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Cover Page Footnote

The author wishes to thank colleagues and staff at John Jay College who helped with survey logistics. Special thanks to Professor Janice Dunham, Associate Librarian for User Services, who has been responsible for managing the 24/7 program. It is because of her efforts, and her commitment to support the needs of the students where she finds them, that the 24/7 program came to fruition.

24/7 Library Hours at an Urban Commuter College

Maureen Richards

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Abstract

Historically, academic libraries have not provided their users with any form of 24-hour access. The evidence today is that many do. This article discusses the results of a survey of students using the library at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, which in the Spring 2014 began offering 24/7 library access during the final exam period. The objective was to gather demographic information about the users and get a better understanding of the reason(s) for their visit. The data collected helps explain what might be driving the trend to extend hours, even as many library resources are available 24/7 electronically from anywhere you can access the Internet. In addition, as academic institutions increasingly struggle with retention, the survey results suggest another beneficial way that libraries, and in this case those at urban commuter colleges, might contribute to the creation of a connected community of learners as a means of improving retention rates and the success of their students.

Keywords: Academic libraries, commuter students, 24-hour library operations, 24/7, extended hours, student success, student retention

Introduction

The library has many meanings. Depending on the point of view, place and time it is being considered, it may mean a collection of books, a center for scholarship, a universal memory, a symbol of wealth and culture, a place for conversation, a repository of knowledge, a sanctum, an archive for stories, a space for transcendence, a gathering place and/or a place for the pursuit of truth (Crawford, 2015). Today, as more and more content is available digitally from anywhere through an Internet connection, the multiple meanings of the academic library and particularly its importance as a place, is coming into question and focus. The demand for access to the physical library persists and seems to be increasing across college campuses. Students are making it clear that they value the library as a place to study, write and do research — online or with print collections.

The purpose of this study is to investigate one aspect of this phenomenon at an urban commuter college, the John Jay College of Criminal Justice. As a result of student demand, John Jay has offered 24/7 access to the library during the final examination period since the Spring of 2014. The focus is on the students who took advantage of these extended hours and what they were trying to accomplish by doing so.

Literature Review

The literature addressing extended, or 24-hour, library hours generally addresses one of these questions:

1. What extended or 24-hour access means in terms of space, services and prevalence.
2. Studies of users in a 24-hour environment or likely to take advantage of a 24 hour or extended hour environment.
3. Issues that arise when managing a 24-hour library.

What does 24-hour access mean? Whether librarians provide 24-hour access, or even extended hours, is typically driven by student requests. It then comes down to issues of cost and security. By around 2000, it appeared that a majority of academic libraries resolved these issues in favor of providing more access. In a 2001 survey of 121 Association of Research Libraries (ARL), which is comprised of the largest research and university libraries in the United States and Canada, 83% of the 63 responding libraries reported having some form of extended or 24-hour access and 69% of these libraries reported that they decided to start offering these hours in the last 7 years (Steele & Walters, 2001, p. 9). However, what constituted extended or

24-hour access in terms of available space and library services varied significantly based on local factors.

In a subsequent study by Arant and Benefiel (2002) that focused on regular library hours only, not hours during special periods like finals, these variations were examined. This study debunked any notions that 24/7 access is common and confirmed that practices varied broadly based on local needs. Using data from ARL libraries in the United States, Arant and Benefiel discovered that only 5 of the 97 academic libraries examined offered some form of 24-hour access on a regular basis. Furthermore, the one institution that offered 24/7 access only did so in a reading room that could be securely separated from the rest of the library. The other 4 libraries that offered 24-hour access offered 24/4 access – that is 24-hour access Monday through Thursday nights – and 3 of these 4 libraries only offered 24-hour access to a study hall.

In 2008, in an effort to update the ARL survey information and discover the hours of actual access as well as what services were being offered, Driscoll and Mott (2008) surveyed 113 ARL libraries. They learned that 70 (62%) of the 113 responding libraries were not “regularly” open 24 hours a day, but 43 (38%) offered some form of 24-hour access with services varying broadly. Compared to the Arant and Benefiel data, the number of libraries offering some form of 24-hour access (not just some lesser amount of extended hour access) was clearly increasing.

A few years later, in connection with an examination of its own practices, the library at Washington University again sought to update this data by surveying directors of all 126 ARL libraries (Laaker, 2011). Of the 66 responding libraries 91% (60) said they were offering some form of 24-hour access, representing yet another increase. However, consistent with earlier studies, the space and services that were accessible continued to vary broadly based on local factors. The data from these 66 libraries revealed that:

- 9% (6) were open 24/7 most of the year;
- 26% (17) were open 24/5 most of the year;
- 36% (24) were open 24/7 or 24/5 in limited spaces, namely spaces that could be securely separated from the rest of the library;
- 20% (13) were open 24/7 only during exam periods; and
- 9% (6) had no 24/7 operations.

Given that the data from ARL libraries is from a limited, and by many measures an elite, group of academic libraries, data from the National Center for Education and other CUNY library websites was examined. Of the 3,793 academic libraries that reported their hours for the Fall of 2012 to the National Center for Education, a total of only 31 academic libraries (12 public and 19 private) reported being open 24/7 (Phan, Hardesty, & Hug, 2014). The websites of CUNY libraries revealed that

seven of ten senior colleges (colleges that offer baccalaureate degrees) offered some form of 24-hour library access during midterms or finals while the remaining three offered some form of extended hours, but not 24-hour access, during this same period. In addition, three of the seven CUNY community colleges stated they offered some form of extended hours during finals but none provided 24-hour access.

User Studies. Library hours like library services are designed to address the needs of users. There are several studies that examine users during the overnight period or users likely to take advantage of such hours, if offered. Both types of studies include headcounts, typically by day and hour of the night, the *sine qua non* for determining the worth given the cost of these extended operations. The other data that was collected varied based on local circumstances but student demographic data, obtained by survey or extracted from library card readers, seems to be commonly collected.

