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Evaluating the User Experience of Patrons with Disabilities at a Community College Library

CATHERINE PONTORIERO AND GINA ZIPPO-MAZUR

ABSTRACT

Community college libraries provide many different types of supports on their campuses. Are patrons with disabilities aware of the kinds of support and services a library provides? To answer this question, we created and administered a survey and held a focus group. Our results showed that in some ways patrons with disabilities used the library differently from patrons without disabilities. Our focus group revealed the importance of including the voices of patrons with disabilities when discussing the library-user experience. Most importantly, our research was conducted as part of a partnership between the library and the disability-services office on campus. This collaboration will increase access and communication between the library and patrons with disabilities.

INTRODUCTION

Our community college has open admission and serves a diverse student population, including students who may have never considered a college education. Our campus library is one of many crucial supports for academic coursework. Do patrons with disabilities take advantage of the type of support the library offers, and are they aware of this support? This paper seeks to answer these and other questions.

For our purposes, any reference to a disability has been self-reported by patrons who voluntarily took the survey. This may mean that there are patrons who have a disability but have not self-disclosed as such.

Throughout the article, we will use the terms *student* and *patron* interchangeably. People who took the survey may not always be a student enrolled in our academic programs, since the library is open to the public.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2016) reports that 11% of undergraduate students reported having a disability in 2011–2012. At Ocean County College, that number is 6% for the fall semester of 2017, which has been fairly consistent over the past five years despite the fluctuations in enrollment (OCC 2018). That is an important portion of our population.

The Office of Disabilities Services is located within the library building. This makes the library very visible to students with disabilities. However, there has been no data or discussion before this paper on whether this physical proximity has any effect on the user experience of those with disabilities. With this in mind, we developed a survey to review what patrons perceived about the library. Our results were fascinating and should inform larger discussions about library policy and collaboration between our two offices.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Much of the research we found references the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as this act was the impetus that sparked libraries in academic institutions in the United States to review how well they were or were not serving their patrons with disabilities. At the time, it seems that this challenge was met with resistance, as pointed out by JJ Pionke (2017) in his article “Toward Holistic Accessibility: Narratives from Functionally Diverse Patrons.” What is important to note is how much of the following literature written about this topic has been about people with disabilities and does not necessarily include their voices (Pionke 2017, 49).

As an example of this tendency to consider disability without consulting people with disabilities, look no further than an article on accessible design in libraries by Sue Samson (2011): “Best Practices for Serving Students with Disabilities.” In this article, Samson makes an effort to speak with librarians at eight academic institutions. While all seem to agree that “persons with disabilities are a minority group whose perspectives and needs are an important part of a diverse society,” none of the people involved think to consult people with disabilities in an article about serving students with disabilities (261). Instead, Samson recommends using ADA standards for testing whether or not your library is accessible, such as walking through your library wearing mittens to identify physical barriers to access. While access and accommodation is very important, and Samson’s article does a great job of breaking down the different kinds of accessibility in terms of universal design, it’s also important to listen to the voices of those with disabilities on campus.

Is this tendency to ignore disabled voices common? Heather Hill (2013) crafted a meta-analysis of published research about libraries and disabilities. Her work gives us a larger picture of the information already out

there. She found that a quarter of the articles discussed issues with accessibility and electronic resources. A full 41% of the articles focus on visual disabilities, and very little focus on learning or physical disabilities (140). While surveys were popular, following accessibility testing, she found the surveys “were generally focused inwardly on services and resources provided by libraries with few surveys focused outwardly toward users and their needs and wants” (140). This once again demonstrates that nondisabled library administrators tend to focus on their own perceptions and needs and what they think people with disabilities want or should have. The most startling statistic was that only 36% of the research included people with disabilities and involved accessibility testing or information-seeking research (140). She concludes that “there appears to be a lot of discussion about people with disabilities, but little direct involvement of these people in research” (141).

