



**Being Black at Duke:
Partnering with Black students to learn
about their campus experiences**

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Duke University Libraries



To learn more, see full report:

bit.ly/BlackStudentReport



BACKGROUND

Inspiration and methodology

USER STUDIES

2016-
2018

1G students

2018-
2020

Black students

2020-
2022

International
students

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

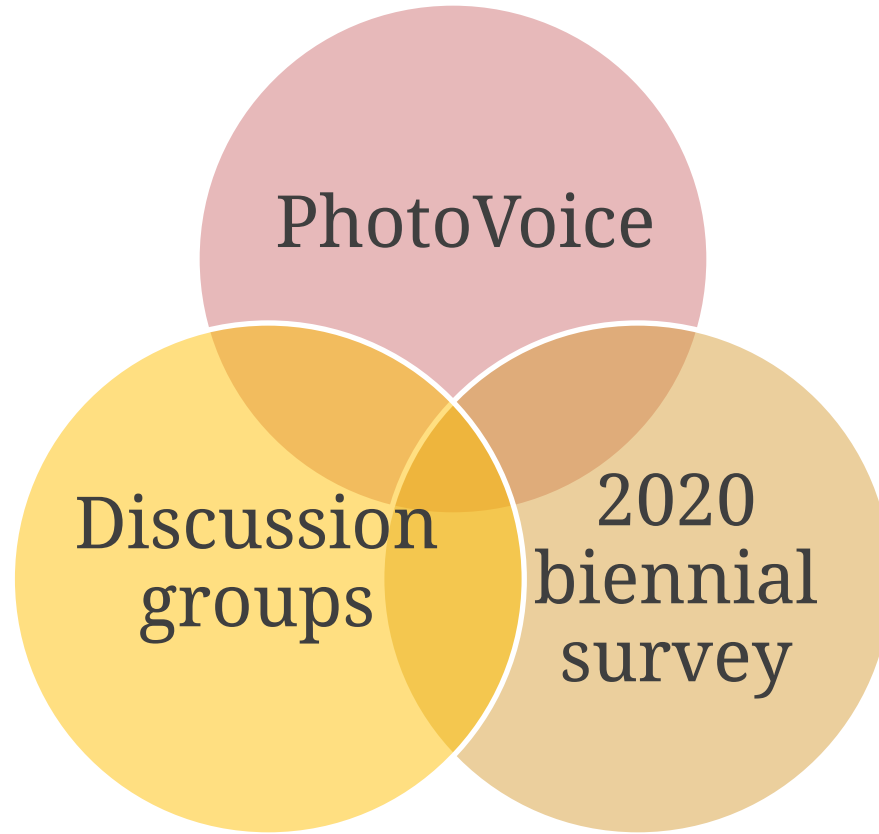
Experiences on campus

- To what extent do Black students consider Duke University to be inclusive?
- What services and spaces help students feel supported?
- Do Black students experience microaggressions in Durham, at Duke, or in the Libraries?

Experiences with the library

- To what extent do Black students consider the library to be inclusive?
- What library services and spaces do students find useful?
- What changes could the Libraries make to ensure that Black students feel supported and welcome?

