



Research Article

Finding Your Place: Assessing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in an Academic Library

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Abstract

Objective – An exploratory study was conducted to identify the key factors that influence students' perceptions of a sense of belonging in an academic library, focusing particularly on gaining insight into the perspectives of students from historically marginalized communities.

Methods – Participants were administered an online survey comprising 18 multiple-choice, Likert-type, and open-ended questions. The survey was active for three weeks during March and April 2022. Effect sizes were calculated using Pearson point-biserial correlation statistics. Qualitative results were coded using thematic analysis.

Results – An analysis of the quantitative data revealed that students who identified as non-binary/queer/gender non-conforming, identified as a person of color, or identified as a person

with a disability were less likely to find the library as inclusive. They were also more likely to report incidents of microaggression, bias, or discrimination. An analysis of the qualitative data revealed several key factors influencing perceptions of inclusiveness, including space, collections, displays, art, technology, programming, marketing, staff, and wayfinding.

Conclusion – These mixed findings suggest that while the majority of students perceive the library environment as inclusive, further efforts are needed to establish a truly inclusive and safe space for students from historically marginalized communities.

Introduction

The climate of universities can significantly impact the retention and graduation rates of students of color, particularly those from underrepresented and marginalized communities (Silver Wolf (Adelvunegv Waya) et al., 2017). When faced with a toxic campus culture that perpetuates harmful stereotypes, students with marginalized identities often question their social belonging as repeated experiences of microaggressions can negatively influence their perceptions of the campus as hostile, signifying that they have no place in the university space (Sanchez, 2019; Walton & Cohen, 2011). As vital components of institutions of higher education, academic libraries are not immune from perpetuating systems of oppression, despite the myth of the library as a neutral space (Gibson et al., 2017). To effect real change, academic libraries must understand how they contribute to upholding these structural and institutional systems of inequality (Gibson et al., 2020). The first step in this process is engaging in critical assessment to identify the biases and limitations embedded within the library's services and spaces.

Colorado State University Libraries (CSUL) embraces the land grant mission of the university and its commitment to the foundational principle of inclusive excellence, the idea that institutional success can only be achieved if the institution welcomes, values, and affirms all members of the CSU community (Colorado State University Libraries, 2021). Guided by this mission and CSU Principles of Community, which include inclusion, integrity, respect, service, and social justice, CSUL strives to foster a welcoming environment for the over 25,000 students, employees, and the larger CSU community that regularly visit one of its two locations, Morgan Library, and the Veterinary Teaching Hospital Library (Institutional Research, Planning, and Effectiveness, 2023). As the hub for academic success and interdisciplinary collaboration on campus, CSUL partners with individuals on their academic journey and strives for excellence in research, creative artistry, and scholarship. With strategic goals to boost equitable access to knowledge and align library services and spaces with user needs, CSUL is intentional in engaging in efforts that place diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) at the forefront of its priorities (Colorado State University Libraries, 2021). In spring 2022, a survey was conducted to gain insight into students' perceptions of DEI in the library. This study analyzes survey results to critically assess CSUL's effectiveness in fostering a welcoming environment for all.

Literature Review

Fostering a Sense of Belonging

A fundamental human need is to experience social belonging and a sense of cultivating positive relationships with others (Walton & Cohen, 2011). Mahar et al. (2013) identified five interconnected themes that conceptualize a sense of belonging: subjectivity, groundedness to an external referent,

reciprocity, dynamism, and self-determination. Applying these five themes to a library context, Scoulas (2021) conducted research to measure university students' sense of belonging and inclusion at the University of Illinois Chicago Libraries during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this study, a sense of belonging was defined as students' perceptions of feeling valued and respected by librarians, as well as feeling accepted through their access and use of library spaces and collections. The study found that students who primarily used the physical library reported a stronger sense of belonging compared to those who relied solely on online library resources. This finding implies a significant link between personal interactions with the physical library and fostering a greater sense of belonging among students. Similar findings were observed in research exploring the experiences of first-generation students in academic libraries. These students reported that their use of the library space was directly influenced by how welcomed and respected they felt within that environment, especially when the space valued all their intersecting identities (Couture et al., 2021).

Racial Climate and Cultural Recognition

Identifying the factors that contribute to fostering a sense of belonging is the first step in creating an inclusive environment. While there is still a dearth of research in this area, a few studies elucidate the factors that influence a sense of belonging in various demographic groups within library settings, particularly for those who hold identities from marginalized communities, such as racially minoritized students. One study highlights the importance of creating inclusive spaces within an academic library. Research conducted at Duke University Libraries (DUL) revealed that overall, Black students perceived DUL as an inclusive space that met their diverse learning needs as underrepresented students in a predominantly White institution (Chapman et al., 2020). However, upon closer examination, researchers found that Black students also faced negative interactions with both staff and peers at DUL. They perceived certain aspects of the library spaces as unwelcoming, often due to the dominant focus on White history. Among the issues raised were the lack of visible support for diversity and inclusion, minimal efforts to limit White western cultural dominance, and the absence of initiatives to educate White students about the experiences of minoritized communities.

Given the history of anti-Blackness in libraries, it is imperative for libraries to move beyond symbolic gestures and actively address the entrenched anti-Black structures and behaviors to foster a truly equitable environment for Black employees and patrons (Ossom-Williamson et al., 2021). Research conducted by Stewart et al. (2019) shed light on the significance of racial climate and its impact on fostering inclusiveness in academic libraries. Using a crowdsourced convenience sampling method, researchers administered a national online survey to 160 Black college students attending non-historically Black colleges and universities in the United States. This study explored the key factors influencing Black college students' perceptions of welcomeness in academic libraries. Most respondents reported feeling welcomed in these libraries, with the social climate of the space and information access being the most significant factors contributing to perceptions of welcomeness. Interestingly, it was not the interactions with library staff that made a significant difference but rather the behavior of other library users that had the greatest impact. Researchers surmised that the lack of influence from library employees was most likely due to infrequent communication with staff or the standardized, professional nature of library services. In contrast, interactions with the library as a physical space significantly impacted students' sense of welcomeness primarily due to the behavior of other patrons. This finding underscores the idea that libraries are more than just architectural structures; they are cultural spaces where social dynamics, particularly microaggressions from others, critically influence the experiences of Black students.

Furthermore, students' perceptions of the overall racial climate on campus also affected how welcoming they found the library. If students perceived the broader campus environment as hostile or racist, they were more likely to view the library as less welcoming. This suggests that libraries are intrinsically connected to the broader campus community and need to work in tandem with their institutions to foster a genuinely welcoming environment (Stewart et al., 2019).

