

Acoustic Management of Library Fishbowls

A Senior Project
presented to
the faculty of the Materials Engineering Department
California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Science

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this project is to aid the Cal Poly Robert E. Kennedy library in modifying the “fishbowl” study spaces to more effectively maintain the desirable sound that is generated within the fishbowls while avoiding the entrance and exit of excess noise to and from the fishbowls. A collaboration between the Materials Engineering Department and the Architecture Department provided the combined expertise needed to design, test, and install a prototype acoustic treatment in fishbowl 216-R in consultation with the Cal Poly Library as the voice of the customer. The fishbowl’s undesirable acoustic properties can be attributed to the hard surfaces within the fishbowl and the large air gap between the top of the walls of the fishbowl and the ceiling of the room. Working with industry standard sound measurement equipment and noise pollution expertise provided by Dr. Tracy Thatcher of the Environmental Engineering Department, wool felt was chosen and found to be a material satisfactory in improving fishbowl sound quality. The felt reduced reverberation within the fishbowl by about 0.1 seconds. With the help of the Architecture Department, the wool felt was incorporated into a fishbowl to provide both an acoustically effective and aesthetically pleasing treatment. The prototype acoustic treatment will be installed in fishbowl 216-R during finals week of the Spring 2017 quarter.

Introduction

Noise dampening in workspaces has been an important focus in many companies. Previous solutions to reduce unwanted sound in office buildings involved installing sound absorbing materials throughout the office¹ and incorporating white noise speakers to mask distracting sounds for workers².

Similar to the role of offices and work spaces in companies, Cal Poly’s Robert E. Kennedy Library has an array of resources to utilize for studying and group work. One of the resources is the library “fishbowls” located on the second and third floors of the library. These glass-walled cubicles (Figure 1) allow students an open space to meet to discuss projects and to study; however, the fishbowls are located directly near a busy café and quiet study spaces. Maintaining the desirable sound that is generated within the fishbowls while avoiding the entrance and exit of excess noise to and from the fishbowls are essential for an effective library resource.



Figure 1. The fishbowl of interest, room 216-R.

The fishbowl's poor acoustic properties can be attributed to its large air gap between the ceiling and the top of the fishbowl as well as its primarily glass construction. The large air gap serves as a pathway for excess noise both from within and outside the fishbowls to leave and enter the fishbowl, respectively. The glass construction provides a highly reflective surface for sound waves within the fishbowl to be reflected back towards the fishbowl user. These additional reflections produce unwanted reverberation, which greatly affects sound quality within the study space.

Materials implemented in acoustic applications tend to be either sound-absorbing materials or sound-isolation materials. When a sound wave strikes a material, it can reflect, absorb, or do a combination of both (Figure 2).

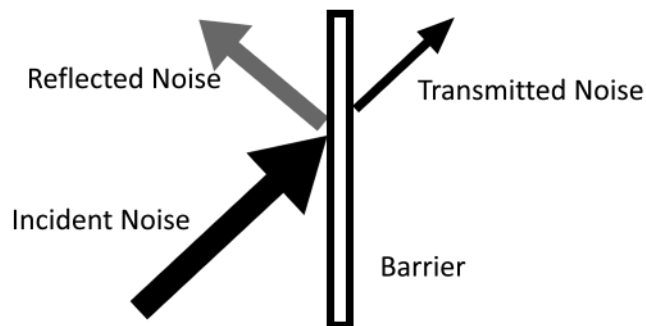


Figure 2. The two paths of incident noise after encountering a barrier.

Effective sound-absorbing materials reduce the amount of reflected noise. Effective sound-isolation materials focus on hindering transmitted noise. Incident noise inside a confined space produces both a direct and indirect field of sound³ (Figure 3).

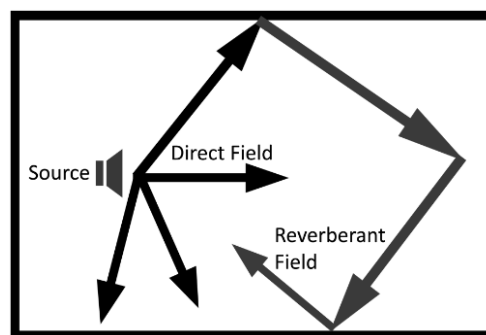


Figure 3. Direct and indirect acoustic waves within a room. (Adapted from Irwin, J. David, and E. R. Graf. *Industrial Noise and Vibration Control*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1979. Print. Page 137)

Sound-Isolation Materials

Sound-isolation materials are massive and airtight to produce a proper sound-insulating structure between noise sources and those hearing the noise sources. An effective sound-insulating structure results in little transmitted noise through the material. These acoustic barriers serve to reduce the

sound pressure levels due to the direct field of the source at a specified location³. Sound isolation materials are rated based on the insertion loss when the material is inserted in a finite environment as shown in Equation 1.

$$IL = L_{p0} - L_{p2} \quad (1)$$

where L_{p0} is the sound pressure level without the material

L_{p2} is the sound pressure level with the material

Sound-Absorbing Materials

Sound-absorbing materials are generally light and porous, which work to disperse sound waves by allowing the partial penetration of the sound into the material, absorbing the wave as thermal energy instead of reflecting the wave. The loss mechanisms in the energy transfer are viscous flow losses due to propagated waves in the material and the internal frictional losses caused by motion of the material's individual fibers³. Materials are rated for absorption based on the ratio of acoustic energy absorbed to the acoustic energy incident upon the material. This ratio is defined as the *statistical absorption coefficient* or the *random incidence sound-absorption coefficient*, α .

