

---

---

# STUDENT WORKSPACE INVESTIGATIVE REPORT AND SUMMARY

---

PREPARED BY

ERICA SHANNON  
STUDENT LIFE LIAISON  
GRADUATE STUDENT COUNCIL  
VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY

REBECCA LEVINSON  
PRESIDENT  
GRADUATE STUDENT COUNCIL  
VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY

GSC@VANDERBILT.EDU

October 20, 2015

# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1	Goals and Motivation . . . . .	3
1.2	The Investigation . . . . .	3
<b>2</b>	<b>Survey Demographics</b>	<b>4</b>
2.1	Information about Participation . . . . .	4
<b>3</b>	<b>Quantitative Results</b>	<b>6</b>
3.1	Carrel Usage . . . . .	6
<b>4</b>	<b>Qualitative Findings</b>	<b>8</b>
4.1	Carrels are necessary for TA duties and for performing research . . . . .	8
4.2	Assigned carrels serve as a “Home Base” . . . . .	8
4.3	Carrels and the work area security is a high priority for students . . . . .	8
4.4	TAs prefer to hold office hours near their carrel . . . . .	8
4.5	Some TAs would like reservable meeting rooms while others would not . . . . .	8
4.6	Carrels foster a collaborative, interdisciplinary student culture . . . . .	9
4.7	Extended discussions held at carrels are very distracting to other graduate students . . . . .	9
4.8	Sharing carrels has a negative impact on student productivity . . . . .	9
4.9	TAs appreciate the access to printers . . . . .	9
4.10	The students appreciate the Graduate Student Lounge in Buttrick . . . . .	9
<b>5</b>	<b>Conclusions and Recommendations</b>	<b>10</b>
5.1	An assigned carrel system is necessary for graduate student productivity . . . . .	10
5.2	Graduate students may prefer smaller carrels if they didnt have to share them . . . . .	10
5.3	A locking space of sufficient size is required for student productivity and TA FERPA requirements . . . . .	10
5.4	It will be more efficient for the College of Arts and Sciences to coordinate carrel distribution than individual departments . . . . .	10
5.5	Cameras mounted in the carrel workspace may deter theft of books and personal items . . . . .	10
5.6	The practice of mixing students from different departments in one area should be continued . . . . .	10
5.7	TAs will benefit from more meeting rooms close to their carrel . . . . .	10
5.8	Providing a separate room with lockers and open desks where students could meet in groups and hold conversations will reduce distractions in the carrel work area . . . . .	11

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Goals and Motivation

Our goal, as representatives of the Graduate Student Council, was to identify graduate student workspace needs in Buttrick Hall. Our investigation consisted of an anonymous survey and extended discussions with students. The results and conclusions of our investigation are presented in this document. The survey addressed topics including whether or not students TA, what tasks students perform while at their carrel, and how often students use their carrel. Survey comments and discussions reveal that the carrels are important for graduate students because they provide 1) a home base, 2) security for TA materials, books, and personal items, and 3) a meeting location for TA office hours. At the end of the document, we list our conclusions and make suggestions regarding future action plans.

## 1.2 The Investigation

The 3rd and 4th floor of Buttrick Hall is currently home to 127 large carrels with 200+ students assigned to those carrels. It is not unusual for two or even three students to be assigned to a carrel. Each carrel has a locking cabinet above the desk, allowing students to secure books, personal items, and TA class materials. It should be noted that when students share a carrel they also share the same locking cabinet. In the current system, each department has an allocation of carrels that they can assign to their graduate students. In some cases, students who are assigned carrels choose not to use them. In other cases, the departments never assign students to all of the carrels in their allocation. The result is a significant number of unused carrels. Other resources in this area include a Graduate Student Lounge, seven small meeting rooms, printers, and open computers.

The College of Arts and Sciences would like to optimize the space on the 3rd and 4th floors of Buttrick Hall. In order to increase the efficiency of this space while also improving graduate student resources, the minimum needs and workspace requirements of the graduate students must be identified. The investigation by the Graduate Student Council has identified these needs and requirements.

