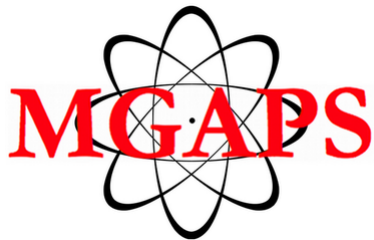


# **Report on the user experience of common spaces in the Ernest Rutherford Building, Fall 2019**

**Results of the survey sent to students, postdoctoral researchers, faculty, and  
staff Fall 2019 on ERB spaces and requests for improvement**

Melissa Mendes Silva  
With Summary by Talia Martz-Oberlander



## **Executive summary**

This survey garnered initial feedback from students, postdoctoral researchers, faculty, and staff users of the Rutherford building on their experiences interacting with public spaces, such as lounges. Results are presented based on area: building, lounges, kitchen areas, washrooms, decorations, and the graduate lounge. The original survey questions are found in the Appendix. A number of written comments are included, which offer a range of types of solutions that can be implemented to ameliorate our work environment. Finally, suggestions for action are broken down in to short, medium, and long term items.

## A. About the survey

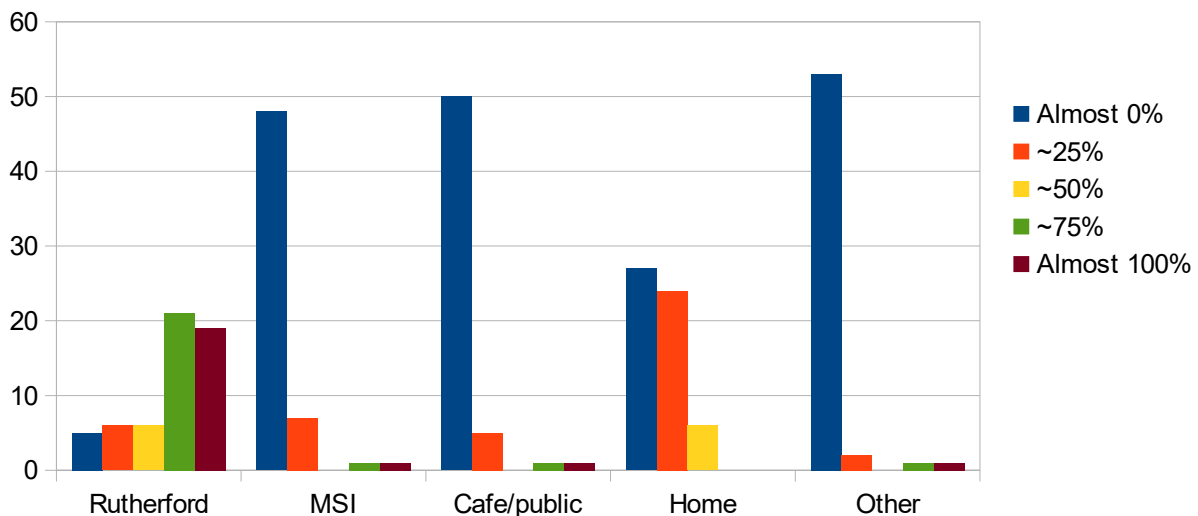
The McGill Rutherford Physics Spaces Survey was prepared by MGAPS members to assess users' experiences in the public spaces of Ernest Rutherford Physics Building (ERB). The goal of this questionnaire was to obtain McGill Physics student, staff, and faculty perspectives into the layout and use of ERB. It was open for voluntary and anonymous contributions with some optional questions from September 27<sup>th</sup> 2019 to November 8<sup>th</sup> 2019. One extra section was included only for graduate students and postdocs regarding the graduate lounge (room 322).

65 answers were received, 52 from students and postdocs and 13 from staff members and faculty. 49.2% of the respondents were male, 36.9% were female and 13.8% preferred not to disclose this information. A great diversity of research fields were represented, including, in alphabetical order, Astrophysics, Biophysics, Condensed Matter, Cosmology, High Energy Physics, Nuclear Physics, Optics, Optomechanics and Particle Physics, from both theorists and experimentalists perspectives. Thus, we can affirm that the respondent pool included a balance of genders, occupations, and research fields.

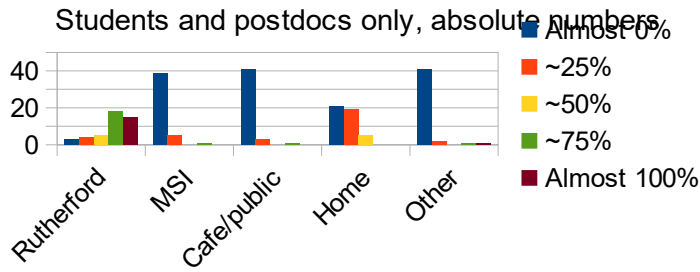
Since the Ernest Rutherford Physics Building was the focus of this survey, we noticed that most respondents identified this location as the place they spent most of their working hours, as can be seen from the graph below.