Representation and cultural recognition are significant factors in cultivating a sense of belonging among marginalized groups within library settings. Research conducted at the University of Nevada, Reno Libraries examined the library experiences, needs, and perceptions of undergraduate Native American students (Bucy, 2022). Researchers found that Native students' perceptions of a sense of belonging were closely linked to the extent to which their Native identity was reflected on campus, with distinctions drawn between "White spaces" and "Native spaces". Similarly, Native students valued visible representations of Native American culture in the library through exhibits, displays, and collections. This finding suggests that incorporating visible representations of marginalized identities in library spaces can foster a sense of belonging by offering positive cultural recognition, provided that the representation is respectful and culturally relevant.

Building Inclusive Spaces for LGBTQ+ Community

Creating a safe space plays a pivotal role in fostering a sense of belonging, particularly for individuals within the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ+) community who are at greater risk of experiencing harassment, discrimination, and violence compared to the broader population (Dau & Strauss, 2016). This is especially true for individuals who identify as transgender or non-binary, and who may need specific accommodations such as specific facilities, equipment, or resources to meet their needs (Matheson et al., 2020). Research conducted by Drake and Bielefield, (2017) explores the unique accommodations essential to welcoming transgender patrons into the library. Using convenience snowball sampling, researchers surveyed 102 individuals through an online questionnaire. Analyses revealed the following top five accommodations to create a safe environment within the library:

1. Updating LGBTQ+ literature within the collection.
2. Providing gender-neutral single-stall restroom access without requiring a key for entry.
3. Implementing a non-discrimination policy that affirms gender identity and expression.
4. Establishing a procedure enabling patrons to change their names remotely (e.g., online, fax or by mail).
5. Adapting library forms by eliminating gender markers, titles or salutations or offering alternatives for self-identification.

Understanding how LGBTQ+ students' information and spatial needs may differ from the general population is the first step in removing barriers to creating a more inclusive environment in libraries (Hays, 2020; Lyttan & Laloo, 2020).

Holistic Approaches to Accessible Spaces

Another key factor that can contribute to fostering a sense of belonging is creating accessible spaces within a library to accommodate the needs of students with disabilities. Research conducted at the University of Kuala Lumpur demonstrated how to effectively foster a sense of belonging among students with disabilities (Bodaghi & Zainab, 2013). The university's library provided 53 study carrels for student use, with 21 reserved for visually impaired students. Researchers conducted interviews and focus groups

with 18 visually impaired students who regularly used these carrels and found that they significantly influenced their sense of belonging within the library. Most participants perceived the study carrels as a second home, where they felt safe, solace, and accepted as active members of the library community. Moreover, the study carrels also functioned as a social hub for visually impaired students, enabling them to interact with peers and ultimately enhancing their overall academic experiences.

Creating genuinely inclusive library spaces requires more than just compliance with Americans with Disabilities (ADA) standards. Learning from the insightful experiences of authors who designed new study spaces and a conference room at Library Services, Minnesota State University, Mankato, underscores the need for libraries to delve deeper into understanding disability dimensions beyond basic legal requirements (Schomberg & Corley, 2022). Despite the technical ADA compliance, the use of the space revealed shortcomings such as inadequate maneuverability for wheelchair users, non-automatic doors, and lack of planned space for height-adjustable tables. To prevent future oversights, the authors recommend that future library space planning adopt a broader understanding of disability, integrate the latest research, and actively involve disabled individuals and advocates in the planning process.

Aims

This paper adds to the growing body of research that explores DEI in library spaces. Given the mission of CSUL and the multitude of factors that may influence feelings of inclusion, we sought to measure factors that influence a sense of belonging in undergraduate students in an academic library.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. Are students from historically marginalized communities less likely to perceive the library as an inclusive environment?
2. What factors influence students' perceptions of what constitutes an inclusive environment in the library?

This paper holds significance to other academic libraries interested in assessing DEI within their own library spaces.

Methods

Participants and Design

Students attending Colorado State University were invited to participate in an online survey. The survey was active for three weeks, from March 14, 2022, to April 4, 2022. The primary promotional strategies included digitally disseminating flyers and posters around campus and including a banner advertising the study on the library website. Participants were also recruited via targeted emails to select groups such as the student affinity groups, the Associated Students of Colorado State University electronic mailing lists, and through tabling efforts in the lobby of Morgan Library. Upon completing the survey, participants could elect to enter a random drawing to win one of twenty \$50 Amazon gift cards. The Colorado State University Institutional Review Board (IRB-2904) approved the survey, marketing materials, and incentives on December 14, 2021.

Survey

We developed an online survey consisting of 18 questions, using Qualtrics, a web-based survey platform. The survey questions were designed taking inspiration from various sources, including Harvard University's Inclusive Demographic Data Collection Tip Sheet (Office of Regulatory Affairs and Research Compliance, 2020), CSU's Employee Climate Survey (Colorado State University Office for Inclusive Excellence, 2021), and the Poudre River Public Library District's survey on equity, diversity, and inclusion (2021). While the questions were not piloted prior to distribution, they were refined through multiple rounds of review by colleagues. The survey included multiple-choice items, Likert-type items, and open-ended questions. The demographic information collected in this survey included age, educational standing, gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, first-generation status, and disability status.

In addition to gathering demographic information, the survey was organized into sections focusing on library services and an inclusive environment. To assess library services, we asked questions designed to measure how often students visited the library, their frequency of usage of library services, and their ratings of the helpfulness of those services. To evaluate an inclusive environment, the survey included questions to gauge students' perceptions of belonging, the frequency of experiencing microaggressions, bias, or discrimination, as well as their feelings of safety and representation. Additionally, three open-ended questions invited feedback on how the Morgan Library could better represent diverse identities and create a more inclusive, welcoming space. The full survey is included in the Appendix.

Analyses

Quantitative

Data were analyzed using R and the base stats package. R was also used for data cleaning and to construct data frames needed to conduct analyses. Survey item scores were converted to numerical values (for example, disagree = 1, somewhat disagree = 2, neutral = 3, somewhat agree = 4, agree = 5). Pearson point-biserial correlational analysis was used for inferential testing and to determine the strength of association between participant identities and item responses. Inferential tests were two-sided with alpha set to 0.05. The effect size was interpreted as small ($|r| \geq .1$ & $< .3$), medium ($|r| \geq .3$ & $< .5$), or large medium ($|r| \geq .5$) (Cohen, 1988).

Groups were collapsed to improve sample size and interpretation. To examine gender, we compared participants who identified as non-binary/genderqueer/gender non-conforming to participants who identified as cisgender men or women ($n = 47$ vs. 555). To examine race/ethnicity, we compared participants who identified as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, Person of Color) to participants who only identified as White ($n = 240$ vs. 362). To examine sexual orientation, we compared participants who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and asexual (LGBTQ+) to participants who identified as straight/heterosexual ($n = 248$ vs. 354). To examine disability status, we compared participants who identified as a person with a disability to those who did not ($n = 81$ vs. 521). These binary classifications were then converted to 1 vs. 0 quantitative codes for the purpose of running correlation analyses. Quantitative coding of demographic variables is common practice in statistical analyses, including correlation and regression (Cohen et al., 2002). Recommendations for analyzing variables such as race explicitly advocate creating dichotomous variables (Ross et al., 2020).