STUDY DESIGN



PhotoVoice

Discussion
groups

2020
biennial
survey

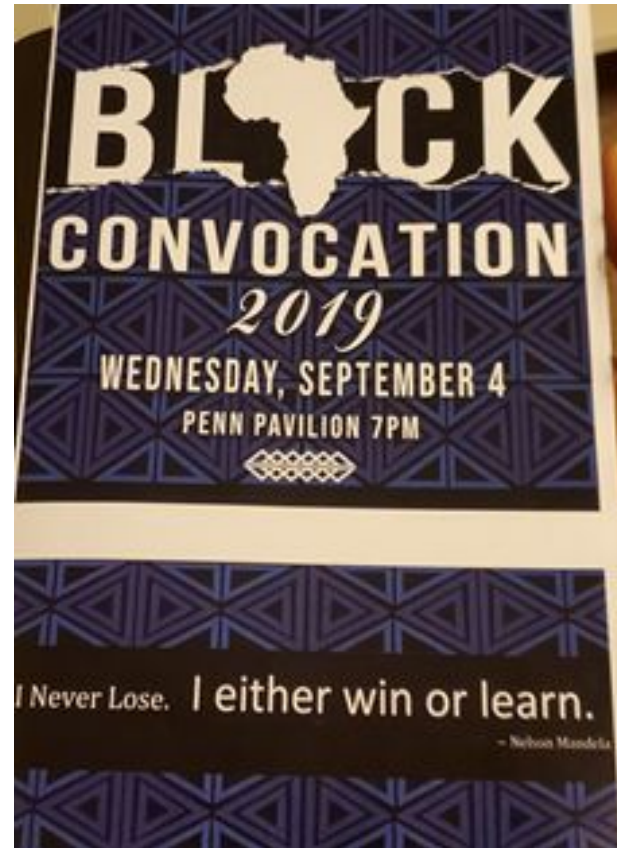
PHOTOVOICE

- Qualitative community-based **participatory research method** originating in global public health
- Participants take **photos** ahead of time in response to a series of prompts
- In group discussion, participants view all photos, and **conversation is driven by photo content**, not a script directed by a moderator

PROMPTS

- ❑ What makes you feel supported, safe, or like you belong on **campus**? (and in the **Libraries**?)
- ❑ What makes you feel unsafe or unsupported on **campus**? (and in the **Libraries**?)
- ❑ What **library services** (e.g., study spaces, research materials, visits from a librarian to your class, workshops, and other programs) do you use and find helpful?

SUBMISSIONS



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Have you experienced microaggressions or bias in your **time at Duke**? Take a moment to **write your thoughts** about microaggressions or bias at Duke on the blank paper in front of you. Then we'll discuss as a group.
- Based on your experience, how might the **library** be more supportive, welcoming, or inclusive of Black students?

PEER MODERATION

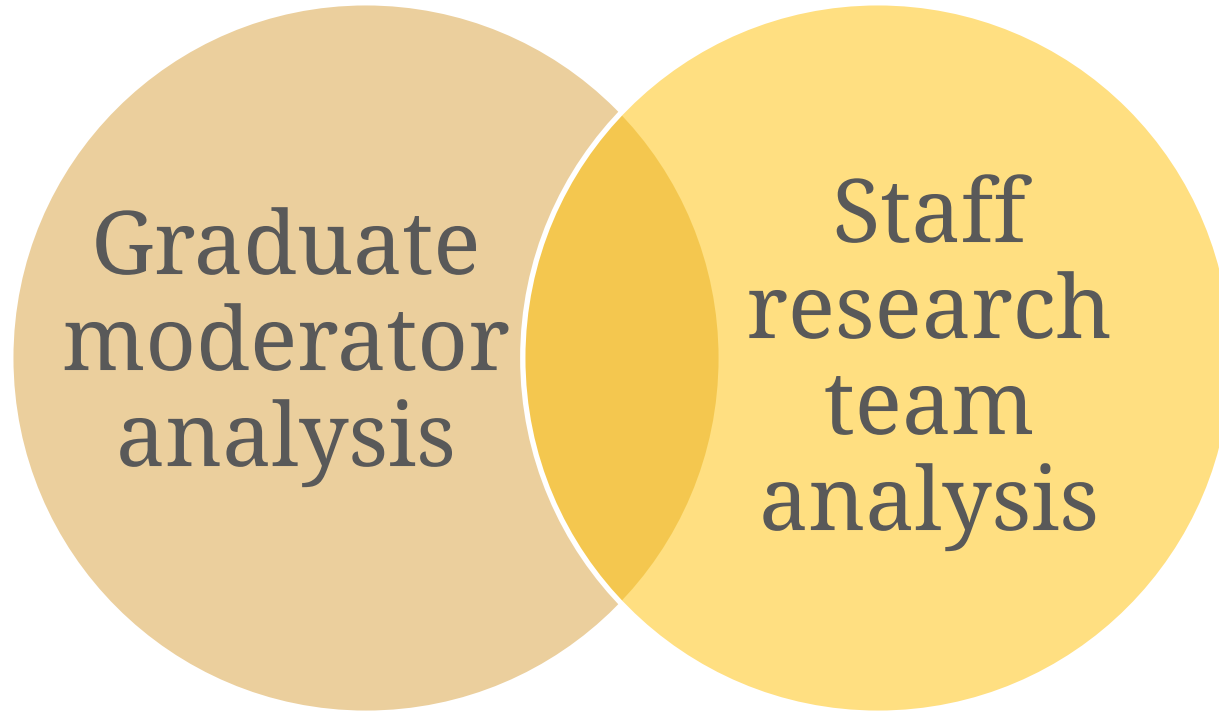
Problem

- ❑ Did not want to have White people lead the discussions
- ❑ Our dept has no Black staff
- ❑ We didn't want to ask other library staff to spend extensive time on project

Solution

- ❑ Recruited Black graduate student moderators with experience in qual research
- ❑ From Psych & Neuroscience, Sociology, Cul Anth depts
- ❑ Peers x 2: Duke students and Black
- ❑ Very successful!