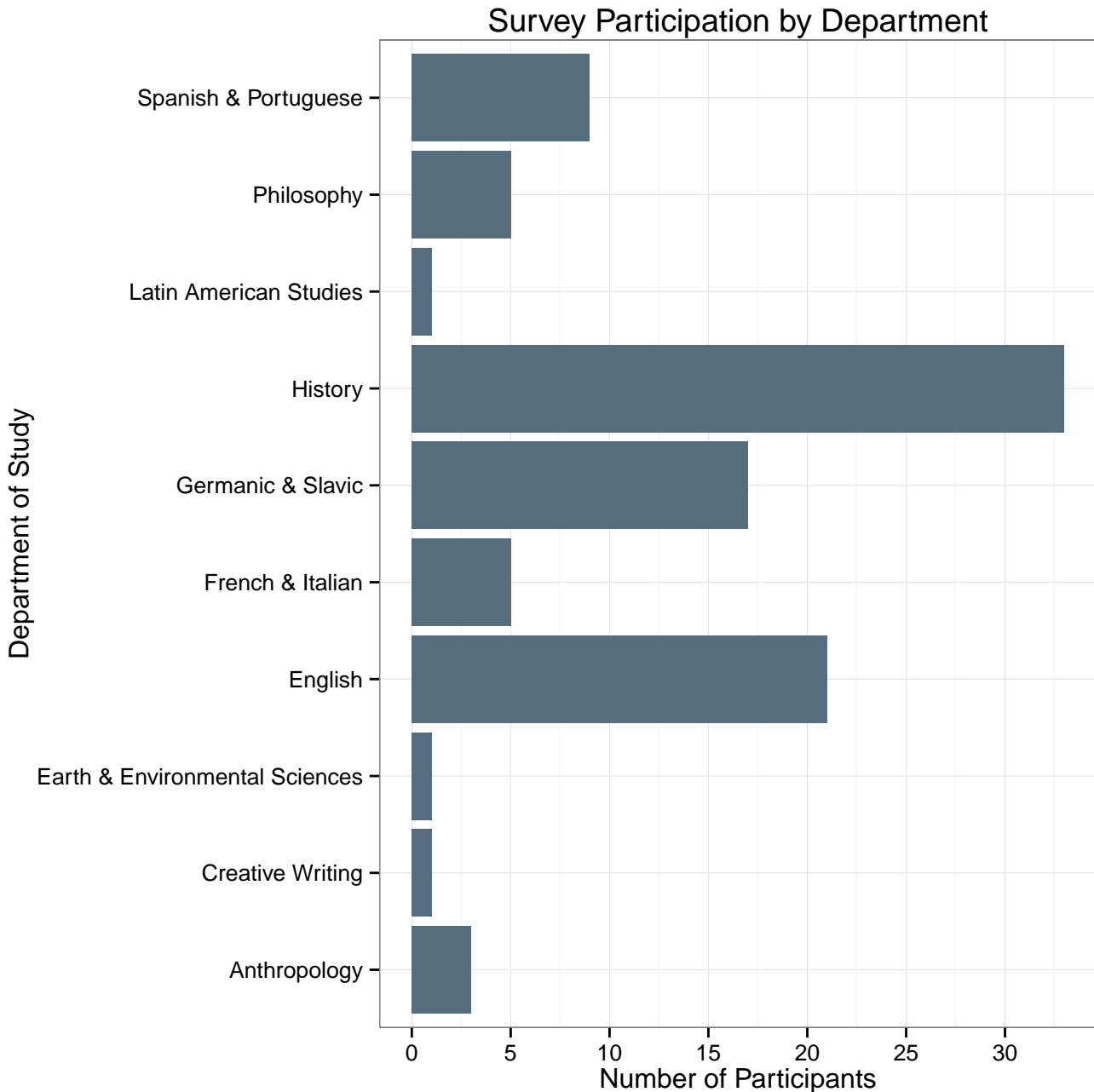
The Graduate Student Council prepared and distributed an anonymous Student Workspace Survey to all graduate students on campus, specifically targeting those with carrels in Buttrick. The survey was advertised by placing flyers on all carrels in Buttrick. Therefore, our survey unequally and primarily reflects the opinions of students who use their carrels on a regular basis. Responses from students with workspaces outside of Buttrick are omitted from this report for the sake of clarity and brevity.

Throughout the course of this investigation the Graduate Student Council also collaborated with a committee of students representing those who work in Buttrick Hall. The committee formed a Carrel Distribution Proposal for administrative review. This proposal is contained in a separate document and includes comments directly from the students as well as an action plan for future carrel distribution.

