Roaming Service Assessment
Compiled By: Rachael Winterling, Usability Coordinator

In the spring of 2016, the J. Murrey Atkins Library’s Usability Lab assessed the roaming service. Due to the library’s growing demand for user assistance, a peer-to-peer roaming service was implemented in the fall of 2015. One goal of the service is to increase library staff visibility throughout the library and not only offering assistance through the circulation and information desks. Atkins’ roamers circulate the library seeking to provide help with research, printing, directions, technology, circulation policies, and study rooms. The roamers are equipped with an iPad when circulating.

The Usability Coordinator collaborated with the Roaming Services Coordinator, the Head of Assessment, the Assessment Assistant, and the Education Librarian to complete the assessment. After the first semester of the service, a survey was distributed to the roamers to assess their experiences and thoughts of the service. After the survey was completed, two student focus groups were planned to assess the service through the user perspective. Focus groups are a “way to better understand how people feel or think about an issue, product, or service” (Krueger & Casey 4) known as needs analysis.

The objectives of the assessment are as follows:

- Gauge the effectiveness of the service, is the service useful to users and help them to achieve their goals accurately.
- Gauge the functionality of the service.
- Gauge the engagement of the service, is the service satisfying to users.
- Identify recommendations to increase user awareness.
- Identify the users’ opinions and desires of the roaming service.

Study Design
Focus groups are a form of needs analysis, which allows researchers to determine the participants’ opinions and desires of a service resulting in qualitative data. “In a typical focus group, participants talk. During the focus group users tell you about their experiences or expectations but you don’t get to verify or observe these experiences” (Focus Groups), allowing the researcher to gather qualitative data. The participant’s that partook in the focus groups are members of the intended audience of the roaming service.

The focus group began with the facilitator (Usability Coordinator) reading a script (See Appendix). Participants discussed ten predetermined questions (See Appendix). The predetermined questions were developed to encourage the participants to progress the discussion into a conversation between the participants and not only answering the facilitator’s questions directly. In addition to the discussion, participants completed a demographic survey (See
Appendix). The survey captured demographic information, including year in school, field of study, frequency of library use, and an explanation of use. The Usability Coordinator developed and finalized the script and the questions that were asked.

Participants’ comments as they discussed the service expose opinions from the intended audience and inform recommendations. During the session, participants were encouraged to share their point of view even if it differed from what others have said. Additionally, the participants were reminded that negative comments at times are the most helpful.

The focus group sessions lasted around 30 minutes and involved a facilitator and an observer/note taker. The Usability Coordinator acted as the moderator and the Assessment Assistant acted as the observer/note taker. The facilitator greeted participants upon arrival, guided participants through the informed consent, presented the participants with the questions, answered participant’s questions, prompted the participants for responses, and guided the discussion. The observer recruited participants on the spot and took notes during the session. In addition, the Education Librarian observed the first session and the Head of Assessment observed the second session. The sessions were captured on an audio recorder. After the focus group sessions were completed, the Usability Coordinator analyzed the qualitative data and informed recommendations.

Recruitment

Student participants were recruited through bookmarks, email blasts, and on-the-spot recruitment. The bookmarks were developed by the Assessment Assistant and distributed with laptop checkouts the week the sessions took place and advertised, “Free Pizza and Drinks Sound Good? Join a Library Focus Group.” Additionally, they included the session dates, times, and contact information. The email blasts went to the Student Library Advisory Board (SLAB) and past usability study participants. The emails included the purpose of the focus groups, the session dates, the participation incentives, and contact information. The Assessment Assistant performed on-the-spot recruitment 10-20 minutes prior to the sessions to ensure at least six participants were present.

Twelve participants took part in the study. The twelve participants read and signed an informed consent form to participate in the focus group. The consent form is approved by the university’s Institutional Review Board. Participants were incentivized with pizza and drinks for their participation. Participants received the incentive regardless of whether they completed the focus group.

Participant Demographics

The participants consisted of eleven undergraduate students, and one graduate student. Each session had six participants. The undergraduate and graduate students represented nine different
areas of study (Figure 1.1). None of the participants had prior knowledge of the service before their participation in the focus groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Usage</th>
<th>Frequency of Use</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Majors:</td>
<td>Computers (9)</td>
<td>A few times a week (8)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>• Biology (2)</td>
<td>Laptop Checkout</td>
<td>A few times a semester</td>
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<td>Printers (8)</td>
<td>A few times a month</td>
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<td>• Finance</td>
<td>Scanners (2)</td>
<td>Daily</td>
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<td>Study Rooms (9)</td>
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<td>• Communication Studies</td>
<td>Study Spaces (2)</td>
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<td>• Psychology</td>
<td>Microfilm Readers</td>
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<td>Website (6)</td>
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<td>Website</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1.1

Findings

Findings are grouped by the predetermined question along with a description and participants’ comments.