ANALYSIS



Graduate student moderator's report: <https://dukespace.lib.duke.edu/dspace/handle/10161/20251>

RECRUITMENT



Undergraduates
Graduate students

INCENTIVES



Created by Max Hancock
from Noun Project



FINDINGS

Based on report and affinity mapping

**To what extent are Duke
University and Duke Libraries
viewed as inclusive spaces?**



Duke is a historically White space

- ❑ Campus culture, curricula, and spaces center White experiences, history, and values
- ❑ Systemic bias in the classroom
- ❑ Students experience microaggressions constantly
- ❑ Bias reinforces the idea that their belonging at Duke is qualified



Overall positive view of Libraries

- ❑ Libraries meet diverse learning needs
- ❑ Numerous services and resources are valued
- ❑ Some negative interactions with students/staff
- ❑ Some aspects of library spaces are unwelcoming, particularly those that center White history and culture



Duke and DUL, while not perceived as actively hostile or racist, are complicit in their silence

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**What does it mean to be
Black at Duke?**

“

*It's like I have to prove
something to somebody: I'm
here for the same reason that
you are.*

“

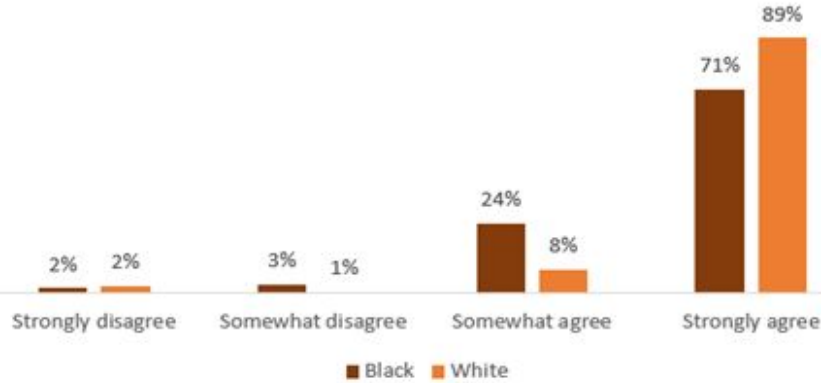
Students don't take it upon themselves to get educated about the Other. The only time my classes are predominantly Black is if it is an AAAS class. But I walk into my AAAS classes and I see people who already know what's going on...People who do need this class, they aren't going to take it. They don't care.

“

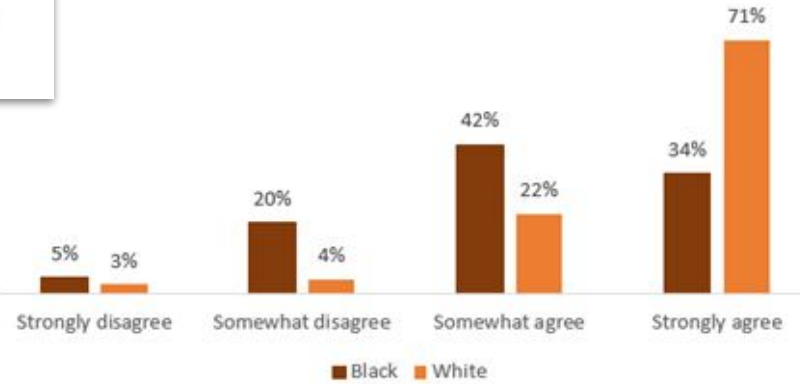
*I don't see an active attempt to make it welcoming.
Depending on...what your experience has been like as a
Black student on campus, I think there would need to be a
purposeful and very explicit attempt to make it welcoming.
Not to say there's a malicious attempt to make it
unwelcoming.*

SURVEY DATA

I feel safe from discrimination, harrassment, and emotional and physical harm at **Duke Libraries**



I feel safe from discrimination, harrassment, and emotional and physical harm at **Duke University**



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**Systemic injustice
perpetuated through the
curriculum**

“

We were absent in the scholarship. Not just Black people – any people of color. And when it was there, it was highly problematized...Every time people of color are mentioned, it's in some kind of negative context. We're deficient in some sort of way.