In a recent article, Kaufmann, Perez, and Bryant (2018, 2) state that the common theme between libraries and Disabilities Support Services (DSS) is that “our [DSS] work is access.” While the library seeks to provide information to all, DSS makes sure that information is accessible to all. The collaboration between the library and the DSS resulted in a specific software purchase and training for staff. They conclude that their collaboration “has inspired new dialogue and communication patterns in cross-disciplinary work” (13). This new association hopes to better serve the “influx of students with disabilities on college campuses,” and this article did speak to students after the new text-to-speech software was installed (13). However, the focus is not on their experiences.

The question is how to gauge the experiences and perceptions of people with disabilities. To us, the most obvious answer seems to be with a survey. In the article “Seeking Meaning: Capturing Patron Experience through a User Survey,” authors Miller and Hinnant (2016, 559) say a good survey can help collect data from a larger sample of an institution’s population. However, issues can exist in the questions being asked. Many library services focus on existing services, or items that are easy to identify, such as budgetary items, collections, or customer service. But what does that really tell us about the user experience and preference?

In the same article, Miller and Hinnant (2016, 560) define *user experience* as how a student feels about key library characteristics such as space and communication. Their survey asked questions such as “How would you describe the library as a place?” and “Thinking of the last time you were in the library, how did you feel?” (563). But they are quick to point out that a survey is just one tool to gather information and recommend things like focus groups, interviews, and usability testing (552). Indeed, they didn’t just offer their survey once but plan to administer it regularly (568). This implies that the work is not complete with a single survey but

requires constant vigilance and discussion to ensure the library is continuing to listen to other voices and make changes accordingly as accessibility standards are constantly changing.

ENVIRONMENT

Ocean County College is located in Toms River, New Jersey, which is in the eastern part of Ocean County, which consists of 638 square miles (County of Ocean 2009). In 2017, the population of Ocean County was 597,943, and of those, 8% under the age of sixty-five have a disability (US Census Bureau, n.d.). The environment is suburban, and there are limited public-transportation options, although a single NJ Transit bus route stops on the campus, right in front of the campus library.

The library is located in a three-story building at the edge of the first student parking lot on campus. The library itself consists of the top two floors, while the ground floor houses unrelated offices. Since the library sits at the front of the largest parking lot, it can be used as an accessibility option for patrons unable to walk up the two sets of stairs on either side of the building leading to the main area of campus. The building was last renovated in 1994.

The Office of Disability Services is located directly before the main entrance to the library, next to the elevator and the only set of automated doors to enter the library. The layout of the library is separated by cinder-block walls, which makes any kind of space or wall reconfiguration challenging. For example, no new electric outlets can be added to the floors, since they are all concrete.

The library houses over one hundred thousand items, with nine separate special-collection areas (children's literature; graphic novels; manga; mystery; LGBTQ; military history; chess; Middle Eastern Center; and Holocaust, genocide, and human-rights education) in addition to reference, government documents, and a small legal collection. DVDs are housed behind circulation along with the periodical back file. There are five full-time librarians.

Disability Services is located within the Center for Student Success. Disability staff works with students with disabilities to develop accommodation plans allowing academic adjustments, which minimize the impact of a disability in a learning environment. Students with documentation of a learning disability, medical/physical disability, visual or hearing impairment, and/or psychological/psychiatric disability must arrange disability services through the Center for Student Success.

METHODS

A twenty-one question survey was designed collaboratively by a reference librarian and the coordinator of disability services of Ocean County College, with input from the institutional research analyst. Our questions

were designed to determine the overall library experience of our patrons, and to see if patrons with disabilities felt differently about the library.

The survey was distributed in April 2018, the busiest month of the spring semester. Paper copies were available in the disability-services office and distributed during information-literacy classes. An online version was linked from the library website to increase access and visibility. Please see Appendix A for the survey.

After the survey was collected, we reached out to patrons who reported that they wished to be contacted. Three respondents agreed to participate in a focus group and were offered the incentive of pizza to participate.