## 2 Survey Demographics

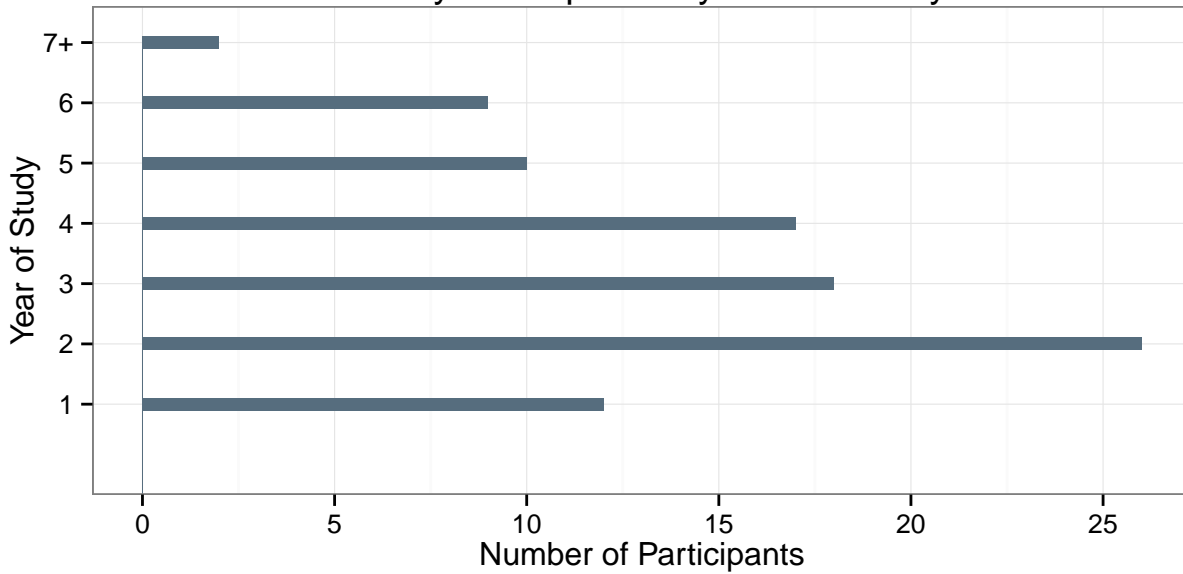
### 2.1 Information about Participation

We have had a total of 96 students who identify their departments as having space in Buttrick fill out the survey so far. Each student was asked if their department had space in Buttrick and answers were not corrected based on existing data about carrel occupants. Below is the distribution of participation by department.



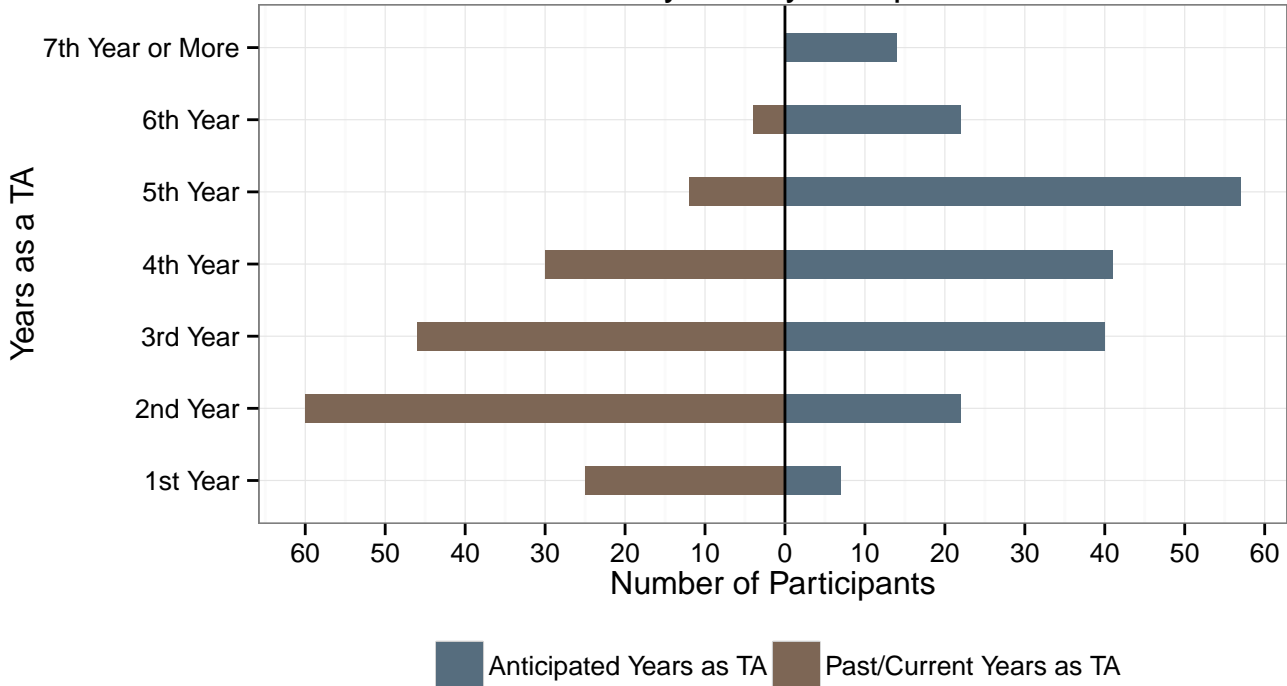
Most of our participants are from departments that have space in Buttrick Hall. The history department has had the most participants with 33 filling out the survey. English and German have the next most participants with 21 and 17 respectively.