In my program, we are often looking at regressions in which race is a factor. And the way that professors interpret the coefficients on that is lazy, or sloppy...Being Black is related to other variables in the regression like education, wealth...My program is [a high percent] international students, a group of people who don't have exposure to Black people, and they will just receive this as 'Black people means less X, Y, Z.'

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**On White and Western
dominance of physical
spaces**

GOTHIC READING ROOM



PhotoVoice caption on image of Gothic Reading Room:
“concentrated white dominance”

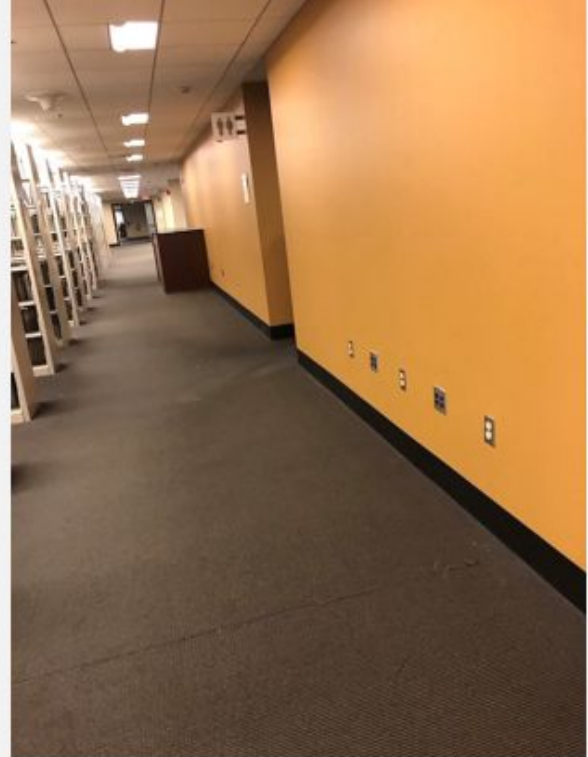


In the library at the [professional] school, there's this room...A bunch of huge paintings of old White guys...It means something...the absence of other people being represented in this school says a lot. If they wanted to do something about it they could...There have been people of color who've been through Duke and have gone on to do great things.

PHOTOVOICE

P13

Picture of the 3rd floor library bookcases. Walking around literature dedicated to Western European thought can be alienating. Sometimes an emphasis on monumental contributions from other places of the world (i.e. Africa) would come off as more inspiring.



**How spaces and services
help students feel supported**

AFFINITY SPACES

Community space and representation.

P1 & P2

Having spaces such as the Mary Lou Williams Center for Black culture makes me feel more included on campus. This is because it highlights and celebrates what it means to be Black in the United States, which is usually not as prolific at Predominantly White Universities (PWI).



“

First semester sophomore year when I was [at the library] really late, there was this one security guard who I saw just going around and around, and each time he would wave. Then I was studying there just two nights ago, I just saw him again and he waved, and it just felt really good.

“

The staff is very nice and very welcoming...They're always cracking jokes, or just always there to help me. That's what makes me feel like I belong.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on findings

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ❑ Increase **diversity of Duke University Libraries staff.**
- ❑ Dedicate a **library space to Black scholarship.** Include art, photographs, or exhibits related to Black culture and history – at Duke or in Durham, or internationally. Highlight library resources from Black scholars.
- ❑ Develop library security staff orientation: provide information about the **important role security staff members' behavior plays** in students feeling welcome or unwelcome.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ❑ Charge a group to further explore use of **library spaces by fraternities**.
- ❑ Increase **portraits, artwork, photographs, or other visual representations of people of color** to balance the number of portraits of white people in library spaces, including the renovated Lilly Library.
- ❑ Work with Black students and faculty to develop more exhibits and events that highlight **Black students' experiences and Black scholarship**.

SHARING FINDINGS

- Duke Libraries **staff discussions**
- Conversations with **campus stakeholders**
- Presentations at local and national conferences
- **Implementation team** formed to move recommendations forward

ACCOUNTABILITY



?

QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION

THANKS!

More info about this study or other user studies:

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