



Herrin Lawn Insight Report  
-Playful Work-  
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## INTRODUCTION

For the past two weeks, our research team has investigated Herrin Lawn to learn about and improve upon its capabilities as a workspace. We identified current issues and sought to learn more about what makes a space good for playful work.

## METHODS OVERVIEW

To conduct this fact-finding mission on Herrin Lawn, our team used a three-stage approach. The first step began with **passive observation over a period of four days**. This observation was intended to gauge how the space was being used, who the space was being used by, and what are the principal functions of the space. The next component involved **a baker's dozen of in-depth interviews** with students, researchers and faculty members who were familiar with Herrin Lawn. These interviews were principally concerned with perceptions and feelings about the space as it currently exists. The interviews allowed us to not only see how the space was used, but to glean more information about the social structures and needs of various individuals who already find themselves around Herrin. The final component was to learn more about potential users of the space. Given our focus of playful work, we designed a cultural probe that would allow us to learn more about what makes a good study space for *studying outside, studying with friends, or working on a group project*. Using short questionnaires and a specifically-designed, conversation-box we were able to get feedback from **50 Undergraduate and Graduate Students**.



## BRIEF OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS ON STUDENT STUDYING/WORKING

### The 5 most popular social/group/outdoor workspaces:

-Neukom Law Gardens, Coupa Cafe, Y2E2 Balcony, Private Study Rooms, Dorm Lounge

### The 5 most frequently stated problems

-No Outlets, No Access to Food, Too Distracting, No Shade, Space is Being Used by Someone Else

### The 5 most frequently cited positive qualities

-Beauty/Appearance of Space, Access to Food, Ample Table Space, Noise Level, Near to Housing

See Appendix for Explanation of Process, Feedback Synthesis & Copies of Survey Responses

## FINDINGS ON HERRIN LAWN

The potential capacity for Herrin Lawn far outstrips its current usage. Most visitors now only use the space to take short breaks from meetings, classes, or research in the surrounding buildings. Nearly all of the people we interviewed saw Herrin Lawn as primarily a leisure space, meant for playing ping pong or eating lunch. Very few said that they had ever studied there, and oftentimes, they would only study there in the minutes before a class or meeting in an adjacent building. Of the people who had not studied at Herrin, most said that they never even considered it as a workspace. We had previously hypothesized that biology students would use Herrin Lawn as a study space, but from our interviews, we learned that biology students already use and enjoy the social and work spaces within their labs and buildings. Interviewees mentioned that they enjoyed working on the balconies above Herrin and highlighted the sense of seclusion, the ample space they had to work up there, and the planters full of varied greenery.

In contrast to the balconies above Herrin Lawn, the lawn itself is not set up as a workspace. The furniture choices -- small circular tables and colorful chairs -- may look nice, but are not particularly conducive to work. Four people can fit at each table for lunch or a simple meeting, bumping the occasional elbow, but there is hardly enough tabletop space for even two people to do work. From our surveys, we learned that having large tables and open spaces are crucial needs for a good study space, and the current setup of Herrin Lawn is not meeting that need. Several interviewees mentioned the cleanliness of the tables as a major issue -- the lack of maintenance means that the tables are often covered in food and grime. Additionally, the circular nature of these tables makes it awkward to put two of them together, as, instead of creating a larger table primed for group activities, two of these tables make for a bulbous monstrosity that is uncomfortable to work at. Square or rectangular tables would likely be a better choice, as they are more modular and better designed to be rearranged. The inability of users to take ownership of the space (i.e. through moving tables around) and the lack of seating variety makes Herrin a one-trick pony. It is currently an outdoor break room and it fulfills that role to the barest minimum. However, it could be so much more for a wider user base if had three characteristics: **purpose, sticking points, and variety.**

## Purpose

Consider some other spaces on campus: Tressider has food and long picnic tables, the Oval has wide, open green space and flowers, and libraries have quiet and academic resources. Herrin lacks a purposeful identity -- the random distribution of tables throughout the space and scattered furniture make it seem somewhat unfocused and not particularly thought out. Thus, we set out to give Herrin Lawn a purpose by turning it into a playful workspace. Through our surveys, we learned that there was a lack of good group or social study spaces on campus, as most spaces lacked some quality (i.e. outlets, privacy, whiteboards) that students were looking for. Furthermore, through interviews with bio students, we learned that there is a lot of group work in the biology department for weekly problem sets and exam prep. The Stanford campus as a whole has a need for designated outdoor spaces for group work, and Herrin Lawn has the potential to fill that need. Therefore, we decided to designate Herrin as a place for group study and build from there.