### Survey Participation by Year of Study



Students who identified their departments as having space in Buttrick tended to TA more than other students who responded to our survey, even those from other A&S departments. In our entire survey group 70.9% of students said they had TA'd so far during their graduate degree. 83.3% of participants from Buttrick departments said they had TA'd, compared to 50% of students from other A&S departments. Additionally, when asked 82.3% of students from Buttrick said they expected to TA in the future. The distribution of what years people had TA'd or expect to work as a TA in the future are below.

### When have you/do you expect to TA?

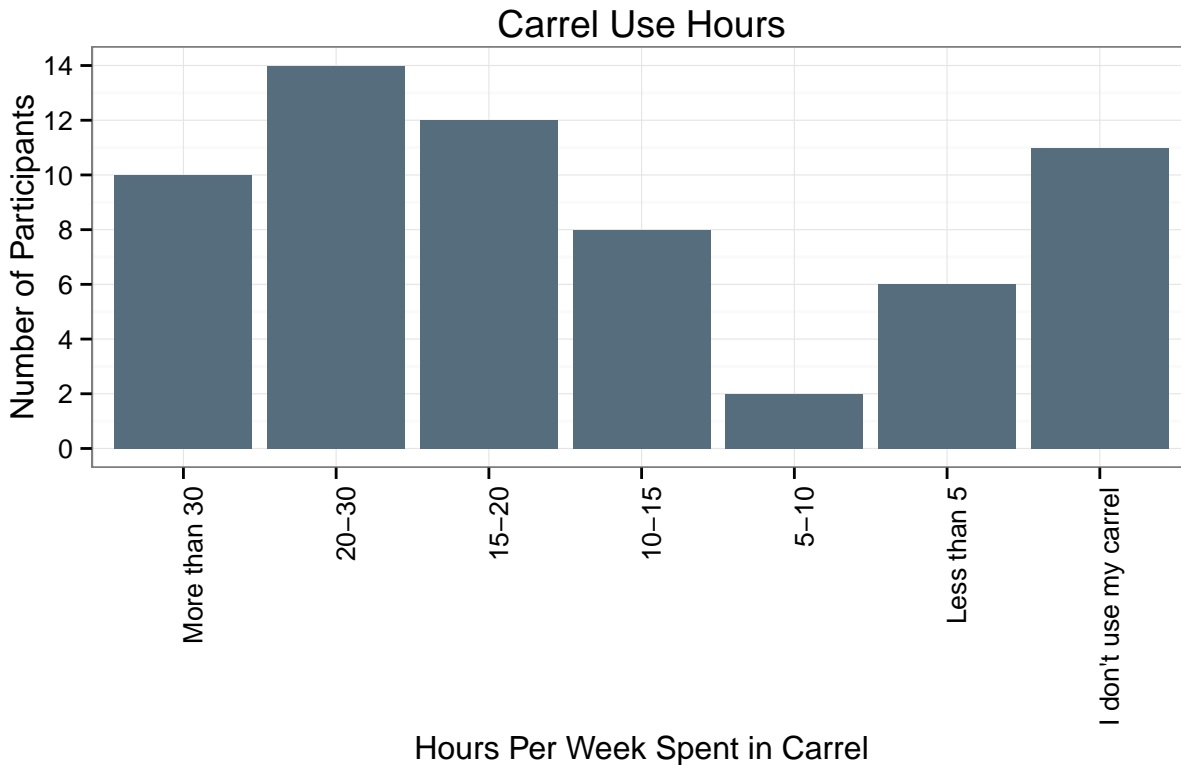


