

NCSU LIBRARIES
Collaboratory Assessment Report
2005/06

The NCSU Libraries is working as a partner with the Information Technology Division and the Learning in a Technology-Rich Environment (LITRE) initiative (<http://litre.ncsu.edu/>) on a project called "Flyspace." This pilot project is establishing and testing the effectiveness of well-equipped, technology-enabled work spaces for student group work and learning. The goal is to create a collaborative work environment that is inexpensive, easy to use, and requires minimal support. The NCSU Libraries' Collaboratory is one of three rooms identified for the "Flyspace" project.

The Collaboratory, located in the D. H. Hill Library, is equipped with a PC and a Macintosh computer, each with a large display for viewing by a small group and with software for developing presentations and manipulating multimedia materials created in the nearby Digital Media Lab. Seating is available for two groups of six to eight people. Videoconferencing equipment can be reserved for use in the room, and wireless networking is provided. Networked printing is available from printers in the Digital Media Lab.

During the 2005/06 academic year 571 groups registered to use the Collaboratory. The size of the groups ranged from 2 to 10 people.

The NCSU Libraries used two approaches during the 2005/06 academic year to assess the effectiveness of the Collaboratory:

- 1) a survey administered to users during three different weeks; and
- 2) a web survey administered to users who had registered for the space during 2004/05.

1) Results of user surveys administered during the weeks of 9/26/05-10/02/05, 10/30/05-11/6/05, and 2/20/06-2/26/06

The Libraries has designated certain weeks as sampling periods for gathering usage statistics. Collaboratory users were surveyed during these same periods. Eleven users responded to the survey.

Status: 9 were graduate students and 2 were faculty.

Purpose: 6 used the Collaboratory for class-related purposes.

Applications used: The most heavily used applications were the Internet (11), Microsoft Office (9), and Adobe Acrobat (5).

Use of technology: The technology aided the users in preparing for presentations, doing projects, and engaging in group study. One group used the technology to help develop a simulation exercise.

Level of satisfaction: 1 was neutral, 5 were somewhat satisfied, and 5 were very satisfied.

Suggestions for improving the Collaboratory: a projector (4), scanner (2), better speaker for PC (1), printer (1), software (IDE, Komodo Professional), better

ventilation/air conditioning (2), less construction noise (1), different scheduling/key check-out (2).

2) Results of web survey of 2004/05 registered users

The Libraries contacted 78 users and received 12 responses.

All respondents had used the room for a group activity, and 9 had used the room 2-5 times. Group sizes of 2-4 people were the most common. The respondents included undergraduates (6), graduate students (4), and faculty (2), and 11 rated the room as more comfortable or much more comfortable compared to other rooms they had used for group work.

The reasons for using the room included class assignments (5), and other uses such as studying, conducting research, and preparing for presentations (7). Users consulted the web (11) and used PowerPoint and other Microsoft Office applications (10); one mentioned using bioinformatics software. Most used the Dell computer (11), followed by the Macintosh (4) and the whiteboard (3).

Reasons for selecting this room instead of other rooms on campus included its central location, the ability to reserve the room, its size, its privacy and quietness, and the equipment and applications (large screens, high speed computers). All of those who planned to continue at NC State said they would likely use the room again.

Most agreed or strongly agreed with the statements that:

- Use of the technology in the Collaboratory facilitates teamwork;
- The benefits of this technology outweigh any hassles or difficulties that might arise;
- This technology helps me visualize the concepts;
- This technology accommodates my needs and learning styles; and
- The technology helps me to understand real-world examples.

Respondents were somewhat split on the following statement:

This technology helps me better comprehend complex or abstract concepts.

Respondents were more neutral on the following statement:

Use of technology in the Collaboratory contributes to my understanding of content in my courses.

Suggestions included making additional rooms available and posting directions on how to use the whiteboard.

Conclusions and Use of Results

The Collaboratory's location on the second floor of the D. H. Hill Library's East Wing is not highly visible, but those who have discovered the room and responded to the surveys

indicate satisfaction with the area and what it offers. The central location of the library and the availability of a room specifically equipped for group work were viewed positively by users, and they believe the technology facilitates the group learning process. Responses indicate that the Collaboratory is meeting “Flyspace” project goals of establishing a group work environment that is inexpensive, easy to use, and requires minimal support.

Responses to the surveys will be used in designing and equipping group areas in the Learning Commons, which is scheduled to open on the first floor of the East Wing in 2007.