"I could study anywhere, as long as I could sit I'll study"

Student Spaces and Pathways at the City University of New York

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Institutional Context

228,484 CUNY undergraduates Fall 2010

- 43% born outside the U.S.
- Mean age = 24
- 28% over age 25
- 44% 1st generation in college
- 38% household income < $20,000
- 31% work for pay > 20 hrs/wk
- 14% support children

- 17% Asian
- 27% Black
- 29% Hispanic
- 26% White

CUNY OIRA. (2010). *A Profile of Undergraduates at CUNY Senior and Community Colleges: Fall 2010.* http://owl.cuny.edu:7778/portal/page/portal/oira/OIRA_HOME/ug_student_profile_f10.pdf

Methodology

Interviews with 30 students @ each campus

- **Photo Surveys:** 10 students photograph 20 objects, locations, or situations related to their scholarly habits

- **Mapping Diaries:** 10 students record, map, and sketch their activities over a typical school day

- **Retrospective Research Process Interviews:** 10 students describe and sketch the process of completing a research assignment

Research Sites

2 year degrees

– Borough of Manhattan Community College

– Bronx Community College

4 year degrees

– Brooklyn College

– City College (Manhattan)

– Hunter College (Manhattan)

2 & 4 year degrees

– NYC College of Technology (Brooklyn)

Place

"the order...in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence"

Space

"is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it"

Taskscape

"every task takes its meaning from its position within an ensemble of tasks, performed in series or in parallel"

Social Spaces

"interpenetrate one another and/or superimpose themselves upon one another"

Qualities of Place

Student Study Locations

At home:
- The bathroom
- On a bed (own or someone else's)
- At a desk
- At the kitchen table
- On the sofa
- On the floor

On the commute:
- On the train, subway, bus or ferry
- Standing / sitting

Off campus:
- In parks
- At a bookstore (with wifi)
- At the public library

On campus:
- In hallways
- In stairwells
- In lounges
- In empty classrooms
- In the cafeteria
- In computer labs
- At their (campus-based) job
- On quads / other outdoor locations

In the college library:
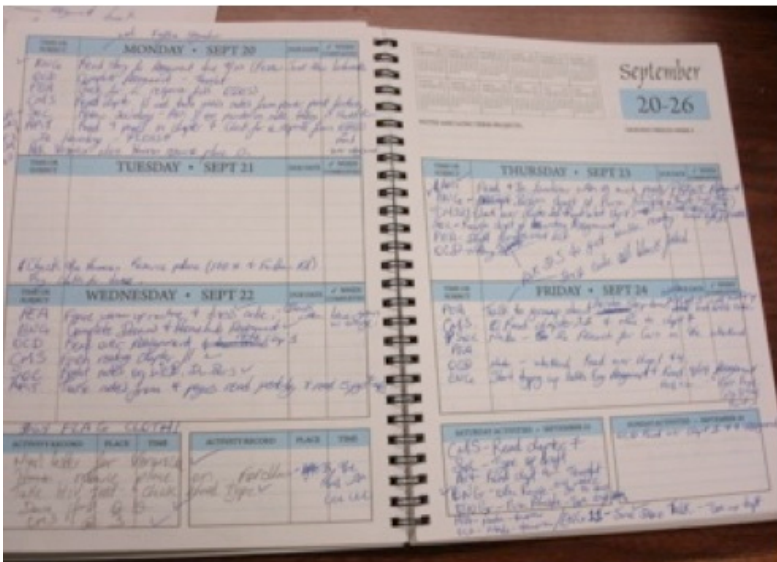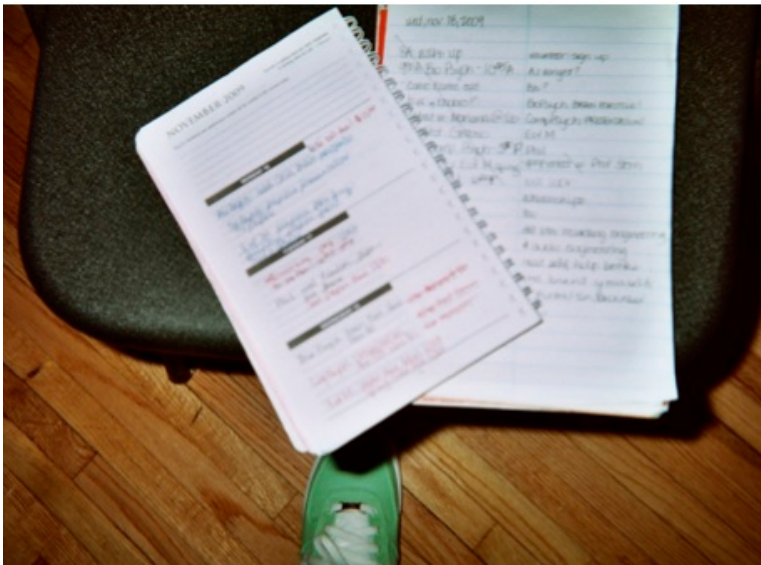- Open tables
- Carrels
- Secluded
- Near service desks

"I am more productive in the library because it's quiet."