### Where do you spend your work hours?

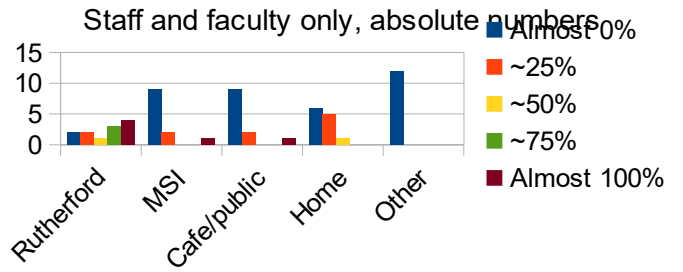
All respondents, absolute numbers



### Where do you spend your work hours?



### Where do you spend your work hours?

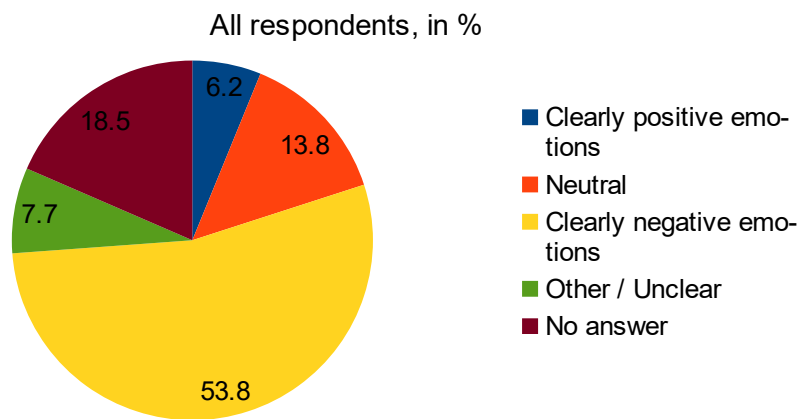


## B. Survey results

**1. Building:** Regarding the building as whole, two questions were asked: “How do you feel when you enter Rutherford building?” and “How do you feel when you leave it, by the end of the day?” These were open questions we posed with the goal of understanding how the current state of the building influences on user’s motivation and productivity at work.

To summarize the answers, we were able to identify four categories: “clearly positive emotions”, “neutral emotions”, “clearly negative emotions” and “other / unclear”.

### How do you feel when you enter Rutherford?



The majority of the answers reported negative feelings when seeing and/or entering the building, most of them related to how the state of conservation of the property and/or its aesthetics make them feel sad and uninspired. Answers describing positive feelings do not provide details and neutral answers typically repeat descriptions found in negative answers but with explanations that the respondent got used to the building’s current state. The same trend is observed considering students and postdocs answers or staff and faculty members’ answers. We display some answers below along with our classification in one of the categories described above.

**Clearly negative emotions:** “Tired, gloomy. I wish the building had more lightning, was more colorful and cleaner”, “It is a pretty old building and not really well maintained”, “stressed”, “Its old and outdated. Half the times when you enter the stairwell area, you can smell sewage or a often a foreign smell.”, “Like I want to leave again as soon as possible. It's too dark, worn down, depressive - like a bunker.”, “Sad because it's drab and grey, uninspiring visually and dull”, “Like this isn't a place anyone cares about because nobody can even be bothered to paint it once a decade”, “Weird: Creepy old building with crack everywhere and yellow-dirty wall.”, “the greyness drains the enthusiasm”

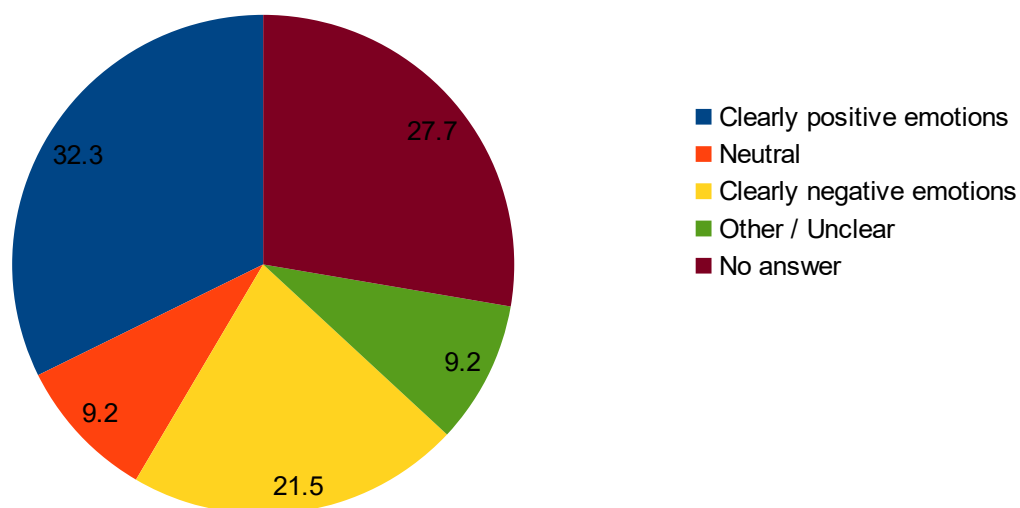
**Neutral:** “Neutral. Rutherford has the industrial feel that's typical for physics buildings, and I've gotten used to that as the norm.”, “Pretty average, not super impressed. The building is quite old, the architecture very bland (just a big concrete building), and it's definitely not as nice inside as other buildings a McGill”

**Clearly positive emotions:** “Good”, “at home”, “awesome”

**Other/unclear:** “It depends on the day.”, “Lots of concrete”, “It feels very warm in the entrance, maybe to much”

### How do you feel when you leave Rutherford?

All respondents, in %



For the second question, the majority of the answers display clearly positive emotions, mostly disclosing a sense of relief and happiness in experiencing fresh air and natural light. The answers showing clearly negative emotions in their majority discuss tiredness and exhaustion. Neutral answers don't provide details. The same trend is observed considering students and postdocs answers or staff

and faculty members' answers. We display some answers below along with our classification in one of the categories described above.