RESULTS

A total of eighty-three surveys were completed. Of those, thirty-three respondents reported having a disability. Thirty percent of those with a disability divulged having autism spectrum disorder, making it the most common disability reported. Demographic information was placed at the end of the survey, so it would not influence the results as the users took the survey. Although we included an option for “other” under gender, none of the respondents reported to identify as other. Consequently, we divided the results into female without a disability/female with a disability and male without a disability/male with a disability.

First, we wanted to determine how often the respondents used the library and what particular services were used most often. We wanted to review whether patrons with disabilities used the library more or less often than patrons without disabilities. We also wanted to determine if there was a difference in the reasons why they were using the library.

We asked, “How often in the past three months have you used any library services?” A checklist was used to accurately measure which library service they used. Those choices included the following: checked out a book, read a magazine, read a graphic novel/manga, asked a librarian for research help, utilized the library’s online resources, put together a puzzle, played chess, used a study room, printed something, made a photocopy, used a scanner, and used a computer (see fig. 1). Our goal was to see how much traditional library services respondents were using in comparison to the nontraditional uses, like utilizing our puzzle or chess collections.

Both sets of data were combined into a single chart (see fig. 2). Patrons with disabilities who said they used the library more often used slightly more library services than did patrons who did not report a disability. The library services most used by patrons with disabilities are as follows: use a computer (10), print something out (9), use a study room (8), and use the library’s online resources (8). Among patrons without disabilities who use the library often, the most common uses are as follows: use a computer (9), print something (8), check out a book (6), and make a photocopy (4).

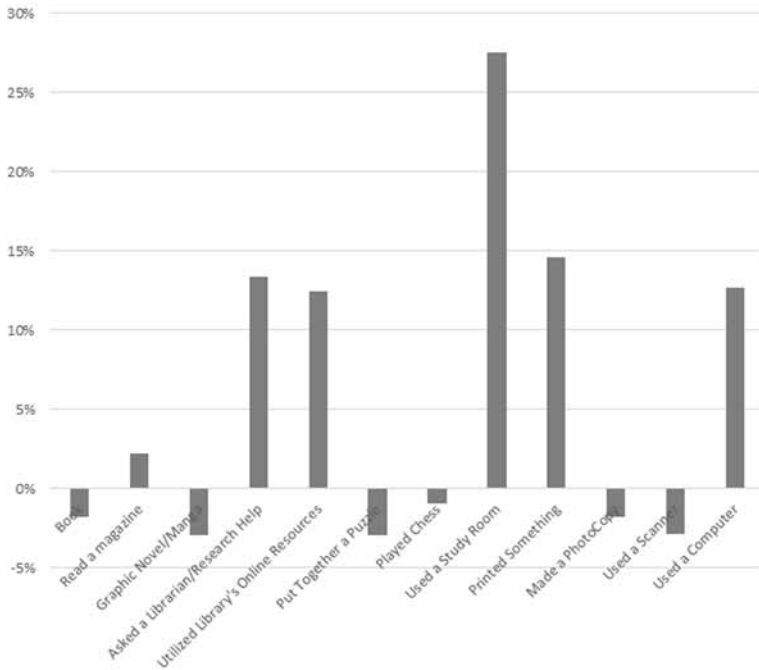
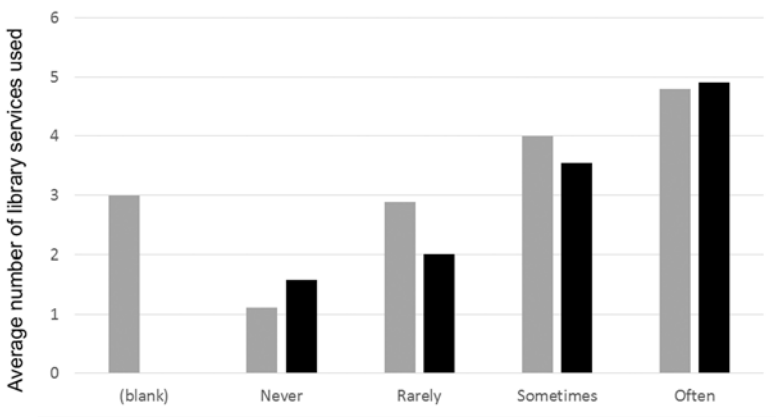


