

Randall Library, Where the Students Go to Study Play

As I walk through the entrance of Randall library at the University of North Carolina, I am nearly trampled by a group of girls with large purses thrown over their shoulders. They are too consumed in conversation and laughter to notice me. Once in the library, I am surrounded by flocks of students walking in all directions carrying books and book bags, and talking and giggling.

Near the entrance is the checkout counter where students go to check out books, laptops and ask for help from the librarians. Five students are standing in line.

Large sections of group study tables and computer labs are scattered throughout the first floor in patches. Some students work diligently with books and notebooks covering the surface of the table, while others are in groups, studying and working on projects with laptops and poster boards laid out in front of them.

The coffee shop, Java City, is around the corner of the checkout counter. The tables in the shop and the couches nearby are always filled with students chatting and laughing with their friends. Java City is supposed to be the only place in the library suitable for socializing, however, this isn't necessarily the case.

Because students can't survive without coffee, they flock to the coffee shop to fill their caffeine addiction. This gives them a reason to meet up with their friends at the library instead of other places on campus appropriate for loud noise. Students are also under the impression that the library is the only place to meet with study groups. When students are faced with group projects, instead of going to one of the group member's homes, they immediately conclude that they must go to the library; as if the library has magical powers and will benefit the students over any other location.

I do not even attempt to find a quiet place on the first floor of the library. Even if I sat in an isolated corner surrounded by books, I would hear the echoes of laughter and shouting from students only book cases away. My large, flowered bag bounces against my hip as I walk up the stairs to the second floor.

I am in search of a quiet spot to study for an exam I have tomorrow on communication research methods. The upstairs of the library is mostly made up of cubicle-like, brown desks, which are in groups of four in the shape of swastikas, for students to work independently at. However, surrounding the desks are faculty offices and group study rooms.

Most professors and faculty members with offices in the library have an open door policy, meaning they keep their doors open for students who need their assistance or anyone who wants to talk. The Women's Resource Center is one section of offices with this policy. The women here love to let the entire library know what they are doing at all times. With their doors wide open, they make business calls, schedule appointments and talk to family and friends. When students stop by, the women invite them in to talk about whatever is on their minds. At lunch time, they announce what they are eating and discuss nutrition facts, and when they use the bathroom, they make an extra effort to say hello to every student they pass.

The only divider between the students in the group study rooms that surround the cubicle-like desks and the students at the individual desks is a thin piece of glass. Inside the room, students act as if the glass is sound proof and no one can hear the conversations they have. Once I sat outside of a row of group study rooms. I got the pleasure of listening to a girl wearing a navy blue sweatshirt and jeans talk about the night before. Evidently, she was very wasted downtown and went home with a guy she did not know. She now had three hickies around her neck.

The Juvenile Section, consisting of four rows of book shelves surrounded by several small tables with colorful chairs, is located in one segment of the second floor, right in the middle of the cubicle-like desks. Every day, college students sit at these tables with young children and teach them grammar, mathematics and how to read. The children willing to learn do so by discussing out loud what they are learning, while the children who do not want to learn run around and laugh and play. They repeatedly walk to the water fountain or the bathroom and back.

I walk to the back of the library passing a teal sign that reads, "Quiet Please. This is a study area." I sit at an open desk in front of the glass window that overlooks the downstairs. Before pulling out my textbook, I stare down at four college students, two boys and two girls, sitting on the couches below me, wildly laughing and throwing pens and paper balls at each other.

The song, *Poker Face*, by Lady Gaga rings in my eardrums and startles me. The girl sitting two desks down from me digs through her oversized, yellow purse and pulls out her iPhone.

"Oh my god. I have got to tell you something, but I am in the library. I will have to call you later," the girl says as she twirls her blond curly hair. Before hanging up, she tells the person on the other end that she is writing a paper for her history class. It is the hardest paper she has ever written, and it is going to take her all night to finish because she waited until today to start.

I grab my textbook out of my flowered bag and turn to chapter 10. As I attempt to grasp the information in my book, over fifty students pass by. At the very back of the library is a classroom that seats around 70. Every hour for about 10 minutes, groups of students will walk to or from class with their book backs whacking against their bodies and their shoes dragging on the ground. Today, class was cancelled.

A tall boy wearing a baseball cap yells to his friend, a short, plump girl carrying flashcards, to tell her class was cancelled.

"What do you mean class is cancelled?! I have my presentation to give. Ugh, I can't believe this! I was up all night," the girl yells back.

The two students stood outside of the doors leading to the classroom for ten more minutes and explained to every single classmate that walks by that class was cancelled and made sure that every one of them understood how upset they are.

Meanwhile, two phones vibrate. One is rattling on a desk of a boy with glasses. He has his headphones on and is staring at his laptop's screen. He glances at his phone without bothering to pick it up or stop it from vibrating. The other phone belongs to a girl wearing a short, blue summer dress and UGG boots. She picks up her phone, giggles and texts. Only seconds after she lays her phone back down, it vibrates again. The girl continues to text the entire time I am there.

On the second floor of the library, group study tables are scattered; some are mixed in with the individual desks. This makes it impossible to escape the noise of students doing school work together. The group study table behind me is occupied by two students overlooking a calculus book, discussing the homework problems. Every few minutes they get off track and talk about the Carolina Panthers.

Two girls with pink ribbons in their hair swerve in and out of the cubicle-like desks. The one in back is following the one in front who continues to look behind her and laugh. They seem to be playing a game of "follow the leader."

Because the library is the place to go when students need to do research, students are always walking in and out of book cases, not only looking for books, but also talking on cell phones or to each other. The students act as if they were infants who haven't yet grasped the concept of object permanence. They believe that because they can't see me, I can't hear or see them.

Three book shelves away, three boys hunt through hundreds of books in search for research for a group project. They can't find what they are looking for and have to call their fourth group member, Jason.

"Hey Jason, man, what's up? We can't find that book you wrote down. I think you got the call number wrong," said one of the boys. He continues talking to Jason, while the other two boys flip through the pages of a random book they found. They point and laugh at the content.

On the adjacent side of the glass window I am sitting in front of are four fluffy couches. Depending on the hour, the couches are either occupied by exhausted students taking a power nap or groups of students chatting away as if they are in their own living room. Today, four students are sitting on the couches with their backpacks dispersed in front of them. Each student has a laptop sitting in their lap supposedly working on research papers for their English class.

However, because they have their backs to the glass, I can see that they are all chatting with each other through a Facebook chat room and looking at drunken pictures of themselves. The Facebook chat room did prevent them from talking out loud, but it did not stop them from laughing at everything they were looking at and talking about online.

As if all of this distraction wasn't enough, a heavysset female custodian walks by pushing her squeaky, yellow cart. Her cell phone, attached to the cart, was on speaker phone. She was talking to one family member about another family member with cancer.

At that point, I decided it was time to go home. I had read 30 pages and did not grasp one bit of it. The reason I came to the library was to escape the noise from my upstairs' neighbors. Over the past year, the already heavy couple each put on an additional twenty pounds. When they walk, my kitchen shakes. Not to mention, they have a dog bigger than me that runs around and barks constantly. Compared to the noise pollution I was experiencing at the library, the noise from my upstairs' neighbors seemed almost nonexistent; as though they were light as feathers and did not even own a dog.

I stayed up all night, sitting at my kitchen table under the spotlight of my 4-foot lamp in my one-bedroom apartment. I drowned out my upstairs neighbors by wrapping myself in a blanket and blasting my broken air conditioner. In comparison to the environment at the library, I felt free of distraction.