Individual Homework #3

ABSTRACT

The game room in the Curry Student Center is highly popular among off campus students. It allows students to kick back, relax and enjoy a game of billiards, Ping-Pong, or television programs. Working as a work-study attendant in the game room for the past years, I found that students are having a hard time finding open billiard tables followed by long waits in line. The wait list for open tables can range from 10 or 15 minutes, upwards to an hour, sometimes longer on a busy day.

REASON FOR OBSERVATION

The Curry Student Center recently upgraded the game room with advanced buzzers that allow students to be buzzed when a table is open, but this approach is somewhat inconvenient and can cause longer lines when students do not show up when buzzed. These buzzers are limited on distance and only work correctly if students remain in the Curry Student Center at all times. During my study I observed students running in and out of the game room continuously checking with the game room attendant for availability even if they were given a buzzer. The overall problem with this current setup is that students would need to actually walk into the game room to check availability, wait times, and be handed a buzzer. There has to be a better approach for students and staff in reserving tables to limit the wait in line.

OVERVIEW OF ACTIVITY

During my ethnography study I observed the following behaviors outlined below:
- Interaction between the game room attendant and the student/s
- Game room attendant checks the computer for wait list times
- Game room attendant states the wait time
- Student/s presents their Husky ID, which is swiped to determine if they have paid their Student Activity Fees for the current semester (Approved/Denied)
- Game room attendant hands student a numbered buzzer and keeps their Husky ID in the order of the buzzer number
- When a table is ready the game room attendant buzzes the student and waits approximately 5-10 minutes for the student to show up to claim their table
- If the student does not show up within the allotted time, their table is given to the next student in line
PEOPLE ENGAGED IN ACTIVITY

Primarily Northeastern University students were engaged in this activity of reserving and waiting in line for a pool table. Although at times student center staff may come by during their lunch break. Most students who enter the game room are either in-between class, done with classes for the day, or on break. The majority of students are also freshman, College of Professional Study (CPS) students, or international students.

ETHNOGRAPHY INTERVIEWS

Interviewee #1:

Participant number 1 is currently a dual major computer science and mathematics sophomore at Northeastern. He attends the game room in-between classes to relax and take a break from classes daily. Most of the time he attends the game room during off-peak hours so there is no lines, but on Tuesdays and Fridays he attends during lunchtime. He states that every Tuesday and Friday, there’s a wait for approximately 30-45 minutes. At that time the game room staff hands him a buzzer in replacement for his Husky ID. He states:

“This is a problem since I use my ID to buy lunch…I can’t buy lunch without it!”

“I need to buy lunch first, then hurry back up to the game room to grab a buzzer.”

The participant also acknowledges that there needs to be an alternative to reserving a table to speed up the wait list. On days where the wait is too long, the participant doesn’t get to play.

Interviewee #2:

Participant number 2 is a CPS student at Northeastern. She attends the game room when she has free time or is bored after classes. She usually gathers a few of her colleagues to play for an hour or so on different days. When asked whether she ever waited in line to play pool she states:

“Maybe once or twice…I usually just leave if there’s a long line”

HOW CAN THIS BE IMPROVED?

Two technological alternatives in which I believe can decrease wait times and better off the current way to reserve a pool table is to:

1) Develop an application that allows students to reserve a table using their smartphones. The application should display current occupancy, current wait times, and other relevant information. The application would instantaneously sync with the game room computer, so there would be no miss-guided information to students that walk in.
2) Create a web application or UI that allows students to reserve a table via website. The website would be similar to the mobile application in functionality and performance. Again the data between the website would instantaneously sync with the game room computer, limiting miss-guided information.

Both applications would have a notification system through an automated phone call or a text message. There would also be a time limit before the reservation expires and the next student in line would become notified.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the current buzzer system in reserving a billiards table in the game room needs to be revamped. There should be a way to reserve a table without the need to turn over an ID and to allow students to reserve ahead of time without the hassle of actually being present. The wait times would drastically decrease and more students would be able to utilize the game room efficiently.