Several studies of users during the overnight period were done at institutions that had adopted or were piloting 24/5 hours during the regular academic period (e.g. Johnson & McCallister, 2015; Sanders & Hodges, 2014; Scarletto & Burhanna, 2013; Sowell & Nutefall, 2014). The study at Oregon State University, which has had a 24/5 operation since 2010, counted heads and collected demographic data but also asked students what they were trying to accomplish, why they were choosing the library as the location to do so and whether they thought the overnight hours contributed to their academic success (Sowell & Nutefall, 2014). The study at Kent State University had similar objectives as it claimed to demonstrate a connection between late night library use, student academic success and persistent rates at the college (Scarletto & Burhanna, 2013).

On the other hand, studies considering whether to increase or extend library hours were squarely focused on projecting hours and days of use and what services would be expected (e.g. Curry, 2003; Engel, Womack & Ellis, 2002; Laaker, 2011; Lawrence & Weber, 2012; Ravenwood, 2015). The results of these studies demonstrate that there is no one size fits all solution. Minnesota State University confirmed the value of providing access to only 2 a.m. (Lawrence & Weber, 2012). Washington University determined, subject to receiving the funds, to trial a 24/4 library program during the semester and a 24/7 hour program only during reading and exam weeks. The University of British Columbia decided to close an hour earlier but open an hour sooner (Curry, 2003). The University of Oklahoma decided to open 24/7 during final exam weeks only (Engel et al., 2002).

Managing 24-hour operations. Providing twenty-four access impacts budgets, personnel and the building and requires decisions relating to the amount of space that will be open and what library services will be offered. For libraries that have implemented or are thinking about implementing 24-hour services, there are

several useful studies focused on management issues. Bowman's (2013) comparative analysis of the measures taken at five different academic libraries, and based on in-depth interviews of managers at these libraries, offers a useful starting point. For insights from libraries that have had long standing 24-hour operations see the case study by Withers (2015) about the 24/7 program at Miami University in Ohio that has been in operation since 2007 or the one by Smith (2008) on the 24-hour program that has been in place at Georgia Southern University since 1989.

The Setting

John Jay College of Criminal Justice is a senior college of the City University of New York (CUNY), one of the largest public university systems in the United States, serving over 269,000 degree seeking students (CUNY, 2016). It is located on the west side of Manhattan on the northern border of the Hells Kitchen neighborhood and a few blocks west of Columbus Circle. It was established in 1965 as a college for police officers but now primarily serves the more traditional college student. It has 13,305 undergraduates and 1,740 graduate students, 77% and 20%, respectively, attend full time and the most popular majors are Criminal Justice (49%) and Forensic Psychology (22%) (John Jay, 2014). Approximately 80% of its students are under 25 years of age and 92% are single and live at home with their family (CUNY, 2014). Annual household income for 60% of the student body is under \$35,000 with 50% of these households supporting 3 or more people. John Jay is a nonresidential college with 84% of its students commuting to school by subway (CUNY, 2014).

The Lloyd Sealy Library at John Jay College is typically open between the hours of 8:30 a.m. and 10 p.m. during weekdays and between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m. on weekends during the academic semesters. In addition to providing access to its collections and reference services, it provides users with access to over 100 computers as well as printers, scanners and copiers. Approximately half of these computers are located in the Reserves Room, which is a separate room on the first floor of the library (and part of the library lab). These computers provide access to the library's online resources and the Internet as well as word-processing, presentation, spreadsheet, and statistical software programs.

In the Spring of 2014, the Student Council at John Jay requested that the library stay open 24/7 during the final exam period. With the support of the Student Council and the Public Safety department, which provides a public safety officer at the library entrance whenever it is open, 24/7 hours were put in place. Only the library lab, which is a separate room on the first floor of the library, and then due to

an overflow of students who arrived to take advantage of these extended hours, the Niederhofer lounge, an open space opposite the library lab, remained open for the 24/7 period for the week before and the week of final exams in the Fall and Spring semesters. No other library space or services were offered other than those of the public safety officer who was situated in a location that was between and visible from these two spaces. Other than for exceptions like the 24/7 library program, the campus is closed to students at 11 p.m. Monday through Friday, at 9 p.m. on Friday, at 6:30 p.m. on Saturday and at 5:30 p.m. on Sunday.

As a result of the success of the inaugural 24/7 program in the Spring of 2014, it continued to be funded. As shown in Figure 1, use of the library during this overnight period increased each semester. Most studies of hours at academic libraries are at residential campuses. These headcounts show that the availability of library space and resources (including computers, printers and Internet access) are also important to the urban commuter student and maybe particularly so.

One of the purposes of the study was to discover whether finding an appropriate space to study in this urban environment, where space – especially quiet space – comes at a steep premium, and having access to the hardware and software needed for academic work, was driving these results. This hypothesis is supported by a recent study of students at a number of other commuter colleges in the CUNY system that more fully explores the challenges students encounter in finding appropriate study space in their homes due to “constraints of space, noise level or the activities of other residents . . .” (Regalado & Smale, 2015, p.4).

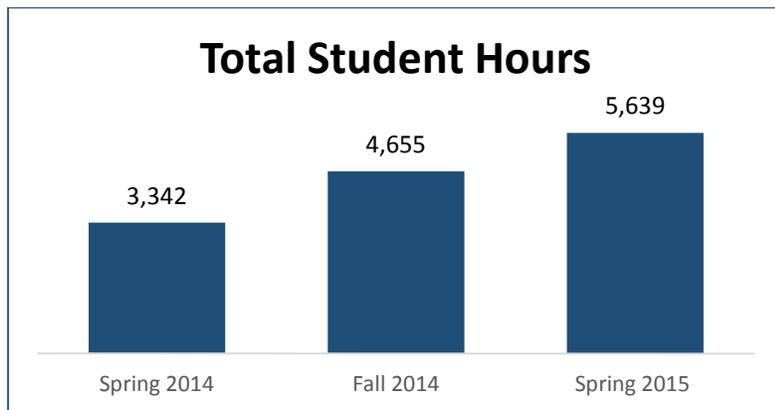


Figure 1. Total Student Hours during 24/7 Library Program

Research Questions and Methodology

This investigation sought to answer the following questions:

- Who is using the library during these extended hours?
- What are they trying to accomplish?
- What other options, in terms of space and tools (like computers and printers) are available to complete these tasks?
- Does the 24/7 library program contribute to the overall college goals for student success and retention?