Overall, we predominantly collected students in the earlier years of their degree program, and we did not collect evenly from departments that use Buttrick. This means that our data may be biased by different carrel usage at different stages of a degree program, and by programs that more heavily use carrels. Despite this, we collected data on 70 students with a carrel in Buttrick. Based on numbers given to us by the College of Arts Sciences, this represents around a third of all students with a carrel in Buttrick.

### 3 Quantitative Results

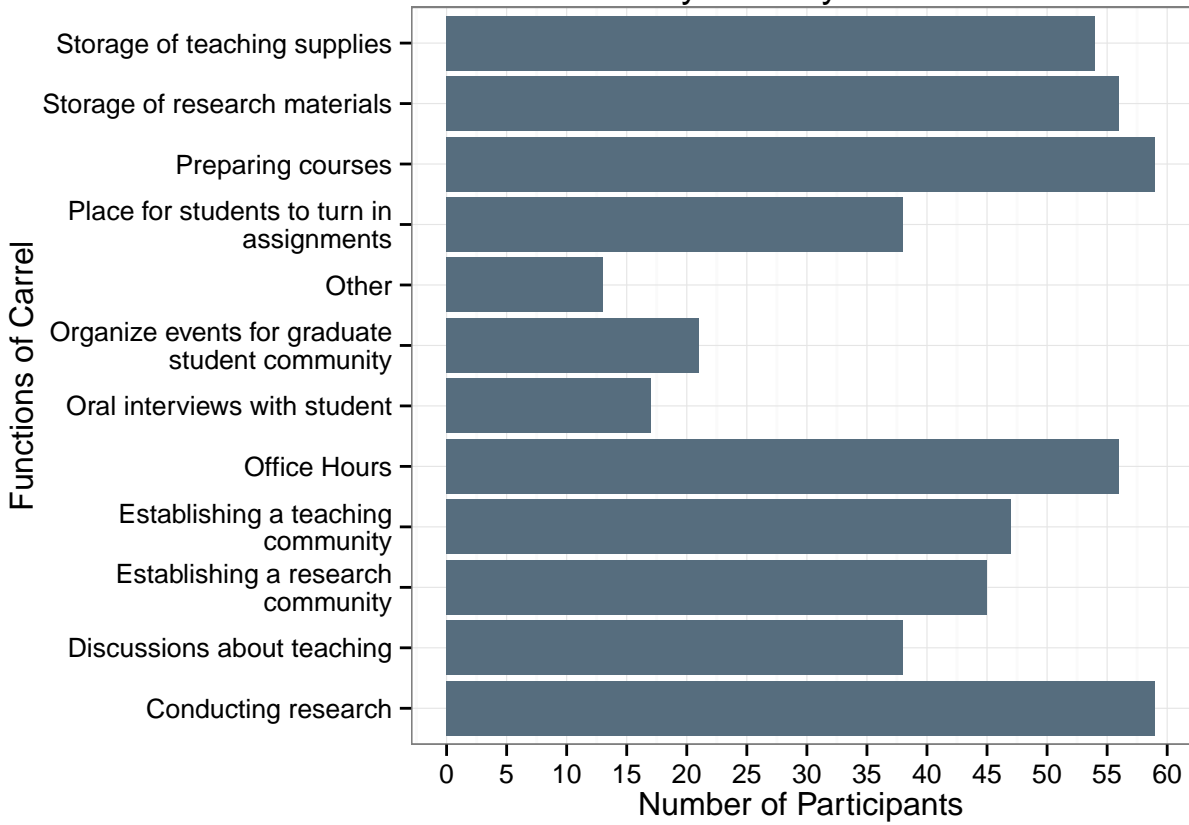
#### 3.1 Carrel Usage

Of 96 participants from Buttrick, 70 (72.9%) have an assigned carrel. Almost all of those with a carrel, 39.6% share their carrel. Survey participants were asked how many hours a week they used their carrel. Most students who responded used their carrel for at least 15 hours a week.



