

TO: Library Steering Committee
FROM: Library Building and Safety Committee (LBSC)
Re: Group Study Room Policy Final Recommendation
Date: March 12, 2019

June 2017

Original Charge

The Library Steering Committee (LSC) charges the Library Building and Safety Committee to:

- Review and assess the suitability of the “TCNJ Library Group Study Room Policy” (<http://library.tcnj.edu/about-the-library/policies/group-study-room-policy/>). Consider relevant data (e.g., longitudinal library-use statistics), input from stakeholders (e.g., LibQual or other surveys, open fora, etc.), and best practices from academic libraries prior to developing preliminary and final recommendations, as required by Library Governance procedures.
- If your review indicates that changes to the current policy are warranted, develop and propose such changes.
- If your proposed changes include scheduling or reserving Group Study Rooms, include a discussion of how such scheduling might be implemented.
- Send final recommendations to the LSC, together with a discussion of how the recommendations were developed and how testimony/input was solicited and used.

September 2018

Preliminary Recommendation

LBSC sent LSC a preliminary recommendation with changes to the Group Study Room Policy as noted below. This preliminary recommendation was based on: 1) relevant data, 2) best practices from other academic libraries, and 3) input from stakeholders. LBSC then proceeded to the next step of collecting further testimony from stakeholder groups on the preliminary recommendation in order to formulate a final recommendation.

The LBSC recommended replacing the current group study room policy with a revised policy. Significant changes to the policy included:

- 1) Making some group study rooms reservable, with the remaining rooms available on a first-come, first-served basis.
- 2) Changing the recommended occupancy from “two or more will have preference in the use of Group Study Rooms,” to “Groups of three or more will have preference in the use of Group Study Rooms.”

- 3) Adding wording to the policy to give effect to the implementation of a reservation system. [If such a system were to be implemented, then the suggested wording in the revised policy would have had to be further amended to accommodate the requirements and limitations of the reservation system.]

In addition to the recommended policy changes, the LBSC also suggested in its preliminary recommendation the implementation of an application that would allow users to see study-room occupancy in real time.

October – December 2018

Discussions and concerns from the LBSC and stakeholders

LBSC presented its preliminary recommendation to various stakeholders by scheduling presentations with library faculty and staff, the staff senate, the faculty senate, and student government. Additionally, two campuswide open fora were held, and feedback was solicited via an online Qualtrics form. LBSC received 64 comments via this online form.

The comments received during the in-person presentations were similar to the feedback received online.

- **In favor of the policy:** Of the 64 online responses, 29 expressed agreement with the overall policy change.
- **Not in favor of the policy:** 23 of the online respondents were opposed to the implementation of a reservation system.
- **Changing the room occupancy requirement:** The suggestion to change the recommended occupancy of group study rooms (from groups of two or more to groups of three or more) generated mixed feedback. For example, of the 64 online comments, 16 respondents disagreed with this change, while 21 approved of the change.
- ***Easily identify unoccupied study rooms:** Many respondents noted their desire to be able to determine room availability without having to walk through every floor of the library floors to find an open room.
- ***Only one person in study room:** Out of the 64 online comments, 6 respondents mentioned only seeing one person in a room. When a room is occupied by a single user, groups do not feel comfortable asking this person to leave. They want library staff to enforce the policy of offering preference to groups of two or more persons.
- ***Frustration with users who “hold” group study rooms:** Another recurrent response was patron dissatisfaction upon encountering rooms empty of persons but clearly being marked as “occupied” by the scattering of books, backpacks, coats, etc.

*In the 2017 Qualtrics survey, which was distributed to gather feedback for the preliminary recommendation, these items were often mentioned as areas of dissatisfaction.

March 2019

Final Recommendation

After considering all of the evidence and stakeholder testimony, LBSC recommends the following:

1. Maintain the current group study room policy.
2. Implement technologies that will allow patrons to identify vacant group study rooms without having to roam the floors. After a reasonable time period (at least three or four full semesters) during which such a technology is implemented and operational, it may be worthwhile to re-evaluate patron satisfaction with the current group study room policy.
3. Change the wording on the group study room signs so that groups of users know how to contact library staff to request assistance in asking a one-person “group” to vacate a room, or in removing personal belongings that are being used to “hold” an unoccupied room.

Other Considerations

As noted in the LBSC’s preliminary recommendation, analysis of feedback on group study usage and policies points to a significant demand both for more group study rooms and more quiet study spaces. Although it is beyond the scope of the current charge, the LBSC has identified some possible ways to address these demands, including the following:

- Consider possible low-cost (as compared to constructing new group study rooms) space reconfigurations. For example, some large tables could be removed from open areas in the library, and replaced with more semi-private study carrels.
- Implement stricter enforcement of the current noise policy, and/or consider possible revisions to this policy, with a view towards creating more quiet spaces.
- Erect dividers on top of large tables, to discourage group conversations.
- Purchase some noise-cancelling headphones that users could borrow.
- Install white-noise machines.

LBSC Committee: Nathaniel Bargad, Terrence Bennett, Richard Brum, Andrew D’Apice (Co-Chair), Marlena Frackowski, Louise Pezzullo-Bizon, Paula Rainey, (Co-Chair)