From chaos to control: Facilitating access to group study rooms at a busy academic library

Problem statement: How can a busy campus hub give students easy, equitable access to new and existing group study rooms with minimal staff intervention?

- 15 study rooms
- Unenforceable first-come, first-served policy
- Students “camping out” all day
- Confrontations between students vying for rooms
- Student requests for some kind of reservation system
- Demonstrated success of student-enforced “quiet floor” policies

March - May 2010
- Planning and construction of new Learning Commons well underway
- Began to search for web-based room reservation systems
- Environmental scan of other libraries, depts at VCU

June-August 2010
- Learned about OpenRoom system developed by Ball State University Libraries
- Downloaded, installed, tested and customized OpenRoom system on VCU Libraries servers
- Added VCU ID login, library branding
- Developed draft guidelines
- Posted “reservations are coming” signage
- Communicated with/trained circulation and security staff

September-December 2010
- Launched web-based reservations
- Posted signage with link and instructions in every room
- Rapid adoption of the system
- First “bingo” (all rooms booked) and 5000 reservations by October

January-May 2011
- Growing popularity
- Mobile device interface
- Reservations for Health Sciences Library

End of June 2011
- 35265 total reservations
- 6648 unique users

Lessons Learned
- Make tools easy and visible
- Empower users by putting tools in their hands
- Passionate users will self-enforce democratic policies
- Close loopholes as you find them

Before
- 30 study rooms
- Student-enforced first-come, first-served reservation system
- No more “camping out” all day
- Little to no staff interaction required
- Fewer confrontations between students vying for rooms

After
- 30 study rooms
- Student-enforced first-come, first-served reservation system
- No more “camping out” all day
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2009 2010 2011 Today

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20.5% of VCU students have used the system