**Clearly positive emotions:** "It's good to get some fresh air.", "somewhat relieved to be outside", "Relieved. The lighting in the offices is so harsh.", "Fine. Rutherford is a completely mediocre building in every respect, 5/10 on all levels", "Happy to leave, fresh air, sunlight, open space, freedom, positive energy, creative, relaxed"

**Neutral:** "No particular feeling", "neutral"

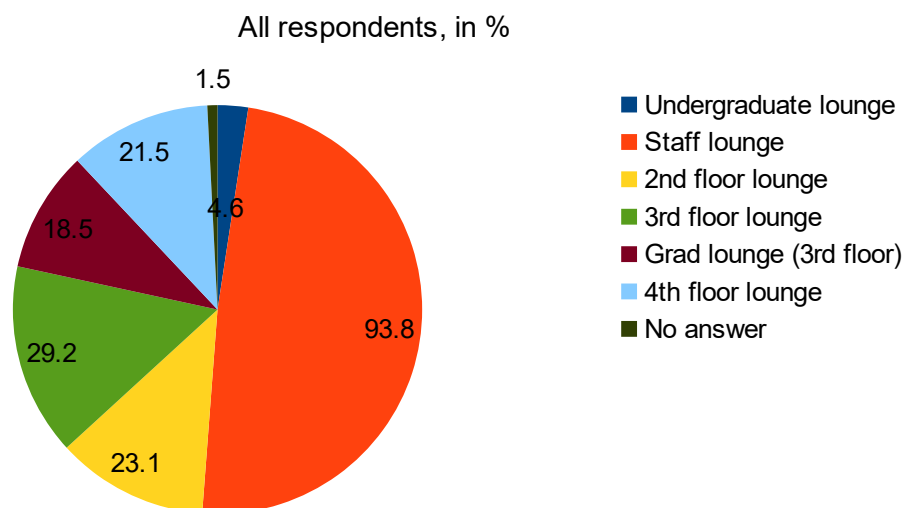
**Clearly negative emotions:** "tired", "Somewhat ill from working in harsh fluorescent lights", "Annoyed and exhausted", "Sad that all the sunlight is gone"

**Other/ unclear:** "It depends on the day.", "It's bright outside", "In winter, in a windowless office, it could be days without seeing sun"

It is clear from these combined answers that most of the users of the Rutherford building believe the working conditions of the physical space are subpar. The lack of sunlight and good ventilation are the major complaints, which we can infer directly affect the wellbeing of the users and their productivity, based on their reported levels of lack of motivation to enter the building and exhaustion at the end of the day.

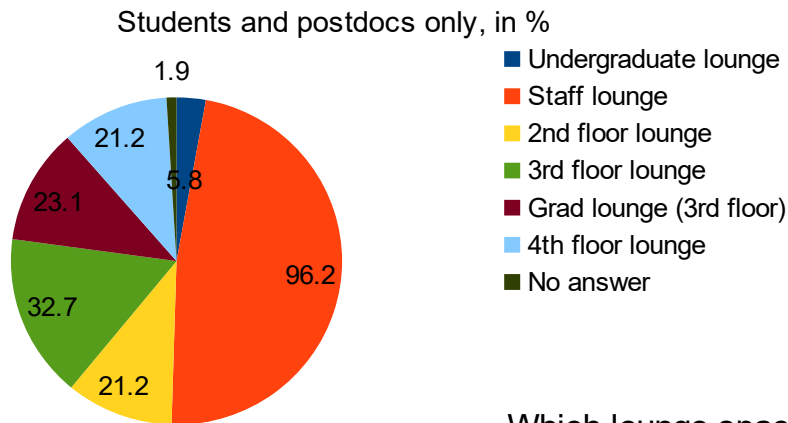
**2. Lounge spaces:** We identify "lounge spaces" as all areas inside the building which are not offices, conference rooms or washrooms, this is, the undergraduate lounge (1<sup>st</sup> floor), the staff lounge (1<sup>st</sup> floor), the graduate lounge (room 322) and the spaces in front of the elevators on each floor, which are furnished (2<sup>nd</sup> floor lounge, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor lounge, 4<sup>th</sup> floor lounge).

### Which lounge spaces do you use?

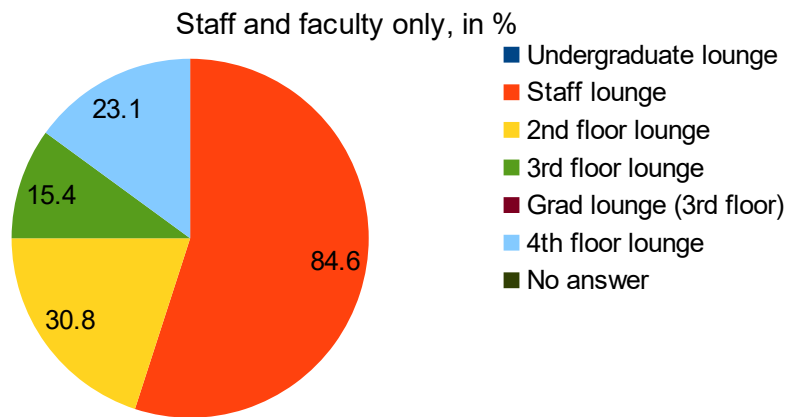


Almost all users frequent the staff lounge, but it's also clear that each of the elevator lounges are being used by around ¼ of the respondents of the survey. According to the following graphs, students and postdocs tend to access all the lounge spaces, whereas staff and faculty members limit themselves to the staff lounge and the elevator lounges.

