

Graduate Student Center – “For the Students By the Students”

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Abstract

Nature has been the source of relaxation in many Design solutions, and as for students under the stress of school, this paper is suggesting the redesign of a Graduate Student Center with the focus of nature through the theory of Attention Restoration Theory (ART).

A literature review and a pilot study were the tools used to gather data for our research. Based on the results from the data collection a suggested design for the graduate student center was developed. The proposed design will focus on lighting, spacing planning and the comfort of the furniture.

Results

The pilot study survey had 10 questions and was answered by 15 students. The study here is presenting the 5 major questions that will effect the proposed design.

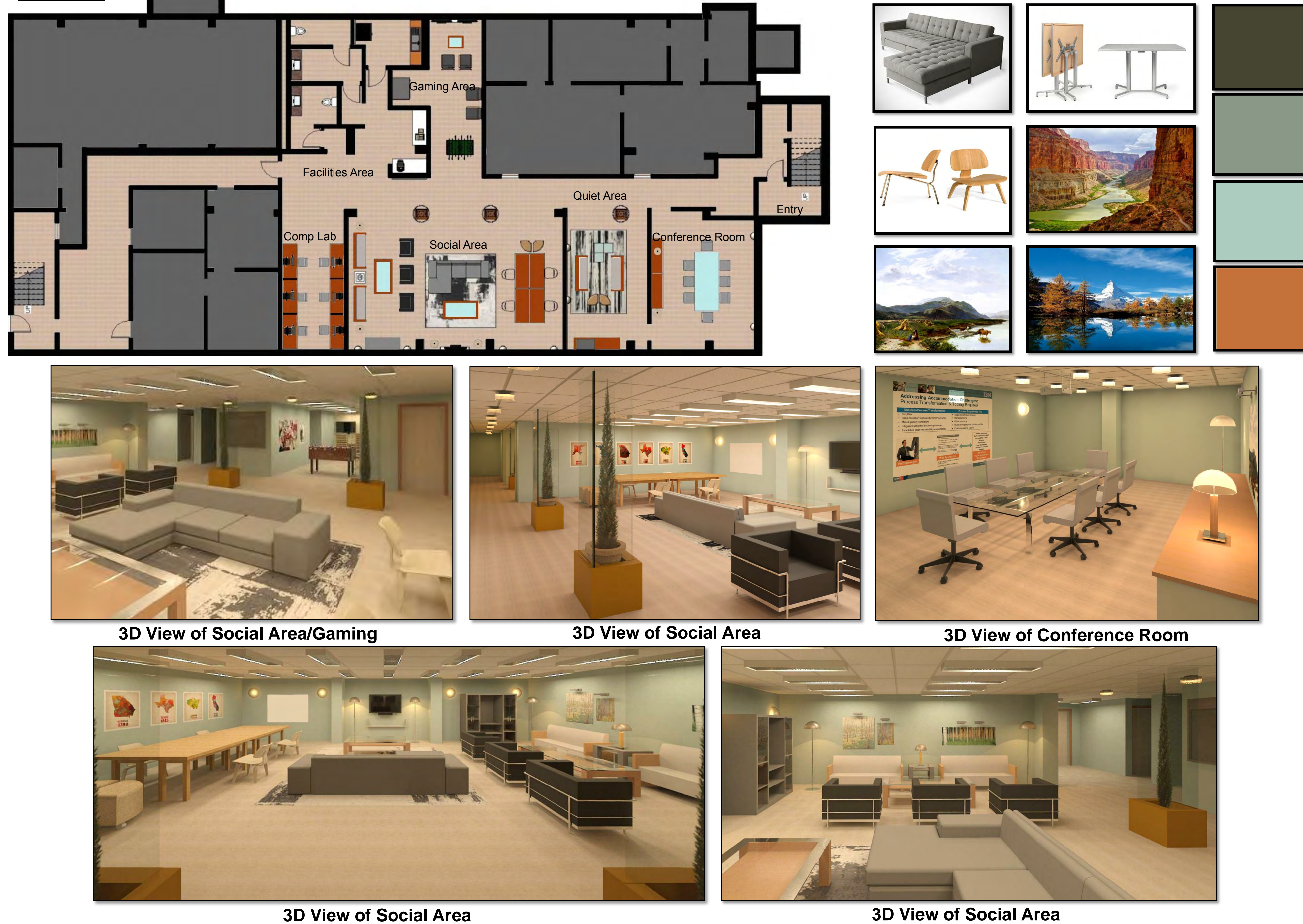
- **Space Planning:** From the answers from question 1, the majority of the students prioritized having a study area in a student lounge with socializing and relaxing coming second and eating last. In question 2, about 2/3 of the students opted for a multi-purpose atmosphere with a comfortable space coming second.
- **Furniture and Entertaining:** In question 3, students were asked, “After hours of studying, what would you do to take a break?” 46.67% of the students said they like to eat after hours of studying and 33% said they like to watch television. Question 4 showed us that a majority of the students considered video gaming during their free time for entertainment which ties back to question 3 supporting the 33% of students who prefer watching television.
- **Design:** The last question ties in our theory and the concept of “For the Students By the Students.” An equal number of 9 students selected Nature Elements and Murals/Artwork as their preferred decor elements. From a choice of warm, cool and neutral colors, students choose a cool color scheme for the space. The suggested design will involve the art students from Texas Tech to participate in this aspect of the design.
- **Lighting:** One of the important factors for this design is lighting. Since the space is in a basement, lighting can be challenging to design but modern technology has resolved the issues in an amicable manner. The proto-type computer based system can identify suitable lighting system from 17 distinct bulb types and 38 ballast types (Hathaway, 2001). As our theory states the natural elements or the closest possible to natural light is the objective of our lighting design. The positive mental and physical effects of lighting can be achieved by providing the appropriate lighting for the area in use (Fonseca, 2006).