## Sticking Points

To create the hot, new place for Stanford students to do group projects or study with friends, we first had to understand what makes a space good for such activities. Through our cultural probe, we identified some key space characteristics that students want for doing a group project or problem set, for working outside, and for doing social work<sup>1</sup> (see fig. 1 for more details). These characteristics include a sense of privacy or seclusion, a common workspace for the whole group, whiteboards, outlets, and room to breath. We aggregated the responses to our cultural probe and the synthesis of our observations to come up with ideas that both conform to what Stanford students already like when they study and unique additions that would make Herrin Lawn stand out. One unfortunate characteristic of Herrin Lawn is that it is quite far from most dorms on campus, so most students will not go there unless there is something to pull them in and keep them there. Currently, the small tables, lack of outlets, and lack of privacy at Herrin Lawn discourage people from staying there long, but fixing those problems would help to attract students.

## Variety

One current strength of Herrin Lawn is its variety of seating options, but because the current purpose of Herrin Lawn as a leisure or recreational space is quite narrow, the seating variety does not lead to a variety of activities in the space. The current arrangement does not provide much beyond a place to sit and take a break. By introducing room for more diverse uses of the space, we will be better

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<sup>1</sup> 'Social work' we defined as a group of friends working in a place they can be talkative (not the library) but still get individual work done (a struggle in hyper social places like Tressider).

able to highlight and build upon the current variety. A variety of chairs, tables, locations, and views is important to making a more intriguing Herrin Lawn, and we identified many opportunities to introduce variety there: table shape and size, alternative types of seating, potentially even putting tables on platforms to add more vertical depth to the space. By increasing variety and designating different parts of the space for different purposes, Herrin Lawn will be better able to serve a larger range of people.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

These insights led to two concrete ideas. The first, emphasizing Herrin's need for a unique pull, is a study playground that would provide students with fun, unconventional seating like hammocks, swings, seesaws, lounge chairs, tables on platforms, etc. This would certainly give Herrin that special something to draw users from all over campus. With the right arrangement and composition of the space, it could be a great place for group study. The second idea is a row of study booths along the wall. These would be picnic tables individually slotted into booths for an ideal group work space. The booth wall would provide seclusion and privacy from other groups, whiteboards to facilitate group work, and outlets to allow for extended work on laptops.

From our insights and the ideas that we generated, we prototyped the study booth and developed a full size example. We set up two wooden walls as the booth with whiteboards situated on the inner side of each. The walls were just high enough to obscure the head of a seated person and long enough to stretch out past the end of the table. We extended a power strip to the table. The booth saw some use from students in the area, particularly because of the outlets, but we anticipate that the main audience for this booth would be the potential, future users of Herrin Lawn more so than the current ones. For further research into the lawn, we could experiment with a pop-up event to drive these potential users to the lawn. One such idea would be, on the days leading up to a Bio core midterm or final exam, organizing a study session with TAs leading discussion and review in each booth. This would tackle the major purpose/sticking point issue that we have with Herrin Lawn. We attributed distance from food to be a major contributor to this issue, so an alternative or possibly concurrent event would be a food truck visiting Herrin to feed the biology masses and ideally attract more students from the surrounding CS buildings.



## SCANS OF SURVEY RESPONSES

WHERE IS A GOOD PLACE TO STUDY  
WITH FRIENDS?

Private room in library  
or dorm room

WHAT MAKES IT A GOOD PLACE?