Qualitative

Both authors were responsible for coding the open-ended responses. We took an inductive approach to the coding process by allowing themes and codes to emerge from the data. We collaboratively created a codebook that included definitions of codes that were applied to the dataset. We conducted three rounds of coding, where we coded the open-ended responses individually and compared the results. All instances of disagreement were thoroughly discussed and reevaluated until a consensus was reached. After the second round of coding, there were few instances of disagreement, likely due to the simplicity of responses and a clear understanding of our dataset. NVivo, a qualitative analysis tool, was used for analysis. Three questions were analyzed:

1. How can we represent your identity better in Morgan Library spaces?
2. What services do you believe Morgan Library can add to become a more inclusive and welcoming space?, and
3. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about Morgan Library?

Results*Participant Demographics*

The survey received responses from 621 participants; however, 19 participants did not respond to any questions asked about the library and were therefore excluded from all analyses resulting in a total sample size of 602 respondents. Additionally, participants were not required to answer every question and could respond as they deemed appropriate. Descriptive and inferential analyses are reported with respect to the total number of respondents.

When reporting total numbers and percentages of demographic variables, we allowed participants to select more than one response. Percentages are, therefore, always relative to the total number of responses, and categories within the same item are not mutually exclusive.

The data indicated that 89% (n = 533 out of 600 total responses) of participants were between the ages of 18-24, and 91% (n = 539 out of 590 total responses) of participants identified their educational standing as undergraduate students, with the remaining 51 self-identifying as graduate students. Additionally, 28% (n = 165 out of 591 total responses) identified themselves as first-generation college students, and 14% (n = 81 out of 592 total responses) of participants self-identified as persons with a disability.

Participants were asked to identify their gender and had the option to select more than one option or abstain from responding. The total response rate to the items in this question was 592 responses. The data indicated that 60% (n = 354) of participants identified themselves as women, 32% (n = 192) as men, 8% (n = 47) as non-binary/genderqueer/gender non-conforming, 7% (n = 40) as cisgender, 2% (n = 10) as trans/transgender, 1% (n = 4) as agender. One percent (n = 4) preferred to self-describe their gender, 1% (n = 4) preferred not to disclose their gender, and less than 1% (n = 2) self-identified as two-spirit.

Participants were asked to identify their race/ethnicity and had the option to select more than one option or abstain from responding. The total response rate to the items in this question was 591 responses. The data indicated that 71% (n = 420) self-identified as White, 20% (n = 121) as Latina, Latinx, or Latino, 8% (n = 45) as Asian (including East Asian, South Asian, or Southeast Asian), 5% (n = 32) as Black or African American, 3% (n = 15) as Indigenous, First Nations, American Indian, or Alaskan Native, 2% (n = 10) as

Arab, Persian, or other peoples of the Middle East, and 1% (n = 3) self-identified as Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander.

Participants were asked to identify their sexual orientation and had the option to select more than one option or abstain from responding. The total response rate to the items in this question was 590. The data indicated that 61% (n = 361) of participants self-identified as straight/heterosexual, 20% (n = 116) as bisexual, 9% (n = 51) as queer, 8% (n = 45) as gay or lesbian. Four percent of respondents (n = 22) preferred not to disclose their sexual orientation, 3% (n = 17) self-identified as asexual, and 2% (n = 13) preferred to self-describe their sexual orientation (e.g., demisexual or pansexual).

Quantitative Results

Ratings of Sense of Belonging

Students were asked to report their level of agreement with a series of statements used to measure their perception of a sense of belonging. The results revealed that 79% (n = 477) of respondents either somewhat or strongly agreed that the library is an inclusive space, compared to 8% (n = 47) who somewhat or strongly disagreed. Additionally, 85% (n = 511) agreed that Morgan Library is welcoming, compared to 6% (n = 34) who somewhat or strongly disagreed. Regarding comfort using library services, 82% (n = 491) somewhat or strongly agreed with this statement, compared to 6% (n = 34) who somewhat or strongly disagreed. Lastly, 75% (n = 453) somewhat or strongly agreed that they felt comfortable asking for help, compared to 10% (n = 62) who somewhat or strongly disagreed.

Ratings of Frequency of Microaggressions, Bias, or Discrimination

Students were asked to report how frequently they encountered microaggressions, bias, or discrimination in the library. The results showed that 65% (n = 393) of respondents reported never experiencing such incidents at Morgan Library. Following this, 25% (n = 150) reported rarely encountering microaggressions, bias, or discrimination. Only 2% (n = 12) reported experiencing these issues during every visit, while 1% (n = 5) experienced them every other visit, and less than 1% (n = 5) reported daily occurrences.

Ratings of Safety

Students were asked several questions to measure their sense of safety in the library. The data revealed that 83% (n = 499) somewhat or strongly agreed that they felt safe from physical harm, discrimination, or emotional harm in the library, while 5% (n = 33) somewhat or strongly disagreed. When questioned about feeling safe reporting microaggressions, bias, and discrimination to library staff, 67% (n = 405) somewhat or strongly agreed, whereas 8% (n = 47) somewhat or strongly disagreed. Regarding the library's efforts to minimize microaggressions, bias, and discrimination, the largest group—47% (n = 264)—neither agreed nor disagreed, 25% (n = 150) somewhat or strongly agreed, and 24% (n = 143) disagreed with this statement.

Ratings of Representation

Students were asked a series of questions to measure how much they believed the library space represented and reflected their identities. The results showed that 57% (n = 341) somewhat or strongly agreed that they felt represented in the library, while 10% (n = 61) somewhat or strongly disagreed. When

asked if the library's resources consider different identities, 63% (n = 380) somewhat or strongly agreed, compared to 6% (n = 37) who somewhat or strongly disagreed. Lastly, 70% (n = 419) somewhat or strongly agreed that the library showcases the work of diverse identities throughout its spaces, while 5% (n = 33) somewhat or strongly disagreed.

Comparisons of Ratings by Gender Identity

An analysis of gender identity revealed that, compared to participants who identified as cisgender men or women, participants who identified as non-binary/genderqueer/gender non-conforming were significantly less likely to view the library as an inclusive space ($r = -0.11$, $p = 0.006$) or welcoming ($r = -0.13$, $p = 0.001$). They were also significantly more likely to report experiencing microaggression, bias, or discrimination ($r = 0.18$, $p < 0.001$), and were significantly less likely to report feeling safe from physical harm, discrimination, or emotional harm ($r = -0.13$, $p = 0.002$) and feeling safe to report microaggression, bias, or discrimination to library staff ($r = -0.15$, $p = 0.003$). Participants were also less likely to report feeling represented in Morgan Library ($r = -0.09$, $p = 0.026$). These effects are displayed in Figure 1 as correlations.

