Sense of Belonging: fostering inclusion in U-M Library Physical Spaces

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Team Introduction

- U-M Library aspires to create physical and virtual spaces that are accessible, welcoming, and affirming to all, while actively seeking to identify and eliminate barriers to access, real and perceived.

- The Sense of Belonging Working Group was created as part of the library's continued commitment to create inclusive spaces.

Different Roles on the Team

- Project team to research and pilot new ideas for space improvement, building on different outreach initiatives team members have been part of in the past.
- Goal to improve connection with groups less likely to view the library as a place they belong.

- Librarians and staff from:
  - Dean's office
  - Accessibility
  - Outreach and Engagement
  - Learning, programs and initiatives
  - Access and Fulfillment
  - Facilities
  - Creative Spaces

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Initial Accomplishments

Creating a Pilot Program

- Provide student organizations consistent study space

- Use staff meeting spaces after hours
    - First year: 4 Groups signed up
    - Second year: 33 groups expressed interest, 16 signed up for use of the space

- Student Employee Study Space

What we learned:

- Directly connect with orgs via trusted partnerships

- Logistics and communication take time

- Student org groups agreed that having access to the space enhanced the community feel of their Student Org

- Student employees less likely to drop in study time

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Using Spaces in Different Ways

Study Spaces for Student Orgs

Making our spaces more sensory-friendly

- They're not right now - we have a lot of really busy spaces, quiet spaces are in high demand

Student Engagement Fellow

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Sensory-friendly Spaces

- Campus space limitations
- Focus group study design
- Emerging themes
- What's actionable?
- Sensory items & Student feedback

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Campus Space Limitations

- We aim to serve all students and don't require proof of diagnosis to offer accommodations/supports
  - SSD affiliated requires diagnosis
  - This can be associated with difficulties, stress and <u>interrogation of disability status</u>

- Bookable rooms often are confusing for students to navigate, don't serve on-the-fly studying habits, and would often get monopolized

- In general, students often reported "settling" for an open space that doesn't meet their needs due to an overall shortage of spaces within vicinity

Focus Group Study Design

- Key objectives was to help us learn:
  - How do students feel about the sensory spaces and resources offered on campus?
  - What kind of impact does the gaps in our sensory spaces and resources have on students?
  - How should future sensory friendly offerings be designed in a way that is visible and welcoming to students that may find them useful?
- Recruitment
  - Email outreach to campus organizations with focus on neurodivergence advocacy, promotion through SSD, library email list
  - Interested participants filled out a screener indicating their year, conditions, environmental needs, and spectrum across hypersensitivity or hyposensitivities
- SSD carrels QR code surveys were posted also for feedback right now

Focus Group Study Design

- Recruitment goals
  - 6-8 participants for each of the 3 focus groups
- Recruitment outcomes!
  - 100+ sign ups in less than a week
  - 1 virtual, 2 in-person focus groups conducted with respectively 5-7 range turnout each
  - Equal sampling of identities - we invited 3 of each regarding:
    - What they indicated for year in school
    - If they identified as neurodivergent - yes, no, unsure
    - If they struggle with concentration
  - 18 participants total across all focus groups
  - Those who couldn't come to focus groups were interviewed individually - 4 students

Emerging Theme 1

- Where there's ambiguity of feelings of belonging, visible and explicit statements create reassurance students are welcome
  - Value in dedicating spaces for hyposensitivities and stating that activity is encouraged
    - "I have a lot of issues with fidgeting, keeping my mind focused, picking things up, and making sounds. I don't want to be distracting."
  - Value in stating all are welcome when space can be interpreted to be dedicated for specific identities
    - "Am I needing the space as much as someone else?" - usually with labels intertwined with needs (SSD, CAPs, sensory) as opposed to behavior (collaborative, quiet)

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Emerging Theme 2

- Predictability of needs and how they can be met is challenging when both students' needs and space stimuli are constantly shifting -> "settling"
  - The same student's sensory needs can vary based on task
    - "I'm very particular with how I like my study environments - some days where I like a little noise. There's some days where I can't have any noise. There's some days where I can't study around other people. It just depends on a daily basis."
  - The same space's presence or lack of sensory stimuli vary based on people
    - "First time I went to the Fishbowl, it was super quiet. Then I went the next day and it was really loud."
    - Students do not want the burden of regulating their peers for predictability

Emerging Theme 3

- Discovery of spaces are passive leading to the same spaces being very popular despite not meeting all of sensory needs
    - Word of mouth, buildings where their classes are, signage
        - "People tell me about a new one, I always go try it because the study space I have right now… there's no perfect one."
    - Students feel anxiety about a potential new space opening up being too popular
        - Suggestion that underused or older areas could be converted into sensory-friendly spaces as new or renovated spaces naturally attract attention and use

Actionable? Piloting of a new space?

- Visible and explicit statements that create reassurance students are welcome
  - Recommendation for those looking for a space addressing opposite sensory needs

- New space offsets what current spaces offer in the types of sensory needs addressed to increase variety of choices
  - Ex. Spaces for hyposensitivities concentrated in an area with lots of spaces for hyper sensitivities

- Should be a regulation system (noise, capacity) where direct confrontation can be avoided for students
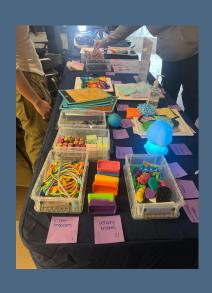 - Ex. noise level sensor

Sensory Items & Student Feedback

- Sensory kits help reduce sensory barriers in lieu of sensory-friendly spaces (they can also supplement more sensory-inclusive spaces)
  - A lot of our spaces are sensory overload spaces by design

- Ordered lots of sensory items and tabled them to get direct feedback and preferences from students
- Items range in senses:
  - Tactile, Proprioception, Visual, Auditory, Vestibular, Interoception

Sensory Items & Student Feedback

- Students would vote by tallying their favorites
- Overall, students gravitated testing items that are easily portable in this context
  - Magnet patties, hand rollers, visual timers, fidget spinners, infinity cubes, tangle toys
- Items that would get less feedback was not as covert
  - Textured pads, colored therapy glasses, happy light, sound machine, weighted lap pads

What's Upcoming

- Completing analysis and rounding out some final evaluations surveys

- Drafting and submitting proposals for sensory-friendly space and kits

- Reflecting on the year and final events

Student Employee Connections

- Creating connections for student employees

- Fostering a sense of community

    - Pilot of booking study space for student employees... didn't go as expected

- End of semester snack room and snack bags

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Employee Sense of Belonging

- We have focused a lot of our energy on the student experience and are now planning to spend some time on thinking about the employee experience.

- Aspiration: employees feel safe & seen, accepted & valued and able to express themselves authentically.
  - Connection, shared experience, well-being

- Pilot new supports? Interest group for discussion?
  - Mental Health SIG
  - Library Diversity Council
  - Employee Resource Groups

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Questions?

Sense of Belonging: fostering inclusion in U-M Library Physical Spaces

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