Figure 1. Those with disabilities are more/less likely to use a library resource



Grey represents student without a disability
 Black represents students with a disability

Figure 2. Number of Library services used

While both groups of patrons reported use of computers, it appears that patrons with disabilities use the library space more (use of study rooms and to use online resources), while patrons without disabilities use the library’s physical materials more (books, items to photocopy).

The next several questions were asked on a five-point Likert scale consisting of strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree. They were worded as statements so patrons could simply check whether or not they agreed with the particular statement. We divided the data by patrons with disabilities and those without, in addition to gender. These questions were developed to determine the user experience of patrons, so they were worded to tease out how patrons felt about the space, staff, resources available, and communication.

The first question asked if the library was inviting (see table 1). We wanted to test how the respondents felt about the library, if the library as a space was a place that made them want to come in. The majority of respondents agreed, with no significant difference between patrons with disabilities and those without. However, since this survey was primarily offered in the library and in DS, these patrons were most likely inclined to be in that space.

Table 1. Responses to the statement: *The library is inviting.*

Demographics	No Data*	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Female							
No (Do not have a disability)			1	2	9	12	24
Yes (Reported having a disability)				1	9	5	15
Male							
No (Do not have a disability)	1		1	8	12	4	26
Yes (Reported having a disability)				1	10	7	18
Grand Total	1		2	12	40	28	83

*Didn’t answer or were unclear in response

We then asked if patrons felt they could study in the library (see table 2). As we are a commuter college, the library’s function as a space to study between classes or for patrons who cannot study in their home environment is very important. Once again this tracked toward the “agree” and “strongly agree” end of the scale.

We asked if the staff is approachable and friendly (see table 3). A bad experience with a staff member can impact a student’s experience of the library. While the respondents tended to agree and strongly agree, a significant number of users responded “neither.” Does this mean they are using the library without seeking help from the staff? Out of the eighty-three

Table 2. Responses to the statement: *I can study in the library.*

Demographics	No Data*	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Female							
No (Do not have a disability)		1		1	11	11	24
Yes (Reported having a disability)		1		1	7	6	15
Male							
No (Do not have a disability)	2			1	13	10	26
Yes (Reported having a disability)					5	13	18
Grand Total	2	2		3	36	40	83

*Didn't answer or were unclear in response

responses, sixteen responded with “neither,” which is nearly 20% of total respondents and 18% of those who reported having a disability. If this is the case, why? Do they already know what they need, or are they afraid to approach staff members?

Table 3. Responses to the statement: *The staff is approachable and friendly.*

Demographics	No Data*	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Female							
No (Do not have a disability)			1	4	9	10	24
Yes (Reported having a disability)				2	6	7	15
Male							
No (Do not have a disability)			1	5	13	7	26
Yes (Reported having a disability)				5	6	7	18
Grand Total			2	16	34	31	83

*Didn't answer or were unclear in response

When asked “I can find what I need in the library,” only three patrons disagreed (see table 4). The next question, “I find it easy to access materials,” resulted in four who disagreed, of which only one was a student with disabilities (see table 5). However, once again we have significant numbers who selected “neither.” Almost 20% selected “I can find what I need in the library,” and 18% selected “I find it easy to access materials.” Those patrons who responded “neither” were more likely to not have a disability. Does this mean they are not using the library’s materials? And if so, why not?

