Assessing the Needs of Users with Disabilities in Pursuit of More Accessible, Inclusive Libraries

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PRESENTATION PLAN

- Background
- Goals for this study
- Methods
- Findings
- Recommendations and next steps
Background
In-Depth User Studies

- User study of 1G undergraduates (2017)
- Mixed methods study of Black undergraduate and graduate students (2019)
- COVID pause
- User study of international students (in progress)
How this study came about

- Heard feedback about accessibility of library services and spaces from 2020 student survey
- Paused study of international students
- Conducted interviews by Zoom for convenience, safety, and increased access
- Learned about users’ experiences with campus and the library during the height of the pandemic
Goals for this study
Research Questions

- To what extent are Libraries supportive of disabled users, caregivers, and allies?
- How might library staff make library spaces, web interfaces, collections, and services more supportive for these users?
Goals

- Deepen our understanding of current services
- Assess effectiveness of services and spaces for users with disabilities, including allies and caregivers
- Recommend improvements or new services
Methods
Learning from others

- Literature review
- Environmental scan
- Campus groups, including Student Disability Access Office, Duke Disability Alliance, and Disability and Access Initiative
Informational Interviews and Previous Assessment

- Spoke with leaders of campus disability groups to gather info about community and previous assessment work at Duke
- Reviewed results from a 2018 Accessibility Survey distributed by Duke Disability Alliance
- Survey data was helpful to gain context for general accessibility issues at Duke, but Libraries were rarely mentioned by respondents
Survey Design

- Demographics (status at Duke, disability status)
- Library usage (which libraries, how often)
- Barriers to visiting libraries
- Satisfaction with physical spaces
- Satisfaction with remote or online services
- Additional comments
Feedback/Distribution

- Received input on survey draft from Dr. Marion Quirici and Duke Disability Alliance students
- Dr. Quirici and DDA helped distribute survey via mailing list and social media
- Also sent to library staff for redistribution, advertised on library social media
- Survey ran from Feb. 8th to March 1st
- Incentive: drawing for $50 Amazon Gift Card
Survey Analysis

- Total responses: 90
- Descriptive statistics for quantitative data
- Manually coded free-text comments (~60 comments across 6 questions)
- Synthesized into themes/recommendations
Semi-Structured Interviews

- Welcoming spaces
- Campus accessibility
- Library accessibility
Interview Participation and Analysis

- 37 Survey participants volunteered for follow-up interviews
- 20 completed screener survey
- Invited three groups:
  - Individuals with disabilities (2 interviews)
  - Caregivers/family members (1 interview)
  - Allies (1 interview)
- Length: 30–60 minutes
- Incentive: $15 Amazon Gift Card per person
Affinity mapping to analyze interview data

- Team gathered in person and online to review transcripts
- Identified key quotes and comments
- Developed high-level themes (e.g., spaces, technology/digital resources)
- Used Miro board to categorize comments by theme, color coded by user group
Findings
Survey Demographics: Is it a disability?
Campus Themes

- Duke’s elite campus culture is generally not inclusive
- The built environment of campus is not accessible for people with physical disabilities
- University systems and policies are difficult to navigate for people with disabilities
“Another part of the culture [at Duke] is doing so much all the time...it’s really not feasible for a lot of neurodivergent people and then they’re kind of shamed for not being able to take on as much. Or alternatively, you just take on that much and then it breaks you down...it makes you feel like not wanting to share if you’re struggling with something.”
“The lack of knowledge of resources has made me feel unsupported, like if I don’t know what resources are available, or I’m not well versed in them, it can be hard for me to support other people.”

INTERVIEWEE WHO IDENTIFIES AS AN ALLY
Library Themes

- The Libraries are generally seen as more inclusive than broader campus
- Space needs vary widely from person-to-person, so having a broad variety of findable spaces is key
- Communicating available spaces, policies, and services is important but challenging
- Explicit efforts to be welcoming to people with diverse needs are appreciated
“I don’t think [the library] is inherently inaccessible, but I do not think it is accessible. I think it’s kind of neutral. And that it’s there, and a lot of disabled people choose not to use it, because it’s not additionally accessible. I wish they had more materials to provide for people with disabilities...or at least a space where disabled people can study and feel like they are surrounded by people who will be respectful.”

INTERVIEWEE WHO IDENTIFIES AS DISABLED
“Many spaces in [the library] have noisy ventilation systems. For someone wearing hearing aids, this can be very disruptive.”

“Emphasis on quiet on every level makes it extremely hard for me to study while having tics without a study room, which is often already booked. I am afraid of being asked to be quiet or being stared at by other students.”

COMMENTS FROM TWO SURVEY RESPONDENTS
Recommendations and next steps
Update relevant info on library website

- More details about services for users with disabilities
- Access to buildings and collections
- Access to online resources and virtual assistance
- Point of contact for users
Improve access to study spaces for users’ diverse needs

- Address complexity of library study “zones”
- Help users more easily connect with spaces that meet their needs
Longer-Term Recommendations

- Create alternatives to “oppressive quiet” spaces for solo study
- Provide sensory-friendly spaces and resources (e.g., fidget spinners, stress balls, audiobooks, large print signage)
- Increase outreach to users who might benefit from services and spaces
Next steps

- Charge team to consider findings and recommendations
- Review findings with disability community at Duke
- Communicate outcomes to library and campus stakeholders
DUKE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

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