Holistically decreasing sound propagation can be achieved by coupling a low frequency sound absorber with a high-density material. High-density materials are known to block sound propagation of high frequencies around 1.5-2 kHz⁴. Glass composite materials that involve sheets of glass sandwiching a thin plastic film have been developed to prevent sound propagation while maintaining transparency. In addition, these glass composites can also be made with holes arranged in them to maintain ventilation while substantially reducing noise⁵.

Complex geometries have been developed to aid in combating unwanted sound. "Double porous materials" are one such invention. By incorporating a porous material with varying hole profiles within the solid material (Figure 4), it is possible to greatly reduce unwanted sound depending on the hole profile⁶.

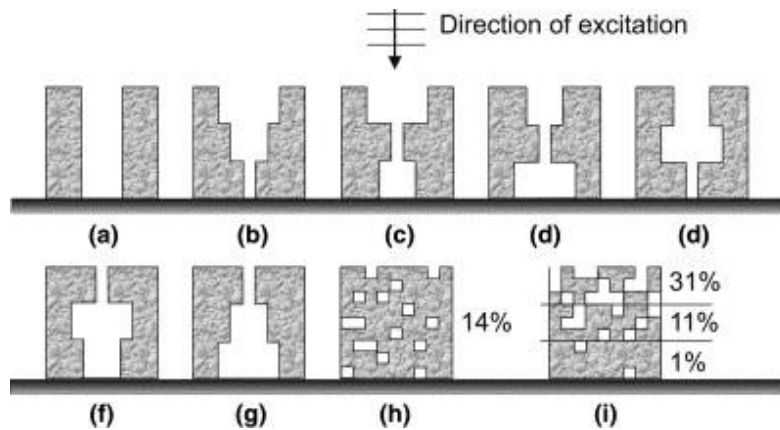


Figure 4. Varying hole profiles of double porous materials. Percentages refer to percent porosity.

Various surface shapes and sizes of foams have been tested to discover levels of sound absorbing effectiveness in specific sound ranges. Overall, the effective sound dampening of frequencies below 1500 Hz was primarily dependent on material thickness. At frequencies of 1500 - 3000 Hz, triangular and semicircular shapes were ideal, and at above 3000 Hz a plate shape was recommended⁶.

Room Acoustics

Sound behavior can be modelled by employing fundamental noise source and room characteristics³. Derivations for sound pressure, average room absorption coefficients, and reverberation time were developed using solutions of the wave equation for velocity and pressure⁷. Sound pressure is commonly expressed in terms of decibel levels to incorporate a logarithmic scale versus using a linear scale.

Sound pressure levels (L_p) are determined using sound equipment and are typically averaged over time to obtain a more accurate representation of the typical value. The average L_p is determined using Equation 2³.

$$\bar{L}_p = 10 \log \left(\frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n 10^{L_{p_i}/10} \right) \quad (2)$$

The total absorption coefficient for a given room as a whole is useful in calculating the reverberation time of a room. The total absorption is a function of the absorption coefficient of the i th surface, α_i and the surface area of the i th surface, S_i . The total average absorption is determined using Equation 3³.

$$\bar{\alpha} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n S_i \alpha_i}{\sum_{i=1}^n S_i} \quad (3)$$

It is important to note that absorption coefficients vary with frequency⁸. 500-2kHz is the range at which sounds important to speech typically occur⁹. The sum of all the absorption coefficients and their respective surface areas is defined by A (Equation 4). Dividing the volume of the room by A and then multiplying that value by a constant result in the reverberation time or T (Equation 5)³.

$$A \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \sum_{i=1}^n S_i \alpha_i \quad (4)$$

$$T = 0.049 \left(\frac{V}{A} \right) \quad (5)$$

Note that the constant in Equation 5 is used for English units of V and A. The reverberation time is defined by the time required for the energy density in the acoustic field to reduce by a level 60 dB below its steady-state value⁸.

Materials and Method

Initial Fishbowl Measurements

To begin developing prototypes to help deter excess noise levels, there must be a better understanding of the vulnerabilities of the fishbowl (i.e. where sound is primarily coming from and what points within the fishbowl are more susceptible to sound propagation). ASTM standards have not been developed specifically for the measurement of fishbowls or even cubicles. However, we can develop a similar standard with known decibel measuring techniques for different applications as a reference.

For our experiment, the iNVH application software by Bosch¹⁰ was incorporated into a Samsung Galaxy s7 phone to record sound data. The application used with the Galaxy s7 allows for decibel measurements to be taken every 0.02 s, allowing for well-refined temporal data collection. However, the microphone is unidirectional which requires averaging over the orientation of the microphone to gather consistent sound data like the sound data averaging method in ASTM E1124-107¹¹.

The experiment involves a noise source placed in various areas of typical student and environmental noise generation, with the decibel measurement device placed in the fishbowl of interest to record data. The noise source is a constant sound played at a specific decibel level (75 dB). With a controlled sound level, the experiment can incorporate the ASTM E336-16 standard of known source level and simultaneous data collection to simulate sound loss between rooms effectively¹². The full procedure of the initial fishbowl measurements is outlined in Appendix 1.

