COLLEGE STUDENTS' CHOICE OF INFORMAL LEARNING SPACES

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Abstract

This research study investigated the way current college students, the Net Gen, chose and interacted with informal learning spaces such as lounges, commons, nooks, gathering spaces and so on. Data was conducted through observation at ten informal learning sites (two libraries, two student centers, two residence halls, and four academic halls) in a Midwestern university and 54 interviews with students, professors, campus facility planners, designers, and administrators.

Using grounded theory, a model to illustrate the ways Net Gen college students chose informal learning spaces was developed from the data. I argued that as Net Gen college students tried to balance academic success and social success, they tended to select social places that offered privacy elements to study - be it study booths and study rooms inside the student commons, study nooks etc.

There were many factors affecting their choice of informal learning places including their needs, the nature of the learning tasks or their needs to stay focus, their perception of environmental factors (setting, noise, crowding, lighting, furniture, amenities, and location), and the facility management factors (accessibility and control). However, depending on the situations, the students adjusted their needs, their abilities to match with the environmental supplies and demands in informal learning spaces through customizing the learning spaces and adapting themselves to the informal learning spaces.