### Which lounge spaces do you use?



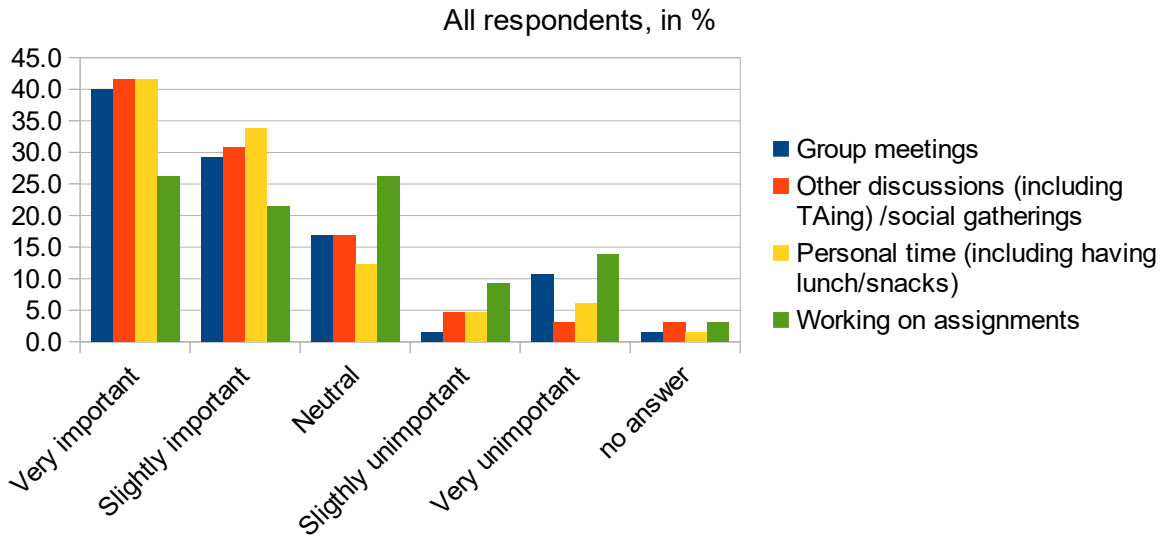
### Which lounge spaces do you use?



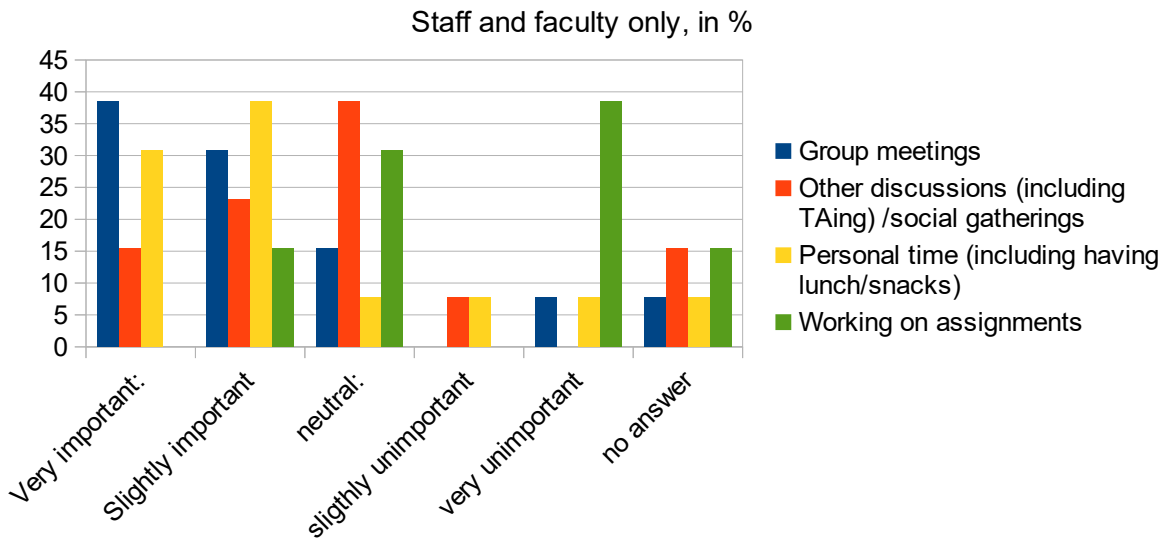
We stress the relevance of this result because not all would defend the revitalization of all these spaces under the argument that few people use them. We prove that this is not the case, especially when combined with the answer to the following question of the survey: “Rate the importance of the common spaces in facilitating interactions” (graph on the next page).

Around 70% of the users believe common areas, or lounges, are ‘very important’ or ‘slightly important’ to group meetings, other discussions including TA’ing and personal time. About 45% also agree they are ‘very important’ or ‘slightly important’ for working on assignments. This result is slightly different considering only the answers of staff and faculty members, who mostly think lounges are ‘neutral’ or ‘very unimportant’ for working on assignments, but who still think they are important for group meetings and personal time (graph on the next page).

### Rate the importance of the common areas



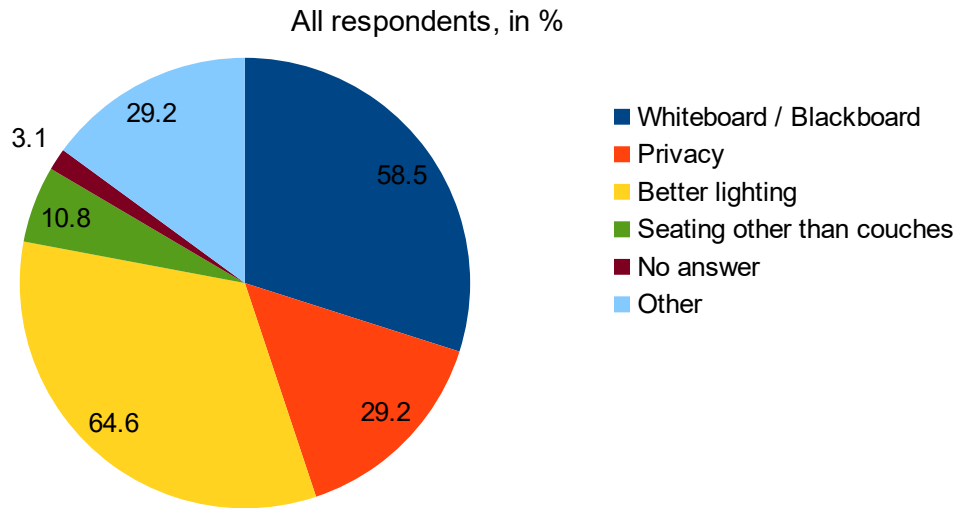
### Rate the importance of the common areas



