Approximately half of the libraries in our database date from the last decade, and the balance from before that time. This 10-year window gives us a good inflection point that we use to understand current and established trends in library design and planning, as compared to older projects. Although concentrated in New England, the spectrum of academic libraries that we survey spans the country.
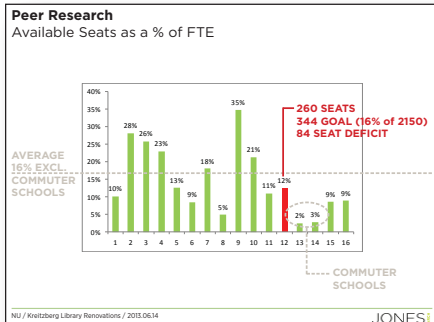
People. Our survey spans a wide range of scales, from small liberal arts colleges to major land grant universities. The undergraduate FTE population of these campuses ranges from 1,500 to over 40,000, with an average around 6,000.

Culture. Our survey includes small liberal arts colleges, private schools, public schools, major land grant universities, and military institutions. Each institution has a specific character and sense of place, and it is this rich diversity that can support the vast spectrum of student personalities that populate the American academic landscape. This cultural diversity can drive differentiation and unique conditions within the library that are best captured anecdotally. This is precisely why our methodology is to visit each campus in person so we can witness these conditions firsthand.
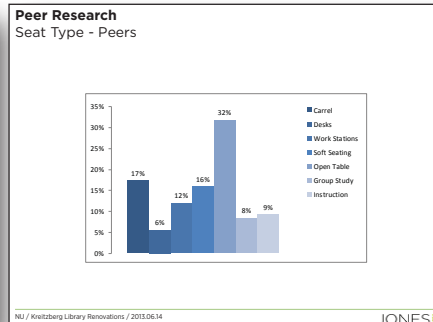
Quantity. A critical benchmark for guiding our design process, we survey the total seat count in the library and evaluate that against the undergraduate FTE population.

Quality. Perhaps more important than simple quantity, the blend of seat types is critical. For example, five hundred seats, 80% of which are study carrels, create a particular character for the library. To that end, we track seven seat types – carrels, desks, workstations, soft seating, open table, group study, and instruction. Shifts in this blend have occurred over the past 20 years. Trends toward more group study, soft seating, and instruction space have emerged, moving away from carrels, desks, and workstations. Open table study (the classic "reading room" environment) remains a persistent model.
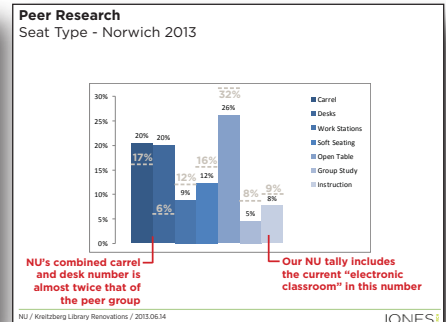
Strategic Partnerships. As libraries have evolved over the past decade, they have forged new alliances and partnerships on campus. Collections, periodicals, microfilm, and microfiche are increasingly available digitally, which opens up floor space for seating, collaborative work areas, and new "tenants." In the past decade, the programmatic diversity has exploded and these partner programs lend added vitality to the library, create opportunities for new synergies, and increase the gate count. However, it is important to remember that libraries are not student centers, and we need to be aware of this balance. They are serious places of research and learning. Research and learning can be open, loud, and collaborative, but it cannot all be that way. Quiet (or silent!) spaces persist for good reason.

Demonstration of total available seats as a percentage of FTE student population. Identifying the institution's deficit.

Seat type blend of peer institutions as a percentage - carrels, desks, work stations, soft seating, open table, group study, and instruction.

Existing seat type blend compared to peer group shows much heavier carrel + desk allocation than more current peer group examples.

+83%

For the month of December 2015, which includes the exam period, the gate count was up 83% when compared to the same month in 2014.

"The best indicator of the success of the project is that use of the library and instruction rooms has increased dramatically. The Norwich community thoroughly enjoys the library's new 'feel' as one of vibrancy and energy in a respectful manner. Norwich University is thrilled with the transformation of our library and most appreciative of Jones Architecture's critical role."

David Magida, CAO, Norwich University

Digital Scholarship

With the increase in media modes of communication, libraries are becoming the place to help students explore, learn, and produce digital content to tell a story through different modes such as digital media, models, song, video, fabricated objects, etc. – rather than through text alone. After all, the rest of the University supports text! Faculty is also producing content for MOOCs.

Makerspaces

Makerspaces have taken on many forms and are not just space and equipment. They must be creatively programmed and appropriately staffed. The best makerspaces offer layers of access – visibility from corridor to activity within; tinkering table that allows for drop-in, low commitment play for anyone; deeper, more time consuming fabrication accessible to more experienced users.

Classrooms

Classrooms are increasingly finding their way into libraries. These versatile spaces accommodate shifts from dialogic to didactic pedagogical modes, and can function as open study space, event venues, or collaborative work environments when not in use as a classroom. Faculty and students alike enjoy access during the extended hours of operation of the library, which is in contrast to traditional classroom building hours. They are also heavily used by library staff for training purposes and for testing new technologies.

Social Spaces

We know that learning happens everywhere and spaces that promote social interaction strengthen student relationships and sense of community, while facilitating collaboration and the exchange of ideas. As such, we see cafes, lounges, laptop bars, and other in-between spaces as essential to libraries.