

Atherton Library  
Teens Focus Group, Menlo-Atherton High School  
6/2/11

### 1. Introduce Project

Kathy and Clarice introduced themselves, then Kathy explained the current project. The group included 22 students, all juniors and sophomores, and the teacher Kelly Todd.

### 2. Library use patterns

Most students said that they use the MAHS Library, though they don't consider it a model. They use it because they need to. Several students were familiar with the current Atherton Library but only one identified himself as a user. Other libraries used:

Menlo Park – most students use this library  
Redwood City - several  
Portola Valley – two students

### 2. What library services do you use? What you do like about the library/libraries you use?

Use the Library's online databases – like that they can access from home  
Use research resources (encyclopedia, reference, etc)

### 3. Where do you go when you need to study? Do those places work?

Public places with food work because students find it easier to work with other people around; relaxed and comfortable  
Restaurant/café – like the casual atmosphere, activity and noise in the surrounding space  
Starbucks  
Places with snacks/coffee/drinks

### 4. How about group projects?

Most students work on group projects at one of their study team members' homes – would like to have a common place to go for this, if available. These spaces should have easy laptop plug-in capability.

5. Is there anything about the libraries you use that you would change, if you could? What would make the Library a place that you would like to use?

Color printers

Computers

Comfortable chairs

Tables and chairs with electrical outlets close by to not limit seating preference/options,  
Big tables to spread out on

6. How about reading – does anybody just read books for fun? If so, what kinds of books do you like to read?

Several students said they do read for enjoyment.

Magazines

New books – whatever is current

We don't want to choose just from YA books – want access to the adult collection

As a corollary: want to not be relegated to a designated teen section – prefer to be able to use the adult area (the group did not react favorably to images of enclosed teen spaces, such as in San Jose).

The group also felt their younger siblings would feel the same – could not confirm this with middle and elementary school students.

7. How many of you have your own computer? How many have laptops?

Most students have access to a personal computer at home and several have their own laptop. The idea of being able to borrow a laptop at the library was appealing, too, for convenience. One person noted that not everyone has a laptop or access to a computer so the Library's computers would be very beneficial to those students especially.

8. How about music or movies? If the library offered music on CD or DVDs to check out, would you check them out? Or is downloading preferable?

Everyone downloads their own music – CDs not a high priority.

DVD access would be great, however. – some do check them out now.

Audiobooks – not used much.

9. What about programming for teens? Would you use video gaming equipment? Participate in book discussion groups?

Not much interest – the group thinks gaming is for a younger audience.

Programming overall did not get much response. This appears to be a group of focused, academically oriented students.

10. How important is separate space for teens within the Library? If this is important, can you describe what it ought to be like?

There was almost universal agreement that they feel awkward walking into a designated teen area.

One student suggested that its name ought to be Young Adult, rather than Teen – less stigma.

These students do not want an area that is totally separated but prefer a space that is associated with adult section

11. What qualities or features would draw you in to the new library? What would make the facility successful for you?

- comfortable environment – comfortable chairs
- outside space where you can sit and study
- modern looking library/atmosphere
- some areas that are more quiet
- tables + chairs to study and plug in
- big tables to spread out at to study – I need plenty of room
- secluded areas to study alone – with no distractions
- a comfortable magazine section
- plug-in stations at comfortable chairs and table/chairs
- quiet space
- good books, best sellers, list of staff recommended titles
- food/snacks available
- tutor space –“businesslike” space with a white board
- acoustical zones
- alcove study space
- natural light
- inside/outside connection and space
- no round tables – hard to work in groups- prefer rectangular tables
- area specifically for groups to work in
- a place like Borrone’s Café in Menlo Park – lots of seating, can eat and drink, lots of tables, indoor and outdoor space.
- an attractive appearance—if it doesn’t look attractive, no one wants to go in
- good storytelling programs for kids – my little brother and sister love to go the Menlo Park Library for this – it is a must

After the discussion, Kathy asked each student to complete a brief questionnaire, marking up to 6 library services or features that they consider most important for effective service to teens and young adults. The results are summarized on the following page and tend to confirm the discussion input.

Menlo-Atherton High School Students Focus Group  
Questionnaire Results

- 18 Comfortable lounge chairs
  - 17 A place to buy and eat snacks
  - 15 Places to plug in laptop computers (your own or the Library's)
  - 13 Plenty of study seating
  - 11 Computers to search the Internet
  - 11 Group study rooms to work together with other students
  - 9 Magazines for teens
  - 7 Nonfiction books for research and study
  - 5 Laptops that people could borrow while they are at the Library
  - 4 Fiction books for teens
  - 4 Books and media in languages other than English
  - 4 Career prep books
  - 4 DVDs and videos to check out
  - 3 Computers for word processing
  - 3 A separate space for teens to study, read and just be together
  - 2 Computers with other software: type-to-learn; MS Office, Internet Explorer
  - 1 Library programs for teens (poetry contests, book discussion groups, film nights)
  - 1 Music CDs to check out
  - 0 Video gaming equipment to use at the Library (Playstation, Wii, etc.)
- Other:
- Whiteboard rooms
  - Outside area
  - Definitely snacks
  - Definitely lots of windows
  - Definitely an outside area