NONBINARY

1. The Morgan Library is an inclusive space.
2. The Morgan Library is welcoming.
3. I feel comfortable using library services.
4. I feel comfortable asking for help.
5. Frequency of Microaggressions, bias, or discrimination.
6. I feel safe from physical harm, discrimination, or emotional harm at the Morgan Library.
7. I feel safe reporting microaggressions, bias, and discrimination to library staff.
8. The Morgan Library can do more to minimize microaggressions, bias and discrimination.
9. I feel represented in the Morgan Library.
10. Resources offered at the Morgan Library take into consideration different identities.
11. The Morgan Library showcases the work of diverse identities throughout the library's spaces.

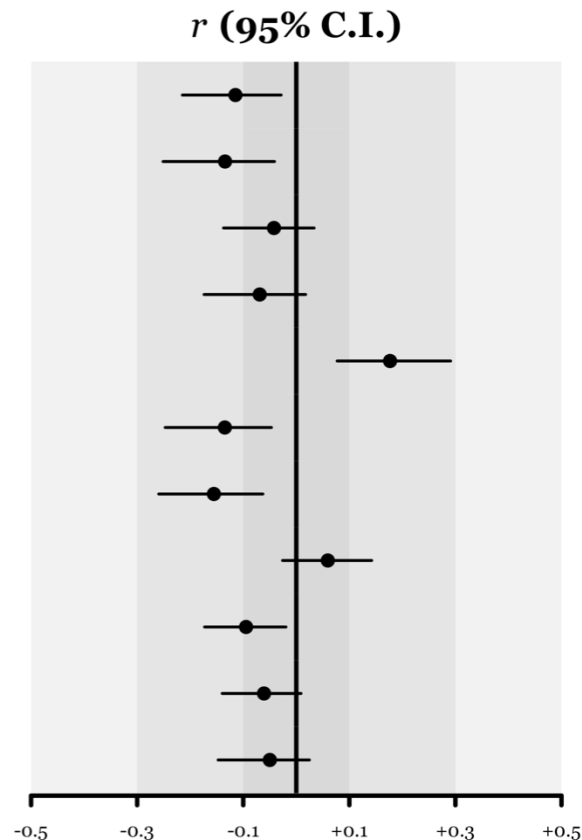


Figure 1

Correlations between nonbinary identity and item ratings. Correlations range between -1 and 1, with negative values indicating a negative association, positive values indicating a positive association, and values closer to 0 indicating no association. The vertical line down the center indicates a 0 correlation. The circles with confidence bars represent the estimates. Estimates to the left are negative correlations and estimates to the right are positive correlations.

Comparisons of Ratings by Race/Ethnicity

An analysis of race/ethnicity revealed that compared to participants who identified as White, participants who identified as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) were significantly less likely to feel safe reporting microaggression, bias, or discrimination to library staff ($r = -0.10$, $p = 0.022$). They were also significantly less likely to report feeling represented in Morgan Library ($r = -0.24$, $p < 0.001$), to feel resources offered at Morgan Library considered different identities ($r = -0.13$, $p = 0.003$), and to feel that Morgan Library highlights the work of diverse identities throughout its spaces ($r = -0.13$, $p = 0.003$). These effects are displayed in Figure 2 as correlations.

BIPOC

1. The Morgan Library is an inclusive space.
2. The Morgan Library is welcoming.
3. I feel comfortable using library services.
4. I feel comfortable asking for help.
5. Frequency of Microaggressions, bias, or discrimination.
6. I feel safe from physical harm, discrimination, or emotional harm at the Morgan Library.
7. I feel safe reporting microaggressions, bias, and discrimination to library staff.
8. The Morgan Library can do more to minimize microaggressions, bias and discrimination.
9. I feel represented in the Morgan Library.
10. Resources offered at the Morgan Library take into consideration different identities.
11. The Morgan Library showcases the work of diverse identities throughout the library's spaces.

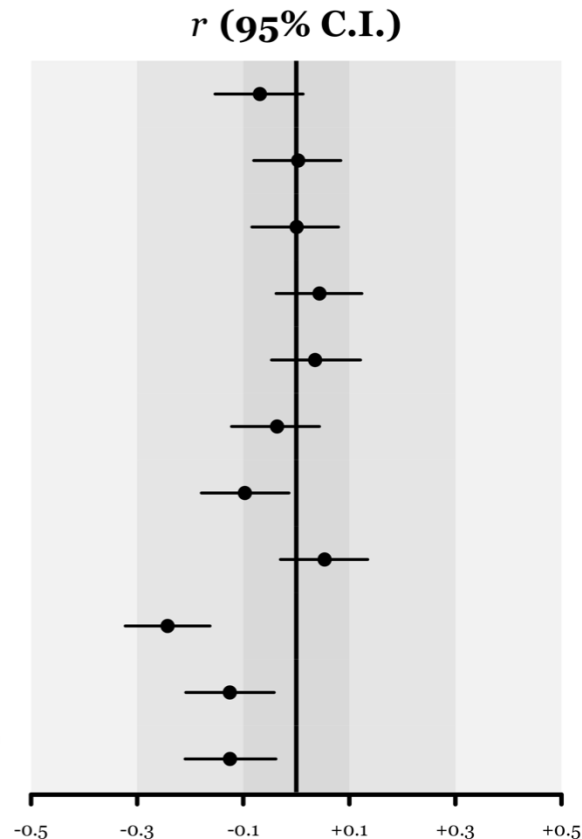


Figure 2

Correlations between BIPOC identity and item ratings. Correlations range between -1 and 1, with negative values indicating a negative association, positive values indicating a positive association, and values closer to 0 indicating no association. The vertical line down the center indicates a 0 correlation. The circles with confidence bars represent the estimates. Estimates to the left are negative correlations and estimates to the right are positive correlations.

Comparisons of Ratings by Sexual Orientation

An analysis of sexual orientation revealed that compared to participants who identified as straight/heterosexual, participants who identified as LGBTQ+ were significantly more likely to report experiencing microaggressions, bias, or discrimination ($r = 0.15$, $p < 0.001$). These effects are displayed in Figure 3 as correlations.

LGBTQ

1. The Morgan Library is an inclusive space.
2. The Morgan Library is welcoming.
3. I feel comfortable using library services.
4. I feel comfortable asking for help.
5. Frequency of Microaggressions, bias, or discrimination.
6. I feel safe from physical harm, discrimination, or emotional harm at the Morgan Library.
7. I feel safe reporting microaggressions, bias, and discrimination to library staff.
8. The Morgan Library can do more to minimize microaggressions, bias and discrimination.
9. I feel represented in the Morgan Library.
10. Resources offered at the Morgan Library take into consideration different identities.
11. The Morgan Library showcases the work of diverse identities throughout the library's spaces.