To understand whether these extended hours were mostly serving adult learners with multiple commitments to work, home and family, or more traditional students, the survey asked about the age of respondents and whether they lived with their parents. The number of years a student was at John Jay was also a point of inquiry to determine whether these library hours were serving newer students or those who have been at John Jay for a number of years. Given the large transfer population and the fact that completion of a baccalaureate degree often takes more than four years at many colleges, including John Jay, this seemed like the more relevant inquiry rather than status as a freshman, sophomore, etc. The expectation was that knowing these demographics might also make it easier to understand how the 24/7 program was contributing to the colleges overall goal of offering programs that actively engage students and support academic success.

This study employed a combination of survey data, observation, headcounts and content analysis of websites. The author created a short survey to be completed by students using the library during the extended hours period. Since it was the exam period and stress levels were expected to be high, the survey was intentionally limited; all the questions and the disclosures and consent required by the Institutional Review Board fit on one sheet of paper. The hope was that brevity would encourage more participation. (See Appendix for the list of questions). The public safety officer manually counted the number of students in the library at the beginning of each hour of the extended hour period. The author also examined the websites of other CUNY libraries to discern whether they offered 24-hour or extended hour access.

The author distributed the survey to students entering the library at the beginning of the extended hour period. This had the added benefit of providing the author with an opportunity to observe activity during this time. Since many students were already in the library, or came to the library at a later time, signs were posted throughout the open space and at the entrance to the library announcing the survey and encouraging participation. Copies of the survey, pencils and a secure deposit box were placed on a table at the entrance to the library where the public safety officer was stationed. Cases of bottled water were stacked next to this table and students were invited to help themselves anytime after completing the survey. Instructions were provided to complete only one survey. The University's

Institutional Review Board reviewed the survey and related materials and granted approval.

A total of 210 surveys were completed by users of the extended hours over the 12-day period. These responses were entered into an electronic survey program and exported to spread sheets, as were the headcounts provided by the public safety officer, so the data could be manipulated and analyzed.

Findings and Analysis

The focus of the survey was to find out who was using the library during these overnight hours and why. During this time the library was only offered as a place to study, to do research using electronic databases or the Internet, to write and if needed, print papers. Library services and staff, including those related to circulation, reserves and reference, were not available.

What was discovered is that simply providing library space and equipment to complete academic work was fulfilling a need. One of the critical findings from earlier studies is that there is no single solution for determining the appropriate combination of library hours and services. Local needs matter and the data collected in this survey made a meaningful contribution to an understanding of those needs.

Times of use

Extended library lab hours were offered the week *before* and the week *of* final exams. Based on hourly headcounts by public safety officers, in the Spring 2015 a total of 5,639 hours were spent in the library during these extended hours (see Figure 1). Figure 2 shows by date the total number of students counted in the library lab each hour of this extended hour period. The average number of total student hours each day was 465 hours and the peak date of usage was the Sunday night before exam week began when over 830 student hours were counted. These overall patterns were consistent with headcounts during the Spring and Fall 2014 extended hour periods with one important exception. Not only were more students taking advantage of these extended hours in the Spring of 2015 but they were doing so more often.

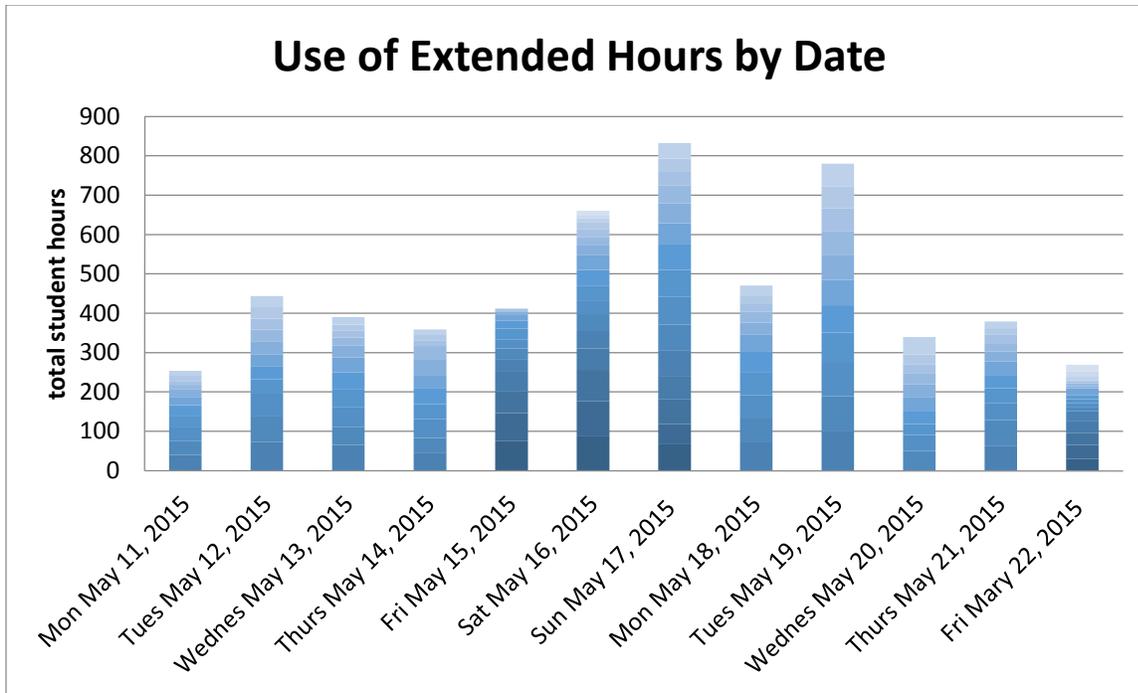


Figure 2. Use of Extended Hours by Date

As was the case in prior periods, Figure 3 illustrates that the largest number of students could be found in the library between 10 p.m. and 11 p.m. These numbers declined throughout the night and began to rise again between 7 a.m. and 8 a.m. as students returned to the library. Based on observation, it appears that students arrived (or remained in the library lab once the extended library hours began, typically at 10 p.m.) and then left at different hours during the night as they completed their work.

