

Proposal for Solving the Noise Problem in the University Library

INTRODUCTION

Statement of Problem

During the October 20XX Convocation at Margate University, students and faculty members complained about noise in the library. Soon afterward, areas were designated for "quiet study," but complaints about noise continue. To create a scholarly atmosphere, the library should take immediate action to decrease noise.

Concise descriptions of problem and objective immediately alert the readers

Objective

This proposal examines the noise problem from the viewpoint of students, faculty, and library staff. It then offers a plan to make areas of the library quiet enough for serious study and research.

Sources

My data come from a university-wide questionnaire; interviews with students, faculty, and library staff; inquiry letters to other college libraries; and my own observations for three years on the library staff.

This section comes early because it is referred to in the next section

Details of the Problem

This subsection examines the severity and causes of the noise.

Details help readers understand the problem

Severity. Since the 20XX Convocation, the library's fourth and fifth floors have been reserved for quiet study, but students hold group study sessions at the large tables and disturb others working alone. The constant use of computer terminals on both floors adds to the noise, especially when students converse. Moreover, people often chat as they enter or leave study areas.

On the second and third floors, designed for reference, staff help patrons locate materials, causing constant shuffling of people and books, as well as loud conversation. At the computer service desk on the third floor, conferences between students and instructors create more noise.

The most frequently voiced complaint from the faculty members interviewed was about the second floor, where people using the Reference and Government Documents services converse loudly. Students complain about the lack of a quiet spot to study, especially in the evening, when even the "quiet" floors are as noisy as the dorms.

Shows how campus feels about problem

More than 80 percent of respondents (530 undergraduates, 30 faculty, 22 graduate students) to a university-wide questionnaire (Appendix A) insisted that excessive noise discourages them from using the library as often as they would prefer. Of the student respondents, 430 cited quiet study as their primary reason for wishing to use the library.

The library staff recognizes the problem but has insufficient personnel. Because all staff members have assigned tasks, they have no time to monitor noise in their sections.

Causes. Respondents complained specifically about these causes of noise (in descending order of frequency):

1. Loud study groups that often lapse into social discussions.
2. General disrespect for the library, with some students' attitudes characterized as "rude," "inconsiderate," or "immature."
3. On all five floors, the constant sound of people typing at workstations or on laptops.
4. Vacuuming by the evening custodians.

All complaints converged on lack of enforcement by library staff. Because the day staff works on the first three floors, quiet-study rules are not enforced on the fourth and fifth floors. Work-study students on these floors have no authority to enforce rules not enforced by the regular staff. Small, black-and-white "Quiet Please" signs posted on all floors go unnoticed, and the evening security guard provides no deterrent.

Needs

Excessive noise in the library is keeping patrons away. By addressing this problem immediately, we can help restore the library's credibility and utility as a campus resource. We must reduce noise on the lower floors and eliminate it from the quiet-study floors.

Scope

The proposed plan includes a detailed assessment of methods, costs and materials, personnel requirements, feasibility, and expected results.

PROPOSED PLAN

This plan takes into account the needs and wishes of our campus community, as well as the available facilities in our library.

Phases of the Plan

Noise in the library can be reduced in three complementary phases: (1) improving publicity, (2) shutting down and modifying our facilities, and (3) enforcing the quiet rules.

Tells how plan will be implemented

Improving Publicity. First, the library must publicize the noise problem. This assertive move will demonstrate the staff's interest. Publicity could include articles by staff members in the campus newspaper, leaflets distributed on campus, and a freshman library orientation acknowledging the noise problem and asking for cooperation from new students. All forms of publicity should detail the steps being taken by the library to solve the problem.

Describes first phase

Shutting Down and Modifying Facilities. After notifying campus and local newspapers, you should close the library for one week. To minimize disruption, the shutdown should occur between the end of summer school and the beginning of the fall term.

Describes second phase

During this period, you can convert the fixed tables on the fourth and fifth floors to cubicles with temporary partitions (six cubicles per table). You could later convert the cubicles to shelves as the need increases.

Then you can take all unfixed tables from the upper floors to the first floor, and set up a space for group study. Plans are already under way for removing the computer terminals from the fourth and fifth floors.

Enforcing the Quiet Rules. Enforcement is the essential long-term element in this plan. No one of any age is likely to follow all the rules all the time—unless the rules are enforced.

Describes third phase

First, you can make new "Quiet" posters to replace the present, innocuous notices. A visual-design student can be hired to draw up large, colorful posters that attract attention. Either the design student or the university print shop can take charge of poster production.

Next, through publicity, library patrons can be encouraged to demand quiet from noisy people. To support such patron demands, the library staff can begin monitoring the fourth and fifth floors, asking study groups to move to the first floor, and revoking library privileges of those who refuse. Patrons on the second and third floors can be asked to speak in whispers. Staff members should set an example by regulating their own voices.

Estimates costs
and materials
needed

Costs and Materials

- The major cost would be for salaries of new staff members who would help monitor. Next year's library budget, however, will include an allocation for four new staff members.
- A design student has offered to make up four different posters for \$200. The university printing office can reproduce as many posters as needed at no additional cost.
- Prefabricated cubicles for 26 tables sell for \$150 apiece, for a total cost of \$3,900.
- Rearrangement on various floors can be handled by the library's custodians.

The Student Fee Allocations Committee and the Student Senate routinely reserve funds for improving student facilities. A request to these organizations would presumably yield at least partial funding for the plan.

Personnel

Describes
personnel needed

The success of this plan ultimately depends on the willingness of the library administration to implement it. You can run the program itself by committees made up of students, staff, and faculty. This is yet another area where publicity is essential to persuade people that the problem is severe and that you need their help. To recruit committee members from among students, you can offer Contract Learning credits.

The proposed committees include an Antinoise Committee overseeing the program, a Public Relations Committee, a Poster Committee, and an Enforcement Committee.

Feasibility

Assesses
probability of
success

On March 15, 20XX, I surveyed twenty-five New England colleges, inquiring about their methods for coping with noise in the library. Among the respondents, sixteen stated that publicity and the administration's attitude toward enforcement were main elements in their success.

Improved publicity and enforcement could work for us as well. And slight modifications in our facilities, to concentrate group study on the busiest floors, would automatically lighten the burden of enforcement.

Benefits

Offers a realistic
and persuasive
forecast of
benefits

Publicity will improve communication between the library and the campus. An assertive approach will show that the library is aware of its patrons' needs and is willing to meet those needs. Offering the program for public inspection will draw the entire community into improvement efforts. Publicity, begun now, will pave the way for the formation of committees.

The library shutdown will have a dual effect: It will dramatize the problem to the community, and it will provide time for the physical changes. (An antinoise program begun with carpentry noise in the quiet areas would hardly be effective.) The shutdown will be both a symbolic and a concrete measure, leading to the reopening of the library with a new philosophy and a new image.

Continued strict enforcement will be the backbone of the program. It will prove that staff members care enough about the atmosphere to jeopardize their friendly image in the eyes of some users, and that the library is not afraid to enforce its rules.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The noise in Margate University Library has become embarrassing and annoying to the whole campus. Forceful steps are needed to restore the academic atmosphere.

Aside from the intangible question of image, close inspection of the proposed plan will show that it will work if the recommended steps are taken and—most important—if daily enforcement of quiet rules becomes a part of library policy.

Reemphasizes
need and
feasibility and
encourages action