Monolithic Wool Felt Treatment

Wool felt was investigated to see whether it is a viable material for mitigating unwanted noise. The wool felt serves as a lightweight sound-absorbing material. For this experiment, long monolithic wool felt sheets were draped along the walls of the fishbowl (Figure 5). Using monolithic wool felt was recommended by the ENVE 309 professor, Dr. Tracy Thatcher who had done work in previous years with her students on the exact fishbowls tested in this project.

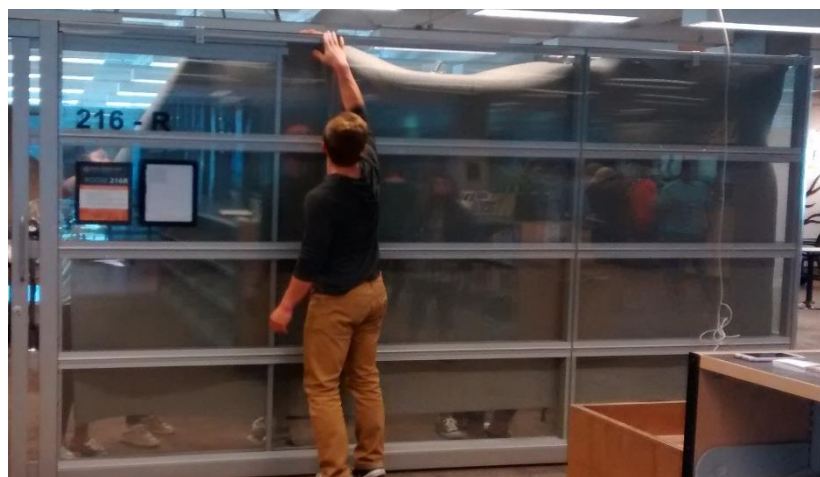


Figure 5. Wool felt being hung from the top of the fishbowl.

SoundPro 3M meters (Figure 6a) measuring in the 1000 Hz band were used to record sound pressure levels at the 8 locations in the fishbowl shown in Figure 6b.

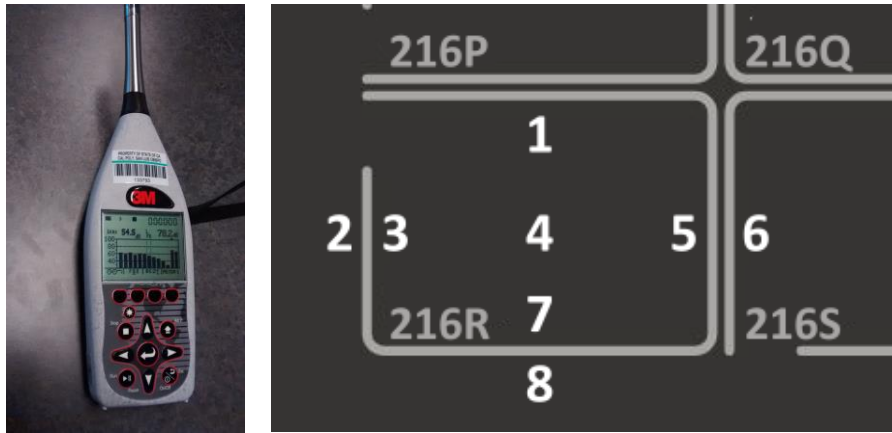


Figure 6. (a) Sound level meter implemented in testing. (b) Locations of eight sound level meters used for sound pressure measurements of fishbowl 216-R.

A 1000 Hz spherical sound source was placed inside and then outside the fishbowl for the sound measurements. Eight sound meters took simultaneous sound level measurements at 15 second intervals for 4 minutes. Three locations of sound sources (ambient, inside, and outside the fishbowl) were paired with two treatments (with and without the felt) for a total of six trials. Sound pressure levels and reverberation were measured, and average absorption coefficients were calculated. The complete outline of the procedure is described in Appendix 2.

Results and Discussion:

The initial fishbowl measurements determined that the fishbowl is more prone to transmitting unwanted sound at the faces of the fishbowl as opposed to its corners (Figure 7). This means that eliminating sound from the neighboring 216-S and 216-P fishbowls takes precedence over sound from 216-Q, which is contacting 216-R only by its corner.

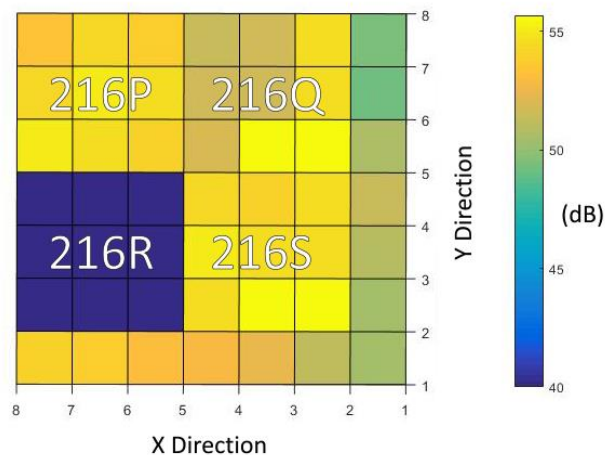


Figure 7. Average sound pressure levels based on location relative to 216-R for 75 dB sound source.

Knowing the weak points for sound transmission of the fishbowl allows the design process to focus on these points to target unwanted noise within the fishbowl.