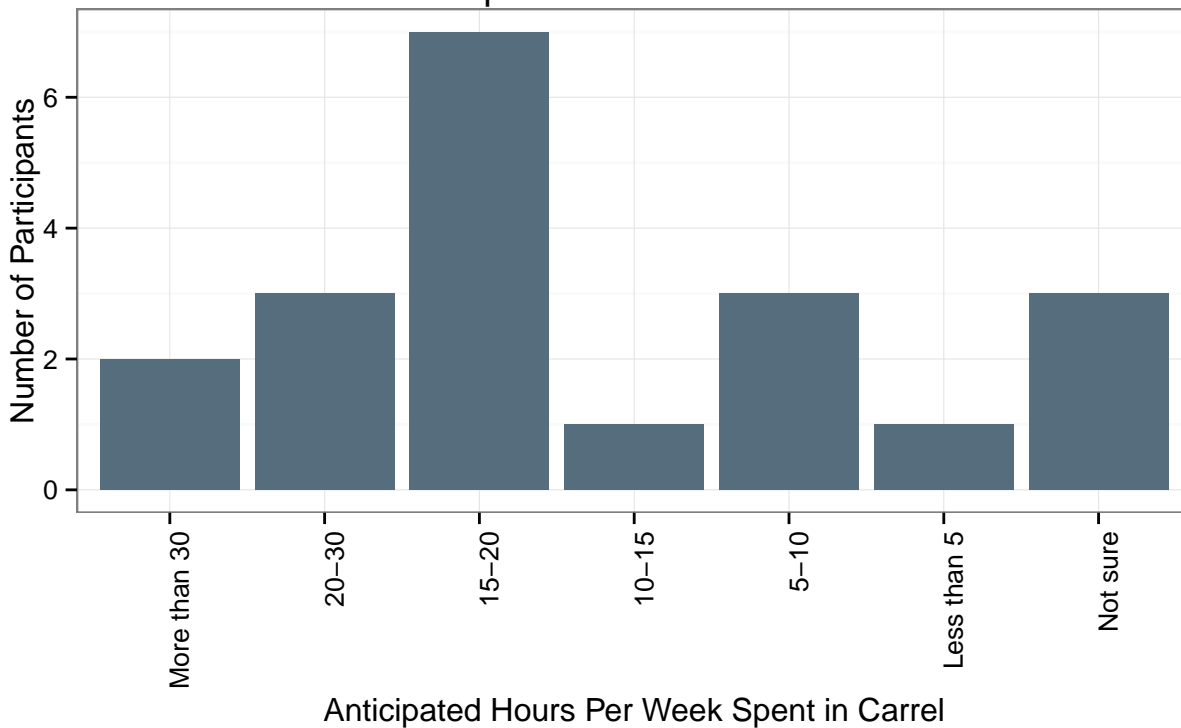
Respondents were also asked what tasks they did while using their carrel. GSC provided a series of possible carrel functions based on discussions with students in Buttrick, and allowed survey participants to select which functions they used their carrels for on a regular basis. Survey participants could select as many of these functions as they felt applied.

### What do you use your carrel for?



Of students who were not assigned a carrel 76.9% said they would be interested in having a carrel if one was made available to them. When asked how frequently they thought they would use a carrel, most anticipated using a carrel more than 20 hours a week.

### Anticipated Carrel Use Hours



## 4 Qualitative Findings

### 4.1 Carrels are necessary for TA duties and for performing research

Please refer to the charts above for quantitative data regarding which tasks graduate students perform at their carrels. In addition to the quantitative data, open ended questions show that students who use their carrel feel their carrel is essential for their success. Their comments indicate that this is because carrels provide a “Home Base”, security, and meeting locations. Please see the topics below for more information.

### 4.2 Assigned carrels serve as a “Home Base”

When responding to the open ended survey questions students indicated that their personal carrel served as their “Home Base” on campus. Because they have a reliable station on campus students can leave their books, research materials, teaching materials, and personal items in one place. Students cannot carry all of the items essential for their work to and from campus each day. Also, because the cost of living in the areas around campus has increased over the years, students are spending full days on campus rather than traveling back and forth from home.