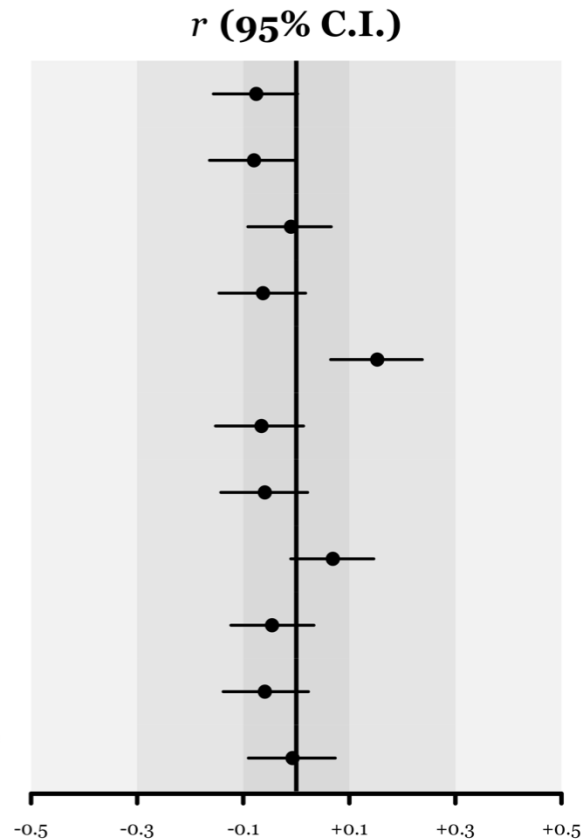


Figure 3

Correlations between LGBTQ identity and item ratings. Correlations range between -1 and 1, with negative values indicating a negative association, positive values indicating a positive association, and values closer to 0 indicating no association. The vertical line down the center indicates a 0 correlation. The circles with confidence bars represent the estimates. Estimates to the left are negative correlations and estimates to the right are positive correlations.

Comparisons of Ratings by Disability Status

An analysis of disability status revealed that, compared to participants who identified as able-bodied, participants who identified as disabled were significantly less likely to view the library as an inclusive space ($r = -0.11$, $p = 0.013$), welcoming ($r = -0.11$, $p = 0.008$), or to feel comfortable asking for help ($r = -0.09$, $p = 0.038$). They were also significantly more likely to report experiencing microaggression, bias, or discrimination ($r = 0.21$, $p < 0.001$), were less likely to feel safe from physical harm, discrimination, or emotional harm ($r = -0.18$, $p < 0.001$), and to feel safe to report microaggression, bias, or discrimination to library staff ($r = -0.18$, $p < 0.001$). Participants who identified as disabled were also significantly less likely to report feeling represented in Morgan Library ($r = -0.09$, $p = 0.04$) and to report that Morgan Library highlights the work of diverse identities throughout its spaces ($r = -0.09$, $p = 0.030$). These effects are displayed in Figure 4 as correlations.

DISABILITY STATUS

1. The Morgan Library is an inclusive space.
2. The Morgan Library is welcoming.
3. I feel comfortable using library services.
4. I feel comfortable asking for help.
5. Frequency of Microaggressions, bias, or discrimination.
6. I feel safe from physical harm, discrimination, or emotional harm at the Morgan Library.
7. I feel safe reporting microaggressions, bias, and discrimination to library staff.
8. The Morgan Library can do more to minimize microaggressions, bias and discrimination.
9. I feel represented in the Morgan Library.
10. Resources offered at the Morgan Library take into consideration different identities.
11. The Morgan Library showcases the work of diverse identities throughout the library's spaces.

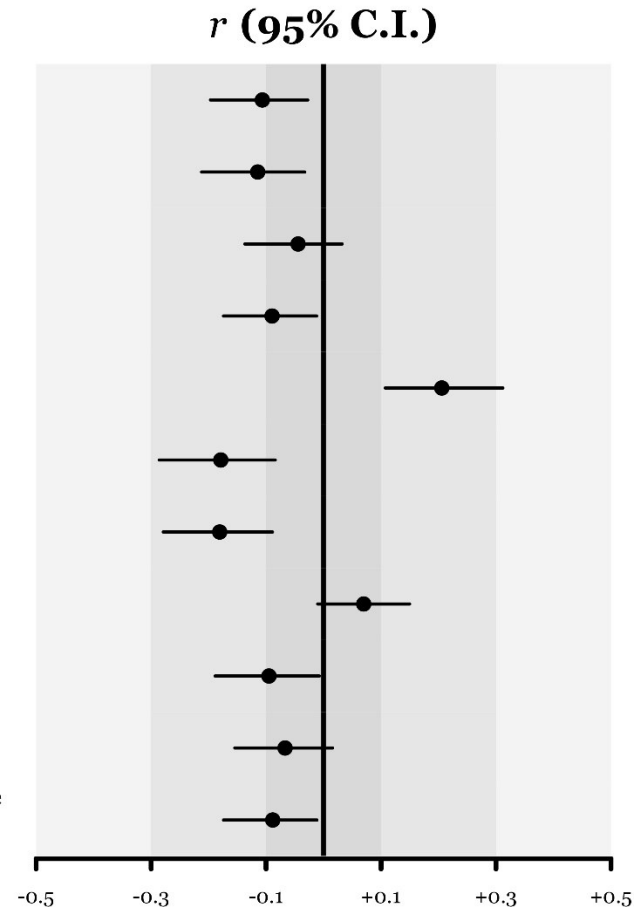


Figure 4

Correlations between disability status and item ratings. Correlations range between -1 and 1, with negative values indicating a negative association, positive values indicating a positive association, and values closer to 0 indicating no association. The vertical line down the center indicates a 0 correlation. The circles with confidence bars represent the estimates. Estimates to the left are negative correlations and estimates to the right are positive correlations.

Qualitative Results

We received 180 responses to the question, "How can we represent your identity better in Morgan Library spaces?" All comments were coded when applicable. There were instances where the comments were not comprehensible or offensive. In these cases, the comments were not coded. The top five codes were: "Space," "Collections," "Displays," "Art," and "Programming."

The top code applied to this question was "Space" ($n = 37$), which included all comments related to the physical spaces within Morgan Library. Students provided many responses to this question ranging from the need for more silent study spaces to the need for more accessible library entrances. One student offered insight on inclusive spaces, "I think it might be nice to offer some space hours specifically for people with disabilities. For example, I have ADHD and I have sensory problems and it would be nice to maybe have separate sign up for study rooms." Several comments related to access to gender-neutral bathrooms, as one student stated, "More clearly marked gender neutral bathrooms...I know this is a structural issue, but gender inclusive restrooms should be more common throughout."

