

University of Arizona: Adds Privacy to Open Space

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AN OASIS FOR FOCUSED WORK IN AN OPEN, PUBLIC SPACE

University of Arizona staff started to notice the trend about five years ago: Students were using campus libraries in the same numbers as in years past, but they were borrowing fewer books.

“So we started to look more closely at how students were using our libraries. We tracked traffic, books checked out, what spaces and furniture were being used, how students were using the building, a lot of different measures,” says John C. Miller-Wells, library information analyst. “We checked on these issues at peer universities, too.”

Their findings reflect some of the larger trends in higher education. Students on the Tucson campus, like college students elsewhere, use libraries for collaborative work with their classmates —not surprising given the rise of active learning curricula and group project work— but they use libraries just as frequently for individual study.



Unfortunately, what they typically find in campus libraries and classroom buildings are open, public spaces, heavy tables and hard chairs. These places are best suited for short-term visits, not long-term study. As a result, students vie for too-few individual study spaces and even fewer power outlets for their digital devices.

“Our research showed that furniture that’s highly adaptable gets the most use,” says Miller-Wells. “That’s why we’re always on the lookout for new options that help us balance limited resources with student expectations.”

Brody WorkLounge seemed an option worth trying. Each Brody is a freestanding microenvironment for focused work, with an ergonomic seat and tilting footrest, adjustable worksurface, power outlets, task light and screens for seated privacy.

Three Brody WorkLounges were set up in the main library. “We chose the biggest open space in the library, with the most traffic since it’s by the main entrance,” says Hayri Yildirim, director, facilities planning and management. “We wanted to see how students used them.”

It didn’t take long to find out.

“As soon as they were installed, people were trying them out,” says Yildirim.

Student staff made spot checks every hour from 10:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. The Brody WorkLounges were in use 76% of the time. “That’s high compared to other furniture, which ranges around 30 to 40 percent,” says Miller-Wells.



“One of the nice things about Brody, and this showed up in student comments, is even though you may be out in the open, you have a sense of privacy so you can get work done.”

Eighty-five percent of students ranked the privacy screen and adjustable worksurface as their favorite features of Brody. Access to power and the ergonomic seat were called out by over 70 percent of students.

Typical comments:

“Wonderful for helping me focus.”

“Definitely a great investment for students and the library.”

“Most comfy chairs in the library. I love that the ottoman rocks, the angle of the chair back, the adjustable light and desk and the privacy.”

When asked what they didn't like about Brody, students overwhelmingly replied: There aren't enough of them. Eighty-eight percent of students said the library should buy more.

“We're very pleased with Brody because the students are pleased. They were even showing them off to their parents during Parents Week,” says Yildirim.

Who knows better what makes for a productive study destination than a busy student? “They come here to study, and Brody really works well for that,” says Miller-Wells.

Students will be glad to know the university has more Brody WorkLounges on order.

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