Considering these spaces are already being used for work and personal activities alike, we asked how their experience could be enhanced. Specifically for the elevator lounges (graph on the next page), we note that most require better lighting and whiteboards/blackboards. Privacy and seating other than couches were also frequently cited as possible improvements to the space, demands echoed by students, postdocs, staff and faculty members alike.



## How to enhance your experience in the lounges?



Many other suggestions were given, such as:

- “cleaning supplies for the whiteboards”
- “plants, carpet, wireless connection to screen”
- “Junk removed”
- “Better pictures and paintings”
- “Magnets or a pin board”
- “Noise reduction from passersby”
- “The space on the 4th floor lounge is tight”
- “table at a height where it's comfortable to write on (current tables are low)”
- “More colours other than yellowish white... it feels very glum”
- “this is not about common spaces only. But overall, I really think that the cleanliness of the building spaces, ie offices, communal, etc.. could be greatly improved.”
- “having door knobs on the doors to stair cases is not ergonomic and makes it difficult to enter and exit if your hands are full (or if you have no hands).”

Along with the above easier-to-implement suggestions, there were others that could demand more investment and/or more careful planning, for example:

- “Dedicated TA office hours space”
- “Make it closed rooms with good lighting and amenities like coffee, tea, comfortable chairs. Make it a small lounge for the groups to have coffee together.”

“we should have open common areas, or a single departmental lounge, but not small lounges all over the place. Also, add furniture in the entry for undergrads.”

“we need more places for group meetings that we can actually book. Only 2 conference rooms for the whole building.”

“One way will be having a huge desk for multiple people to set and work. Having an open space for work is better than having an offices for graduate students that sometime not used by the students.”

“Better projectors/noise isolation/lighting in rooms 305A and 305B! Why is the key to these rooms in some random student's locker in the 349(?) office? We need a dedicated space/leave the rooms unlocked!”

“Rutherford lacks significantly in terms on infrastructure when compared to other institutions. The Kitchen areas are disgusting, under maintained. Windows / Natural light in the common areas would be a welcome. Better coat of paint! Modern furniture for all staff and students alike. When you walk into the doors it literally does feel like a place Rutherford worked in!”

“Coming from a university where whole research groups would go to coffee together, I feel Rutherford and McGill is very unsocial. Good, comfortable and somewhat private common rooms are the first step towards a community.”

It is clear that the users aren't satisfied with the current state of the facilities and demand structural and design changes on the lounge spaces. Many of the suggestions aim at purposely furnishing the spaces so they become more functional, thus, leading to more productive work and better connections between group members as well as increased wellbeing.

**3. Kitchen areas:** We refer in this section to the kitchen spaces on the staff lounge, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> floors. To access users' experience in these areas, we asked an open ended question on how they could be improved. The great majority of the answers mentioned the need for a cleaner space as well as the provision of cleaning supplies, such that the users themselves could help maintaining the facilities clean. Specific issues with outlets on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor were also mentioned. Here are some examples of answers received:

“2nd floor has outlet problems, there are two microwaves, a kettle, a fridge and a toaster but only two of the five appliances can be used at the same time”

“cleaning the kitchen and products / sponge to clean stuff”                      “Non-plastic cutlery”

“regularly cleaned microwave. Clean fridge”      “more microwaves, maybe water kettle”

“coffee facilities, comfortable seating, privacy”                      “More colours in the halls :)”

“Get rid of the 2nd and 3rd floor kitchen areas (...), enhance the "staff" lounge if necessary.”

“The department should consider providing coffee and tea for all graduate students and staff”

“I think there should be a food bar that sells some fast prepared food”

“hot chocolate machine”

“microwave on 3rd floor needed”

“A toaster oven”

“The microwave and the refrigerator on the 4th floor could be present at a better place with access to a kitchen sink”

**4. Washrooms:** In this section, we asked the respondents an open-ended question on how the washrooms in the Rutherford building could be improved. We purposely didn’t ask about the bathroom on the basement because a specific survey to access the use of that facility and possible improvements had already been made.

Most of the answers demand better cleaning, automatic flushing of the toilets and urinals, better hand dryers and a way to increase privacy. Other constant demands are the creation of gender neutral washrooms and more women’s washrooms, specially for specific floors. We also noticed a demand for more inclusive spaces to users with disabilities. Some answers are shown below:

“More female (or gender neutral) washrooms! Removing the ads (why are they there anyway?)”

“WE NEED A WOMEN WASHROOM IN THE BASEMENT. The floor and lighting of washrooms are pretty bad.”

“Washroom could be cleaner with automatic flush. Hand dryers are old technology (even thought they were replaced recently) so unhygienic”

“The 2nd floor men's bathroom needs more privacy for the urinals, passersby can see right down them. The paint in the bathrooms is also chipping and broadly a disgrace”

“leaks should be fixed”

“Making them all gender neutral because COME ON.”