Responses coded with “Collections” (n = 35) included all mentions of physical or electronic collections. One student said, “Honestly, I feel represented by seeing books about my culture but also books or posters showing other cultures as well.” Another student commented, “(The) history section is Whitewashed.” A student also suggested that the library, “Display books by and about queer issues topics/general fiction focusing on special identities...” Several students called for additional books in specific areas such as, “More disabled and/or Jewish books” and “International books in (the) most popular foreign languages.”

All mentions of physical displays within the library were coded with “Displays” (n = 23). One student suggested, “Shelves displaying authors with different identities around the library.” Another student commented that, “It is Women's History month this month, so maybe having a display about that would be cool.” Finally, a student suggested, “I think it would be cool to have more library displays curated by some of the cultural centers on campus or Pride Resources Center, etc., to let students, with mediation, display their identities at the library.”

The code “Art” (n = 16) was used to indicate any mention of prints, photographs, or paintings displayed on the walls of Morgan Library. A student stated, “I would appreciate more visibility of LGBT+ inclusion, such as the display of the Philadelphia pride flag and others, as well as posters for LGBT resources.” Another student suggested, “I think seeing the historical art of different ethnicities could help represent identity better.” Finally, one student suggested “More Latino artwork.”

Codes related to “Programming” (n = 16) were applied at all mentions of events and workshops held within the library. One student commented, “Include more local contributions, as well as contributions from minorities as well as featuring and promoting these folks more often. Potentially hold events like book club readings, discussions, etc.” Another student said, “I think that hosting more diverse events and notifying students by email of these upcoming events would help increase the engagement and representation here at the Morgan Library.” Finally, one student suggested, “Maybe partner with the diversity centers on campus to offer DEI events to help support inclusive efforts.”

Additional topics included “Staff” (n = 8), which comprised all mentions of staff, staff training, or more inclusive customer service practices. For example, one student said, “As a trans woman who has not transitioned in a legal way, having to present my ID when checking out materials creates a massive issue. My CSU ID is not linked to my dead name, so having to show my driver's license creates a huge issue.”

We next report results for the questions, “What services do you believe Morgan Library can add to become a more inclusive and welcoming space? Is there anything else you would like to tell us about Morgan Library?” We received 131 responses, and all comments were coded when applicable. As with the above question, there were instances where the replies were not usable, and in these cases, the comments were not coded. The top five codes were: “Space,” “Inclusion,” “Technology,” “Collections,” and “Marketing.”

The most prominent code was “Space” (n = 41), which was applied to any mention of the physical spaces within Morgan Library. One student suggested, “More comfortable chairs. I have a lot of back problems so that is a big issue for me.” Similarly, a student said, “Please make an area for standing work, i.e. rising desks. Some of us can't sit for so long.” Another student suggested creating more neurodivergent-friendly study spaces: “Not have the study rooms be so echoey. The echoey spaces amplify the sound inside of and outside of the study rooms and is incredibly distracting. Especially for neurodivergent people, the extra amplified sound can make it really hard to focus and feel comfortable in the space.” Another

student suggested “More reflection rooms with longer reservation times.” Additional suggestions included “Easier elevator access” and “More study spaces for students with disabilities.”

“Inclusion” (n = 21) was used to code all suggestions for inclusive practices to make the library a more welcoming place. Students had many ideas regarding this topic. Students suggested having “Different languages being spoken when getting help,” coordinating “Meditation training,” offering “Multicultural services,” and providing “Resources for people struggling in school.” One student voiced concern about parking affordability, “Make parking cheaper. Low income students can’t afford the parking and so won’t use the library.” Finally, one student suggested, “Tampons in every bathroom.”

The code “Technology” (n = 16) was applied to all mentions of printing, computers, and software. In some cases, students made various recommendations, and in other cases, students expressed their satisfaction with current practices. For example, one student said, “Super happy you all rent laptops. I am super poor and can’t buy one for myself. Had it not been for this service I would not be graduating.” Many students advocated for equitable financial policies. For example, one student commented, “I returned a charger an hour late and was charged \$8.00 which really sucked.” Many students suggested “Free printing.”

“Collections” (n = 13) was used to indicate all comments that referred to print and electronic resources. Students made many suggestions about specific types of resources that would be helpful for curating inclusive collections. Students suggested purchasing, “Textbooks for short-term checkouts,” “Books from other languages,” “More books about LGBT information, history and representation,” “Hispanic or Latino authors, work, etc.,” and “Audio books & braille books.” Another student said, “It would be awesome if there were more regular fiction contemporary/popular books.”

Comments related to the promotion of resources and services were coded with “Marketing” (n = 11). There appeared to be confusion over services offered in the library, and suggestions for remedying this issue were provided. One student commented, “I think Morgan Library has inclusive services. They just need to work on advertising those services to underrepresented communities.” Similarly, another student said, “I think they should have little graphics about different tools they have because I feel like not a lot of students know about different resources they offer and some people could really use them.” Students made suggestions regarding marketing ideas, including, “Have a big sign of things you can get at the help desk, on the wall as you walk in” and “Better advertisement on the services work.” Additional topics included “Staff” (8), “Programming” (n = 8), and “Wayfinding” (n = 6).

Discussion

This study aimed to investigate students’ perceptions of DEI within the library and to evaluate the library’s overall effectiveness in cultivating a welcoming environment for all. To guide this research, we focused on answering the following specific questions. The first inquiry was concerned with whether students from historically marginalized communities were less likely to perceive the library as an inclusive environment. Overall, while most participants expressed positive feedback regarding the measures used to evaluate inclusivity, further quantitative analysis revealed that individuals who identified as nonbinary/genderqueer/gender nonconforming, BIPOC, and those with disabilities were less likely to perceive the library as inclusive. The second inquiry guiding this research was more exploratory, focusing on identifying what factors influence students’ perceptions of what constitutes an inclusive environment within the library. Through thematic qualitative analysis, we discovered the following

factors as being instrumental in influencing perceptions of inclusiveness: space, collections, displays, art, technology, programming, marketing, staff, and wayfinding.

Overall, students provided positive feedback across all four quantitative measures for inclusivity (sense of belonging, frequency of microaggressions, bias or discrimination, safety, and representation). The majority agreed that the library fostered a sense of belonging, was welcoming, and felt comfortable using library services and seeking assistance. Similarly positive results in the other measures indicated that most students rarely encountered microaggressions, bias, or discrimination, generally felt safe in the library, and believed that the space sufficiently represented their identities. Positive results such as these are not surprising, as other surveys measuring student perceptions of libraries have reported similar outcomes. Students surveyed at the University Library at the University of Illinois Chicago similarly provided positive ratings regarding a sense of belonging, respect for identities, and diverse/representative collections at their library (Scoulas, 2021). Likewise, Morgan-Daniel et al. (2022) also found a predominantly positive perception of their library's DEI climate and inclusivity, especially concerning feeling welcomed and safe from physical harm.