The blocked area shown in the plan are not include in the design because it was not allocated to us by the Graduate Student Advisory.

Introduction

Texas Tech University has never had a space allocated exclusively for graduate students to socialize and interact with students from other disciplines. The daily schedule of students is full with hectic, stressful activities that can affect their productivity and performance in school. However, simple changes in the surrounding of daily environments can help restore some of the mental fatigue. One of the most powerful theories is Attention Restoration Theory (ART) (Kaplin, 1995), which demonstrates how views of nature can affect the mental well-being during study breaks for students. In Environmental studies, it has been proven that surroundings with nature have restorative abilities on attention fatigue (Felsten, 2009) in college students. Environments can have a positive and negative effect on the students. Therefore, implementing natural settings has been proven to reduce stress levels and increase cognitive attention. The current study will focus on creating a space that is functional for graduate students as well as allowing them to gain an experience. With the input of the students from the survey and the consideration of the ART theory, a design solution would be more tangible.

Design



Methods

This research paper was conducted by reviewing literature and articles that is related to the concept of nature being a way to improve school performance and socializing of graduate students. Specific keywords helped with the search to find the proper literature review such as, therapeutic environments, nature effects, student performance, environmental design, and multifunctional furniture in a student lounge. The main search engine for these articles was the Texas Tech University library and Google Scholar.

A pilot study was conducted as a first step to set the direction of the design. A survey with 10 questions was distributed to a Graduate level design class. The data was collected over a two weeks period with 15 students completing the survey. The questionnaire asked questions such as: After hours of studying what do you do to take a break?, What attracts you most to a student lounge?, and What type of atmosphere do you look for in a student lounge? Once the data was collected we were able to design a space better fit for graduate students needs which is presented in the results section.

Conclusion

The physical and mental well being of students is important and has been studied extensively around the world. However, studying the conditions of a school to fit specifically the students’ needs is important as well. That is why this study differs from other studies done previously as it focuses on the needs of Texas Tech students.

Based on the literature review and survey, the final design was broken down in 3 major parts: private area, social/study area and facilities area. The private area includes a conference room and a quiet break room which will provide comfortable couches and a small coffee area. The second area, which is the social/study area, is the focal point of the design. It contains the 4 points that were discussed in the results. This space is open and allows students to study, socialize and take a break in a relaxed setting. The final area, which is the facilities area, includes a computer area, a kitchenette, lockers, and restrooms. The idea of dividing the space into 3 broad categories will accommodate the different needs of all the graduate students.

The Attention Restoration Theory (ART) best fits the design due to the location of the space as it is in a basement. The students have no access to true restorative elements such as natural sunlight and plants. The biggest limitation was working with a tight budget restricting the design to only focus on the 4 major points that were the most important to the students.

References:

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Pilot Study: Data Analysis