Question One: Do you know what the roaming service is? (Show of hands)

- If yes, have you ever used the roaming service and what for?
  - i. How did you hear about this service?
ii. How would you rate your experience?

iii. Would you use this service again?

- Can you explain to the group what the service is?
- Explain in further depth to the group
- Would you use this service in the future?

Question one was designed to determine how many participants had knowledge of the roaming service. Additionally, if a participant had knowledge of the service they would be asked to identify if they had used the service and why, to rate their experience, and if they would use the service again. Gathering qualitative data for question one allows researchers to analyze user engagement and the functionality of the service.

The twelve participants that partook in the two focus groups had no prior knowledge of the roaming service. The session facilitator then showed the participants visuals of the roammers and asked if anyone had seen them in the library, five of the twelve participants had seen them before. One participant commented that they saw a roamer after spring break directing students to the second floor to print because of furniture installation on the first floor. In session one, the Education Librarian provided an overview of the service and in session two, the Head of Assessment provided the overview to the group. After the service overview, the facilitator asked the participants if they would use this service in the future and the response was a unanimous yes.

Question Two: Have you had any issues with a library service (physical/digital)? If so, what have they included?

- How significant was this issue?
- What do you think is the cause of this issue?
- What do you think would improve or fix this feature/issue?
- Did you seek help to resolve the issue?

Question two was designed to determine the issues that the participants have experienced when using the library’s physical and digital services. After participants identified issues, they were asked how they resolved the issue and did they seek help from a library employee. The facilitator then asked the participants if they would have used the roaming service to assist them with the issue. The issues reported in the two focus groups included printing, study rooms, desktop computers, and locating books physically.

Three participants shared issues that they have experienced while attempting to print in the library. One participant commented that when they attempted to swipe their identification card that had money on it to print, the printer did not recognize the card. This was a significant issue because the student could not print an assignment before class. The participant went to a different computer lab on campus to resolve the issue. The participant did not seek help from a library employee in the instance, but stated that they would seek out a roamer in the future. One
participant shared that they could not print due to a cartridge being low. The participant commented that the issue was frustrating but not significant at the time. It would have been significant if they were limited to time. To resolve the issue, the participant went to a different printing station located in the library. The remaining participant shared that when they returned from spring break, the printers on the first floor were disabled due to renovations. The participant shared the issue was not significant because library employees including the roamers were directing students to the second floor to print.

Two participants shared problems that they had associated with study rooms. One participant commented that they have had trouble locating the study room they had reserved. The participant attempted to use the floor maps on the library’s website to locate the room but was unsuccessful and shared that the numbering of the rooms is confusing. The participant did not seek help from a library employee and just roamed the floor until they found the room. The participant stated they would seek help from a roamer in the future. The remaining participant shared that when they arrived at their reservation, other students were occupying the room. The participant did not do anything about the issue; they waited a few minutes after the reservation and then went and found another space to study. The participant stated in the future that they would seek assistance from the roaming service or circulation desk.

Two participants shared issues that they had associated with locating the physical location of a book in the library. Both participants had similar situations. Both participants utilized the circulation desk to help locate a book; the employee at the desk in both situations gave the student the item’s call number. Both participants struggled to locate the book because they had never searched for a book physically with a call number. Both participants stated that they would use the roaming service in the future now that they are aware of its existence.

One participant shared that the only issue they have experienced with the library is the slowness of the public desktop computers. When the participant made this comment, the other five participants in the session agreed. The participant shared that the slowness of the computers reduces the efficiency of the printing process. Additionally, the participant commented that they did not seek help for this issue and that a roamer would not be able to help.

**Question Three: Do you think this service is beneficial to students and why?**

Question three was designed to collect the participants’ opinions of the service. All of the participants agreed that the service is beneficial to students. Three participants provided the following reasoning:

- “The service is more accessible, so not everyone is going to the circulation desk.”
- “In theory, yes but currently it is not beneficial due to awareness and students not knowing about the service.”
“When I need help, I have to pack up all of my items like books and my laptop and take them with me to find help at the circulation desk. With the roaming service, they can come to me to help.”

**Question Four: What kind of services do you think the roamers should provide?**

Question four was designed to collect the participants’ desires of the service. Specifically, what services should the roamers provide. The facilitator recapped the roamer services that were provided by the Education Librarian and the Head of Assessment at the beginning of the sessions. The participants did not have any new service requests but reemphasized the importance of technology support and directional help.