When asked if they could find what they needed on the library website, most responses were “agree” but not “strongly agree,” and a large number

Table 4. Responses to the statement: *I can find what I need in the library.*

Demographics	No Data*	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Female							
No (Do not have a disability)			1	6	7	10	24
Yes (Reported having a disability)				1	8	6	15
Male							
No (Do not have a disability)	2		1	7	13	3	26
Yes (Reported having a disability)	1		1	3	7	6	18
Grand Total	3		3	17	35	25	83

*Didn't answer or were unclear in response

Table 5. Responses to the statement: *I find it easy to access materials.*

Demographics	No Data*	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Female							
No (Do not have a disability)			2	2	13	7	24
Yes (Reported having a disability)	1		1		8	5	15
Male							
No (Do not have a disability)	1		1	9	11	4	26
Yes (Reported having a disability)				4	10	4	18
Grand Total	2		4	15	42	20	83

*Didn't answer or were unclear in response

(18) responded “neither” (see table 6). Of the patrons with disabilities, 25% reported “neither.” Does this mean they don't use the library website? And if not, why? As we showed in figures 1 and 2, students with disabilities were more likely to use the library as a space, as opposed to using library resources. If they are not using the website, does that mean it is difficult to use, or do we not offer resources they want to use?

The next statement was “I know when the library is open” (see table 7). This question was added to determine if basic information about the library is being communicated well. This resulted in fifteen who disagreed or strongly disagreed. That's 20% of respondents who do not know the library's hours. We need to communicate this information more effectively and clearly to our student population.

The next statement, “I know who to ask when I have a question or concern,” was added to determine if patrons felt confident in whom to ask for particular help (see table 8). There are three service desks on the first floor of the library. This resulted in “mostly agree” and “strongly agree”

Table 6. Responses to the statement: *I can find what I need on the library website.*

Demographics	No Data*	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Female							
No (Do not have a disability)	2			4	11	7	24
Yes (Reported having a disability)				2	6	7	15
Male							
No (Do not have a disability)	1		2	6	14	3	26
Yes (Reported having a disability)				6	4	8	18
Grand Total	3		2	18	35	25	83

*Didn't answer or were unclear in response

Table 7. Responses to the statement: *I know when the library is open.*

Demographics	No Data*	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Female							
No (Do not have a disability)		2	4	4	9	5	24
Yes (Reported having a disability)				3	8	4	15
Male							
No (Do not have a disability)		2	4	6	10	4	26
Yes (Reported having a disability)		1	2	3	4	8	18
Grand Total		5	10	16	31	21	83

*Didn't answer or were unclear in response

Table 8. Responses to the statement: *I know who to ask when I have a question or concern.*

Demographics	No Data*	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Female							
No (Do not have a disability)	1	1	1	6	10	5	24
Yes (Reported having a disability)			1	3	5	6	15
Male							
No (Do not have a disability)		1	6	4	13	2	26
Yes (Reported having a disability)			2		9	7	18
Grand Total	1	2	10	13	37	20	83

*Didn't answer or were unclear in response

responses, with again a large number who responded “neither” (15%). However, twenty-seven of the patrons with disabilities responded “agree” or “strongly agree” (33%). Even if they know the appropriate person to talk to, are they actually asking for help? If not, why?

The next questions involved the general feel of the library. We asked about noise because that is often a common library issue (see table 9). The library has a quiet floor, but the main floor can get quite noisy during busy times. When given the statement “there is too much noise in the library,” most of the responses were “disagree” or “strongly disagree.” However, four of the fifty patrons without disabilities (8%) agreed, and three of the thirty-three patrons with disabilities (10%) agreed.

Table 9. Responses to the statement: *There is too much noise in the library.*

Demographics	No Data*	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Female							
No (Do not have a disability)		2	11	8	3		24
Yes (Reported having a disability)		2	8	2	1	2	15
Male							
No (Do not have a disability)		7	14	4		1	26
Yes (Reported having a disability)		8	4	6			18
Grand Total		19	37	20	4	3	83

*Didn't answer or were unclear in response

The next statement, “I feel comfortable in the library,” resulted in a majority of “agree” and “strongly agree” responses, with only two patrons strongly disagreeing (see table 10). Of patrons with disabilities, 91% selected “agree” or “strongly agree.”