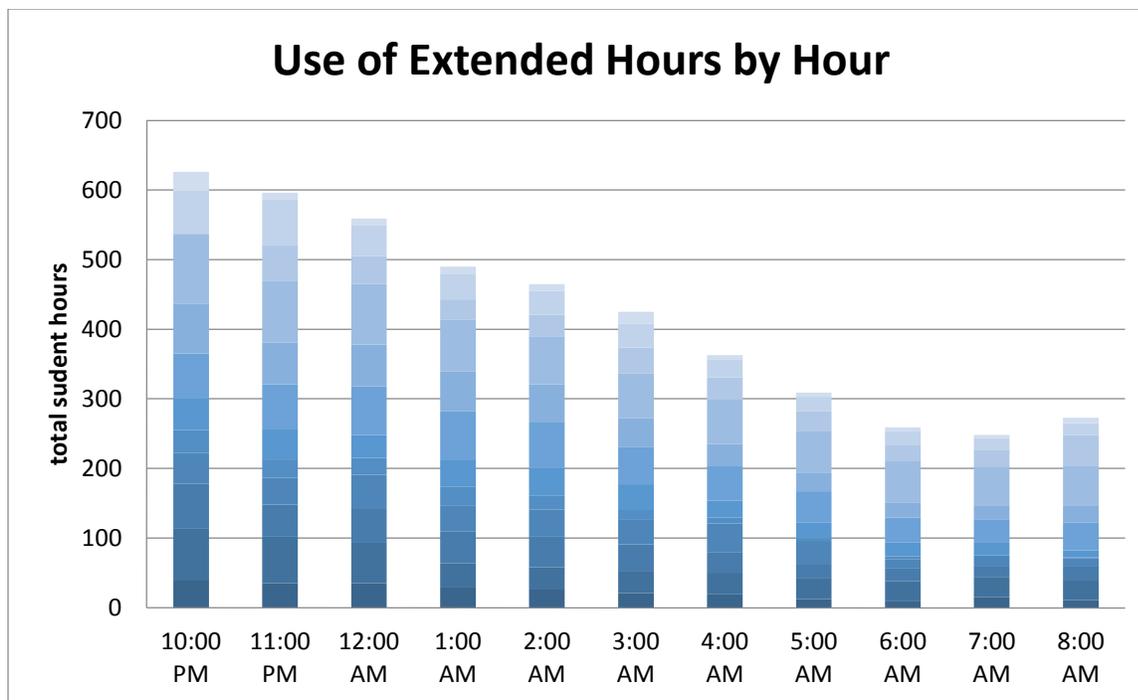


Figure 3. Use of Extended Hours by Hour

These suspected traffic flows are supported by the survey data showing how long respondents had planned to spend in the library on a given night (see Figure 4). Only about 4% of the surveyed respondents planned to spend 1 or 2 hours in the library lab on a particular night while about 45% were planning to be there for 3 to 6 hours and the largest percentage, about 50%, planned on staying 7 or more hours, essentially making a night of it.

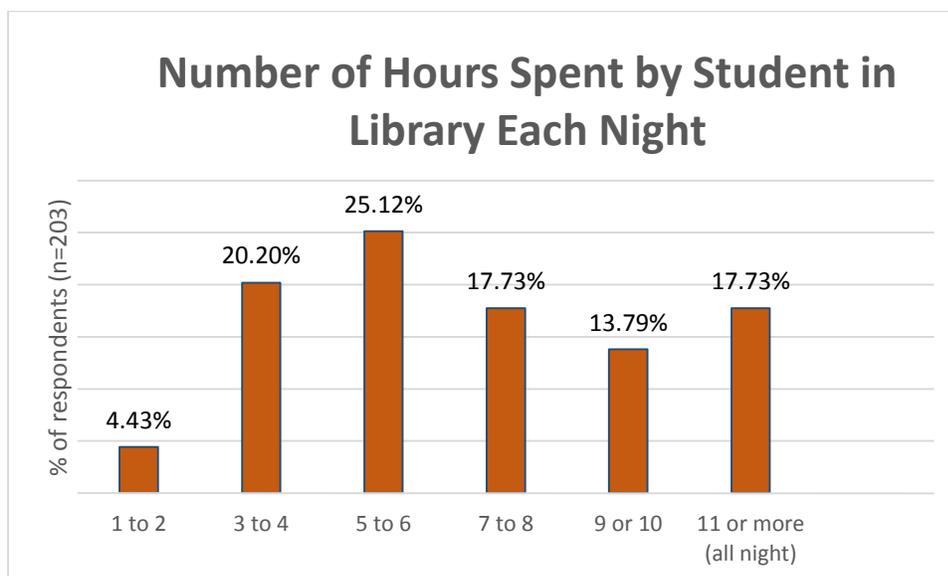


Figure 4. Number of Hours Spent by Student in Library Each Night

As shown in Figure 5, most students taking advantage of the extended hours did so repeatedly. Over 72% of respondents planned on using the 24-hour library more than 4 days and half of those students planned on using the library during these extended hours 8 or more of the days. For a library program that only spanned a 12-day period, it appears to have attracted a regular cohort of users.