"Most of the time, people passing by in the hall right there, they're so loud. . .it's distracting, and there's not much light coming through."

"I like to study at the Music Library at Shepherd Hall. Partly because I have a class there, so it's convenient."

"Well, half. . .I mean, if I'm at home, I'll stay at home. If I'm on campus, I'll stay on campus."

Academic Spaces in Academic Places

"And, you know, a place that you read and study should be a quiet, serene place. That's usually why that rule is enforced, so you can focus and, I don't know, get the most out of the experience."

"Well the reason why I took that picture [to show a new student] is it's right on the entrance. You can see all the computers, you can see all the rows of books, so you can see where you can go for your references and stuff like that."

The Newman Library at Baruch College, CUNY.

Image: Stephen Francoeur http://flickr.com/photos/stephenfrancoeur/2508715065/in/photostream/

"What do you like specifically about the library at Baruch?"

"First of all it's huge and architectural-wise it's beautiful and very quiet, and it's five floors of studying so I can pretty much go anywhere to study. And they have a very large collection of books as well. . .the environment is very nice."

"It says it's a 'Learning Resource Center' but in actuality it's a 'Hang Out With Your Friends and Look at Your Cousin's Wedding Pictures Center'. . . 'on Facebook.'"

"And, um. . .it's just the general demeanor of it. Like it's not a very *academic* place. Which is ironic, because it's a library."

"But you only like that in the morning when it's quiet?"

"Yes, otherwise I'm in the library or something because it's so noisy. It's a hang out spot for everybody. They don't really study."
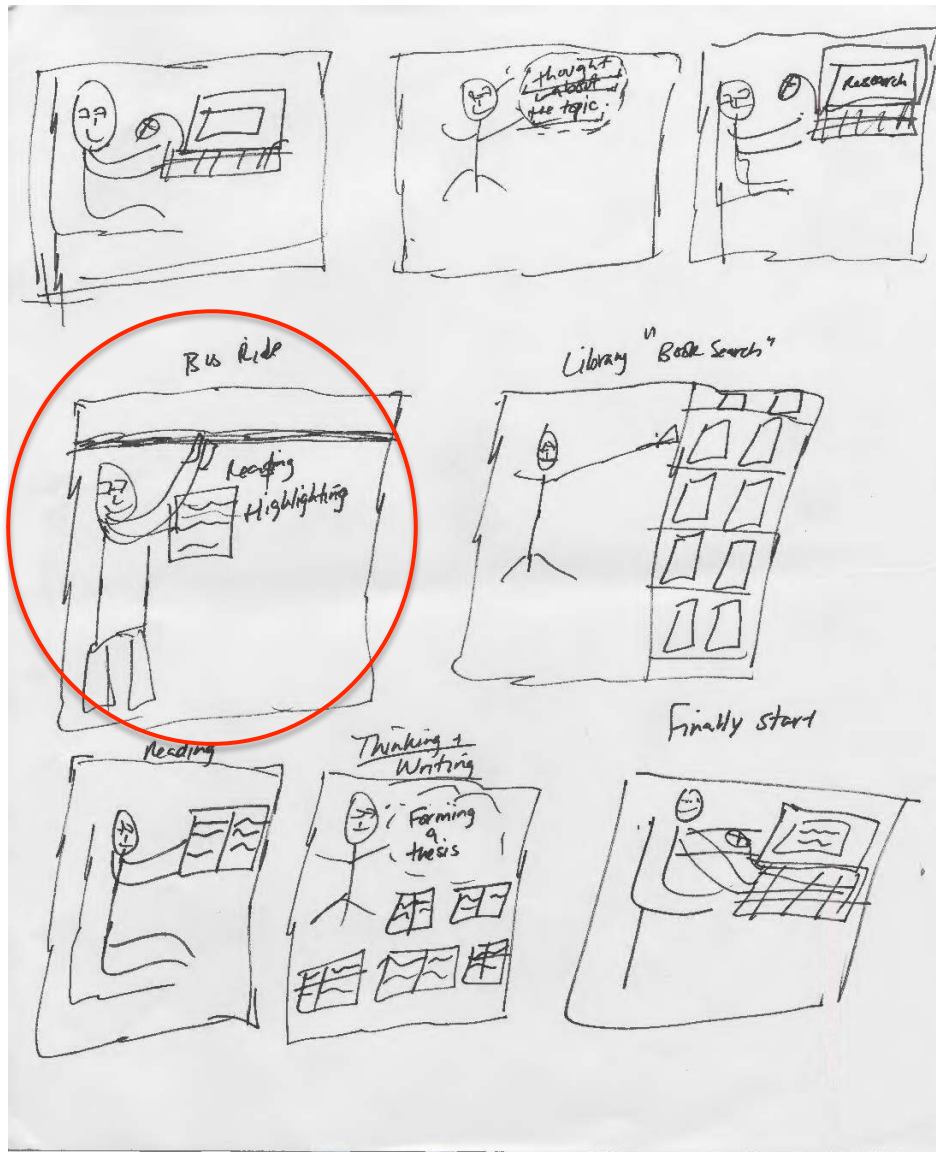
Mobile Challenges