**Question Five: How can we make the service more identifiable to the university?**

Question five was designed to collect ideas to increase the service awareness. The participants from the two sessions recommended the following:

- Flyers to be included in SOAR handouts and for roamers to hand out flyers in the first week of each semester
- Library website to advertise the service
- Signage at the library’s entrances, elevators, coffee cafes (Peet’s & Rubi), and at the services that users need assistance with such as printing stations
- Additional focus groups
- Teaching faculty to share information about the service with classes
- Campus tour guides to include roaming service information when they are touring the library
- A central location where one roamer is located to answer quick questions or act as a dispatcher
- A quick way to locate a roamer such as a press for assistance button, call area, or a text service
- Email blasts sent to students

**Question Six: Would you feel comfortable approaching a roamer? Why?**

- Would you feel comfortable when a roamer approaches you? Why?
- How can we make service more approachable and usable to you?

Question six was designed to discover if users are comfortable approaching a roamer or being approached by a roamer. Participants were also asked how the service can become more approachable and usable to them. All twelve participants said they would be comfortable approaching a roamer now that they know about the service. One participant shared that the t-shirts help identify the service so they know the students work for the library. The participants all agreed that they would feel comfortable if a roamer approached them, especially when they are
identifiable so they do not think a random person is approaching them. In addition, the identifiable accessories let the users know that the student is there to assist them. The participants shared that the service will become more approachable when campus awareness increases, participants will not seek the service if they do not know it exists. Participants commented that the service would be helpful during critical times in the academic calendar like registration, student orientation, beginning of the semester, midterms, and finals. One participant shared that if roamers were trained to assist in registration it would be very beneficial to students because many students complete registration in the library and have difficulty registering.

**Question Seven: What time of the day do you find yourself using library services?**

Question seven was designed to find out when users are using the library and what they are using it for. The findings can lead to recommendations to increase the service’s number of employees and the service’s hours. The majority of the participants shared that they come to the library in-between classes to study in a group study room or at a table, to print, or to use/rent computers. Two participants shared that they come to the library in the afternoon after classes and stay until they have finished their assignments or studying.

**Question Eight: What days of the week do you mainly use library services?**

Question eight was designed to find out the days of the week users are using the library. The findings can lead to recommendations to increase the service’s number of employees and the service’s hours. During the sessions, participants were asked if they live on campus or off campus, all the participants live off campus which led them to comment that they do not come to the library on the weekends (the only exception is for exams), and only come when they are already on campus.

**Question Nine: Is this an adequate summary? (Summary question, after the brief oral summary)**

Question nine was designed to allow the facilitator to recap the session to the group.

**Question Ten: Is there anything else you would like to add to our discussion?**

Question ten was designed to allow participants to add any additional comments to the discussion as a follow up to the session recap provided by the facilitator. Three participants shared general comments about the library. One participant shared that the added electrical outlets on the first floor have been helpful because they could not accomplish a lot of work without access to an outlet. One participant commented that the added tables on the second floor have been helpful. One participant shared that they would like to see improved directories throughout the library to increase service findability.
Recommendations

The following recommendations were developed based on analysis of the qualitative data gathered from the two focus groups. The study revealed several modifications that should be addressed to enhance the engagement, effectiveness, user awareness, and desirability of the service as it matures.

Increase User Awareness

Increasing user awareness of the roaming service will enhance its engagement and effectiveness. With low awareness, the service does not reach its potential effectiveness to the campus. Additionally, the low user awareness limits the engagement of the service. Increasing user awareness is critical to the growth and success of the service. The focus group sessions resulted in several ways to market the service to potential users. The library should produce signage to advertise the roaming service as well as the Ask Atkins brand. The signage should be placed at high traffic areas such as the library’s three entrances, elevators, circulation desk, restrooms and coffee shop. When the library acquires digital signage, the roaming service should have a slide that circulates frequently. Signage should also be created and strategically placed by the services that acquire frequent assistance such as the printing, copying, and scanning locations. This signage should include the Ask Atkins logo and could state, “Need help, text a roamer” or a way to contact the service. The library should advertise the service on the current website and on the redesigned website; it should be a reoccurring spotlight story and have information prominently located in the navigation. One participant suggested that roamers hand out flyers at the beginning of the semester to advertise the service.

Additionally, marketing of the service should extend outside of the library to maximize the users reached. Flyers advertising the service could be shared in the Student Orientation, Advising, and Registration (SOAR) program; incoming freshmen and transfer students partake in the program. Campus tours come through the library, adding the service to the tour guide script would reach potential students. More ways to advertise the service is through campus email blasts and having teaching faculty sharing the service’s information with their classes.