Table 10. Responses to the statement: *I feel comfortable in the library.*

Demographics	No Data*	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Female							
No (Do not have a disability)	1			3	13	7	24
Yes (Reported having a disability)	1			1	6	7	15
Male							
No (Do not have a disability)				7	11	8	26
Yes (Reported having a disability)		1			9	8	18
Grand Total	2	1		11	39	30	83

*Didn't answer or were unclear in response

Currently the library charges for printing and requires patrons to purchase a refillable card in order to do so. Complaints about printing are common. To our surprise, when asked if patrons found it affordable to print in the library, a majority agreed (see table 11). However, ten strongly disagreed, and six of those patrons were disabled, which is 18% of the total respondents with disabilities. We also had a large number select “neither agree nor disagree”—38% of the total. Once again, does this mean they are not using the printing, or do they not have an opinion?

Table 11. Responses to the statement: *I find it affordable to print in the library.*

Demographics	No Data*	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Female							
No (Do not have a disability)		3	1	8	9	3	24
Yes (Reported having a disability)		3		7	1	4	15
Male							
No (Do not have a disability)	1	1		11	10	3	26
Yes (Reported having a disability)		3	1	6	4	4	18
Grand Total	1	10	2	32	24	14	83

*Didn't answer or were unclear in response

As the college continues to build and expand, we thought we would ask about the location of the library (see table 12). When asked if the library was in a convenient location, a majority agreed or strongly agreed. Only one respondent disagreed.

Table 12. Responses to the statement: *I find the library to be in a convenient location.*

Demographics	No Data*	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Female							
No (Do not have a disability)				4	12	8	24
Yes (Reported having a disability)			1	1	8	5	15
Male							
No (Do not have a disability)	1			9	11	5	26
Yes (Reported having a disability)					9	9	18
Grand Total	1		1	14	40	27	83

*Didn't answer or were unclear in response

Currently food is not permitted in the library; however, this is not strictly enforced. Since eating in libraries is another common library issue, we added the statement “I would like a place to eat in the library”

Table 13. Responses to the statement: *I would like a place to eat in the library.*

Demographics	No Data*	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Female							
No (Do not have a disability)	1	1	2	3	12	5	24
Yes (Reported having a disability)		2	2	3	4	4	15
Male							
No (Do not have a disability)			4	11	4	7	26
Yes (Reported having a disability)		1	1	5	3	8	18
Grand Total	1	4	9		23	24	83

*Didn't answer or were unclear in response

(see table 13). A majority of respondents (47) agreed and strongly agreed. Nineteen of those were patrons with disabilities, or 58% of disabled respondents. This indicates that having a space to eat is very important to that population, which could be for a number of reasons ranging from social to sensory.

FOCUS GROUP

After reviewing the surveys, we collected contact information for participants who were interested in attending a voluntary focus group. The focus group was a one-hour session that included three patrons with disabilities. Our sample included two males and one female along with two facilitators (the coordinator of disability services and the reference librarian). We used the original survey questions as a guide, asking for clarifications of their responses on the library survey that they completed in the spring 2018 semester. The participants' disabilities varied in nature but were inclusive of learning and physical disabilities.

Participants agreed to have the session audio recorded to accurately capture their comments and feedback. We disclosed that the participant's names would not be included and that we would only reveal their statements for research purposes. Additionally, the facilitators stated that although the participants were asked for their feedback, there may or may not be items that were included in the discussion that can be modified at the library due to institutional policies.

Participants reported that the staff members in the library were welcoming and helpful. One person reported that they were sometimes uncertain about whom to ask specific questions at the help desk. The participants suggested a directory on where to go and whom to ask about certain topics relating to library questions.

The online resources were described as "not user friendly" and are not being utilized as often as the physical space. One of the participants

reported that the online resources changed while they were taking a break from attending classes, which was confusing to them when they returned.

