it will become increasingly important for all segments of higher education to share in the responsibility of campus governance.

As Thomas (1991) illustrated, the changes in attitudes beginning in the 1960s have redefined the relationship between institutions and their students. Although no court has explicitly resurrected the doctrine of in loco parentis since the Bradshaw v. Rawlings decision, higher education faces complex new obligations and liabilities due to expanded theories of negligence, contract and guest/host laws. College administrators must walk a fine line between providing too much or too little regulation and protection, while remaining exposed to potential liability in both cases (Thomas, 1991).

Still, many members of the student affairs profession agree that the parenting function will continue to be a significant issue in higher education, no matter how or by whom it is defined. The success of future student affairs staff could hinge on how this new student-campus relationship is managed, making it vital to know and understand the capricious nature of college climates and developing roles.

References


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Indiana Memorial Union: An Environmental Assessment

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The union of a university has long been seen as the campus center; the place where all constituents of the university can come to find a common meeting ground, and a sense of identification and comfort. The traditional union mission “emphasizes its contribution to the institution’s educational goals; the union is a unifying force, building campus community” (Blackburn, 1990, p.15). The union provides “an oasis of quiet freedom, splendid activity, and simple pleasure” (Burdick, 1987, p.1). The Indiana Memorial Union (IMU) incorporates these ideas into its guiding philosophy. According to the mission statement, the IMU exists “...To serve as a community center for all members of the Indiana University community...To provide the services, conveniences, and amenities which are needed in daily campus life...and to serve as a point of identification—a unifying force—in the life of Indiana University” (Indiana Memorial Union, 1993, p. 1).

The analogy for the union as the front porch of the university is often used. The Director of the IMU describes the union as an integral place where members of the neighborhood—the university community—can spend time with each other, share ideas and concerns, feel like part of a community, and have their needs met.

The IMU’s ideal sense of community is reflected through its history, constitution, mission, and values statement, all of which have been recently posted throughout the IMU. The history speaks to creating a welcome atmosphere bringing students, faculty, staff and alumni together. A primary purpose of the IMU is described in its constitution as bringing about a greater spirit of unity and cooperation among all students. Included within the mission of the IMU are the following two concepts: serve as the community center, and provide a point of identification—a unifying force—in the life of Indiana University.

The purpose of this study is to investigate students' perceptions of the IMU and determine if their perceptions are consistent with the union's mission and front porch analogy. For the purposes of this study, the idea of the union as the front porch was assessed as follows: how comfortable students feel in the union, whether they feel a sense of identity with IU through the union, whether the union meets their needs, and if students are generally satisfied with the union. The frequency of participation in various activities and use of specific areas were also examined. Finally, the relationship between feeling a sense of identity and overall satisfaction with the IMU was compared to the respondents class year and ethnicity.

Blackburn states that how a union is perceived can impact its effectiveness and its objectives (1990). Therefore, this study uses the perceptual approach to research the
questions stated above. According to Strange (1991), perceptual models, "acknowledge that a critical element in understanding how individuals experience an environment is their subjective interpretation of that environment" (p. 161). In other words, students' perceptions of the IMU will define the environment of the IMU, and evaluate whether or not the Union does as its mission guides. Additionally, the characteristics of age, gender, class standing, race, and housing of the respondents will be examined.

This study is important for several reasons. First, it will provide insight into what students actually do or want to do at the union. In addition, the study will serve as an avenue through which students can communicate their concerns, suggestions, feelings and perceptions about the IMU; all of which are especially significant in light of the recent and ongoing renovations. Finally, this study will provide feedback to the IMU staff about how well their efforts match students' perceptions of these efforts.

Review of the Literature

Research has shown that the primary function of a union is that of a community center. Burdick claims that the university community "tests on the union foundation" (1987, p.1). While the literature also describes the union as part of the total education of students, as a programming center and as a provider of necessary amenities, it seems evident that the union's most important role is that of a community gathering place. Thus, as Butts suggests, "the union may have its highest value as a community center, a center which serves not just as a sheltering building structure, but as a unifying force in the university. . ." (Butts, 1987, p. 31).