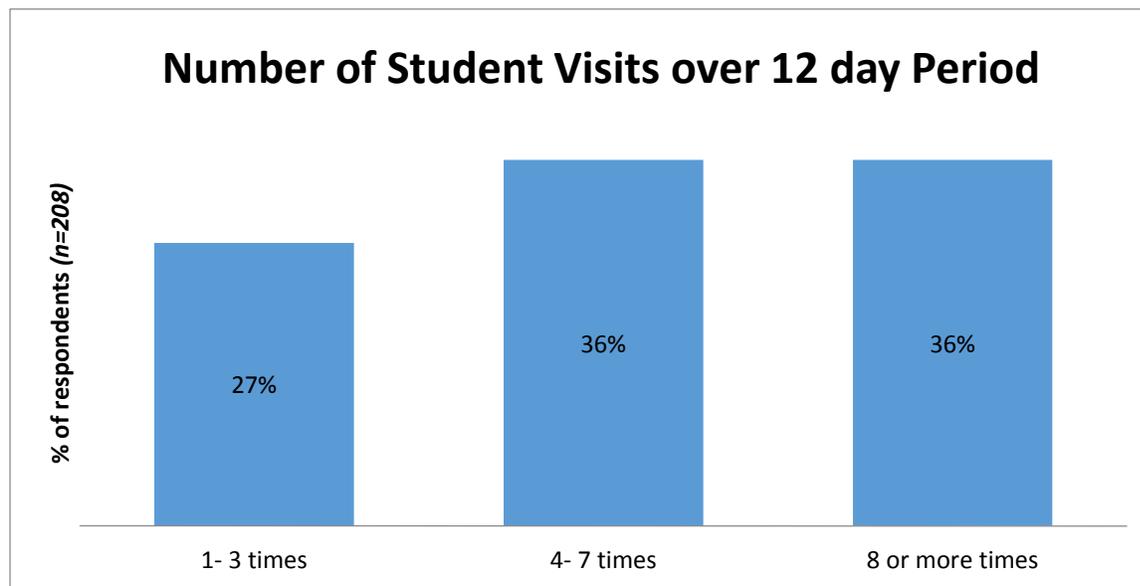


Figure 5. Number of Visits by Student over the 12-Day Period

Student Profile

A typical user of the library's extended hours mirrored the characteristics of John Jay students in general. They were most likely to be a full-time undergraduate student in their first or second year at John Jay, of traditional college age and living with their parents. Perhaps they were looking for a college experience (an all-nighter of studying with or without friends) or in need of a place with a computer and Internet access to complete their work for the semester, or some combination.

Student status. The overwhelming majority of respondents were full-time undergraduate students (80%), followed by part-time undergraduate students (10%) with the remainder constituting graduate students equally divided between full and part-time status ($n=208$). Sixty four percent of the respondents reported that they still live with their parents ($n=182$). While this number is significantly below the 92% of students overall who reported living with their family (CUNY, 2014) it may be attributable to the wording of the question which asked if students lived with their parents rather than using the broader concept of family.

As shown in Figure 6, most students (85%) had been at John Jay College somewhere between one and four years. The presence of so many relatively new students suggests that the 24/7 library lab may be playing a special role in contributing to the colleges overall strategic objectives to actively engage these students.

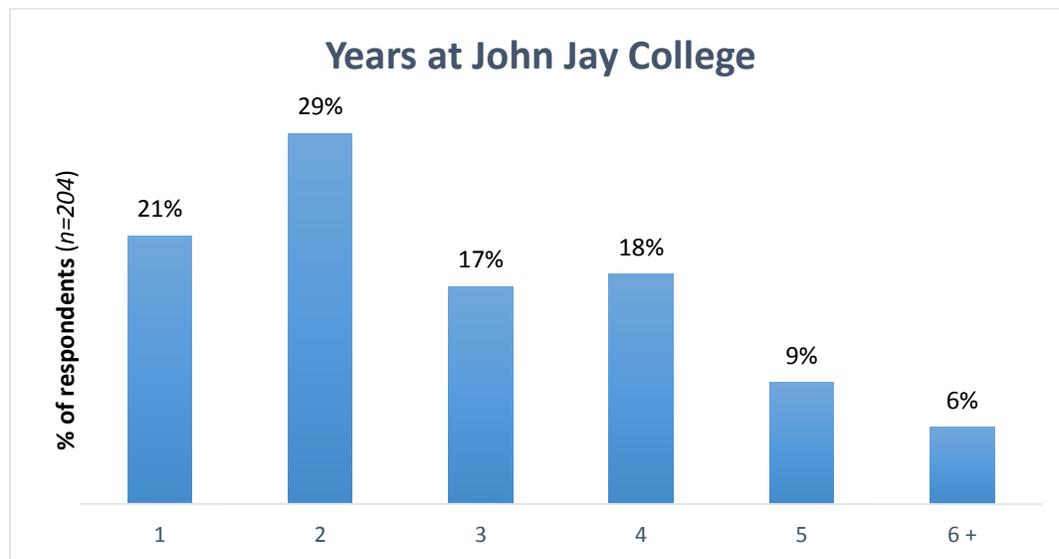


Figure 6. Years at John Jay College

Age. A majority (70%) of the students were 24 years of age or younger tracking the overall college rate of 77% full-time undergraduates (CUNY, 2014), with the strongest showing in the 19 to 23 year old category (see Figure 7). The fairly large turnout by students age 30 and over, which included one respondent who reported being 62 years old, confirms that 24/7 access to the library can also serve the needs of non-traditional students.