The average sound pressure level was determined for all eight locations using Equation 2 and highlighted in Appendix 3b and 3c. Results of the monolithic wool felt experiment showed that the overall average sound pressure level decreased insignificantly in the fishbowl with and without the treatment (Figure 8).

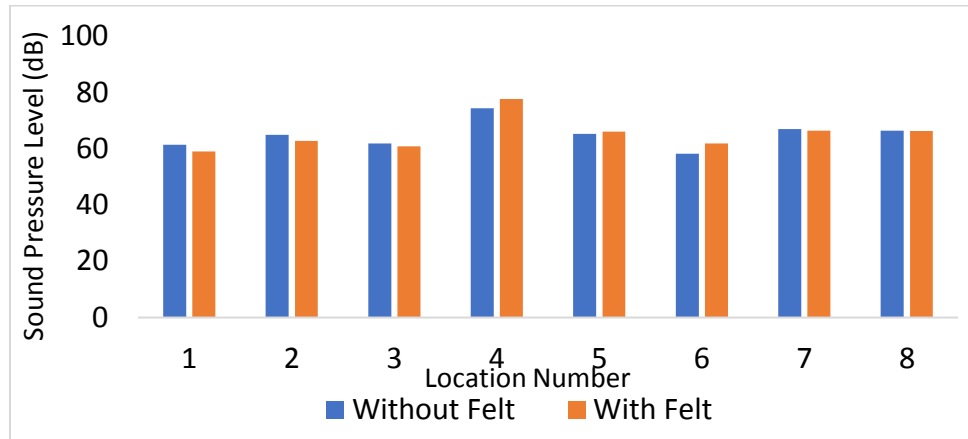


Figure 8. Sound pressure levels at different locations around the fishbowl with and without the monolithic wool felt treatment, with the sound source located outside the fishbowl.

The sound pressure levels remained relatively unchanged because administering felt to reduce reverberation does not account for sound transmission reduction, resulting in a minor change of overall noise reduction. However, noise reduction is not the only deciding factor for an effective treatment. Qualitatively, fishbowl users could hear a significant decrease in noise when the wool felt treatment was administered. This is due to the increase in average sound absorption by covering some of the hard surfaces in the room with the felt. This increase in sound absorption results in a lower reverberation time (Figure 9), which in turn results in higher sound quality within the fishbowl. The values of total average sound absorption and reverberation time were calculated using equations 3 and 4 and the resulting Excel worksheet is highlighted in Appendix 3a.

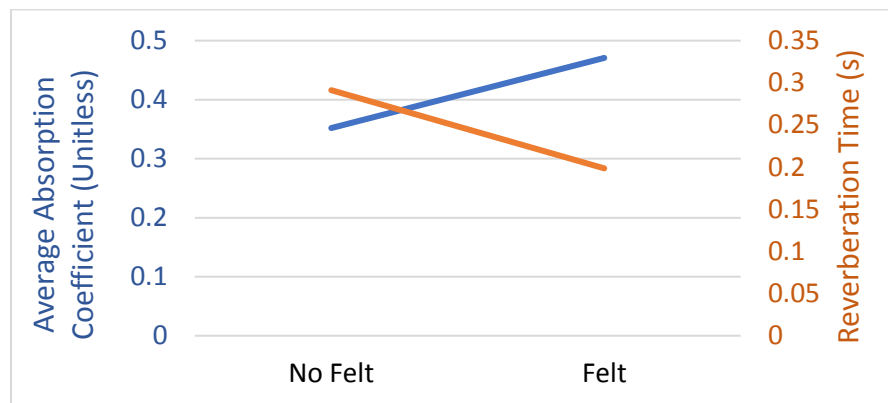


Figure 9. The average absorption coefficient and reverberation time within a fishbowl with and without the monolithic wool felt treatment.

Segmented Wool Felt Treatment

It was found from the monolithic wool felt treatment that felt can be used to improve the sound quality within fishbowls. However, the monolithic wool treatment obscures the transparent and airy qualities that define a fishbowl. This led to a segmented wool felt design that is hypothesized to be both aesthetically pleasing and acoustically satisfactory while attempting to preserve the transparent and airy characteristics of fishbowls. The prototype segmented design consists of many wool felt hexagons mounted on an acrylic frame (Figure 10a). The wavelength of sound for 500 to 2kHz is 27.01 and 6.75 inches respectively¹³. The wool felt hexagons were chosen to be 19 square inches to fit within the typical sound range's wavelengths. The frame (Figure 10b) allows individual two-dimensional wool hexagons to be bent into three-dimensional forms that help increase sound absorbance [akin to the foam “spikes” that often line the walls of anechoic chambers (Figure 10c)] and increase visual interest.

