Suma is an open-source tablet and web-based assessment toolkit for collecting and analyzing observational data about the usage of physical spaces and services, developed at North Carolina State University Libraries. The tool streamlines existing data collection, enables fast, hassle-free mobile data collection, provides sophisticated data analysis and visualization capabilities for non-technical users, and promotes observational data analysis as an integral part of service and space design and day-to-day planning.

What is Suma?

Suma adds value to observational data analysis in several ways:

- Improved decision-making vis-a-vis service and space design.
- Error reduction and improved data collection compliance.
- More expansive data collection and analysis possibilities at a reasonable cost in time.
- Cross-departmental availability of data previously encapsulated by departmental silos.

The need

Many libraries produce manual head counts or activity counts for physical spaces and services, but struggle with the difficulties of collecting, organizing, storing, and analyzing such data, significantly limiting its use. The availability of tablet devices has created an opportunity to simplify and encourage the collection of fine-grained data about the usage of library services and physical spaces. Suma -- which can be used on a tablet or a desktop browser -- streamlines collection and centralized management of space usage data and enables rapid, sophisticated quantitative analysis that reduces technical barriers to employing usage data to aid space and service design.

Contact

Jason Casden, jason_casden@ncsu.edu
Joyce Chapman, chapmajc@email.unc.edu
Kim Duckett, kim_duckett@ncsu.edu

Data collection

Collecting program
Set up as many unique collection initiatives as you want. Define different spaces and activities for each one.

Locations
Define your own multi-tiered locations. Share your location trees across initiatives, or create new ones.

Activities
Tag each count with as many activities as you like. Define and group your tags for analysis, specifying which are required and which can have multiple states.

The "Count" button
User testing showed the need for a huge count button, so staff could count without looking, or even use their thumb.

Data analysis capabilities

Suma’s data analysis tools allow users to explore their data through a web-based interface. Users can easily change settings to view data from different collecting programs, locations, activities, and time periods. Suma currently provides an interactive time-series, the ability to splice data by time of day, views of proportional activities and location counts, and a calendar heat map.

Data exports

- Chart images.
- Raw comma-separated data for use in spreadsheet applications.
- Useful summary data (including counts and percentages by year, month, and day of the week for all locations and activities).

Calendar heat map

NCSU Libraries usage

- Twice-daily library head counts
- Detailed activity-annotated head counts during sampling periods
- Learning Commons service desk transaction (e.g. reference) tracking
- Special Collections researcher transactions
- Usage of soon-to-be-opened Hunt Library