

# What are they up to? An Examination of SALC Users

By

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## Abstract

The Self-Access Learning Center (SALC) at Sojo University has been in operation for four years. During that time statistics about SALC student usage have been meticulously collected and analyzed. The following study attempted to dig deeper into what students are actually doing at the micro level. Rather than just recording the number of students using a certain area of the SALC, the current study looked at what activities students are engaged in whilst in the SALC. Also, student perceptions of SALC services such as the booking service for Learning Advising sessions and MPR's were surveyed.

**Key Words** : SALC, self-access

## 1. Introduction

Self-access centers generally attempt to offer a broad range of resources and services to their students. However, very little data has been published on exactly what students are doing in their centers. Even the most rudimentary data about the number of students visiting a center on a weekly or monthly basis is rarely made available for public consumption. Probably the most comprehensive Self-Access Center study is Gardner and Miller's "Study of Tertiary level Self-Access facilities in Hong Kong" (1997). However, this study is focused on evaluating student and administrator experiences of the center's resources and equipment rather than actual usage patterns. Castellano, Mynard, & Rubesch (2011), looked at borrowing records of students in their center, but only with respect to Technology-based language

learning tools (TLLT). The authors of this paper believe that tracking not only the number of students attending the center, but also an examination of how students are using their time, is an important part of understanding how the center is functioning and whether it is adequately meeting the needs of students. The number of students visiting the SALC has steadily increased over the past 4 years. During 2013 the average number of visits to the SALC per month during term time was approximately 2,100 of which approximately 30% were borrowing books. Our targeted participants were the 70% of students not simply borrowing a book.

## 2. Procedure

In order to capture what students are doing in the SALC in real time, we needed an instrument that was as non-intrusive as

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possible and could be completed in a very short period of time. Thus it was decided that a short paper survey, in Japanese with mostly multiple choice questions was the best approach. The surveys were given out to most students that visited the SALC during busy periods of the day over a 3 week period in December 2013. As stated earlier, our focus was students actively engaged in some type of learning activity rather than a routine function such as returning a book.

### 3. Results

A full detailed summary of the results can be found in appendix 1. The most relevant findings are discussed below. We surveyed 240 students of which 20 surveys were incomplete. Thus our sample was 220 students. As expected the overwhelming majority of students surveyed were first or second year students, accounting for over 96% of respondents.

Table 1. Year

2. 学年		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
1年	60.2%	133
2年	35.7%	79
3年	3.2%	7
4年	0.9%	1

In terms of the types of activities students were engaged in, SALC Activities, Praxis-ed and Moodle Dictations were registered as the most common (table 2). Again not surprising, SALC activities can only be completed in the SALC and both Praxis-ed and Moodle dictations are required by the 1st and 2nd year curriculums. Note that more than one answer could be selected for question 4.

Table 2. What are you doing in the SALC today?

4. あなたは SALC で今、何をしていましたか？あてはまるものにチェックして下さい。		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
PraxisEd	21.5%	63
Moodle Dictation (ムードルディクテーション)	10.2%	30
Moodle Reader (ムードルリーダー)	5.8%	17
English Class	8.9%	26
Homework	45.7%	134
SALC Activity	7.8%	23
Other		

The primary motivation for using the SALC for whatever activity the students were engaged in was that it was convenient. Also ranking highly was the students' own intrinsic motivation to do so. Surprisingly approximately 7% reported their motivation for using the SALC was that their faculty teacher had advised them to do so.

Table 3. Why are you using the SALC?

5. なぜSALCを使っていますか？あてはまる内容の□にチェックして下さい。		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
It's convenient	36.4%	95
My teacher advised me to	15.3%	40
A Learning Advisor told me too.	0.4%	1
I don't have a PC at home	3.4%	9
Because I want to	28.0%	73
I was told by my subject teacher	6.9%	18
Other	9.6%	25

In terms of areas of the SALC that students use there were no major surprises. The

Computer Access Area was the most popular due to the fact that students can complete a lot of their homework tasks there and because some SALC activities require the use of a PC. The conversation lounge also features prominently because approximately half the SALC Activities require students to go there. The Reading area is also popular only because of the requirement that students in 2nd year borrow graded readers.

**Table 4. What areas of the SALC do you usually use?**

7. SALC のどのエリアを通常良く使いますか？あてはまる内容の□にチェックして下さい。		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Reading Area	17.1%	54
MPR's	4.7%	15
SB's	3.5%	11
Listening Stations	1.9%	6
Computer Access Area	37.3%	118
Group Access Area	3.5%	11
Gallery	7.9%	25
Conversation Lounge	19.0%	60
Edutainment Booths	3.2%	10
Speaking Center	0.9%	3
Writing Center	0.9%	3
Advising Room	0.0%	0

When surveyed about the ease of use of SALC resources and services, there were no notable surprises. Students felt that they could find and use SALC equipment and materials easily. Approximately two-thirds of students said they did not know how to use the Learning Advisory service or book a MPR, not surprising since if you had never had to book either service, you would not know how to do that. Perhaps a moderate surprise was the fact that 38% of respondents said they knew how to book an advising session even though a much smaller percentage of students (less

than 3%) actually make an advising session booking in any one year.