If the union truly serves as a community center for all members of the university community, it is important to investigate how comfortable and welcome different populations feel at the union. Do all students feel as if they can go to the union for various purposes, or is there something about it that feels exclusionary? According to Fagan (1989), "Special efforts must be made to ensure that every subpopulation on campus (minority students, non-traditional age students) feels comfortable" (p. 36). Fagan draws an analogy between the union and a living room, describing both as places where people can gather, explore and discuss: "It is everybody's turf" (p. 35). She describes the union as "...a place that belongs to everyone, feels comfortable to all, and alienates no one" (p. 35).

Another theme common to the literature is the union as a place that addresses student needs. The union provides students with a place to study, eat, socialize, sleep, or buy books; in addition to having meeting rooms available for student organizations. In her living room analogy, Fagan (1989) describes the union as a place which, "...meets primary needs that are requisite to growth" (p.35). As Norman F. Moore, Vice Chancellor for Student Services at Louisiana State University notes, "Students still want what we call community. They need it and want it" (Think Tank, 1991). Above all, the union strives to meet the diverse wants and needs of the students.

Assumptions

Prior to conducting the study, the assessment team made several predictions based on pre-study observations in the IMU and discussion with the Director of the IMU. These included:

Fall 1994 Edition

1. The ethnic ratio of those answering the survey would reflect the campus population.
2. Those respondents with majors housed in close proximity to the IMU would comprise a higher percentage of the respondents.
3. More upper-class students (juniors and seniors) who typically live off-campus would be more likely to utilize the union.
4. The ongoing construction in the union would be reflected in respondents' comments.
5. Overall, respondents would be satisfied with the IMU and feel their needs were being met.
6. The IMU would be seen, according to the definition used in this study, as the front porch of Indiana University.

Methods

The discussion of methods for the assessment is divided into three sections: setting and participants, instrument, and data analysis.

Setting and Participants

Students using four different areas of the IMU participated in the study. These four areas were two study lounges, the Commons (a cafeteria setting used as an informal meeting area), and the seats located in a high traffic area on the Mezzanine floor. These specific environments were chosen because they are representative of frequently used areas which serve a variety of purposes.

A random sample consisting of 1% of the approximately 18,000 daily users of the union was surveyed. (This small percentage of respondents was manageable for a four-member assessment team conducting surveys.) Members of the assessment team distributed the questionnaires randomly to students in the four areas over the course of four days (Monday through Thursday) during specific time slots: 7:00–10:00 AM, 10:00 AM–1:00 PM, 1:00–4:00 PM, 4:00–7:00 PM, and 10:00 PM–2:00 AM. The total number of subjects who declined to participate in the study was 37. Before completing the questionnaires, subjects signed a consent form. The questionnaires were completed by the subjects and immediately collected by the assessment team member.

Instrument

The assessment team developed the questionnaire based on a literature review and a review of the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) by Dr. Robert Pace of UCLA. Items addressed on the questionnaire included: demographics of the student (age, class, major, race, sex, and housing); frequency of participation in specific activities (e.g., studying, eating, relaxing); and frequency of utilizing specific areas within the IMU.

Additionally, a Likert scale was used to determine level of satisfaction with five items that relate to the front porch description. These items were: comfort of the facilities; whether the union meets the needs of the respondent; whether the union provides a sense of identity with Indiana University; whether the union provides a sense of being part of the university community; and overall satisfaction with the IMU.
Data Analysis
The data from the questionnaire was analyzed by tallying the frequency of responses for each section in the demographics. Values were also found for frequency of participation in each of the specific activities listed, as well as specific areas utilized within the IMU.

Numerical values were assigned to each response on the Likert scale. The responses ranged from strongly agree (a value of 1) to strongly disagree (a value of 5). A response value equal to three was interpreted as neutral. Response values of one and two were combined, as were response values of four and five. A percentage for each of these three values was then calculated. A mean overall satisfaction score was also calculated. Written comments from the open comments sections were tallied and analyzed for recurring themes.

Results
The five Likert scale items were evaluated to determine the perceptions of the respondents. Frequencies of the demographic characteristics, participation in specific activities, and frequent areas used were also evaluated. These results are outlined in this section, followed by a discussion.

Demographics
The gender of respondents was 63% female and 36% male, with 1% not answering. The mean age was 21, with a range of 17 to 46 years. Forty-six percent of the respondents live off-campus, 27% on-campus, and 12% in Greek housing, with 15% giving no response. Ethnicity of the respondents was found to be 67% white, 4% black, and 4% other. No response was given by 25% of the respondents.
The largest representation by class was senior, comprising 29% of the respondents. Sophomores comprised 22.3%, juniors 20%, freshmen 12.8%, and graduate students 10.6%. An additional 4.4% responded other, and 6% gave no response. Types of majors represented varied greatly, with the largest numbers being 22 Business majors, 15 Education majors, 10 Psychology majors, and 8 Journalism majors.