To many students an assigned carrel is necessary. Students expressed that they need the reassurance that they will have an open space with a consistent environment. As one student described it, “having to move to a different place depending on the day is disruptive to my work.” 31 students who responded to open ended survey questions specifically stated that having an assigned carrel is essential for success, productivity, and/or efficiency. Furthermore, students who are TAs have expressed that having an exact and consistent location where their students or colleagues can find them builds a sense of professionalism.

### 4.3 Carrels and the work area security is a high priority for students

Having a lockable area is important for graduate students because their books and computers are valuable. FERPA requirements also state that student assignments must be secured. Some students reported that they use between 150-200 books for their research, so they require a large locking space. Discussions with students revealed that if they share a carrel, each student gets half of the total locking space in the cabinet. This amount of space seems sufficient for the students. However, multiple students reported that these locking cabinets are easily broken and books are often stolen despite being locked up.

Students report that they are satisfied with the safety of the building and workspace itself because people must swipe in to enter the building. Some students feel more comfortable in Buttrick Hall than other buildings on campus.

### 4.4 TAs prefer to hold office hours near their carrel

TAs report that their undergraduate students do not attend most office hour sessions. Therefore, the TAs prefer to hold office hours at their carrels so they can remain productive until a student arrives. During discussions TAs indicated to us that walking to a different room or building to hold office hours would negatively impact their own success because it would interrupt their progress and distract them from work. Many TAs prefer to initially meet students at their carrel and then move to a small meeting room if a student arrives during the office hours.

TAs with carrels on the third floor may not realize there are additional meeting rooms on the fourth floor. As a result, meeting rooms on the fourth floor are often empty while meeting rooms on the third floor are often full. If the meeting rooms are full, TAs meet with students at their desk. This likely explains why students have reported the third floor is louder than the fourth floor (more TAs are probably talking with their students at their carrel on the third floor). Holding office hours at carrels is not ideal for the privacy of the undergraduate students and disrupts the concentration of nearby graduate students.

### 4.5 Some TAs would like reservable meeting rooms while others would not

The survey and discussions with students have yielded conflicting results regarding reservable meeting rooms. Some TAs would prefer have reservable rooms so they were guaranteed a private room when meeting with their undergraduates. However, because undergraduates do not attend office hours often, other TAs feel that reserving rooms in advance limits the available space for other TA meetings. Students who are not interested in an assigned carrel may take advantage of reserved rooms for their meeting hours, but we did not capture enough of these students in our survey to make any conclusions on this.



#### **4.6 Carrels foster a collaborative, interdisciplinary student culture**

We learned that graduate students working in Buttrick Hall appreciate having a carrel next to students in other departments. This helps many students make new friends outside their department and learn about research outside their field. Graduate students also commented that separating students from others in their department limits the formation of cliques and reduces conversation in the work area. However, in the survey 3 students reported that they would prefer to sit next to students in their department in order to promote mentorship-like relationships.

#### **4.7 Extended discussions held at carrels are very distracting to other graduate students**

Students report that they spend less time at their carrel if the surrounding work area is noisy due to others conversations (or occasionally, a loud broken AC fan). While the carrel work area is normally quiet, TAs will hold conversations with their undergraduate students in the work area if they cannot find an open meeting room. Also, other graduate students occasionally initiate prolonged, research related conversations.

#### **4.8 Sharing carrels has a negative impact on student productivity**

Some students are able to work out a schedule with the student they share a carrel with. For example, one person will have access to the carrel in the morning while the other will have access in the evening. For other students, it is a first come, first serve situation. We have also observed that some students stop using their carrel because of the scheduling conflicts with the student they share with: "Last year I shared a carrel, so I was much less likely to use it since I never knew when the other person would be there." These last two situations are not ideal because they prevent students from establishing a "Home Base" and cause stress. When asked, 12/12 students responded that they would accept a smaller carrel if they did not have to share it.

#### **4.9 TAs appreciate the access to printers**

TAs indicated they were glad to have access to printers to prepare course materials because some departments do not have printing options for TAs. Students occasionally become frustrated if the printers stop functioning. Two students requested access to a copy machine and several students said they would like more printers (in case one breaks or many students are trying to print at once).

