What the Library means to Users

Did you know that more than half of the concepts conveyed in the 500 entries received for the Got Words? raffle show that the library is appreciated as an intellectual hub and a provider that supports access to collections and other resources?

The raffle asked students, faculty and staff to submit one or more short entries (under 10 words) about what the library means to them. The purpose behind this request was to obtain words and ideas from our users that could be used to inform the development of library messaging, and possibly even a slogan. While there is no immediate winner for a library tagline, this information has already provided quotable material for our Library Communications publications and public relations. It will also inform future discussions about a cohesive message that promotes the library to our users.

The creativity and diversity of ideas that were conjured to express the meaning that the Library has for our users gives us an interesting, if unscientific, glimpse into their perceptions. Many took the opportunity to praise the library, many to share the ways in which they use it, others to express universal qualities, and others simply to submit an entry for the raffle. The chart below is a frequency summary by eight broad categories of concepts that we derived from the entries (some entries straddle several categories).

By far, undergraduate and graduate students submitted the highest number of entries. Undergraduates represented 58% of participants and they submitted 64% (n=319) of all entries; graduate students represented 24% of participants and they submitted 22% (n=110) of all entries. The remaining 14% of ballots were submitted by library staff, non-library staff, faculty, alumni and individuals who chose to remain anonymous.

Surprisingly, the idea of a virtual library with availability of resources at any point in time and place was unambiguously invoked only three times, while the concept of the library as a place does permeate the vast majority of responses.
INTELLECTUAL (30%; n=223). Thoughts on how the library supports the respondent’s scholarly and academic endeavors. For example:

- Great place for any person to gain more knowledge.
- An environment that nurtures academics and learning
- Bursting books of learning and self-fulfillment with computers too!
- A place to sit and think untrammelled by pace.

PROVIDER/SUPPORT (24%; n=181). Thoughts on specific materials, services and functions that the library provides to library users. For example:

- The library houses almost every resource I need on a daily basis - human resources, paper resources, technological resources, comfy chairs, and coffee.
- I give them five minutes, they give me the world.
- Searching through the stacks, surfing the web, and sipping coffee
- More books than Wikipedia has articles!

IDEAL/UNIVERSAL (12%; n=91). Thoughts about the ideals that the library fulfills on campus and in society in general. For example:

- It’s the comforting smell of knowledge and books
- In the library, information has no boundaries.
- Cornell libraries: books are only the beginning.
- A leg up to stand on the shoulder of giants.

EMOTIONAL (12%; n=90). Thoughts that reflect a role that the library plays in emotional and psychological well-being. For example:

- The library is another place I call home.
- A safe place to escape the world and go anywhere.
- The library is a calm oasis where I can think.
- Refuge, sanctuary, haven respite: The library is thesaurus

PHYSICAL NEEDS (7%; n=54). Thoughts that reflect a role that the library plays in physical well-being. For example:

- Between class haven: study, nap, eat
- A bed away from bed. A desk away from mine.
- It’s home to an awesome café.
- The library is warm on a snowy day

SOCIAL (7%; n=48). Thoughts that reflect a role that the library plays in contributing to a sense of community and social connection. For example:

- A place I can see my friends and drink chai
- The library is a place to be social AND get work done.
- Where students (especially after midnight) are united under common suffering.
- The library is the only alcohol-free social outlet on campus.
PRAISE (6%; n=45). Some entries simply exalted the library. For example:

- SUPER AMAZING!!
- AD White Room: more magical than Harry Potter!
- Library rocks!
- The library defines the school. The library is Cornell.
- The library means the world to me.

OTHER (2%; N=14). Unclear or nonsensical entries.

With questions please contact researchandassessment@cornell.edu.