1. space to be goofy
2. not bothering other people

WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

1. guaranteed space  
on campus

WHERE IS A GOOD PLACE TO WORK  
ON A **GROUP PROJECT**?

Old Union

WHAT MAKES IT A GOOD PLACE?

1. space/couches
2. access to food

WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

1. more space  
nicer looking places to sit

WHERE IS A GOOD PLACE TO WORK  
ON A **GROUP PROJECT**?

The Couches at Old Union

WHAT MAKES IT A GOOD PLACE?

1. Food is readily available
2. Everyone knows where it is.

WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

1. The couches could be less  
grdy.

WHERE IS A GOOD PLACE TO STUDY  
WITH FRIENDS?

Kitchen

WHAT MAKES IT A GOOD PLACE?

1. Food
2. cycles of distraction  
+ quiet

WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

1. comfier chairs

WHERE IS A GOOD PLACE TO WORK  
ON A **GROUP PROJECT**?

Huang

WHAT MAKES IT A GOOD PLACE?

1. open offices
2. lots of them

WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

1. closer location

WHERE IS A GOOD PLACE TO STUDY  
**WITH FRIENDS**?

Old Union

WHAT MAKES IT A GOOD PLACE?

1. Different rooms to study in
2. Can order food

WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

1. It could be quieter

WHERE IS A GOOD PLACE TO STUDY  
WITH FRIENDS?

coho

WHAT MAKES IT A GOOD PLACE?

1. good coffee
2. good drinks

WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

1. no smell

WHERE IS A GOOD PLACE TO STUDY  
WITH FRIENDS?

airbuckle

WHAT MAKES IT A GOOD PLACE?

1. it's beautiful
2. fresh air

WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

1. rooms/cubbies of  
some sort

WHERE IS A GOOD PLACE TO WORK  
OUTSIDE?

LAWN GARDENS

WHAT MAKES IT A GOOD PLACE?

1. BEAUTIFUL
2. GOOD TABLES

WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

1. CLOSER TO WHERE I LIVE



WHERE IS A GOOD PLACE TO STUDY  
WITH FRIENDS?

Someone's dorm/residence

WHAT MAKES IT A GOOD PLACE?

1. Homier
2. Convenient

WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

1. \_\_\_\_\_



WHERE IS A GOOD PLACE TO WORK  
ON A **GROUP PROJECT**?

Huang

WHAT MAKES IT A GOOD PLACE?

1. Private Rooms
2. Has stuff like TVs & Projectors

WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

1. Rooms could be more publicly  
reservable

WHERE IS A GOOD PLACE TO WORK  
ON A **GROUP PROJECT**?

DORH common room

WHAT MAKES IT A GOOD PLACE?

1. access to facilities
2. big

WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

1. quieter

WHERE IS A GOOD PLACE TO WORK  
ON A **GROUP PROJECT**?

New Kom Terrace

WHAT MAKES IT A GOOD PLACE?

1. ambience
2. "chill"

WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

1. coffee

WHERE IS A GOOD PLACE TO WORK  
ON A **GROUP PROJECT**?

Law School

WHAT MAKES IT A GOOD PLACE?

1. not quiet
2. pretty

WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

1. more space

WHERE IS A GOOD PLACE TO WORK  
**OUTSIDE**?

Near the new McMurtry Building

WHAT MAKES IT A GOOD PLACE?

1. Shade
2. Grass

WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

1. Grass seating

WHERE IS A GOOD PLACE TO WORK  
**OUTSIDE**?

Coupa Cafe

WHAT MAKES IT A GOOD PLACE?

1. Good proximity to coffee
2. Good place to meet

WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

1. More shade!

WHERE IS A GOOD PLACE TO WORK  
ON A **GROUP PROJECT**?

Tresidder

WHAT MAKES IT A GOOD PLACE?

1. Central location
2. Nice ambience / background noise

WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

1. Cleaner sometimes than other  
could be



WHERE IS A GOOD PLACE TO WORK  
ON A **GROUP PROJECT**?

In a dorm lounge

WHAT MAKES IT A GOOD PLACE?