“Everything should be improved/renewed. The washrooms are the worst part of Rutherford by far.”

“To diminish the space between the cabins walls and doors and the floor! It is very annoying recognizing the sandals and shoes of staff and professors.”

“They are dirty and gross and uncomfortable and don't flush properly”

“And the light sensors go out too fast. Also no automatic doors for folks w handicaps. Cannot believe we are behind the times so much.”

“Bag holders in the stalls would be nice in the washrooms.”

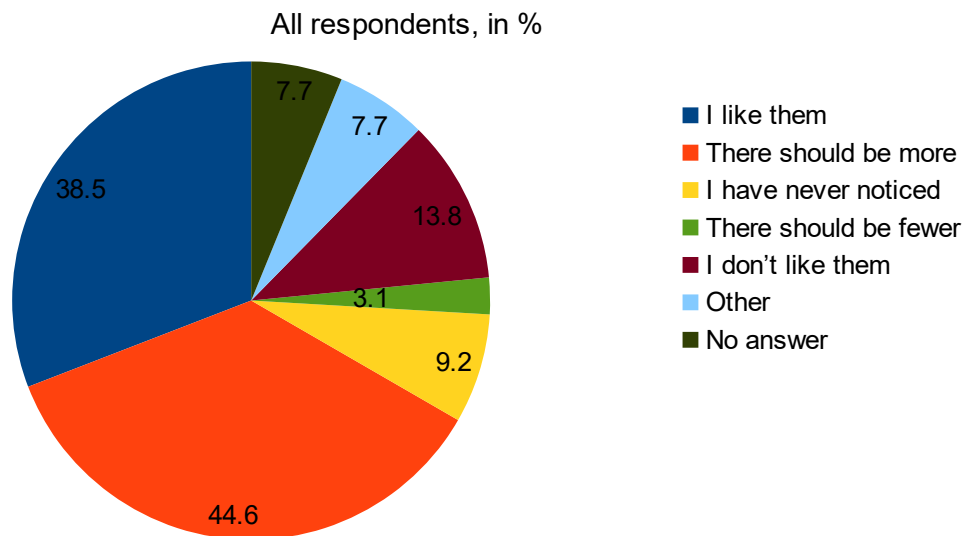
“Increase hygiene with IR equipment (automatic flush, water, soap, paper, etc.). Please don't build in any of those annoyingly loud heat fans that just blow the germs around the room.”

“A ceiling would be nice. Different colours, more modern design.”

“Women's washrooms should accommodate more than 1 person at the time”

**5. Decorations:** Our final two questions to all surveyed ask about decorations in the building, such as paintings and statues. We specifically didn't ask about scientific posters, but only artistic interventions and historical pieces.

### How do you feel about decorations in the building?



In answering the question “How do you feel about decorations in the building?”, 83.1% respondents reported to ‘like them’ and/or ‘there should be more’. This trend is observed considering students and postdocs answers or staff and faculty members’ answers. Those who answered ‘I don’t like them’ justified by saying the decorations are outdated, poorly framed, not related to actual research being performed at the department or actual researchers from the department and male dominated. Some suggestions for improvement include:

“I know its a science Building but arts would be really nice! Painting of other things than people we don't know about would be nice”

“If possible, it would be really great to see more display cabinets”

“please get some good decorations that bring fresh colors and stimulate creativity. Also plants would be a huge asset!”

“There should almost certainly be more on every floor. The ones that are up now seem to be from 1970 - 1990 so a refresh would be welcome”

“I prefer fewer, but strategically placed decorations”

“More silly hats”

“Also the museum is mostly closed and unused, I am sure they are better ways to valorize this.”

“Rutherford should stay. Old white men on b/w photos with no connection to McGill should come off the wall, even if they won a Nobel Prize. I'd replace them with pictures of current students doing research - in labs, at the South Pole, etc.”

“The posters about important women physicists should be more clearly visible, when entering the building”

“Make them more fun and less gloomy. Give explanations so undergrads or non-physicists would understand what they mean.”

“Need to be colorful, inspiring, some science relevant but some just aesthetic”

“there should be some pictures of nature or light colors. The building looks dark from the inside.”

“If you are serious about making it a better place, let students decide on the design and not the few, established PIs.”

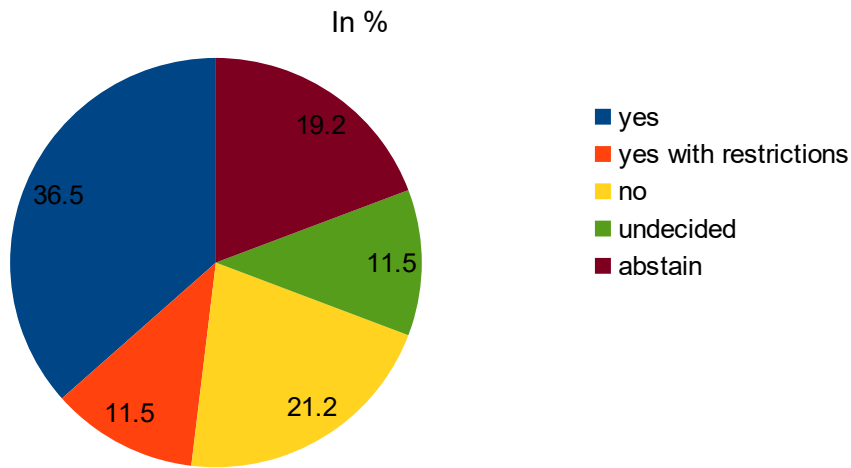
“basement should have a couch or chairs, whiteboard and real poster boards that don't get ruined. I like seeing people's work in the department.”