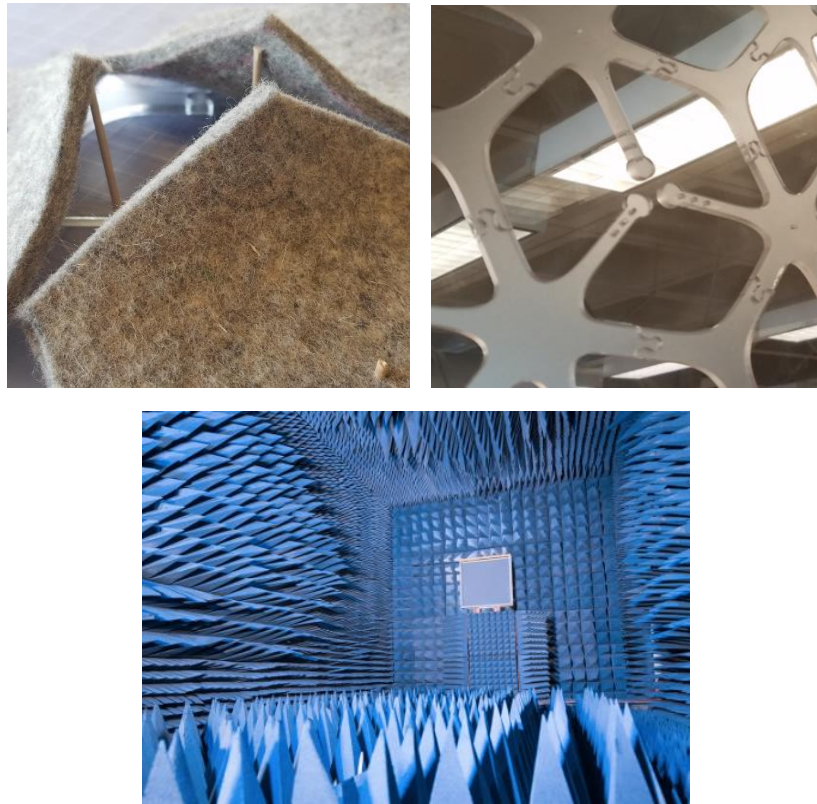


Figure 10. (a) Acrylic frame with wood attached to bend the hexagonal wool to allow the transmission of light. (b) Acrylic frame attached to the fishbowl glass walls. (c) The bent hexagons create a three-dimensional form that are intended to mimic foam “spikes” in an anechoic chamber. (From <http://kitsapcomposites.com/quality/inspection-testing/anechoic-chamber/>)

Design of the segmented wool felt treatment is inspired by a nucleation and growth approach: nucleation sites were chosen at random on each wall of the fishbowl. A felt hexagon is placed at each nucleation site, and a “colony” of felt hexagons is “grown” around each nucleation site (Figure 11). The prototype was modeled using *Rhinoceros* software, and the nucleation and the random growth script was developed using a plug-in called *Grasshopper*. The size and shape of the colonies are customizable with the script to try to preserve the transparent and airy nature of the fishbowl.

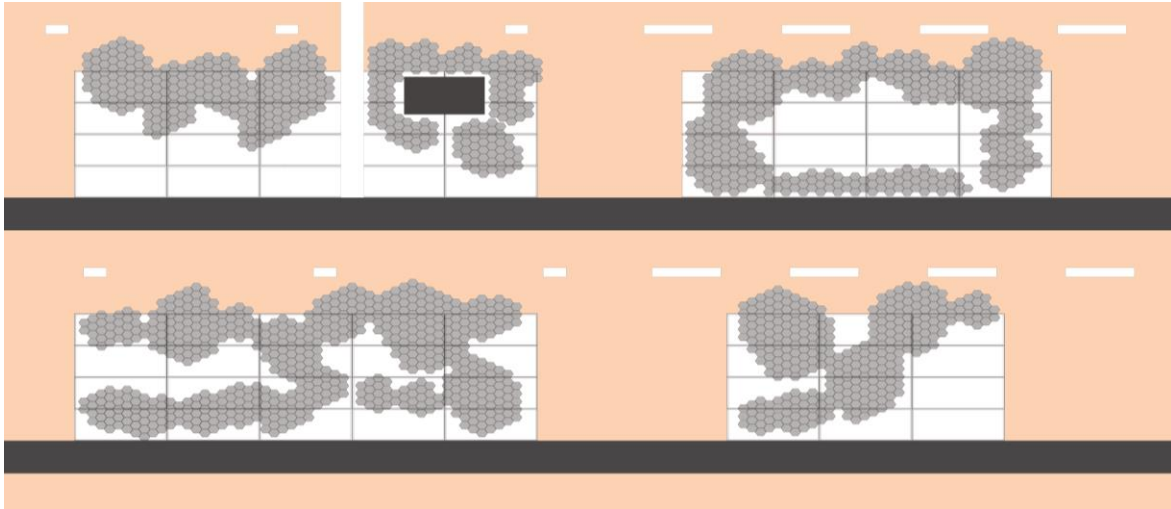


Figure 11. Rendering of nucleation and growth approach for segmented wool felt treatment, showing “colonies” of felt hexagons for each of the four walls of the fishbowl.

The segmented wool felt treatment can be mounted so that part of it reaches above the tops of the fishbowl walls. This serves to reduce reverberation time and sound transmission by partially absorbing sound that enters or exits the fishbowl from above. This treatment targets reduction of the five-foot air gap between the tops of the fishbowl walls and the ceiling by 17% to reduce sound transmission in and out of the fishbowl. Calculations were performed based on the surface area of the segmented wool felt treatment to determine its acoustic efficacy using Equations 3 and 4 highlighted in Appendix 3a. The treatment is expected to increase the absorption coefficient of the fishbowl and reduce the reverberation time within the fishbowl (Figure 12). This treatment will be installed in fishbowl 216-R during finals week of the Spring 2017 quarter.