1. generally convenient
2. cozy

WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

1. maybe more group study spaces in libraries

WHERE IS A GOOD PLACE TO STUDY  
**OUTSIDE**?

Adirondack chairs

WHAT MAKES IT A GOOD PLACE?

1. Good view
2. central location

WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

1. more shade

WHERE IS A GOOD PLACE TO STUDY  
**WITH FRIENDS**?

Old Union

WHAT MAKES IT A GOOD PLACE?

1. Open space
2. Food is close

WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

1. more table space

WHERE IS A GOOD PLACE TO WORK  
ON A **GROUP PROJECT**?

Lathrop

WHAT MAKES IT A GOOD PLACE?

1. Lots of conference rooms
2. whiteboards

WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

1. better location

WHERE IS A GOOD PLACE TO WORK  
ON A **GROUP PROJECT**?

Huang Basement

WHAT MAKES IT A GOOD PLACE?

1. Big tables, open space
2. Close to coupa

WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

1. Acoustics, basement gets kind of loud

WHERE IS A GOOD PLACE TO WORK  
ON A **GROUP PROJECT**?

GSB Library

WHAT MAKES IT A GOOD PLACE?

1. Quiet
2. Great projections

WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

1. More rooms

WHERE IS A GOOD PLACE TO STUDY  
**WITH FRIENDS**?

Dorm lounge

WHAT MAKES IT A GOOD PLACE?

1. Couches
2. Open structure

WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

1. Tables at an appropriate height

WHERE IS A GOOD PLACE TO STUDY  
**WITH FRIENDS**?

common areas of houses

WHAT MAKES IT A GOOD PLACE?

1. comfort/familiarity
2. proximity to snacks

WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

1. more focused

WHERE IS A GOOD PLACE TO STUDY  
**OUTSIDE**?

The new art building

WHAT MAKES IT A GOOD PLACE?

1. quiet and cool
2. nice comfortable seating  
and fresh grass

WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

1. espresso machine

WHERE IS A GOOD PLACE TO STUDY  
**OUTSIDE?**

Cubbyhole Cafe

WHAT MAKES IT A GOOD PLACE?

1. quiet
2. Shady

WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

1. better seating

WHERE IS A GOOD PLACE TO WORK  
**OUTSIDE?**

the GSB outside balcony

WHAT MAKES IT A GOOD PLACE?

1. the nature & foliage
2. the shade and the cool architecture

WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

1. there are no outlets

WHERE IS A GOOD PLACE TO WORK  
ON A **GROUP PROJECT?**

Lathrop Study Room

WHAT MAKES IT A GOOD PLACE?

1. Big Whiteboards
2. Closed Room

WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

1. More Rooms!

WHERE IS A GOOD PLACE TO STUDY  
**OUTSIDE?**

benches around YZER

WHAT MAKES IT A GOOD PLACE?

1. limited noise/people
2. good places to sit  
↳ comfortable

WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

1. more shade

WHERE IS A GOOD PLACE TO WORK  
ON A **GROUP PROJECT**?

free old union

WHAT MAKES IT A GOOD PLACE?

1. private study rooms

2. \_\_\_\_\_

WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

1. signing up could be  
easier

WHERE IS A GOOD PLACE TO WORK  
ON A **GROUP PROJECT**?

at D-school

WHAT MAKES IT A GOOD PLACE?

Lots of space (for private + public  
group work)  
Whiteboards/ways to be creative

WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

More materials to make things

WHERE IS A GOOD PLACE TO WORK  
ON A **GROUP PROJECT**?

LOW school

WHAT MAKES IT A GOOD PLACE?

1. Beautiful

2. Calm

WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

WHERE IS A GOOD PLACE TO WORK  
ON A **GROUP PROJECT**?

Green Lib. study rooms

WHAT MAKES IT A GOOD PLACE?

1. Quiet + privacy

2. Space (whiteboards)

WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

1. more of them!

WHERE IS A GOOD PLACE TO WORK  
**OUTSIDE?**

12EL Tables

WHAT MAKES IT A GOOD PLACE?

1. Sun

2. People

WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

1. outlets