The discussion focused on the physical accessibility of the library on the college campus. Participants reported that the placement of the library on campus was difficult to get to because it is not centralized or convenient to the classes they are taking or where they park. For patrons with a time constraint between classes, stopping at the library is inconvenient. One of the participants reported that due to age, it is challenging to walk to the other side of campus. A participant reported that they felt the library was convenient because the bus stop was outside of the library and that they often go to the library to do homework before leaving for the day.

In terms of the library floor plan, a major area of concern was the layout of the computer carrels, which participants cited as “overcrowded,” as well as not having enough space to lay out materials to write papers due to the close proximity of other patrons and computer stations.

Food was another topic of discussion during the focus group. Patrons reported that they would prefer to have a place to eat in order to multitask, satisfying hunger and working on assignments simultaneously. Since library policy does not allow food in the library, the participants felt that there should be an area to eat and perhaps also a socialization area. One of the disability-specific considerations for food and drink in the library was due to medication side effects. One participant disclosed that they took medications that often caused dry mouth. If a person were on such a medication regimen, they would need to vacate the library in order to take medication and, if needed, eat.

In terms of the structure of the library survey, one participant made a comment about being happy that when they were asked about gender, there was an option for male, female, and other, which was considered inclusive.

The participants discussed physical books in the library, and none of the participants reported taking out books. One of the patrons preferred to access online materials due to ease of access and time constraints.

DISCUSSION

We began this project with a desire to learn from our patrons with disabilities about how they experience the library. Was the library serving their needs? Were they even aware of some of the services the library provided? How can we increase communication at all levels, between library staff, students, and the Office of Disability Services? The survey was the first stepping-stone to answering some of these questions.

However, what was even more important was combining the survey with the focus group at the end of the study. The survey gave us insight involving a larger number of the population and general answers to our questions. Due to the intimate number of focus-group participants, that

session allowed us to ask follow-up questions and really get to the heart of the matter. After the focus group, we rethought our questions and how we could revise our survey for future offerings.

There are two examples that illustrate this. Although we asked about being comfortable in the space in the survey, we did not ask specifically about the comfort at the computer terminals. As a result of the focus group, it became obvious that the current computer setup is not adequate to the unique needs of patrons with disabilities. The computers on the first floor are in carrels with very little space between them. There is little room for a notebook or a textbook. Lastly, there is limited space for beverages such as coffee or a bottle of water.

The second example involves eating in the library. Food in the library is discouraged for a number of reasons: to prevent computers or books being spilled upon, to protect the building from vermin, and because there is not adequate trash pickup—a sandwich left in a trash can at noon will remain until after closing. Initially, it did not seem to make sense for patrons to want a place to eat in the library since the college just unveiled a large state-of-the-art student center with a brand new cafeteria.

However, during the focus group, patrons with disabilities reported unique reasons for wanting to eat in the library—for example, to take medication. This is not something commonly brought up when discussing accessibility and libraries. In fact, in our literature review, the article “Best Practices for Serving Students with Disabilities” (Samson 2011) does not even mention food, but it is clearly an aspect of accessibility that needs to be thought of.

During informal conversation outside of the focus group, one student said their reason for not wanting to go to the student center was because it was “too loud.” A student with sensory needs might not be comfortable in that environment and would seek out a quieter place. The library is one of the few quiet places on campus. These discussions move us beyond physical accessibility, such as when a building is being built, remodeled, or designed (i.e., putting in wheelchair ramps, making sure desks are wheelchair height, providing accessible software and hardware) to something that is ever-changing as our patrons evolve.

Further Research

The changing nature of perceptions as to what constitutes universal accessibility has not been studied/reported in the literature. Our hope is that others will expand on this idea and consider accessibility as something changing based on communication with patrons with disabilities. Those patrons should be our partners when it comes to designing library spaces, providing library services, and training library staff.

One of the limitations of our study is that the respondents were already familiar with and users of the library. If we were to recreate this study, we

would move beyond the library building and distribute the survey in places like the student center. Of course, the revised survey would have to ask these students why they do not use library services, in addition to asking if they are aware of them.