**6. Graduate lounge:** The following three questions were only open for answers of students and postdocs, the public of the graduate lounge. It was already established, from a previous question from this survey, that this space was being used, as well as the general need to revitalize it. Thus, we focused on finding the demands of the users for this specific space.

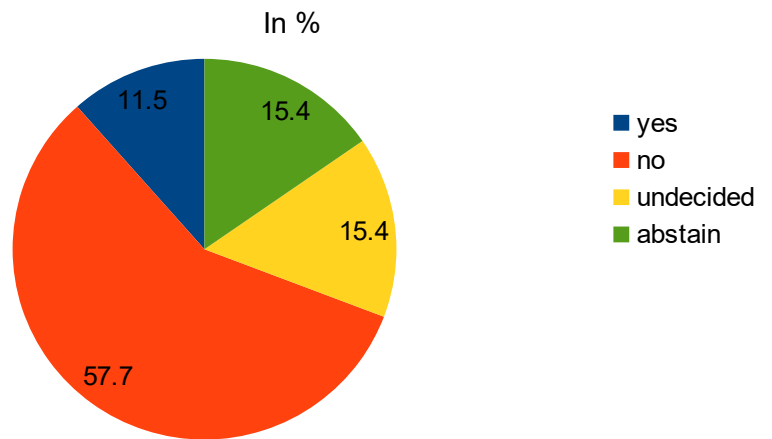
We asked “Should the graduate lounge have games/social tools?” to understand whether the public was interested in the creation of a space for relaxing and socialization. 48% of the answers were favorable to this scenario (graph on the next page). Then we asked whether it should be bookable, to which 57.7% of the answers were negative (graph on the next page). As explained in the detailed answers, students and postdocs have difficulty finding spaces for group meetings and personal time in the building, usually recurring to the lounges. Thus, most were unfavorable to limiting their use of one of these spaces.

Finally, we asked “What other amenities should be in the graduate lounge?” A summary of the most recurrent suggestions is given in the graph on the next page, which include food supplies, coffee and beverages, better lighting, clean and comfy furniture.

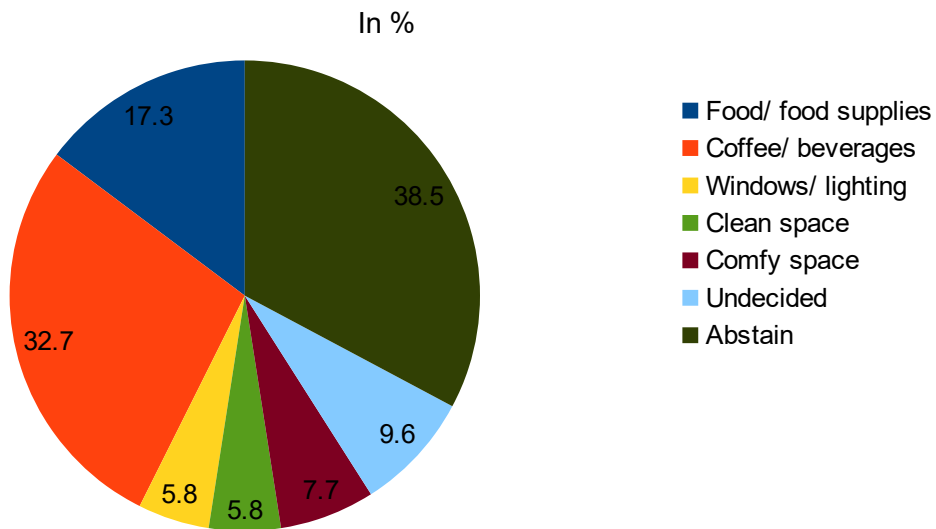
### Should the grad lounge have games/social tools?



### Should the grad lounge be bookable?



### What other amenities should be in the grad lounge?



Some other suggestions are shown below:

“Coffee machine for sure, maybe another microwave, definitely more art.”

“The room is nice, but it should be cleaned more often. “

“Coffee (& cookies). Information about when/how to use the room and who it is for is not currently clear to me, so I would like that information to be crystal clear in order to feel comfortable to use it.”

“It would be cool to have (healthy) snacks”

“Should have lamps and comfy seating”

“please: plants, food, hot chocolate, enough light, comfortable chairs/couches”

**C. Conclusions and suggestions:** From the results of this survey we can conclude that the Rutherford building is in urgent need of upgrades. According to the majority of the users, the building is not well maintained and is outdated and dysfunctional in its operations, which negatively affects their motivation, productivity, socialization and wellbeing. There are several complaints on the cleanliness of the building as a whole, including the need for better upkeep on a weekly basis. The users find it hard to keep their spaces clean due to a difficulty in accessing cleaning supplies as well as lack of clarity of what cleaning services McGill staff should provide in the building. Furthermore, accumulation of junk and old furniture around the elevator lounges occurs regularly as office-users decide to “outsource” their junk. Other complaints center around lighting and space utility and availability.

The following recommendations are left to the department to address user’s comments in the survey.