Participation In Specific Activities and Frequently Used Areas
Activities described by respondents as occurring very often included the following: meeting friends to socialize (22.5%), meals and snacks (21.9%), and participated in various activities (21.4%). Those described as occurring occasionally include: saw a film, concert or other special event (58.8%), played games (50.0%) and looked at bulletin boards for notices about campus events (46.6%).

Respondents listed the commons (36.9%), the South lounge (24%) and Sugar-n-Spice (17.9%) as areas described as being used very often. Areas the respondents most often described as being used occasionally include the bookstore (50.8%), the cafeteria (49.7%) and Whittenberger Auditorium (46.4%).

Perceptions of Respondents
The salient perceptions of the respondents were analyzed according to the following aspects.

Fall 1994 Edition

Comfortable Facilities and Meeting Needs. Overall, 84% of those surveyed described the union as having comfortable facilities. Although many commented on the lack of comfortable furniture and inadequate lighting, only 6% indicated dissatisfaction with the comfort of the facilities, and 7% offered no opinion. Eighty-seven percent of respondents felt that the IMU was meeting their needs, with only 5% indicating dissatisfaction with this aspect. Five percent of respondents indicated no opinion.

Sense of Identity. Sixty percent of respondents indicated that they felt a sense of identity with Indiana University through the Indiana Memorial Union. Only 7% disagreed with this statement, while 30% offered no opinion.

Correlation coefficients were calculated to examine any possible relationship between respondents' ethnicity and sense of identity. No significant relationship was found.

Feeling Part of the University Community. Sixty-five percent of respondents agreed that the union makes them feel like a part of the university community. Seven percent disagree, and 25% indicated no opinion. Several respondents commented about meeting friends at the union, seeing others while studying at the union, and enjoying the operating hours.

Overall Satisfaction
Overall, 90% indicated that they were satisfied with the Indiana Memorial Union. The overall mean satisfaction score calculated equaled 1.74. Correlation coefficients were calculated for undergraduate respondents to examine any possible relationship between respondents' class year and overall satisfaction. Also, ethnicity and overall satisfaction were examined for a possible relationship. For class year and overall satisfaction, no significant relationship was found. For ethnicity and overall satisfaction, no significant relationship was found.

Discussion
The following is a discussion of the findings as they relate to the front porch analogy. The discussion will address the perceptual model, the demographics of the respondents and their perceptions of the IMU. It is the perceptions of the IMU that will determine if the front porch analogy has been achieved. Following the discussion section, the assessment team examines the limitations of the study and concludes with recommendations.

Perceptual Model
The assessment team used the perceptual model to evaluate the environment of the IMU. This was used as a guide in developing the assessment tool. Also, the theoretical model was used to evaluate if the analogy of the front porch was being supported by the facilities and services provided.

Demographics
The majority of the respondents were female. The gender ratio of the Indiana University-Bloomington campus, according to the registrar is 52.7% female, and 47.3% male. As compared to the percentages found in the study, the results are representative of the male to female ratio at IU. The average age of the respondents (21) reflects the traditional-aged
student population at Indiana University. It also supports the assumption that more upper
class students use the union.

The ethnicity of the sample reflects the campus ratio. These ratios obtained from the
registrar at the Indiana University-Bloomington campus are 84.1% white, 4% black, and
11.9% other. The ratio of respondents were similar, with 25% giving no answer. While
accounting for the 25% no answer category, the assessment team determined that the sample
was representative of the campus population.

The class standing with the most representation was seniors. The combined percentages
for juniors and seniors reflects that these students use the union more than the combined
numbers of sophomores and freshmen. Since more upperclassmen typically live off-campus,
this finding supports the assumption that more off-campus students utilize the IMU.

The final assumption was that majors housed in buildings in close proximity to the IMU
will utilize it more. The highest represented major was Business, followed by Education,
Psychology, and Journalism. This did not support the assessment teams assumptions. In
addition to the fact that the IMU is a good meeting place for on- and off-campus students,
the team decided that the best represented majors are those which have many group projects.