The revised questions would also need to be more specific. For example, when we asked about finding library resources and using the website and got mostly “neither” responses, we would need to have follow-up questions about whether or not they use these resources, and if not, why. One possibility would be to include skip questions in the online component, which would direct those who answer a certain way to more specific questions. This is the only way to ask follow-up questions in this survey format.

We should also continue to hold focus groups. A survey cannot replace a conversation that takes place periodically and that allows for specific exploration of details, especially since the focus group revealed important information that was not covered in the survey. For example, we learned that patrons with disabilities need more individualized communication about what the library can do for them. Many were not aware of services that the library offered, like checking out tablets and specific subject guides for their particular classes. This shows the need for increased communication about the library’s services and that having them listed on the website may not be the only primary method for distributing that information. As the library moves forward and expands its outreach, the mode of communication will need to be continually improved to reach all patrons.

In the future, when performing research in this area, based on the discussion from the focus group, we would add several questions about specific resources. It is not adequate to ask if the participants find everything they need on the library website. We must ask if they are aware a subject guide exists, or where they can find the library’s hours.

CONCLUSION

One of the most important outcomes of this study is talking with patrons with disabilities to provide them with an opportunity to elaborate on their responses. The discussions we had during the focus group were important, and those discussions would not have happened if we had not allowed patrons to use the survey to sign up and be a part of the focus-group session.

Our recommendation for any library looking to reproduce a similar study is to have informal discussions with volunteers before designing their surveys. Try to find out what is most important, like computer layout or eating in the library. Then use specific questions in the survey and follow up with discussions afterward. Let the voices of patrons with disabilities guide you.

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APPENDIX

Thank you for taking our survey! Your responses will help us learn more about how students view the library. Your responses are confidential. Remember that you can choose to stop taking the survey at any time. In this survey “library” refers to the top two floors of the library building only.

1. How often in the past three months have you used any library services?
 - a. Often
 - b. Sometimes
 - c. Rarely
 - d. Never

2. In the past three months I have used the following library services (please check all that apply):
 - a. Checked out a book
 - b. Printed something out
 - c. Asked a librarian for research help
 - d. Put together a puzzle
 - e. Played chess
 - f. Found an article using one of the library’s online resources
 - g. Read a magazine
 - h. Used a study room
 - i. Made a photocopy
 - j. Used the scanner
 - k. Looked at a magazine
 - l. Used a computer
 - m. Looked at a graphic novel or manga

CHOICES ARE: Yes, No

3. Thinking about your experiences in the library over the past three months, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Be honest in your responses as there are no wrong answers.
 - a. The library is inviting.
 - b. I can study in the library.
 - c. The staff is approachable and friendly.
 - d. I can find what I need in the library.
 - e. I find it easy to access materials.

- f. I can find what I need on the library website.
- g. I know when the library is open.
- h. I know who to ask when I have a question or concern.
- i. There is too much noise in the library.
- j. I feel comfortable in the library.
- k. I find it affordable to print in the library.
- l. I find the library to be in a convenient location.
- m. I would like a place to eat in the library.

CHOICES ARE: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

- 4. What is your gender?
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Other
- 5. Are you a:
 - a. Student
 - b. Faculty
 - c. Staff
- 6. If you are a student, how long have you been attending OCC?
 - a. less than 1 year
 - b. 1 to less than 2 years
 - c. 2 years to less than 3 years
 - d. 3 years to less than 4 years
 - e. More than 4 years
- 7. Do you have a disability?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
- 8. What type of disability do you have? Please select all that apply.
 - a. Mobility impairment
 - b. Visual impairment
 - c. Hearing impairment
 - d. Learning disability
 - e. Autism Spectrum

- f. Medical condition
 - g. Psychological condition
 - h. Other (please specify):_____
9. Would you like to discuss the library in person? If so, Please leave your contact information below.
- a. Name_____
 - b. Email_____
 - c. Telephone Number_____

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