

UCT Libraries Research Commons

A tranquil retreat, sheltered from the main library's busy public areas.

Level 6 Chancellor Oppenheimer Library



The Research Commons: A Physical and Virtual Support Environment for Postgraduates and Researchers

(An Adaptable, Scalable, and Replicable Creature!)

What is the Research Commons?

- Access controlled facility open only to academic staff and postgraduates (opened 2008)
- Equipped with
 - State-of-the-art computer workstations
 - Printing, copying, scanning facilities
 - Varied workspaces; soundproofed group room; small, integrated lounge for social networking and relaxation
 - Small reference collection, some current journals of general interest, newspapers, tea and coffee

What is the Research Commons? (continued)

- Laptops for loan
- Small storage units, so that users can come and go
- Permanently staffed by two reference specialists (not new staff, moved from other duties)
- Space and facility for knowledge production, not just information acquisition

What Does the Research Commons Look Like?



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Types of services

Laptops for loan within
in the RC



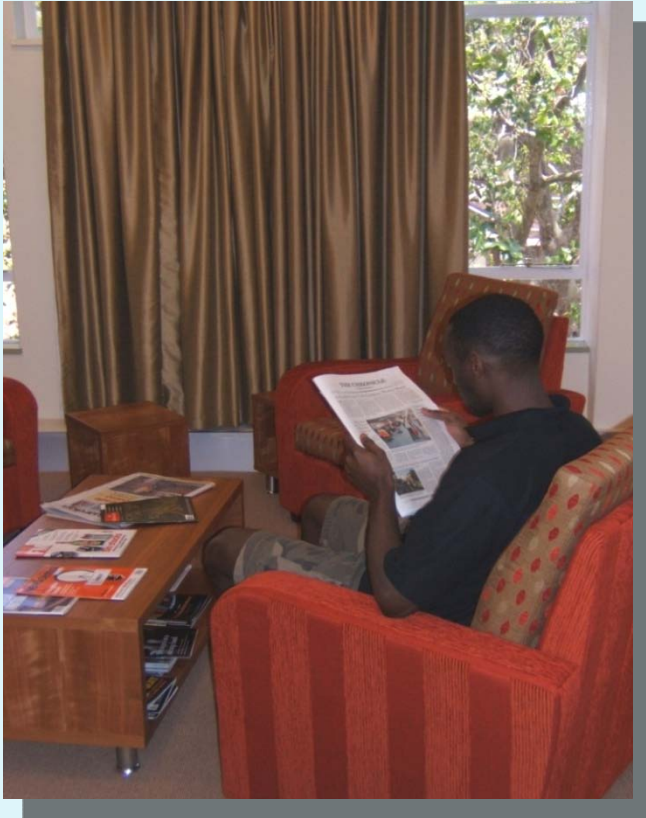
“Multi-lockers”



Mobile lockers

Books on writing
and research





A lounge for relaxing, reading, or chatting



Complimentary coffee and tea

Reference Specialist Support



Building the Research Commons

The Research Commons is **one component** of a Carnegie-supported, integrated consortial project involving 6 South African universities.

The aim: To develop a model for enhancing libraries' ability to support research and researchers

Three related components:

1. A Web-based Research Portal
2. A residential two-week Academy followed by internships at major North American research libraries
3. The Research Commons (in each participating university)

The three project components were developed based on:

- Focus groups of postgraduates and academics
- Responses to an internationally benchmarked survey (LibQUAL+) – a first such survey in the Southern hemisphere (2005)
- Reports from academic units and key researchers
- Best international practice

What did researchers tell us they wanted from their libraries?... (in addition to good collections!)

- ▶ Help in mastering the research process– librarians who understand their projects
- ▶ Access tools which make it easy to find information from a complex array of web–based sources
- ▶ Subject specialist assistance

- ▶ Supportive physical environment, described in various ways:
 - ❑ A haven
 - ❑ Quiet spaces for concentration
 - ❑ Technologically enabled
 - ❑ With expert help always available
 - ❑ A “supportive” environment...

The Research Commons is the convergence point of all these requirements.

“We built it, but would they come?”

“The Long Tail”

4 Jan - 4 Oct 2009 (225 work days, including Saturdays)

29,678 card swipes (excludes door holding, buzzing, etc.)

Of 924 unique visitors—

24 users visited the RC on more than 100 days

64 users visited the RC on more than 50 days

108 users visited the RC on more than 20 days

—and we have only 30 workspaces!

