In the fall semester of 2008, two assessment projects were put into action in the Library East Commons (LEC) of the Georgia Tech Library in order to gain a deeper understanding of student habits when using the LEC.

The first project was a daily census. For the first several weeks of the semester, library staff recorded statistics eight times a day for each zone of the LEC. The statistics captured were total number of students in the zone, number of groups in the zone ("group" defined as two or more students occupying the same productivity furniture, or socializing on lounge furniture), and number of laptops in use. Later in the semester, a graphic census sheet was created so that staff could also record the locations of students, locations of laptops, and number of students in each group.

Preliminary analysis showed heavy laptop use by individuals and groups in all zones of the LEC. This has led to increased efforts to accommodate laptop use in the Commons, including installing adapters on some LEC computers to allow students to show laptop screens on larger monitors. The initial analysis has also inspired an observational study of other library spaces and has helped inform the discovery process for the Georgia Tech Library’s next Commons project.

Further analysis should bring insight into patterns of use throughout the day, including the proportions of individual to group use in the LEC, the favored zones of the LEC for group and individual work, and when students shift from individual to collaborative use.

The second project was the distribution of survey cards throughout the LEC twice-weekly for two months. Each survey card had one of three sets of three questions, relating to computing, programming, or daily productivity use in the LEC. The Library provided a physical collection point for the survey cards and an email address on the cards themselves for further comments.

The low response rate to the survey cards precluded discerning trends in responses, but individual responses were used to inspire or refine various projects in the Commons, including software selection, printer queue requirements, and tech fee requests.