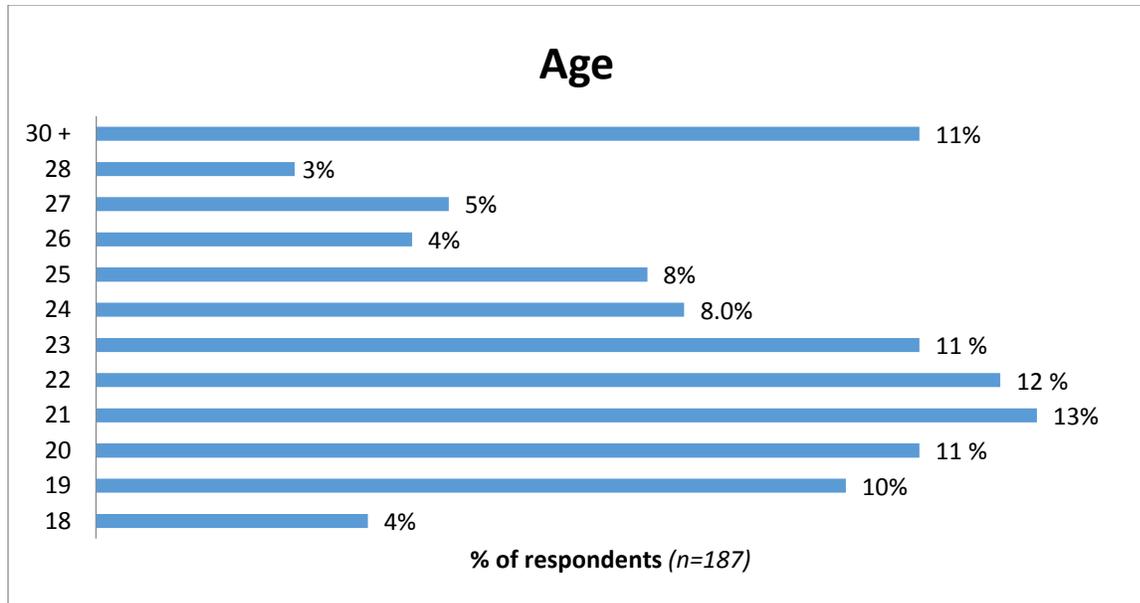


Figure 7. Age

Majors. From a major or area of concentration perspective, 21 out of a possible 30 different majors were represented. As shown in Figure 8, Criminal Justice and Forensic Psychology majors dominated which is consistent with the popularity of these majors overall at John Jay College. It is interesting to note that English majors, a fairly new major at the college, comprised a very respectable number of these late night library users with a turnout rate of about 5%, demonstrating how the library supports changes in the curriculum.

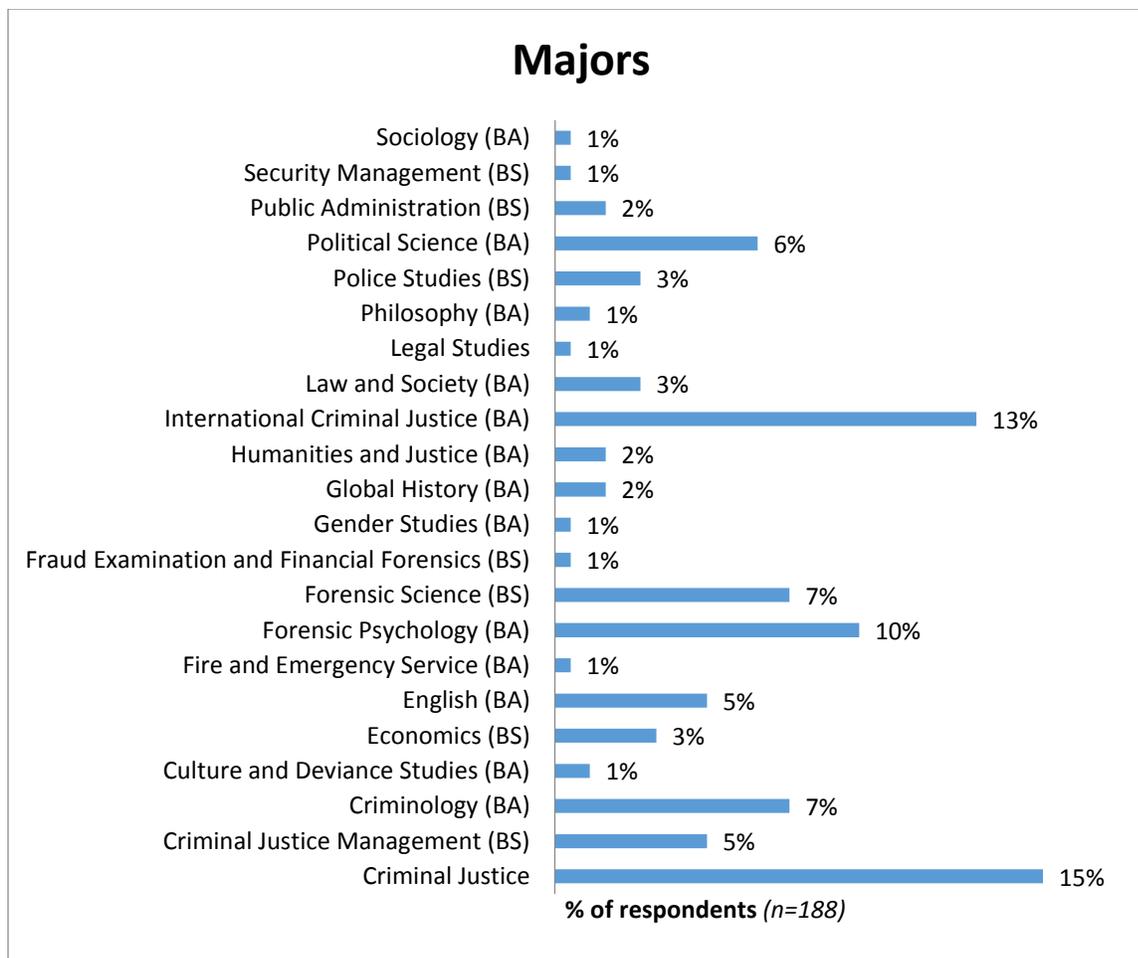


Figure 8. Majors

Grade Point Average. As shown in Figure 9, the largest number of respondents (almost 16%) reported having a 3.0 grade point average. Reported grade point averages ranged from 2.0 to 4.0, demonstrating that the library lab was supporting the success of a full spectrum of academic performers. However, over 75% of the reported grade point averages were 3.0 or higher indicating there may also be a correlation between library use and academic success.