Applicability of Front Porch Analogy
Based on the assessment team's original definition of the front porch and the results of
the study, it would appear that the IMU generally meets this definition. The results indicated
that, although the union meets the students needs, provides comfortable facilities, and offers
a wide variety of services, a strong sense of identity or community may be lacking.

The issue needs to be raised, however, of how applicable the concept of a front porch
is to a campus as large as Indiana University. Although students felt that their needs were
being met, they did not seem to include feeling a sense of identity with Indiana University
as one of their needs. The frequency of agree responses to this question was less than other
issues that were being measured. This may be due to the size of the institution and perhaps
the size of the IMU itself. Students frequent the union for specific reasons, and while they
are there may take advantage of the variety of services offered.

Perceptions
Facilities Are Comfortable. A large majority of the respondents were satisfied with the
facilities. However, the open comments reflected a theme of dissatisfaction with the
furniture and lack of adequate lighting in the lounge areas.

IMU Meets Respondents Needs. The majority of the respondents felt the IMU met their
needs. The respondents frequently engaged in a variety of activities. Also, the respondents
indicated that they use a variety of services that are provided at the IMU.

Sense of Identity. Over 60% of the respondents felt the IMU created a sense of identity
with the university community, with 30% indicating no opinion. Also, no ethnic correlation
was found for this response, indicating that in this study, students of color felt a sense of
identity with IU through the union as often as white students.

Part of the University Community. Of the respondents, more that half agreed that the
IMU made them feel like a part of the university community. One quarter of the respondents,
however, responded that they had no opinion. Based on the no opinion responses, the
assessment team hypothesized that the respondents did not understand the question.

Overall Satisfaction. Overall, the respondents were very satisfied with the IMU. The
respondents may not perceive a strong sense of identity with the university and a sense of
community as being important to overall satisfaction.

Limitations
The assessment team sampled a small percentage of respondents over a two week period
of time in four specific areas of the IMU, therefore limiting the number of observations.
Given the large number of people who use the union each day, it was not feasible for a
major percentage of this population to be sampled. People who do not use the IMU, or
who did not use one of the four areas sampled during the two week period could not be
included in the sample.

Recommendations
The following recommendations are offered as suggestions for the union staff to help students
gain a better sense of community and identity with Indiana University through the IMU.

Further Study
Continued research should be conducted that would include a wider sampling of the
population that uses the union on a regular basis. Implementation of this extended survey
should include students who are utilizing facilities in the union other than the four focused
on in this study. Also, sending a campus wide survey would enable staff of the union to
obtain information about students who do not use the union at all or on an infrequent basis.
By analyzing this data, more could be done to attract people to the union to utilize its
services.

Renovation
For any union with the tradition and history of the IMU, construction and renovations
are inevitable. Several of the respondents in this study commented about the construction
as a distraction, especially in the areas in which students normally study. One recommenda-
tion pertaining to this situation would be to post or publish a timeline for the construction.
It is also recommended that signs are posted outside of the areas where construction or
renovation is about to begin. This would give the students advance notice so that they could
find alternate places to study or meet.

Sense of Community
Increasing the sense of community could best be accomplished through creating a sense
of connectedness with others who are utilizing the union. There should be more program-
ning that will first draw people to the union, and then give a chance for more interaction
among those who are there. Another suggestion would be to put more of an emphasis on
publicizing the union's events in the residence halls so that the community that is felt in
the halls can be brought with them to events in the union.
Student Related Concerns
Throughout the surveys, students offered many of their own suggestions for improvements that could be helpful for staff members who are interested in creating a more comfortable and welcoming environment for the students of the campus. One area in which students wished to see improvements is in the lighting of various study areas. Although increased lighting may alienate those who are accustomed to the dimmer lighting, concessions could be made in certain areas of those lounges. Another recommendation would involve keeping more rooms open in the evenings to create additional study spaces. Another area in which students would like to see improvements is in the food selection. Comments were made about wanting to see more of a variety of foods in the Commons.

Conclusion
The research results reflect the need for further research on students perceptions of the IMU, and perhaps other unions. Overall, results indicate that students are satisfied with the IMU and the services that it provides. It can be stated from the research findings that the mission of the IMU is being achieved.

References


Indiana Memorial Union. Indiana University publication, designed and distributed by the Indiana Memorial Union Director’s Office, revised June, 1993.