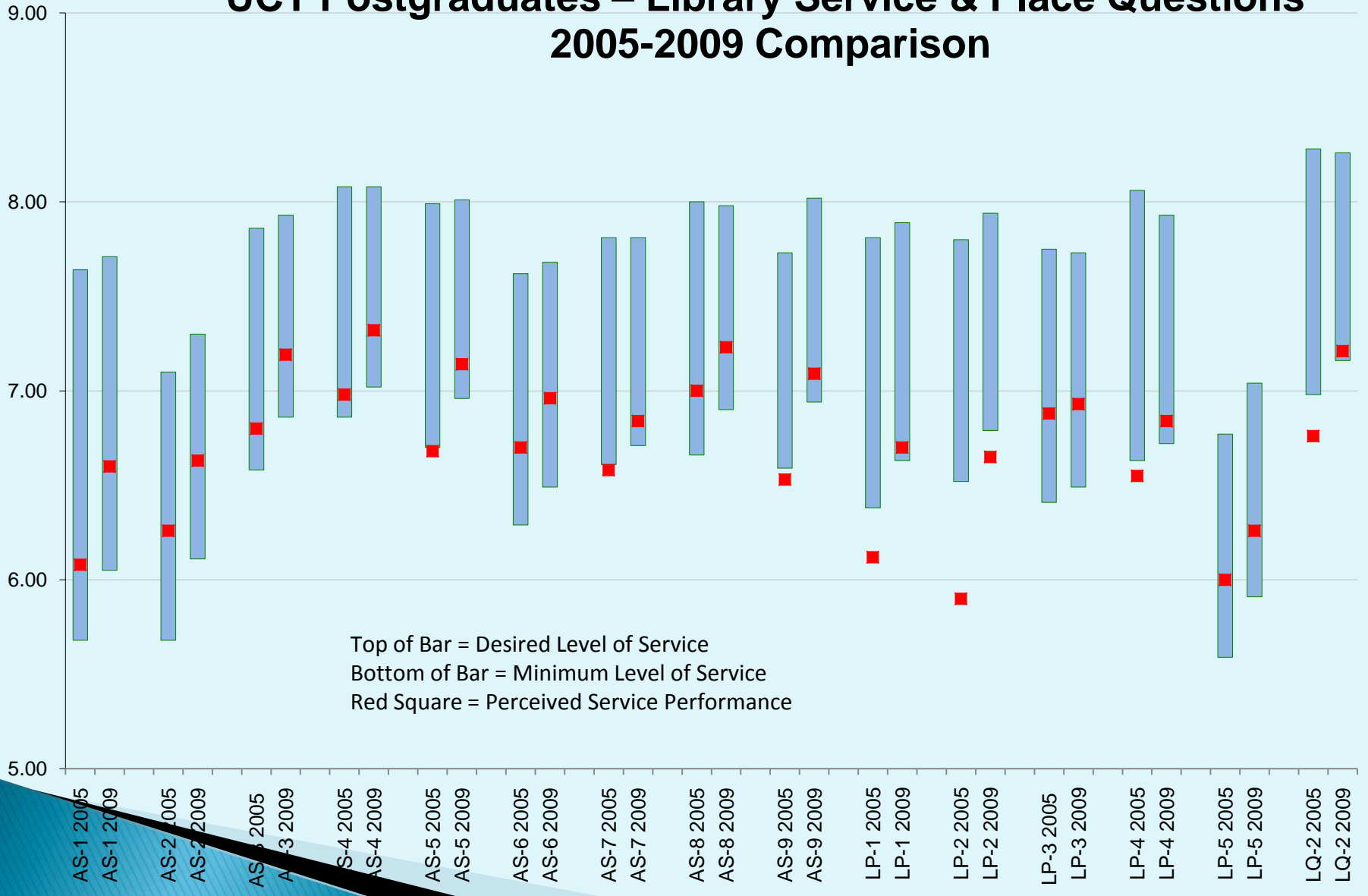
Who our users are...

	Commerce	Engineering	Health Sciences	Humanities	Law	Science	Totals
Academic	1%	1%	1%	3%		1%	7%
Doctoral	4%	1%		9%		4%	18%
Master's	13%	5%	4%	34%	7%	10%	74%
Post Doc	1%					1%	1%
Totals	19%	7%	5%	46%	7%	15%	100%

LibQUAL+ Survey Results

UCT Postgraduates – Library Service & Place Questions

2005-2009 Comparison



Feedback:

“I wish that I had known about this room when it opened, as I know that I would have been able to submit my PhD months ago. I love the fact that I have a quiet, sunny, warm space to work and that I am able to leave my work unattended while I collect books from other sections of the library (oh and the coffee is a definite draw-card too!). Thank you for making this wonderful space available to students like ourselves.”

LibQUAL comments

- ▶ The Research Commons is wonderful. Its development and its excellence make a significant difference to my working experience at UCT. I use it whenever I have to write something serious and whenever I need to truly focus. Thank you very much!

- ▶ More research commons area – it is getting full!
- ▶ Both the research and knowledge commons are the best places to be. I have never seen anything like them. Keep it up!
- ▶ I am more than satisfied with the service offered at the research commons. I find peace for concentrated qualitative research.

Types of support/services offered

- ▶ Creating an environment that is supportive and conducive to producing quality research
- ▶ Developing a sense of community and a “cohort” among young researchers
- ▶ Helping researchers overcome feelings of loneliness and isolation

Types of support/services offered

- ▶ Helping to ensure that young researchers and postgraduates feel valued and special (which they are!)
- ▶ Providing specialist support in navigating complex web-based resources, locating needed information, suggesting new resources, and assisting with proper citation for research