#### *Short-term and quick fixes*

1. Improve utility of existing amenities
  - a. Increase electrical capacity on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor kitchen so that appliances can be used without blowing a fuse
  - b. Ensure bathrooms are kept clean, toilets unclogged, and light sensors do not turn bathrooms lights off too quickly
  - c. Ensure kitchen areas and utilities are kept clean and/or cleaning supplies made available
  - d. Replace burnt out bulbs on all the elevator lounge areas
  - e. Provide whiteboard supplies on the elevator lounge areas so that the existing whiteboards can be used and easily cleaned
2. Address the availability and booking of all bookable common spaces on 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> floors.
  - a. Investigate the possibility of automatically reserving these rooms on a regular basis, in the absence of other bookings, for student group use
  - b. Increase ease of the room bookings; as a start, advertise on the website how bookings can be made, since currently the only way to find out how is by word of mouth

### *Mid-term improvements*

2. Enhance building decorations to reduce drabness addressing negative physical atmosphere
  - a. Form a committee, led by graduate students and postdoctoral researchers, to choose new wall hangings for the hallways, replacing black and white portraits of scientists, with inspiring as well as beautiful art and décor. The survey respondents suggest that colorful and artistic pictures would make the environment more welcoming as well as more motivating. Pictures of nature were also recommended to disguise the lack of natural lighting in the building
  - b. Commission student murals in the stairwells and on hallway walls
  - c. Fill the front display cabinet/glassed-in black board near the porter's room with headshots of PIs and their student groups to add a sense of humanity and contemporariness to the department
  
3. Enhance the functionality of the elevator lounge spaces
  - a. Plan for the refurbishing of these spaces to improve their usefulness, including adding better working/writing surfaces of different heights and easily accessible power strips
  - b. Offer regularly scheduled junk removal of unwanted furniture to keep hallways clear

### *Long-term improvements*

3. Move Rutherford into the 21<sup>st</sup> century
  - a. Offer gender neutral and wheelchair accessible washroom facilities [architectural designs have already been finalized and submitted to McGill by their engaged architect firm. Follow-up from our department is crucial to ensure the project will actually be carried out on B1, B2, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> floors]
  - b. Make sure all doors inside the building have automatic features to support people with physical needs
  - c. Increase the building's overall capacity/access to fridge, microwave, coffee, and other kitchen utilities
  - d. Redo lighting in every non-laboratory room and elevator lounge by consulting with professional designers
  - e. Paint walls more fresh and vibrant colours than beige
  - f. Ensure building and departmental growth plans establish the addition of more semi-private spaces for casual meetings, research discussions and TA sessions. Ideally design a room specifically for TA sessions.

Finally, we recommend delivering this survey to all building users and publish of a summary report every three years.



# Appendix

## McGill Rutherford Physics Spaces Survey

Thank you for responding to our survey about users' experiences in the public spaces of Ernest Rutherford Physics Building (ERB). The purpose of this survey is to obtain McGill Physics student, staff, and faculty perspectives into the layout and use of ERB.

Your responses are collected anonymously and you may quit the survey at any time. Your responses will not be submitted until you click submit at the end. You may skip questions.

By filling out this survey you help support any improvements that might enhance our work here in Rutherford.

\* Required

### 1. Where do you spend your work hours, proportionally?

Mark only one oval per row.

	Almost 0%	~25%	~50%	~%75	Almost 100%
MSI	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cafe/public location	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Home	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Otto Maass Chemistry Building	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Rutherford Building	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

2. Please rate the importance of the common areas in the Rutherford Building in facilitating the following kinds of interactions:

*Mark only one oval per row.*

	Very unimportant	Slightly unimportant	Neutral	Slightly important	Very Important
Group meetings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other discussions (including TAing) /social gatherings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Personal time (including having lunch/snacks)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working on assignments	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

3. Which lounge spaces do you use?

*Check all that apply.*

- Staff lounge (1st floor)
- Grad lounge (3rd floor, number ?)
- 4th floor, area in front of the elevator
- 3rd floor, area in front of the elevator
- 2nd floor, area in front of the elevator
- Undergraduate lounge (1st floor, number ?)

4. What do you need to enhance your experience in the \*elevator lounges\*?

*Check all that apply.*

- Better lighting
- Whiteboards
- Privacy
- Seating other than couches

Other:  \_\_\_\_\_

- 5. Other comments - What else do you need or what would you change about these spaces ?

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- 6. What do you need to enhance your experience in the \*kitchen areas\* (2nd floor, 3rd floor and staff lounge)?

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**BUILDING PERCEPTION**

- 7. How do you feel when you enter Rutherford?

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- 8. How do you feel when you leave Rutherford (e.g. by the end of the day)?

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9. How do you think the washrooms can be improved (in terms of structure but also aesthetically) ?

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10. What are your thoughts about decorations in the building (e.g. pictures and statues, but \*not including scientific posters\*)?

*Check all that apply.*

- There should be more
- There should be fewer
- I have never noticed these
- I don't like them (comment below)
- I like them

Other:  \_\_\_\_\_

11. What would you change about the current pictures and statues?

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Demographic questions

12. Are you...? \*

Mark only one oval.

- Master's, 1st year    *Skip to question 15*
- Master's, 2nd/ 3rd... year    *Skip to question 15*
- PhD, 1st year    *Skip to question 15*
- PhD, 2nd year    *Skip to question 15*
- PhD, 3rd/ 4th... year    *Skip to question 15*
- Post-doc    *Skip to question 15*
- Staff
- Faculty

13. What is your gender (can write prefer not to say)? \*

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14. What is your field of research? \*

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Grad  
Lounge  
Questions

In MGAPS's winter 2019 Grad Spaces Survey, respondents (you!) stated a need for collaborative space in the grad lounge with lots of blackboards (room 322). The following questions pertain to the lounge and will help MGAPS more precisely update it this year.

15. Should the Grad Lounge (room 322) be a bookable room? Why/why not? How?

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16. Should the Grad Lounge (room 322) have games and social tools (e.g. puzzles, small basketball hoop)?

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17. What other amenities should be or should not be in the room (food, coffee, etc.)?

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