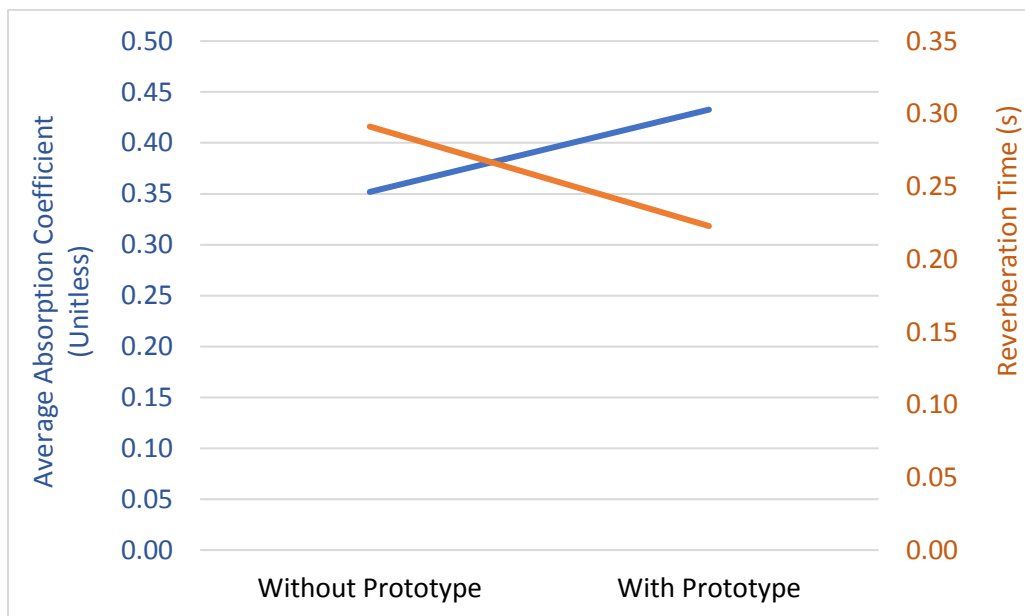


Figure 12. Calculated average absorption coefficient and reverberation time within a fishbowl with and without the segmented wool felt treatment.

Of the four walls indicated in Figure 13a, the segmented wool felt was applied to Wall 1 of fishbowl 216-R (Figure 13b). Due to limitations in laser jet cutting capacity, it is presently undetermined when walls 2-4 will have the segmented wool felt treatment installed.

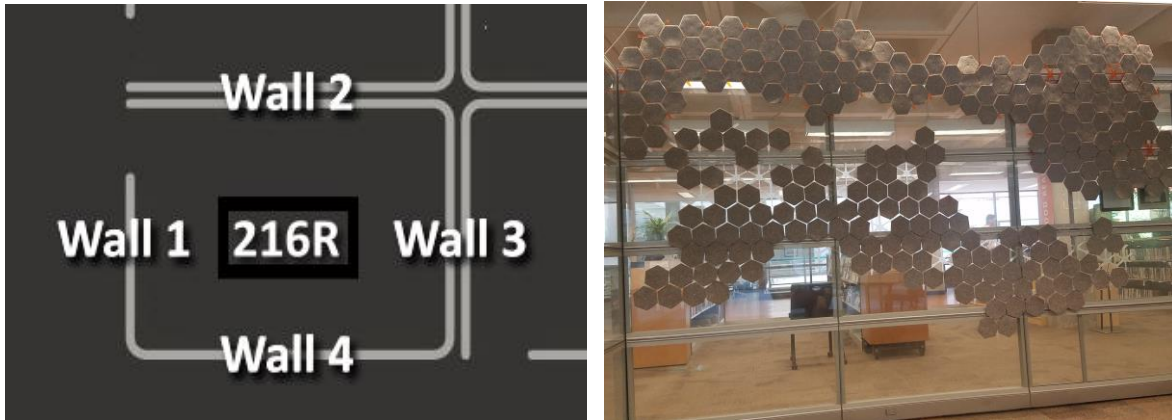


Figure 13. (a) 216-R wall designations for segmented wool felt. (b) Segmented wool felt treatment installed on Wall 1 of the 216-R fishbowl.

Wall 1 was tested according to the standard operating procedure for monolithic and segmented wool felt treatment testing (Appendix 2) with two sound meters facing Wall 1 two feet away from inside and outside the fishbowl, respectively, to determine the noise reduction with and without the segmented wool felt treatment (Figure 14).

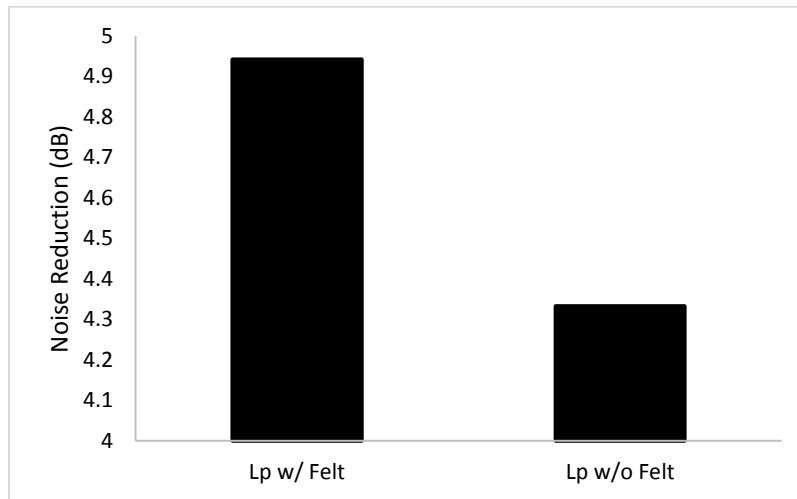


Figure 14. Noise Reduction of the entrance wall with and without the segmented wool felt treatment.