On the surface, the positive results of this study indicate that, by and large, the library is considered an inclusive space on campus. However, it is necessary to dig deeper into the data to grasp the full picture. More detailed analyses revealed that respondents with historically marginalized identities were less likely to perceive the library as inclusive. Although the effect sizes identified in this study were generally small according to conventional standards, it's crucial to recognize that even statistically small effects can yield serious consequences when impacting a large population over an extended period (Funder & Ozer, 2019). A significant strength of this study is the large sample size, which allows us to detect these concerns.

The negative ratings first appear in our analysis while exploring gender identity. Respondents who identified as non-binary/genderqueer/gender non-conforming were significantly less likely to view the library as an inclusive space or welcoming and did not feel particularly represented in the library as compared to cisgender men or women. However, most concerning were the higher reports of experiences of microaggression, bias, or discrimination, as well as not feeling safe to report these incidents to library staff. Similarly, respondents who identified with the LGBTQ+ community were also significantly more likely to report experiencing microaggression, bias, or discrimination. While the results are disconcerting, there exists a substantial body of literature delineating the experiences of students encountering violence, harassment, and discrimination on campuses due to their sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression (Waling & Roffee, 2018). Libraries are not immune from these adverse experiences, as multiple studies have underscored negative encounters reported by patrons identifying with the LGBTQ+ community, especially when seeking information related to LGBTQ+ or gender identity issues (Hays, 2020). It is this fear of experiencing a negative reaction that may explain the reluctance of non-binary/genderqueer/gender non-conforming respondents in our study to reach out to library staff and report incidents of microaggressions, bias, or discrimination.

When exploring the measures of inclusivity in relation to race/ethnicity, significant findings appeared when comparing respondents who identified as BIPOC to respondents who identified as White. One of the first areas that showed significance was that BIPOC respondents were less likely to feel safe reporting microaggressions, bias, and discrimination to library staff. Interestingly, BIPOC respondents did not report significantly higher experiences of microaggressions, bias, and discrimination; however, they were less likely to report these incidents to library staff. The hesitancy of BIPOC students to report instances of microaggressions, bias, and discrimination to library staff reflects similar findings from the Duke

University Library (DUL) study. In that study, Black students believed that DUL did not address racist incidents on campus and would not take sufficient action to address reports of prejudice or microaggressions (Chapman et al., 2020). However, the findings with the largest effect size for BIPOC respondents were related to representation, with BIPOC respondents reporting that they were less likely to feel represented in the library space, less likely to feel resources offered at the library consider different identities, and less likely to feel that the library showcases diverse identities throughout library spaces. These findings are important because research suggests that students' perceptions of belonging are strongly linked to the degree to which their identity is represented on campus (Bucy, 2022; Chapman et al., 2020).

Stewart et al. (2019) emphasized that libraries alone cannot solve these issues. The urgency and importance of creating an inclusive environment requires a broad coalition across campus communities. To address these concerns, CSU Libraries must collaborate with campus partners to ensure that the campus community takes a holistic approach to make BIPOC students feel that their identities are represented on campus and that they feel safe reporting instances of microaggressions to campus employees.

Another group that showed significant findings in relation to our measures for inclusivity was respondents who self-identified as disabled. Respondents who identified as disabled were significantly less likely to report that the library is inclusive, welcoming, or feel comfortable asking for help. They also did not feel represented in the library space and were less likely to report that the library did a sufficient job of showcasing diverse identities throughout library spaces. However, the most pronounced finding for this group, with the largest effect size, was their increased likelihood to report experiencing microaggressions, bias, or discrimination, along with feeling less safe reporting these incidences to library staff. Similar research assessing DEI in a health sciences library also reported lower scoring response rates for individuals with disabilities when asked to rate whether the library met their needs (Morgan-Daniel et al., 2022). One possibility for the propensity of negative attitudes about libraries among individuals with disabilities is the failure of libraries to expand the concept of accessibility beyond mere ADA compliance and truly consider the mobility needs of their users comprehensively (Schomberg & Corley, 2022).

Recommendations

Through qualitative analysis of participants' open-ended responses, we identified the following factors as central to influencing perceptions of inclusiveness: space, collections, displays, art, technology, programming, marketing, staff, and wayfinding. Based on this analysis, researchers suggest implementing the following recommendations to improve perceptions of inclusiveness.

- Create inclusive and quiet study spaces to accommodate different learning styles and preferences. Careful consideration should be given to creating a welcoming space for neurodivergent learners.
- Purchase furniture that suits all body types and learner needs, including adjustable desks, adjustable chairs, and distraction-free furniture.
- Promote scholarship of people of color and other marginalized identities through displays and other programming.
- Create a user-focused marketing plan that promotes library services and collections. There is a disconnect between what services and collections we offer between what students think is available.

- Display inclusive artwork throughout the building that reflects a diversity of identities.
- Invite campus partners to the library and collaborate on programming and services. Consider collaborating on study skills sessions, informational sessions, and thematic events such as poetry readings.
- Provide additional staff training on DEI topics, such as intercultural communication, understanding oppression, microaggressions, and inclusive language, all of which are offered by the CSU Office of Inclusive Excellence. Include student employees in these training sessions.
- Improve the wayfinding experience. Create and post clear and concise signage throughout the library to enhance knowledge of elevators and gender-neutral bathrooms.
- Eliminate barriers for patrons who identify as disabled. Provide more accessible entrances and pathways throughout the building.
- Adjust technology policies, access, and procedures to make them more accessible and user-friendly.

Limitations and Future Research

The survey method is often used in Library Information Science (LIS) because it is easily accessible and requires fewer human resources than other research methods. Despite its convenience, it is important to acknowledge the inherent limitations of solely relying on survey data. For example, students may not accurately portray or feel comfortable sharing their experiences during a survey. To gain a more holistic and accurate picture, researchers suggest a follow-up study utilizing focus groups and photo elicitation methods to gather deeper insight into inclusion in Morgan Library.

Conducting focus groups with our students will provide a deeper understanding of their experiences at the Morgan Library. Given the results of this study, focus groups should be tailored to elicit feedback from the underrepresented and marginalized communities who expressed the greatest concerns about inclusion in Morgan Library. This includes students who identify as nonbinary/genderqueer/gender nonconforming, BIPOC, LGBTQ+, as well as people who identify as disabled. Focus group questions should be developed based on study results and aim to delve deeper into the students' experiences. This approach will enhance the study by capturing the in-depth thoughts of our student body.