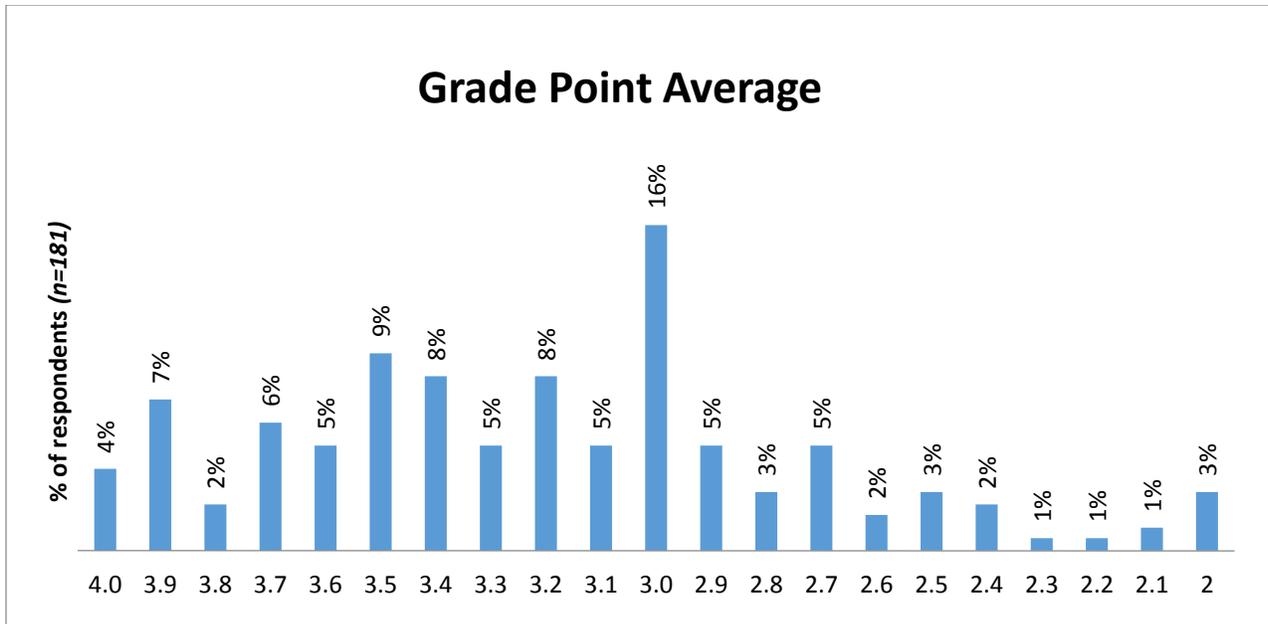


Figure 9. Grade Point Average

Activities. Students reported they were using the library during these extended hours for a variety of reasons but the top reason was to write a research paper (73%), followed by individual study (44%) and then online research (39%). Since the entire library was not open, only the library lab and a cordoned off section of study space opposite the library lab, the type of activities a student could engage in were in large part limited and foreordained. However, given the number of students who reported they were at the library to study, it also suggests that if more study space were made available, even more students would have taken advantage of these extended library hours.

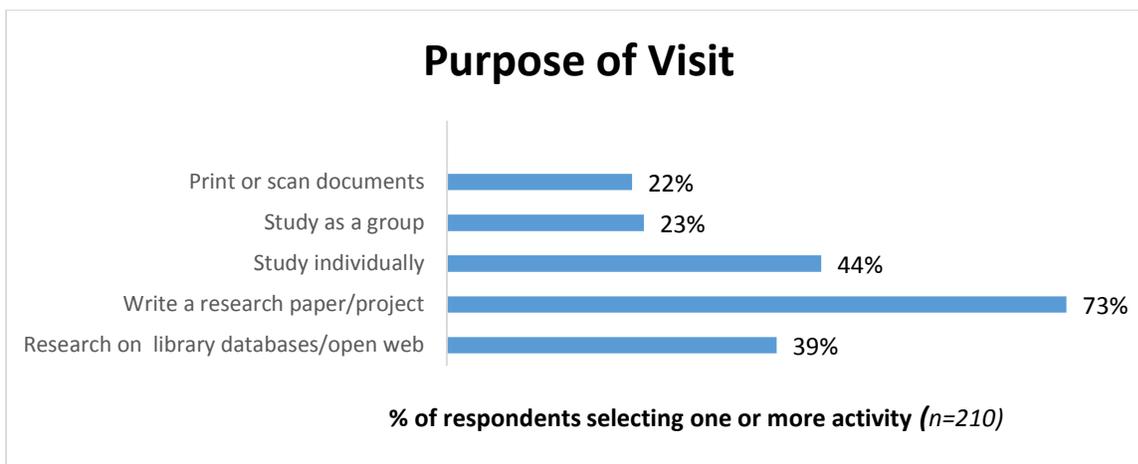


Figure 10. Purpose of Visit

Were students looking for computers, Internet access, and/or space? To try and gauge the importance of the library in providing access to study space and computers for writing and research, respondents were asked where they typically do their research and writing. Most reported some combination of the library and home, as multiple responses were permitted, but the library was chosen the most. Of the 189 respondents, 184 (97%) stated they used the library, 141 (74%) said they worked at home and 49 (25%) reported they did their research and writing at other places such as Wi-Fi hotspots in coffee shops or their workplace.

