Inscriptio: Interactive carrel seating application
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Project summary
·   Accomplishments

The Interactive Carrel Seating application aka Inscriptio successfully launched in the Fall of 2011. What was once a time-consuming process involving an excel spreadsheet, paper applications, and thousands of pages printed yearly of carrel packet information is now a streamlined online function. Where before staff had no reporting mechanism for available or expired carrels and did have the challenge of explaining to patrons that even though the carrel they want is physically empty of books it is actual reserved by four of their peers, thanks to Library Lab and the Berkman Center we now have an online reservation system with strong visual elements to assist patrons in choosing the best option for research adjacencies. We estimate that this application will ongoing save five weeks of an FTE and $800 in supplies per year, making this a green initiative.

Eligible patrons are now able to apply for a carrel or hold shelf in Widener or Pusey library via an online application. Once registered, they can navigate their way through floor maps of the libraries, showing which carrels and hold shelves are available. They can cross-reference availability with subject classification adjacencies, ensuring they are as close as possible to their research area of interest. Patrons can then choose a carrel, much like one chooses a seat on an airplane or train. Staff run reports on pending reservations, approve the patron, and an email is generated, sending the patron information on how to charge items to the carrel/hold shelf and any relevant information such as the locker combination for the carrel locker. Patrons assigned to a particular carrel can communicate with each other to schedule use times via a bulletin board built as part of the application. As patrons reach their chosen reservation end date, the application will automatically send an email with renewal options. Staff can run reports on expired reservations so that the space can be cleared and made available for future use.

As the project was developed, staff were inspired to create a workaround in Aleph, streamlining the process of charging items to carrels/hold shelves for staff and patrons. In the past, when patrons applied for a carrel, they received a separate library card allowing them to charge material to the carrel. Patrons then had to carry around two cards (their HUID and their carrel card) when coming to the library to engage in research. By populating the Additional Notes Field One in Aleph with the patrons' carrel number and the Aleph psuedo-patron card number for the corresponding carrel, we were able to push that information to the loan screen in the patron details box. This eliminated the need for a separate carrel card. Patrons now show their Harvard issued ID at the Circulation desk, and from there the staff copy and paste the carrel number so that materials are charged appropriately.

Prior to launch this Fall, staff entered 498 existing reservations; post-launch, 272 patrons have reserved carrels and another 113 have been registered but have yet to reserve a carrel. Carrel reservations typically follow a two year pattern based on length of study for graduate students. Statistics over the past five years show a consistent pattern of

alternating increase/decrease with an 11% spread. As FY11 saw the greatest increase in carrels in the past four years, it is consistent that on average, application for carrels using Inscriptio for FY12 are down about 11%. We expect that FY13 will show a corresponding increase in carrel applications—if this does not hold true to the pattern on the past five years we will need to investigate further. Staff have received no negative feedback from patrons, and have been astonished at how seamless it was to go into production at a high-traffic time of year with a brand new tool. We have a netbook available for people to use who come to apply in person.

·   Challenges – please explain anything you couldn't do

Prior to launch, it was determined that the original goal of having patrons use their HUID and PIN to authenticate into the system would not be in place by the intended launch date. A work-around was established where patrons used an edited version of the previous online application form. Once staff received the contents of the form in email, they verified eligibility and created an account for the patron in the application. The account creation generated login and password instructions, and the patrons were able to then fully access the application. We decided to implement the HUID/PIN authentication piece in December, when requests for carrels and hold shelves in Widener and Pusey libraries experience a lull.

The application was named Inscriptio: latin for address. Not particularly self-explanatory, however, since the application may be used at a variety of Harvard Libraries for carrel, lockers, hold shelves, study rooms we had a hard time finding a name that was relevant and yet encompassing. Any and all naming ideas are welcome.

·   Next steps

It was the original intention to launch the application for several libraries at once, and we hope to do that in the coming year. Development of a macro is under way to facilitate the copy/paste function in Aleph for charging materials to a carrel/hold shelf. We have also drafted a user survey based on our own observations and initial user feedback, including questions to rate the interest in patrons being able to access a list of items charged to their carrel/hold shelf from the application. Yale visited the Widener Privileges office in September and is interested in using the application and further partnering with Harvard on developing the application further.

·   Budget spent

Total development hours:
349.2
Total development cost (including salary, benefits, overhead, and administration):
$43,137.44

·   A list of any publicity you did, e.g., articles, blog posts, podcasts, etc.
·   A list of any presentations you gave that involved your project

Information on Inscriptio is available here:

blogs.law.harvard.edu/inscriptiodemo

http://www.screencast.com/t/62rnlxoI
https://inscriptio.harvard.edu/demo
Login: admin at example.com
Passcode: kcnjs7mjwgy
https://github.com/berkmancenter/Inscriptio

Inscriptio has been demonstrated at the following:

Harvard University Inaugural IT summit June 23, 2011
Library Lab Project Showcase August 4, 2011
Yale visit to Harvard campus September 28, 2011
ENUG: Ex Libris Northeast Users Group October 27, 2011
Library Lab Project Showcase October 27, 2011