To reduce bias and microaggressions, it is essential to recruit moderators who share similar backgrounds with focus group participants. Duke University Libraries successfully applied this strategy by recruiting graduate students who identified as Black to moderate focus groups exploring the experiences of Black students at Duke. To further reduce bias, one of these graduate students, unaffiliated with the library, independently analyzed the findings (Chapman et al., 2020). Even if exact matches between moderators and participants cannot always be achieved, research indicates that focus groups can promote more open and sensitive disclosures among participants with marginalized identities. For instance, in a study conducted by Guest et al. (2017), 350 Black men were randomly assigned to either focus groups or individual interviews, where they were asked identical open-ended questions about their healthcare-seeking behavior. Despite the moderator being a White woman, participants in focus groups were more likely to reveal sensitive and personal information than those in individual interviews. This suggests that individuals with marginalized identities may feel more at ease sharing in a group setting with others who share similar cultural backgrounds, as opposed to a one-on-one interview with someone of a different gender and cultural background. Employing the above strategies in a follow-up study will help create a comfortable environment, encouraging participants to share more openly.

Photo elicitation gives students the opportunity to take photos of places in Morgan Library where they feel the most and least comfort and representation. By coding all the photos, researchers will be able to identify specific spaces within the library that are triggering students or making them feel comfortable. This method will add value to the study by capturing rich, multidimensional data and providing meaningful insight into the daily lives of students.

The addition of this new data, used in tandem with the survey results, will provide a more holistic and accurate picture of the student experience in Morgan Library. However, we also note that the findings of this study may not always generalize to other settings, as all participants were drawn from the same university, which may reduce the diversity and representativeness of the sample.

Conclusion

In this study, we sought to gain insight into what factors influence students' perceptions of an inclusive environment and whether students from historically marginalized communities were less likely to perceive the library as an inclusive space. Overall, the survey elicited positive feedback, with most participants agreeing with the measures used to assess an inclusive environment. In general, participants reported high levels of satisfaction with the measurements for a sense of belonging, safety, and representation. However, further analysis revealed that participants who identified as nonbinary/genderqueer/gender nonconforming, BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and individuals with disabilities were less likely to rate the library as an inclusive, safe, or represented space. An examination of the qualitative data revealed numerous pivotal factors shaping perceptions of inclusiveness, including aspects such as space, collections, displays, art, technology, programming, marketing, staff, and wayfinding. These mixed findings indicate that although most students who visit the library find the environment inclusive, more work is needed to create an inclusive and safe space for students from historically marginalized communities.

Author Contributions

Khaleedah Thomas: Conceptualization (equal), Data curation (equal), Quantitative analysis methodology (lead), Writing - original draft (lead), Writing - review & editing (lead) **Meggan Houlihan:** Conceptualization (equal), Data curation (equal), Qualitative analysis methodology (supporting), Writing - original draft (supporting), Writing - review & editing (supporting)

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Appendix
Survey Questions

1. Please select your age range.

- ☐ Under 18
- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-34
- ☐ 35-44
- ☐ 45-54
- ☐ 55+
- ☐ Prefer not to disclose

2. Please select your educational standing.

- ☐ Undergraduate student
- ☐ Graduate student

3. Please identify your gender. Check all that apply.

- ☐ Woman
- ☐ Man
- ☐ Non-binary / Gender Queer / Gender Non-Conforming
- ☐ Trans / Transgender
- ☐ Cisgender
- ☐ Agender
- ☐ Two Spirit
- ☐ The gender I most closely align with is not listed (please specify)

- ☐ Prefer not to disclose

4. Please identify your race/ethnicity. Check all that apply.

- ☐ White
- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ Latina, Latinx, Latino
- ☐ Indigenous, First Nations, American Indian, or Alaskan Native
- ☐ Asian (including East Asian, South Asian, Southeast Asian)
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- ☐ Arab, Persian, or other peoples of the "Middle East"
- ☐ Prefer not to disclose

☐ Other (please specify) _____

5. Please identify your sexual orientation. Check all that apply.

☐ Straight/Heterosexual

☐ Gay or Lesbian

☐ Bisexual

☐ Queer

☐ Asexual

☐ Prefer to self-describe: _____

☐ Prefer not to disclose

6. Are you a first-generation college student?

☐ Yes

☐ Maybe

☐ No

7. Do you identify as a person with a disability?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Unsure

☐ Prefer not to disclose

8. How often do you visit Morgan Library?

- ☐ Daily
- ☐ More than once a week
- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ 1-2 times a month
- ☐ 1-2 times a semester
- ☐ Rarely or never

9. Please rate how much you agree with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Morgan Library is an inclusive space.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Morgan Library is welcoming.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel comfortable using library services.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel comfortable asking for help.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

The next section of the survey will be about microaggressions, biases, and discrimination.

Microaggressions are defined as verbal, behavioral, and environmental actions that are often brief, and whether intentional or unintentional, come across as derogatory, hostile, or include negative racial slights and insults towards people of color ([Sue et. Al, 2007](#)).

10. How often do you experience microaggressions, bias, or discrimination in Morgan Library?

- ☐ Daily
- ☐ More than once per visit
- ☐ Once per visit
- ☐ Every other visit
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

11. Please rate how much you agree with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
I feel safe from physical harm, discrimination, or emotional harm at Morgan Library.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel safe reporting microaggressions, bias, and discrimination to library staff.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Morgan Library can do more to minimize microaggression, bias, and discrimination.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

12. Please rate how much you agree with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
I feel represented in Morgan Library.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Resources offered at Morgan Library take into consideration different identities.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Morgan Library showcases the work of diverse identities throughout the library's space.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

13. How can we represent your identity better in Morgan library spaces?

The next section of the survey will address the various services Morgan Library offers.

14. Please rate how often you use each service in Morgan Library.

	Never	I-2 times per month	1-2 times per week	Everyday
Loan & Reserve Desk, book checkout	☐	☐	☐	☐
Technology Loans (iPhone chargers, laptops, etc.)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Prospector and Interlibrary Loan (ILL) (checking out materials from other libraries)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Help Desk	☐	☐	☐	☐
Printing Services	☐	☐	☐	☐
Assistive Technology	☐	☐	☐	☐
Research Librarians	☐	☐	☐	☐
Archives & Special Collections	☐	☐	☐	☐
Geospatial Centroid	☐	☐	☐	☐

15. Please rate how helpful you believe each service is in Morgan Library.

	Not Helpful	Neutral	Somewhat Helpful	Helpful	I have not used this service
Loan & Reserve Desk, book checkout	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Technology Loans (iPhone chargers, laptops, etc.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Prospector and Interlibrary Loan (ILL) (checking out materials from other libraries)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Help Desk	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Printing Services	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Assistive technology	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Research Librarians	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Archives & Special Collections	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Geospatial Centroid	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

16. What services do you believe Morgan Library can add to become a more inclusive and welcoming space? Is there anything else you would like to tell us about Morgan Library?