"So it's all that travelling I have to go through just to get to class. . . I didn't know it was that much"

"It's a hour and a half, kind of [laughs]. I live in the Bronx so I come all the way from the Bronx over here. I'm all the way up on 228. . . so it's like a complete trip [laughs], a complete trip."

"Because in the morning time, there's not a lot of people on the train; and when I'm coming home, I get on the first stop, because the 2 train is right there, so I can go all the way to the front of the train, and I can read."
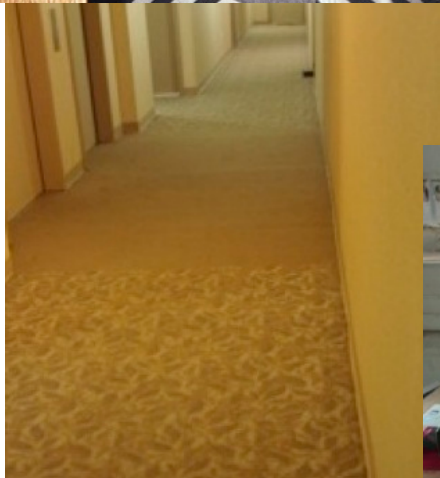
"End of the semester I'll probably borrow a book, but, right now, just school stuff."

"It depends, it really depends on whether I get a seat or not. If I can't sit, I can't read. Because I can't read standing up. So the only thing I can do is really listen to music."

"Or sometimes I just sit still and do nothing; relax my mind"
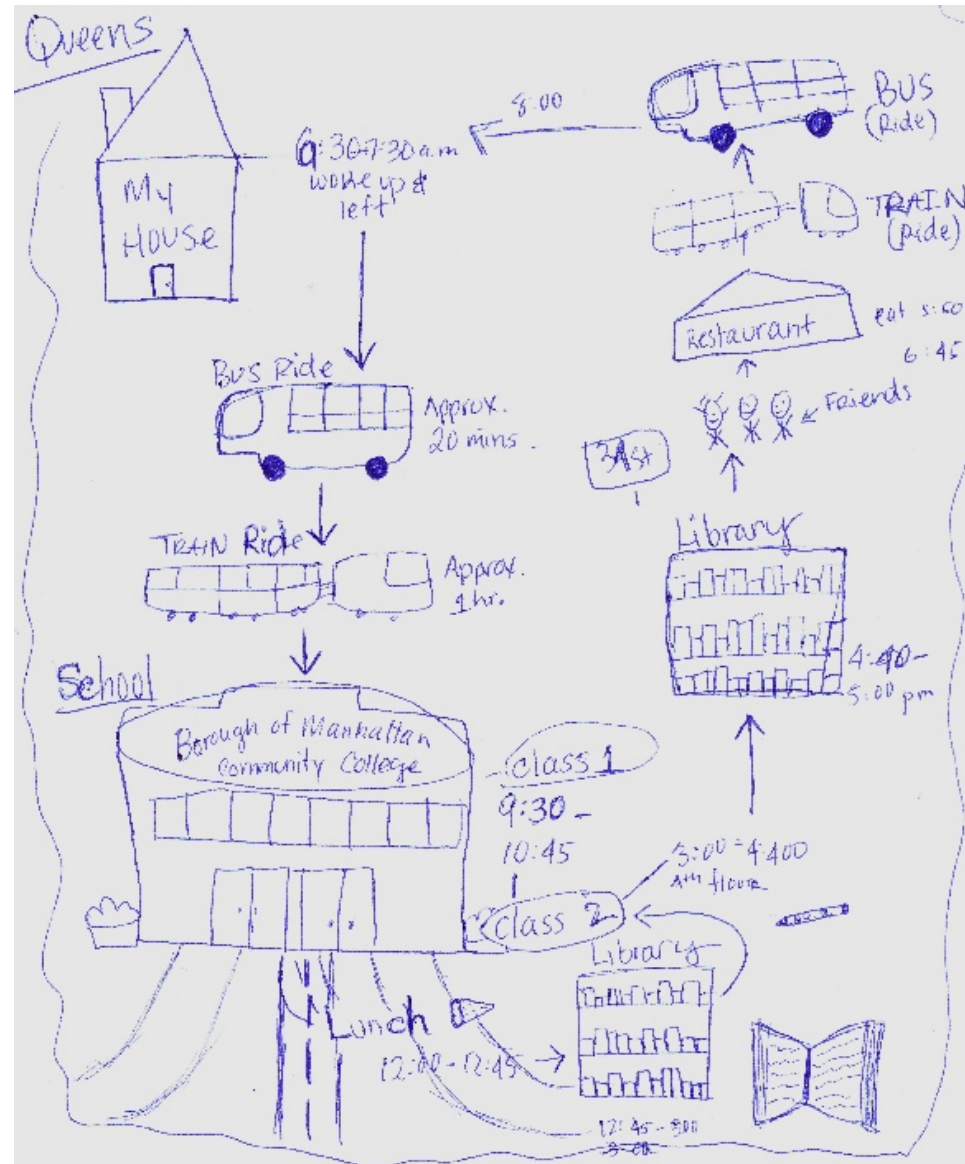
Expectations and Reality at Home