**Table 5. SALC services and equipment**

8. SALC 環境について、もっとも近い番号に丸をつけてください。				
Answer Options	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I can find materials I need easily	16%	73%	11%	0%
I learnt how to use SALC equipment easily	21%	74%	4%	0%
Range of materials and services meets my learning needs	16%	75%	8%	0%
I know how to book a learning advisor	9%	29%	44%	18%
I know how to book an MPR room	10%	24%	43%	24%

#### 4. Conclusion

The results of this survey were largely anticipated. The vast majority of activities undertaken by students in the SALC pertain to some curriculum requirement rather than an intrinsically generated motivation to study English. Thus the number of students coming to the SALC of their own volition is a small percentage (probably less than 10%) of the total. This is not surprising given the Sojo context, where there are no English majors and the English faculty operates as an adjunct faculty.

Whilst the authors firmly believe that all students should be given equal opportunity to experience what a self-access center can offer, we remain skeptical that forcing all students to engage in the center is of benefit to the vast majority. Making the self-access learning center open to all but compulsory to none would have significant implications for the

way the SALC is used. Both in terms of numbers of students (significantly less) and the types of benefits that accrue to students, given the choice to willfully use the SALC. This is an ongoing issue that needs to be considered when formulating future SALC programs and policies.

### Appendix 1

#### Appendix 1. Survey Questions and Results

1. 専攻 ( 学科)		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
1.応用生命学科	20.6%	57
宇宙航空システム	2.4%	8
2.応用微生物	19.4%	51
3.情報学科	12.9%	32
4.機械工学科	9.4%	22
5.薬学科	22.4%	58
6.ナノサイエンス科	5.9%	26
7.美術科	2.4%	4
8.デザイン科	0.6%	3
9.建築学科	3.5%	8
10. (エコ)	0.6%	1
<i>answered question</i>		<b>220</b>

2 学年		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
1年	60.2%	133
2年	35.7%	79
3年	3.2%	7
4年	0.9%	1
<i>answered question</i>		<b>220</b>

3. 性別		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
男性	56.5%	126

女性	43.5%	93
<i>answered question</i>		<b>220</b>

**4. あなたは SALC で今、何をしていましたか？あてはまるものにチェックして下さい。**

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
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Other	9.6%	25
<i>answered question</i>		<b>220</b>

**6. 学期中にどれくらいの頻度で SALC を使ってますか？あてはまる内容の□にチェックして下さい。**

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
3 or more times a week	14.5%	32
about once a week	28.6%	63
about 2 or 3 times a week	35.0%	77
less than once a month	21.8%	48
<i>answered question</i>		<b>220</b>

**7. SALC のどのエリアを通常良く使いますか？あてはまる内容の□にチェックして下さい。 複数選択可です。(左のページの地図を見て教えてください)**

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I know how to book an MPR room	10%	24%	43%	24%

#### 9. SALC を改善するために何か提案はありますか？

Answer Options	Response Count
<b>answered question</b>	
<b>23</b>	

- I want more various kind of activities. I want the one involves conversation with teachers.
- English Only environment is too hard for me...I think it is because of my communication skills. I want you have more signs of basic communication such as greetings around the SALC.)
- I think SILC is perfect. The problem is how to keep up.
- Make students interested in English, make it requirement for the students to come to conversation lounge more than once a week
- I want more different kinds of books
- No problem
- I could not take the first step easily.

- Please allow to use Japanese. It is difficult to stay someone who does not understand English. At least, I hope the reference sheet for some expressions in English with Japanese translation with Katakana be back on the counter at the SALC.
- Everyone is kind and nice people, so it is fine as it is now.
- If there are some way to teach students how to use new words that will be fine.
- No need to change. If I have to suggest something new PC would be nice.
- I want to borrow CDs (and take them home)
- Make an improvement and enhancement of the content of SALC.
- Since I feel that SALC is intricate in construction (or arrangement of furniture /booths), you should make an improvement.
- I think it may be as well to strengthen speaking booths
- there are many English teachers but there aren't any foreign students
- I want staffs( and teachers) to speak Japanese when I cannot understand English.
- slow internet connection
- I think it's just fine
- If it is possible, open on Saturday as well.
- Since I love seasonal SALC events, I'd like you to have more events.
- I want you to put the air conditioning more quickly in summer
- Hand in an assignment of SALC more!

### **References**

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