With the introduction of the segmented wool felt treatment on Wall 1, the sound pressure was reduced by 0.6 dB. Reduction of noise is primarily a factor of the concentration of sound blocking materials to mitigate sound transmission³. To further decrease noise, it is recommended to incorporate a greater amount of sound blocking elements compared to sound absorbing elements above the fishbowl walls in this treatment.

Conclusions:

1. Using a monolithic wool felt approach, a decrease in reverberation time of 70 ms was achieved within the fishbowl.
2. The segmented wool felt treatment results in a noise reduction of 0.6 dB more from the outside of the fishbowl to the inside of the fishbowl compared to without the segmented wool felt treatment.
3. Reducing the air gap at the top of the fishbowl walls with sound absorbing and sound blocking materials reduces the sound transmission between the outside and inside of the fishbowl.

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14. Daniel, E. *Noise and Hearing Loss: A Review* 2007, (Accessed Nov. 12, 2016).

Appendix 1:

Standard Operating Procedure for Initial Fishbowl Experiment

1. Check that the iNVH software calibration is reset to ensure consistent data collection.
2. Check that the volume of the noise source is at 75 dB using the iNVH meter. Adjust volume if necessary.

The fishbowl that will act as the receiver in the experiment will be 216-R (Figure A1). 216-R has been chosen as the fishbowl of interest because it is closest to Julian's Cafe which through observation generates a large amount of unwanted noise.

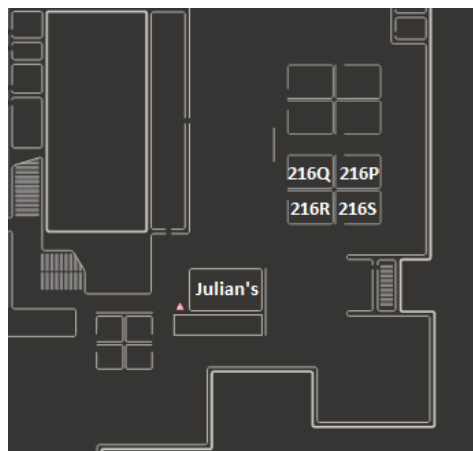


Figure A1. Location of fishbowl 216-R in relation to Julian's Cafe and fishbowls 216-P, 216-Q, and 216-S on the second floor of the Robert E. Kennedy Library.

3. Place the sound source.
 - a. For adjacent fishbowl testing: Begin at 216-Q and place the sound source facing 216-R in the middle of the room at approximately 4 feet above the floor.
 - b. For fishbowl testing of outside noise: Begin along the line of columns closest to Julian's (starting point circled in Figure A2.) approximately 4 feet above the floor.

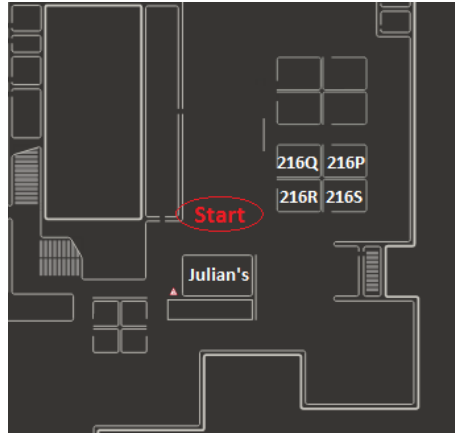


Figure A2. Starting position of outside noise testing experiment.

4. The Samsung Galaxy s7 will be placed initially in the middle of 216-R (position 1 in Figure A3) at approximately 4 feet above the floor (average ear position for a seated person) with the microphone facing down. Gather data for positions 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 for each sound source position.
 - a. For each sound data measurement record 0.5 s of data with the phone's screen facing North, South, East, and West.

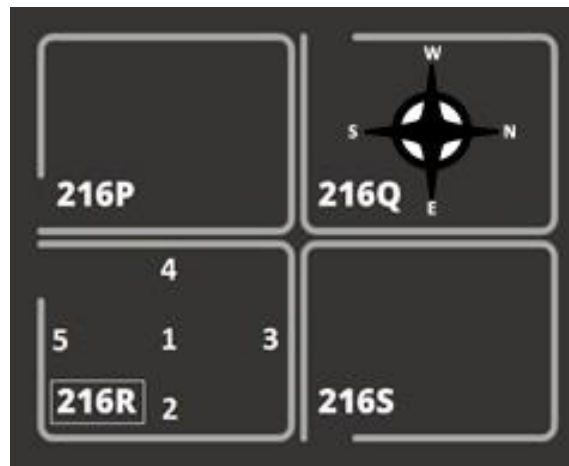


Figure A3. Fishbowl 216-R with numbers referring to the positions where data is recorded as well as the order in data is recorded.

5. Move sound source along path and collect data
 1. For adjacent fishbowl testing: Place source at 216-Q, then 216-P, and finally 216-S
 2. For fishbowl testing of outside noise: Follow source path highlighted in Figure A4 and stop every 5 feet to record sound level for 3 seconds.