Increase User Access to Roamers

Roamers currently can be found at the circulation desk or roaming the library looking for users to assist. The service should expand ways that users can contact roamers for assistance so communication can work both ways. For example, a text/chat service would allow users to communicate with the service from anywhere in the library. This will increase the functionality, effectiveness, engagement, and efficiency of the service, because users will be able to quickly seek assistance from their location.
Evaluate the Growth of the Service

As the roaming service matures, the service’s growth will need to be evaluated. For example, the service will need to consider increasing staff as well as the service’s hours as user awareness grows. Increasing staff and hours will improve the effectiveness of the service.

Continuous Roamer Training

To ensure that the service is effective and efficient, roamers should be continuously trained on library tools and services. Additionally, roamers need to be up-to-date on library renovations and events to appropriately assist users.

Conclusion

The roaming service assessment focused on the functionality, engagement, effectiveness, user awareness, and desirability of the service through two user focus groups. After roamers completed a survey including their experiences and options after the first semester of the service, two user focus groups were planned and conducted.

The following recommendations should be addressed to enhance the functionality, engagement, effectiveness, user awareness, and desirability of the service as it matures:

- Increase user awareness
- Increase user access to roamers
- Evaluate the growth of the service
- Continuous roamer training

In response to growing demand for patron assistance detached from the traditional library desk model, Atkins rolled out the peer-to-peer roaming service. Roaming staff walk around the library, equipped with an iPad and visible identification, seeking patron questions related to research, printing, directions, technology, circulation policies, and study rooms. The goal of the service is to increase library staff visibility while reducing library anxiety. To ensure this goal, further assessment methodologies should be conducted as the service matures to ensure continued functionality, efficiency, and desirability.
Works Cited


Appendix

Script:

Thanks for taking the time to join our discussion about the library’s roaming service. My name is Rachael Winterling and I am the Usability Coordinator here. The library is assessing the roaming service to evaluate its efficiency, effectiveness, and desirability. The discussion today will allow us to give the Library information about how students feel about the service. The information will help them improve the service they provide.

There is no right or wrong answers. We expect that you will have different points of view. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what others have said.

We are recording this session because we do not want to miss any of your comments. No names will be included in the reports. Your comments are confidential. Keep in mind that we are just as interested in negative comments as positive comments, and at time, the negative comments are the most helpful.

If you want to follow up on something that someone has said, you want to agree, disagree, or give an example, feel free to do that. Do not feel like you have to respond to me all the time. Feel free to have a conversation with one another about these questions. I am here to ask questions, listen, and make sure everyone has a chance to share. We are interested in hearing from each of you. Therefore, if you are talking a lot, I may ask you to give others a chance, and if you are not saying much, I may call on you. We just want to make sure we hear from all of you.

Let us begin. Let us find out some more about each other by going around the room one at a time. Tell us your name, program, and what you use the library for.

Questions:

1. Do you know what the roaming service is? (show of hands)
   a. If yes, have you ever used the roaming service and what for?
      i. How did you hear about this service?
      ii. How would you rate your experience?
      iii. Would you use this service again?
   b. Can you explain to the group what the service is?
c. Explain in further depth to the group
d. Would you use this service in the future?

2. Have you had any issues with a library service (physical/digital)? If so, what have they included?
   a. How significant was this issue?
   b. What do you think is the cause of this issue?
   c. What do you think would improve or fix this feature/issue?
   d. Did you seek help to resolve the issue?

3. Do you think this service is beneficial to students and why?

4. What kind of services do you think the roamers should provide? (receptive to out-of-the-box ideas)

5. How can we make the service more identifiable to the university?

6. Would you feel comfortable approaching a roamer? Why?
   a. Would you feel comfortable when a roamer approaches you? Why?
   b. How can we make service more approachable and usable to you?

7. What time of the day do you find yourself using library services?

8. What days of the week do you mainly use library services?

9. Is this an adequate summary? (Summary question, after the brief oral summary)

10. Is there anything else you would like to add to our discussion?

**Demographic Survey:**

1. What year are you in school? (Circle answer)
   - Freshman
   - Sophomore
   - Junior
   - Senior
   - Graduate Student

2. What is your field of study?
   - Major(s):
   - Minors(s):
   - Concentration(s):

3. How often do you use the library?
   - Never
   - A few times a semester (2 or more)
   - A few times a month (2 or more)
   - A few times a week (2 or more)
   - Daily

4. What library services do you use?