TRU Main Library Pager Study: Report on Findings

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Background:

The pager system was identified by TRU Library staff in Summer 2018 as a possible solution for filling short periods when either the Main Library Information Desk would be very busy or be left empty due to good practices, such staff helping students at their workstations or leading users to a location in the stacks. The intent of the system was to have a back-up Library Client Service Associate (LCSA) on call throughout the day; whenever necessary, the LCSA(s) on desk duty would page the on-call person, who would come out to the desk for a few minutes. This was intended as a way to fill service gaps systematically and equitably.

Purpose:

In Fall 2018, the TRU Library assessed the pager system, for two main purposes:

1. To ascertain if the pager system was functioning as intended, and
2. To identify any problem time slots to address in future scheduling.

Late October was chosen for the study, so as to give time for a “pager culture” to develop at the Information Desk, whereupon the desk staff would have settled into a routine of using it.

Methodology:

A form was developed to ascertain both the time the pager was used, and the length of time that the on-call LCSA was at the desk. The form was available as a link on the Reference Statistics online guide, which is always open and available at the Information Desk. LCSAs were given the instructions that for a two week period, from October 9-19, 2018, the on-call person would, upon being called out to the desk, open the form and record the time. Just before leaving, they would record the number of minutes they had spent at the desk.

Challenges:

In the course of informing desk staff of the study, it was revealed that a “pager culture” had developed in the way that had been expected. LCSAs identified that, most often, service gaps were being filled either by staff in the vicinity of the desk but doing other work or by staff who happened to be walking by at the time of need. Because the study had already been planned and its implementation would be of very minimal inconvenience, it was decided that it would proceed as planned. Staff were requested to try to use the buzzer for the length of the study period, and if they noticed a temporary service gap while not on desk duty to buzz the on-call person, rather than to fill it themselves.
Results:

Only 12 instances of pager use were recorded during the study period, with the maximum time on desk being 10 minutes, a mean of 3.5 minutes, and a mode of 1 minute. Furthermore, instances of pager use occurred at disparate days and times. While the 11am-12pm slot was the most popular time for pager usage, the number was still very low overall and scattered across different days.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

If this study were the only available data source, it would be concluded that the Information Desk is always staffed correctly. However, considering the challenges encountered, I would strongly hesitate to draw any firm conclusions from this data. The pager system does not seem to have met its identified need, though it was outside the scope of this study to identify why that may be. I recommend investigating what the barriers are to fully implementing the pager
system. If LCSAs are still in favour of the pager system in theory but still in the process of transitioning it into routine use, then I would recommend running this study at a later date after the pager has been fully implemented. If, however, objections are to the pager system as a whole, then I recommend working with the LCSAs to identify a different system of on-call desk support.