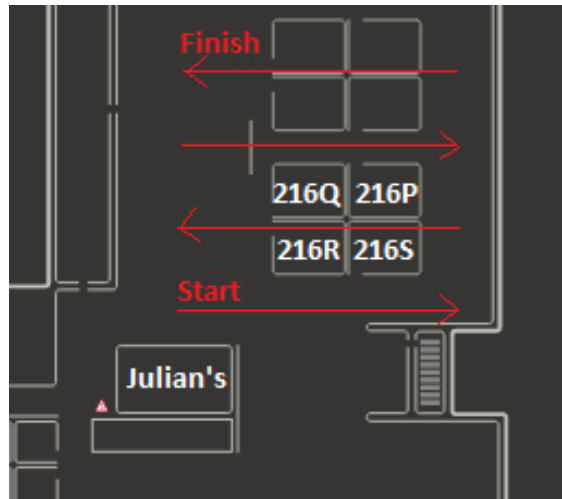


Figure 4. Start and finish path of outside noise experiment.

Note: Safety precautions for the experiment relate to sound levels on the ear. However, no ear protection is required because the maximum dB level the experimenter will be exposed to is far below the minimum threshold for ear damage (<110 dB)¹⁴.

Appendix 2:

Standard Operating Procedure for Monolithic and Segmented Wool Felt Treatment Testing

The purpose of this experiment is to determine if wool felt covering the walls of the library fishbowls produces better sound quality compared to the fishbowl without any wall covering.

The fishbowl of interest is 216-R. Nine sound meters will take simultaneous sound level measurements in 15 second intervals for four minutes totaling 16 data points per location. The sound meters will be positioned based on Figure B1. The position of each individual meter will be approximately six inches from the wall at waist level facing the wall.

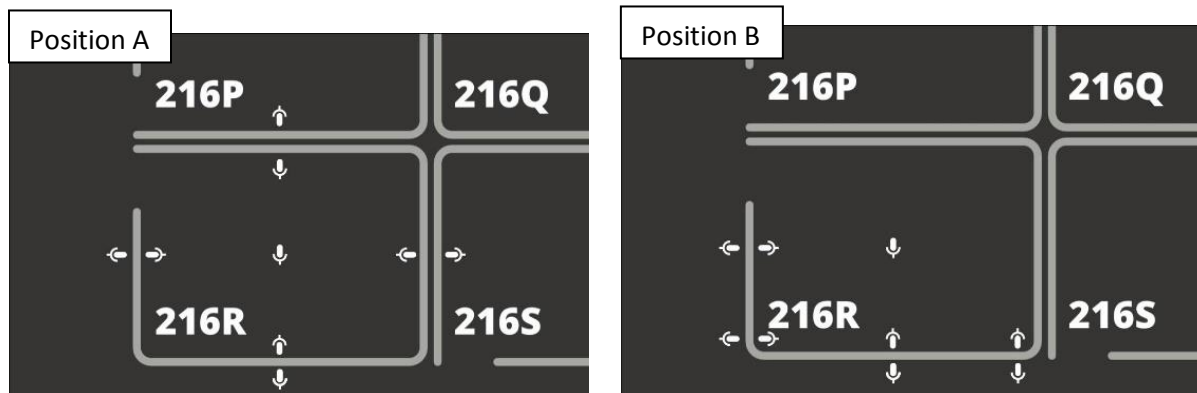


Figure B1. Fishbowl sound meter layout. If access to 216-P and 216-R is possible, use position A layout. If not, use position B layout. If only one of either 216-P or 216-R is available, employ a combination of Position A and B.

The 1000 Hz band will be the frequency of interest for recording measurements. The 1000 Hz band was achieved using the sound source indicated in Figure B2. Trials consist of recording measurements without a speaker, with the speaker positioned outside the fishbowl, and with the speaker in the center of the fishbowl. These three trials will be conducted with and without the treatment, totaling six trials. When the speaker is outside the fishbowl it should be approximately six feet away from the center of the wall containing the fishbowl entrance. The door of the fishbowl is closed when conducting the experiment.



Figure B2. Sound source used to drive 1000 Hz band frequency.

d. Raw data, Lp average, and noise reduction with/without segmented wool felt

	Measured Data		$10^{(Lp/10)}$		Location	Lp Average	
	Lp w/ Felt (dB)	Lp w/ Felt (dB)	Lp w/ Felt (dB)	Lp w/o Felt (dB)		Lp w/ Felt (dB)	Lp w/o Felt (dB)
Inside	69	73	7943282.3	19952623.1	Inside	71.1023842	74.58083
	72	75	15848932	31622776.6	Outside	66.1603815	70.248479
	73	76	19952623	39810717.1			
	68	76	6309573.4	39810717.1	Noise Reduction		
	70	77	10000000	50118723.4	Lp1-Lp2	Lp w/ Felt (dB)	Lp w/o Felt (dB)
	69	71	7943282.3	12589254.1	Inside-Outside	4.94200265	4.3323515
	74	73	25118864	19952623.1			
	70	72	10000000	15848931.9			
Outside	63	66	1995262.3	3981071.71			
	66	58	3981071.7	630957.344			
	65	70	3162277.7	10000000			
	69	69	7943282.3	7943282.35			
	68	75	6309573.4	31622776.6			
	66	71	3981071.7	12589254.1			
	64	70	2511886.4	10000000			
	65	69	3162277.7	7943282.35			