Serving and Supporting LGBTQ+ Students: A Mixed-Methods Assessment of Library Services at the University of Maryland

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Purpose

The goals of this research are to:

- Identify emerging themes about LGBTQ+ students' experiences in libraries and on campus.
- Identify methods to evaluate and assess library services for LGBTQ+ populations.
- Investigate and improve the role academic libraries play in supporting curricular and co-curricular activities of LGBTQ+ students.
- Implement best practices and recommendations for supporting LGBTQ+ students in our libraries and on campus.

Methods

This research used a mixed method approach.

Survey

- Participants were recruited by flyers in the library and campus LGBTQ+ group listservs.
- Anonymous survey conducted through Qualtrics.
- Three sections: demographics (6 questions), library experience questions (18 questions), and general campus experience questions (4 questions).
- Mix of multiple choice, multi-select, likert scale, and open-ended.
- After completing the survey, participants had the opportunity to provide an email address on an external form to enter a raffle for gift cards valued at $30. In that form, participants could also sign up to be contacted for group interviews.
- 52 total survey responses were collected.

Interviews

- Group interviews were conducted to further explore the themes of the survey.
- Interviews were in-person, in a private space inside the main library on campus to immerse students in the library setting.
- Researchers asked open-ended versions of the library use and campus climate questions from the survey and prompted for further details when necessary.
- 6 total participants were interviewed.

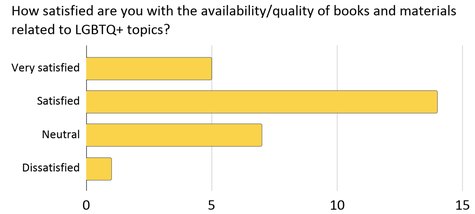
To view survey and interview questions, use this QR Code:

Demographic Data

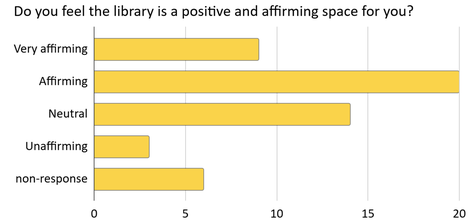
- Survey responses were skewed toward **graduate-level students** (58% of participants)
- The majority of the respondents were white, with 67% (n=35) identifying as solely white.
- The most common gender identity was woman (n=24).
- 19 participants identified as non-binary, 8 of those participants indicated that they were non-binary and another gender.
- Queer was the most selected sexual orientation selected. 11 participants (21%) selected multiple sexualities.

Library Use

- Participants were frequent library users, most participants claimed to use the library either 1 to 3 times a week (27%) or 1 to 3 times a month (36%).
- Participants rated library staff as helpful & knowledgeable (33%) or very helpful & knowledgeable (42%).
- Over 50% of survey participants have used the library collection to look for LGBTQ+ related material. Participants who had used the library for LGBTQ+ materials were mostly satisfied (n=14) or very satisfied (n=5).



- Some wanted more physical books (or more signs and guides to find physical books on LGBTQ+ topics).



Personnel

Overall, participants note that their identity does not generally play a role in their interactions with library staff. If it does, they feel supported/affirmed, which is noted by the support they receive when locating LGBTQ+ related information or when placing purchase requests for queer content exclusively.

Themes

Funding in Higher Education

Participants brought concerns about decreased funding in higher education. They worried about finding internships, funding for graduate education, and about a decrease in services. Participants had also been informed of cuts to library grants and were worried about if UMD was impacted.

> *"I think broadly, like I think concerns about cuts to higher ed in general are very concerning for me."*

A word cloud of the most commonly used words from the interview transcript

Bias and Being Othered

Misgendering is a frequent theme in the survey. Similarly, participants talked about overhearing conversations on campus that were homophobic, transphobic, or sexist.

> *"... better biased incidents support response and resources. Better education for faculty, but also like better, like accountability for harm because there really aren't things that, like, hold faculty accountable."*

University Response to Political Climate

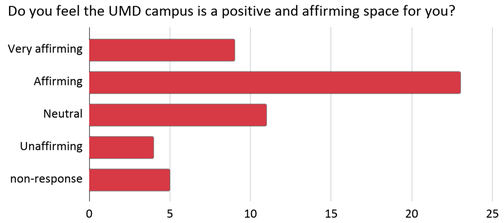
Participants were very concerned about the political climate of the country. They want campus to be loud about their support of LGBTQ+ students.

> *"in the face of the Trump executive orders, I find UMD's near silence on how they will protect their LGBT students, specifically trans students, very concerning. I feel safe here at the moment because of my department, but how will that change in the coming months? Silence is complicity."*

Themes cont.

Campus Sense of Community

Participants emphasized support networks among students, showed great pride and appreciation for the campus Equity Center and for UMD's reputation as a queer friendly institution.



Tangible Support

Students care about practical forms of support; Things such as the ease of the name change process positively impacted student's sense of belonging. Students were negatively impacted by barriers such as: difficulties finding affordable housing, low wages, and concerns about bathroom access.

> *"Call me the right pronouns all you want, I cannot afford to live in College Park!"*

Gender Neutral Bathrooms

Participants provided feedback about the physical space of the library, and the gender neutral restroom in the main library was identified as an area needing major improvement.

> *"the gender-neutral bathroom on the ground floor is *always* locked... This puts me in an uncomfortable position of choosing a bathroom when, as someone in early transition, neither bathroom feels like a safe place for me."*

Conclusion

Students overall feel that UMD libraries and the campus are a safe and affirming place, appreciate the services, and have found community. At the same time, students struggle with the political climate, and want university support in both words and deeds.

Acknowledgements

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