To understand the importance of providing students with the Internet bandwidth, and the hardware and software they need to do their work, students were also asked where and on what device they typically access the Internet for academic work. Again, no single place was identified, as multiple responses were permitted, but again the library was selected the most. Of the 187 respondents, 177 (94%) said they use library computers to access the Internet, 142 (75%) said they do so from home, 62 (33%) said they use various Wi-Fi hotspots and 25 (13%) reported they used “other” places (which included work, the College’s computer labs and the New York Public Library). The not insignificant percentage of those accessing the Internet *for academic work* from places other than the library or home, could be an indication that the library might be used more, if open more often.

Students were asked what devices they used for academic work and again most students reported using a combination of devices, but the choice that got the most respondents was library computers. Of the 185 students who responded to this question, 160 (86%) said they use library computers, 129 (70%) use desktops/laptops, 65 (35%) use tablets and 66 (36%) use smartphones. These results suggest that for academic work students prefer to be tethered to a desk and/or in need of a larger screen. This may help explain the popularity of the 24/7 library program – particularly during the final exam period when academic demands are at their highest.

Suggestions for improvement. Students were asked how the 24/7 library program, if offered in the future, might be improved. Most students were just happy that the library was open. As stated by one student: “Just the fact that John Jay has extended hours will improve my GPA. I go to school in the morning, work, and now I am here and it is 12:30 am. Great, so thank you John Jay.” As summarized in Table 1, in addition to expressions of gratitude, common themes for improvement did emerge. The top suggestion was to open more library space!

Table 1. Most Frequent Student Comments

Most Frequent Student Comments	% of Respondents (<i>n</i> =141)
Open more space	31%
Perfect as is	20%
Allow food and coffee	18%
Open 24 hours during other times	15%
Provide more and better access to computers	7%
Keep reserves open	7%

Conclusion

Library hours were extended at John Jay College of Criminal Justice for the same reason they have been extended at many other academic libraries – to respond to student demand. Also, like other academic libraries that have extended their hours, John Jay College did so in a manner and at times that accommodated local needs and circumstances.

This study started out because of a desire to simply know more about who these urban commuter college students were and why they were choosing to spend so many nights in the college library. It ended up demonstrating that the library is a much needed and valued place for this urban commuter population who primarily used the space to study, write papers and do research.

Based on student comments, there was little demand for library staff and services other than for some interest in having access to reserves during the overnight period. If more library space and funds were made available, it would be appropriate to revisit these issues. Notably, no safety concerns were raised about travelling during late night hours. This may be partly due to experience in navigating a 24/7 transit system and partly due to the choice made by many students to simply stay in the library the entire night and travel during normal hours. Again, if more library space and library services were offered, issues of staff safety would have to be explicitly addressed.

As academic librarians increase their efforts to collect evidence of their contribution to the overall goals of their institution, the study also ended up providing data that helps show just how a library can contribute to such goals. Recent literature explores the complexities of establishing the library's contribution to overall retention (Murray, Ireland, & Hackathorn, 2016) and student success goals (Nichols Hess, Greer, Lombardo, & Lim, 2015), as well as the importance of collecting data at the student level in order to do so (Matthews, 2012). The data collected by this

study provides a foundation for making such claims and for developing other integrated institution-wide programs in the future.

Based on number counts alone, the 24/7 library program at John Jay College was clearly engaging students. As shown by reported grade point averages, the library was also providing a place for students to continue to enjoy academic success and possibly contribute to future gains by underperforming students. Furthermore, the students who were primarily making use of these extended hours were full-time undergraduate students in their first and second year, often the targeted demographic for institution-wide initiatives to increase retention, improve engagement and fuel academic success.

In our data driven society, library programs will be well served by more robust data collection efforts, particularly at the individual student level. As these efforts are undertaken, the academic library should take comfort in knowing that its multiple meanings, especially as a place to gather, study and for transcendence continues to be intact. As noted by other observers of 24/7 libraries:

Even with the convenience of digital access, the basic student need for human interaction persists. "This is the place students want to be . . . Here they have everything -- the resources, it's safe, it's central, and it's comfortable. Over and over they say the library is where they want to be" (Albanese, 2005, p.43).

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APPENDIX

Survey Questions for Users of John Jay 24/7 Library Lab – Spring 2015

1. The Library Lab at John Jay is currently open 24/7 the week before and the week during finals. Please indicate how often you have used or plan to use the Library Lab during these extended hours.

- a. 1 - 3 times
- b. 4 - 7 times
- c. 8 or more times

2. How many hours will you (did you) spend in the Library Lab tonight?
_____ Hours

3. During these extended hours what were you trying to accomplish?

(Select as many as applicable)

- a. Conduct research using library databases & the open web
- b. Write a research paper/project
- c. Study individually
- d. Study as a group
- e. Print or scan documents
- f. Other, namely _____

4. What is your student status at John Jay?

- a. Full time undergraduate student
- b. Part time undergraduate student

- c. Full time graduate student
- d. Part time graduate student
- e. Other, namely _____

5. How many years have you attended John Jay? _____ Years

6. What is your major (or area of concentration)? _____

7. What is your age? _____

8. Do you live with your parents? YES ____ NO ____

9. Where do you usually do academic research and writing? *

(indicate the approximate %)

_____ % Library

_____ % Home

_____ % Other, namely _____

10. From where do you access the Internet for academic work? *

(indicate the approximate %)

_____ % Library

_____ % Home

_____ % Wi-Fi hotspots *(other than in library or home)*

_____ % Other, namely _____

11. What devices do you use for academic purposes? *

(indicate the approximate %)

_____ % Library computers

_____ % Laptop/Desktop

_____ % Tablet

_____ % Smartphone

_____ % Other, namely _____

12. What is your GPA? _____ *(remember your identity remains anonymous)*

13. If extended Library Lab hours are offered in the future, what could be done to improve this program?

** Because of incomplete data, any percentages that were provided were ignored in the analysis*