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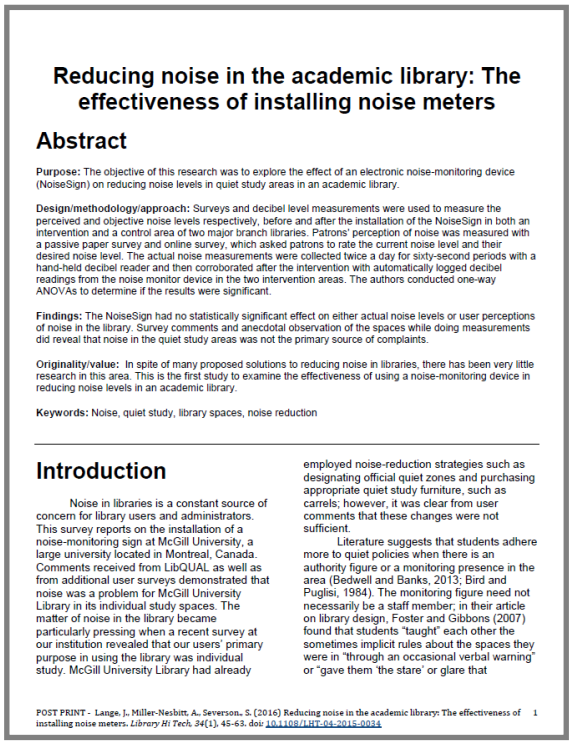

Reducing noise in the academic library: The effectiveness of installing noise meters

Abstract

Purpose: The objective of this research was to explore the effect of an electronic noise-monitoring device (NoiseSign) on reducing noise levels in quiet study areas in an academic library.

Design/methodology/approach: Surveys and decibel level measurements were used to measure the perceived and objective noise levels respectively, before and after the installation of the NoiseSign in both an intervention and a control area of two major branch libraries. Patrons' perception of noise was measured with a passive paper survey and online survey, which asked patrons to rate the current noise level and their desired noise level. The actual noise measurements were collected twice a day for sixty-second periods with a hand-held decibel reader and then corroborated after the intervention with automatically logged decibel readings from the noise monitor device in the two intervention areas. The authors conducted one-way ANOVAs to determine if the results were significant.

Findings: The NoiseSign had no statistically significant effect on either actual noise levels or user perceptions of noise in the library. Survey comments and anecdotal observation of the spaces while doing measurements did reveal that noise in the quiet study areas was not the primary source of complaints.

Originality/value: In spite of many proposed solutions to reducing noise in libraries, there has been very little research in this area. This is the first study to examine the effectiveness of using a noise-monitoring device in reducing noise levels in an academic library.

Keywords: Noise, quiet study, library spaces, noise reduction

Introduction

Noise in libraries is a constant source of concern for library users and administrators. This survey reports on the installation of a noise-monitoring sign at McGill University, a large university located in Montreal, Canada. Comments received from LibQUAL as well as from additional user surveys demonstrated that noise was a problem for McGill University Library in its individual study spaces. The matter of noise in the library became particularly pressing when a recent survey at our institution revealed that our users' primary purpose in using the library was individual study. McGill University Library had already employed noise-reduction strategies such as designating official quiet zones and purchasing appropriate quiet study furniture, such as carrels; however, it was clear from user comments that these changes were not sufficient.

Literature suggests that students adhere more to quiet policies when there is an authority figure or a monitoring presence in the area (Bedwell and Banks, 2013; Bird and Puglisi, 1984). The monitoring figure need not necessarily be a staff member; in their article on library design, Foster and Gibbons (2007) found that students "taught" each other the sometimes implicit rules about the spaces they were in "through an occasional verbal warning" or "gave them 'the stare' or glare that

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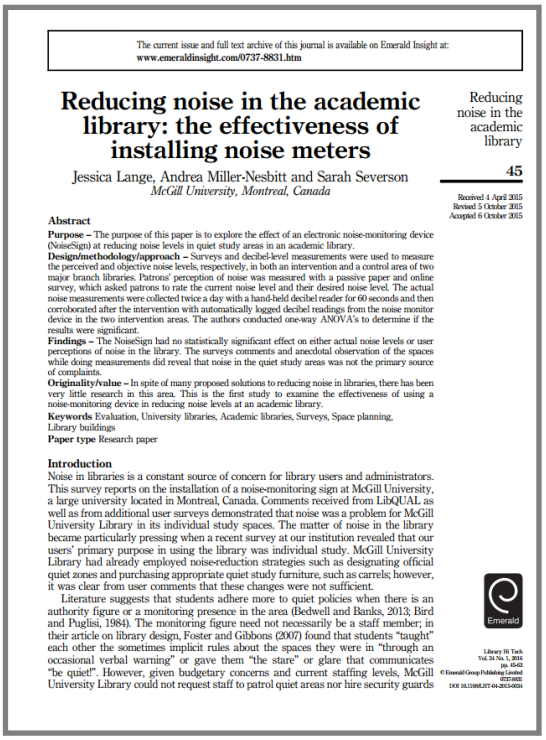

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Reducing noise in the academic library: the effectiveness of installing noise meters

Reducing noise in the academic library

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore the effect of an electronic noise-monitoring device (NoiseSign) at reducing noise levels in quiet study areas in an academic library.
Design/methodology/approach – Surveys and decibel-level measurements were used to measure the perceived and objective noise levels, respectively, in both an intervention and a control area of two major branch libraries. Patrons' perception of noise was measured with a passive paper and online survey, which asked patrons to rate the current noise level and their desired noise level. The actual noise measurements were collected twice a day with a hand-held decibel reader for 60 seconds and then corroborated after the intervention with automatically logged decibel readings from the noise monitor device in the two intervention areas. The authors conducted one-way ANOVA's to determine if the results were significant.
Findings – The NoiseSign had no statistically significant effect on either actual noise levels or user perceptions of noise in the library. The surveys comments and anecdotal observation of the spaces while doing measurements did reveal that noise in the quiet study areas was not the primary source of complaints.
Originality/value – In spite of many proposed solutions to reducing noise in libraries, there has been very little research in this area. This is the first study to examine the effectiveness of using a noise-monitoring device in reducing noise levels at an academic library.
Keywords Evaluation, University libraries, Academic libraries, Surveys, Space planning, Library buildings
Paper type Research paper

Introduction

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