Looking for a Seat in the Library?

In this article, the librarian describes the current status of seating in the library, explains what the library is currently doing to help Johnson students, and provides some general advise on this topic.

In the coming weeks, Cornell students from across campus will be looking for places to work and study as they prepare to complete their course work and prepare for examinations. The activity of the semester reaches a crescendo at this time. Stress and tension are in the air. Even if you don’t feel the stress chances are that someone you know is feeling stressed. Libraries have long been seen as a place to read, to study, and to get away from the hubbub of the world. In the coming weeks, Cornell students will converge on the Cornell Libraries.

While there are nineteen libraries on campus, there are still not enough library seats for all of the Cornell students who would like to work or study in the libraries. Contention for library seats is a campus wide phenomenon. This is not a new problem unique to Sage Hall. We had problems with overcrowding in Malott Hall going back twenty years. Now that Cornell has renovated Sage Hall, there are still not enough library seats for all Cornell students who would like to work or study in the libraries. This is a Cornell problem.

What is the library doing to help Johnson students find a seat? First, we have set aside the Marin tiered reading room. The majority of library study carrels are located in this room. There are no library materials or special equipment in this room so the room can be segregated from the rest of the library. If the seats in the Marin room are filled, you may ask regular library staff to check the room. We will ask non-Johnson people to move.

One caveat - most of the library staff are Cornell undergraduates. Policing the Marin room is not one of their responsibilities. The undergraduate library staff is aware of the non-Johnson discussion. They have and will continue to behave professionally. As Cornell employees, our undergraduate staff, are entitled to your full respect.

The Management Library is a campus facility. As we planned the Sage renovation, we actually removed seating from the library so that other spaces in the building could be developed and used as study spaces when needed. Segregating library seats is not a preferred solution. I will continue to look for solutions that are more inclusive and look at the larger problem across campus.

What does a librarian do when he wants to study? I did graduate from the Johnson School, Class of '84. Despite the impression that I left with many of the faculty, I did study! I couldn’t study in my office. It was too easy for people to find me and there were too many distractions. I like my work! Here are some tips:

- Plan ahead. You probably already plan what and when you are going to study. Consider also planning where you are going to study. I have already reported that there are not enough seats in the libraries on campus.
- Be a contrarian. Don’t travel with the herd. Arrive early or work during the dinner hour. I guarantee a seat to everyone who comes into the library between 8am and 9am.
- Diversify. Sage Hall is very nice. There are other nice places in Sage and on campus. I was always able to get more work done outside the Johnson School. There were fewer distractions. As I could concentrate more on the work at hand, I could accomplish more in less time.
- Do not leave your belongings unattended. The worst thing that can happen in the coming weeks is to lose your notes, your books, your bag or your laptop. If you need to get up from studying to stretch or get a drink, ask a colleague to keep an eye on your things. Petty theft on campus increases as we approach the end of the semester.

Don Schnedeker, November 1998.