"I don't know. I just like. . .my house. The feeling of being in my house. Everything is just like quiet a little bit."

"I usually study at home. . . because I can have a break whatever time I want, I can cook something."

"I would prefer to study on campus because I find that I'm much more productive on campus. The main reason is because the campus doesn't have a refrigerator."

"I don't like studying at home. . .I'm not able to concentrate at home. Because, you know, there's a TV going on here, there's a TV going on there, and it's just, I get lost into the TV."

Student Engagement

"Do you study in the library?"

"Yes, very much so. It's not really a place that I like to 'study,' so to speak, it's a place where I learn. I think I've learned more in this library. . .or, not more. . . just as much in this library I've learned as I have overall in my classes with my professors."
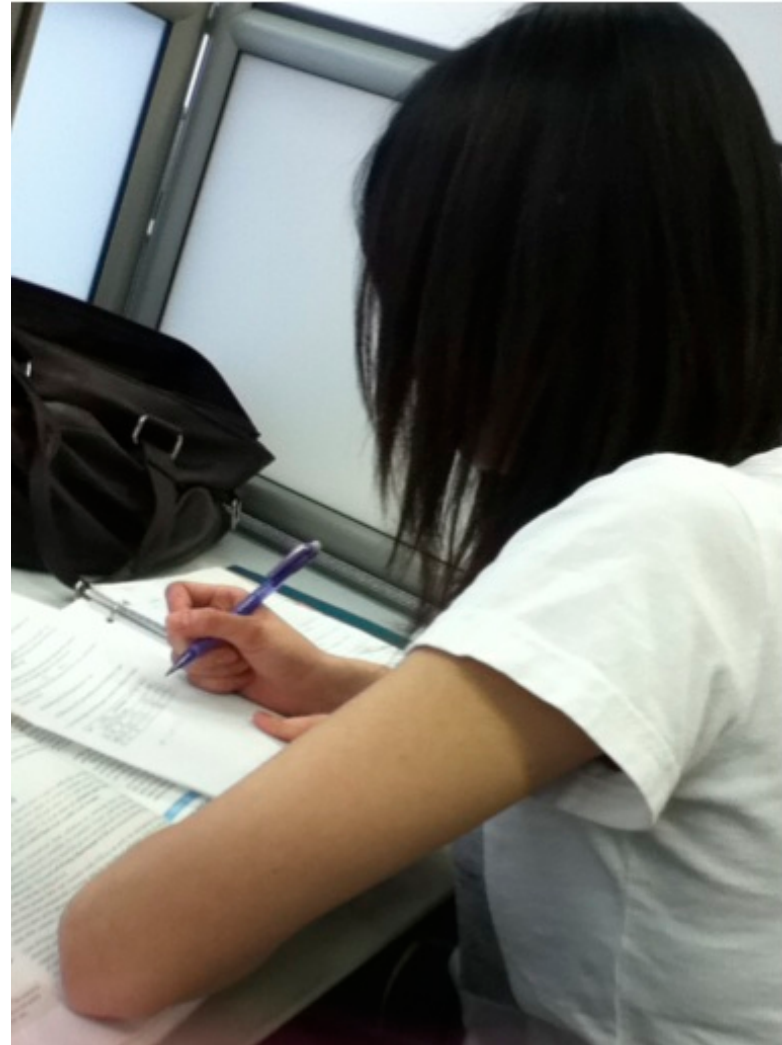
"Umm, it varies. Like, sometimes I'm home 'cause of the food, and I don't like taking the train too much. But then school's like, like it's more easier to study 'cause it's not that much distractions. 'Cause I'm in the library. 'Cause you're in a reading environment, mostly just that too."

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