

Narratives of Access

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Introduction

This project focused on interviewing patrons with disabilities at a large academic library in order to understand their needs through the compilation of narratives.

Participants were encouraged to discuss their library experience through the lens of their disability and through their status as either undergraduates, graduates, or faculty/staff.

The narratives revealed a wealth of issues that need to be addressed but more importantly, the end of the interview process was also used as an educational pathway for pointing participants towards resources that already exist that they didn't know they had access to.

Questions Asked

Opening Question (Model the answer)

Tell us your name and an aspect of your disability that benefits you.

Introduction Question

When you think about libraries, what comes to mind?

Transition

Think back to the last time you were in any of the UIUC libraries, what was your experience like?

Key Questions

What are some of the barriers you have faced in getting what you need from the library?

Overall, what has been your experience with library workers (not including us)?

Overall, what has been your experience with the physical libraries?

What would make your library experiences easier?

What would make your library experiences more productive?

All things considered Question

Of all of the things that we have talked about today, what is the single most important to you?

Give Summary of Session including if there was material that was NOT mentioned that you had expected

Is this summary complete?

Is there anything we should have talked about but didn't?

Method

Interviews

Recruitment

- ❖ Email solicitations
- ❖ Posters distributed in densely populated student areas
- ❖ Word of mouth
- ❖ Monetary incentive was offered

Conducting Interviews

- ❖ Audio recorded via computer
- ❖ Between 35-85 minutes long
- ❖ A light snack and water were available
- ❖ Interviews were transcribed by graduate student
- ❖ Some participants followed up with email

Participants

- ❖ 8 in total
- ❖ Mix of ages and genders
- ❖ Four broadly defined disability groups: Autism, Mobility Impairment, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and Visual Impairment

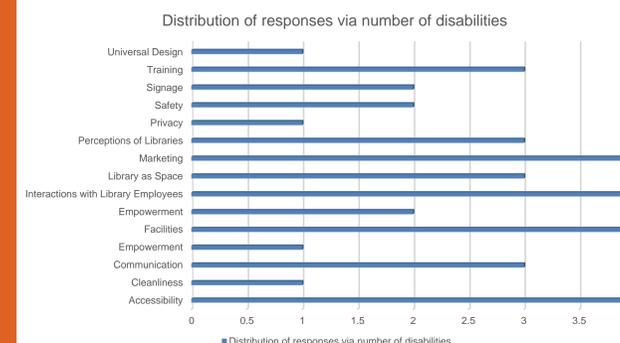
“I’ve seen incremental progress over time. I think I’ve mentioned that the workstations are still wonky. [The workstations] are still coming from the perspective that someone needs it there, but it’s not taking my needs into consideration. Progress, but not success.”

“The front door for someone with a disability is kind of a back or side door for everyone else.”

Results

Themes

1. Accessibility: Frustration with, Physical Concerns, Digital, and Suggestions
2. Cleanliness
3. Communications: Frustration with, Struggles with
4. Empowerment
5. Facilities
6. Hours
7. Interactions with Library Employees: Positive, Negative, Expertise needed
8. Library as Space
9. Marketing: How to reach, What needs to be done
10. Perceptions of Libraries
11. Privacy
12. Safety
13. Signage
14. Training
15. Universal Design



Conclusions

Lessons Learned:

1. Patron narratives are powerful in creating change.
2. Approached from a position of trust, patrons will open up and tell you exactly what is on their minds.
3. Patrons have clear ideas of what works for them and what doesn't and why.

Next steps include:

- ❖ Developing programs and services that generate greater acceptance, assistance, and flexibility in working with people with disabilities
- ❖ Continuing conversations with people with disabilities in order to generate more suggestions and feedback
- ❖ Formally evaluate current programs, services, and spaces

“I worry about needing things that already exist.”

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