#### **4.10 The students appreciate the Graduate Student Lounge in Buttrick**

Students speak very highly of the lounge available to them. They like to have a place to eat and take breaks. When asked, 12/12 students said they would not travel outside of the building to use another lounge. Some students reported that they would like it to become a graduate student only lounge, but others do not mind sharing the lounge with the undergraduates because the undergraduates only use the lounge between classes or during lunch.

However, it is very important to graduate students that the lounge remains a "safe space" for them and remains separate from administrative or faculty offices. To elaborate, students wish to be able to express themselves (acting silly or venting about school difficulties) without fear of judgement/embarrassment/repercussions from administration and faculty if they were to be overheard.

## **5 Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **5.1 An assigned carrel system is necessary for graduate student productivity**

The qualitative data above indicates that assigned carrels are essential for graduate student success because they give students a “Home Base” and a sense of stability.

### **5.2 Graduate students may prefer smaller carrels if they didnt have to share them**

All graduate students who were asked indicated that they would accept smaller carrels if they did not have to share those carrels. The Colleges of Arts and Sciences might consider replacing the current, large carrels with smaller carrels. Filling the third floor with these smaller carrels may provide a sufficient number of carrels for graduate students to have their own. The fourth floor of Buttrick would then be open for future development. If smaller carrels are chosen, we recommend desks with a curved shape (similar to those used by students with shared offices in Featheringill Hall) as these desks provide a large working space but have a small footprint.

### **5.3 A locking space of sufficient size is required for student productivity and TA FERPA requirements**

If the College of Arts and Sciences decides to provide smaller carrels or lockers for students they must be able to hold many books as well as work materials. Based on the current amount of lockable space used by students who share carrels, we recommend a lockable space that is at least 2x2x3. These new lockable spaces should also have a sturdy lock to avoid the theft issues students are currently facing.

### **5.4 It will be more efficient for the College of Arts and Sciences to coordinate carrel distribution than individual departments**

Students have reported that some departments do not assign all the carrels allotted to them. If carrel distribution was controlled by one source rather than multiple sources the total number of unused carrels would be dramatically reduced. If the College of Arts and Sciences chooses to oversee carrel distribution an opt-in system would further increase the efficiency of carrel distribution. The Central Library has an established dissertation carrel application and distribution system that could be used as a model for a new distribution system in Buttrick Hall.

### **5.5 Cameras mounted in the carrel workspace may deter theft of books and personal items**

Security is a high priority for the graduate students in Buttrick Hall. Items are often stolen from locked carrels and from desks during the day. Graduate students have suggested putting cameras in the carrel workspace area to deter theft. Stronger locks on the carrel cabinets or supplemental lockers might also reduce theft.

### **5.6 The practice of mixing students from different departments in one area should be continued**

While a few students have indicated that they prefer to sit near colleagues within their department, more students prefer sitting near students from different departments. This, combined with the benefits of interdisciplinary collaboration, leads us to conclude that this practice should continue.

### **5.7 TAs will benefit from more meeting rooms close to their carrel**

Discussions with TAs indicate that they prefer their current office hour strategy where they meet students at the carrel and walk to a nearby meeting room. However, if these meeting rooms are full office hours are held at the carrels which is not an ideal situation. To avoid this possibility, TAs will benefit from more meeting rooms (perhaps a total of 10) close to their carrel areas. It is possible that the current number of meeting rooms is sufficient. If the College of Arts and Sciences does not wish to provide additional meeting rooms, we suggest posting signs on the third floor meeting rooms directing students to the fourth floor if the rooms are in use. We also suggest numbering meeting rooms so students can easily direct others to the correct room for meetings.

While most TAs might prefer to meet close to their carrels, some might elect to hold office hours in classrooms. The College of Arts and Sciences might consider providing TAs with the resources or options to reserve classrooms for office hours.

### **5.8 Providing a separate room with lockers and open desks where students could meet in groups and hold conversations will reduce distractions in the carrel work area**

Conversations in the carrel work area are very distracting to nearby students. However, these conversations are often work related and promote interdisciplinary collaboration. We recommend providing a separate closed room with open desks and lockers that students could use for extended research related conversations. It would be ideal if the tables were easy to re-arrange so students could form small or large groups as needed. This room would not be a break room or lounge, but an alternative work area. Supplemental lockers could be put in this room for those students who opt-out of a carrel assignment. If a room like this were provided, the carrel work area should be labeled as a quiet area to discourage conversation.