

LGBTQ+ Library Improvement Survey & Interviews: Preliminary findings

Franklin Ofsthun, Marcus O. Ortiz, Gary W. White, and Michael Cortese
University of Maryland, College Park

Overview

This poster details the preliminary findings of an assessment project about LGBTQ+ students use of the library.

Methods

This was a mixed-method qualitative research project. The first method used was a survey and the second was group interviews. The survey was used to obtain information from a wider audience and the focus groups were used to dive deeper.

Survey:

- 2 eligibility questions, 6 demographic questions, 18 library questions, and 4 UMD campus climate questions.
- Questions were a combination of multiple choice, likert scale, and short open ended questions. All questions were optional.

Interviews:

- 3 interviews occurred. A large group of students proved difficult to schedule at one time, especially during late-April /early-May. Group 1 was 3 participants, Group 2 was 2 participants, and the final interview was only 1 participant.
- Recruited via the survey. Survey included an external sign up to be contacted for a focus group.

Demographic Data

- Skewed toward **graduate-level students** (58% of participants, compared to UMD graduate population of 25%)
- Majority white, with 67% (n=35) identifying as solely white

<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>	Total	Race/Ethnicity
Asian	5	10%
Black or African American	2	4%
Multiracial	9	17%
Prefer not to say	1	2%
White	35	67%

- 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.

<i>Gender identity</i>	Total	Percent out of total participants
Man	10	19%
Woman	24	46%
Non-binary	19	37%
Prefer not to say	1	2%
Prefer to self identify	2	4%
Unsure/Questioning	3	6%

**Total surpasses n because participants were allowed to select multiple answers.*

- Queer was the most selected sexual orientation selected. 11 participants (21%) selected multiple sexualities.

<i>Sexual Orientation</i>	Total	Percent
Lesbian	17	33%
Bisexual	17	33%
Gay	4	8%
Queer	20	38%
Asexual	6	12%
Unsure/Questioning	2	4%
Straight	0	0%
Prefer not to say	0	0%

**Total surpasses n because participants were allowed to select multiple answers.*

- Many participants in the survey were **questioning aspects of their identity** in demographic questions about sexuality and gender identity.

Number of respondents who indicated they were “Unsure/Questioning” per question

Question	Total	Percent
Sexual Orientation	2	4%
What is your gender identity ?	3	6%
Do you consider yourself to be transgender (identifying as a gender other than the one assigned at birth)?	7	13%

Library Use

Participants were asked questions about the **frequency** they used the library, the **location** and **timing** they felt they most frequently visited. McKeldin was the most frequently visited location for 79% of participants Hornbake (10%), Art Library (8%), Michelle Smith Performing Arts Library (2%) were selected as well.

<i>What time of day do you usually visit the library?</i>	Total	Percent
Morning (7 am – 12 pm)	17	33%
Afternoon (12 pm – 5 pm)	38	73%
Evening (5 pm – 9 pm)	24	46%
Night (9 pm or later)	6	12%

**Total surpasses n because participants were allowed to select multiple answers.*

These participants were active 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%).

<i>On average, how often do you visit the library?</i>	Total	Percent
4 or more times a week	7	13.46%
1 to 3 times a week	14	26.92%
1 to 3 times a month	19	36.54%
1 to 3 times a semester	8	15.38%
Rarely	4	7.69%
Grand Total	52	100.00%

Participants selected their primary reasons to visit the library. Students study in the library, borrow materials, and meet with classmates or friends the most. Few students indicated they primarily used the library to receive research assistance, but survey and interviews uncovered that students were getting help from librarians and staff that they found quite impactful.

<i>What are the primary reasons for your visit to the library? (Select all that apply)</i>	Total	Percent
Study in the library	36	69%
Borrow books or other materials (course reserves, ILL, laptops, chargers, cameras, etc)	27	52%
Meet with a classmate group or friends	24	46%
Use computers or other technology (Makerspace, Podcasting Lab, printing, etc)	14	27%
Attend events or workshops	6	12%
Get research assistance (research consultation, writing assistance, GIS/statistical support, etc)	3	6%
Other	6	12%

**Total surpasses n because participants were allowed to select multiple answers.*

Library Personnel

Participants rated library staff as helpful and knowledgeable (33%) or **very helpful and knowledgeable (42%)**. Additionally, when asked “Is there anything else you’d like to share about the UMD Libraries?” students brought up the library staff in comments such as:

- “Thank you for **all of the work** that you do!”
- “They’re amazing! Thank you for the hard work.”
- “Many, many **cool people work there.**”

Additionally, an interviewee identified the **presence of people** they perceived as **visibly queer working at the library** was a positive experience for them.

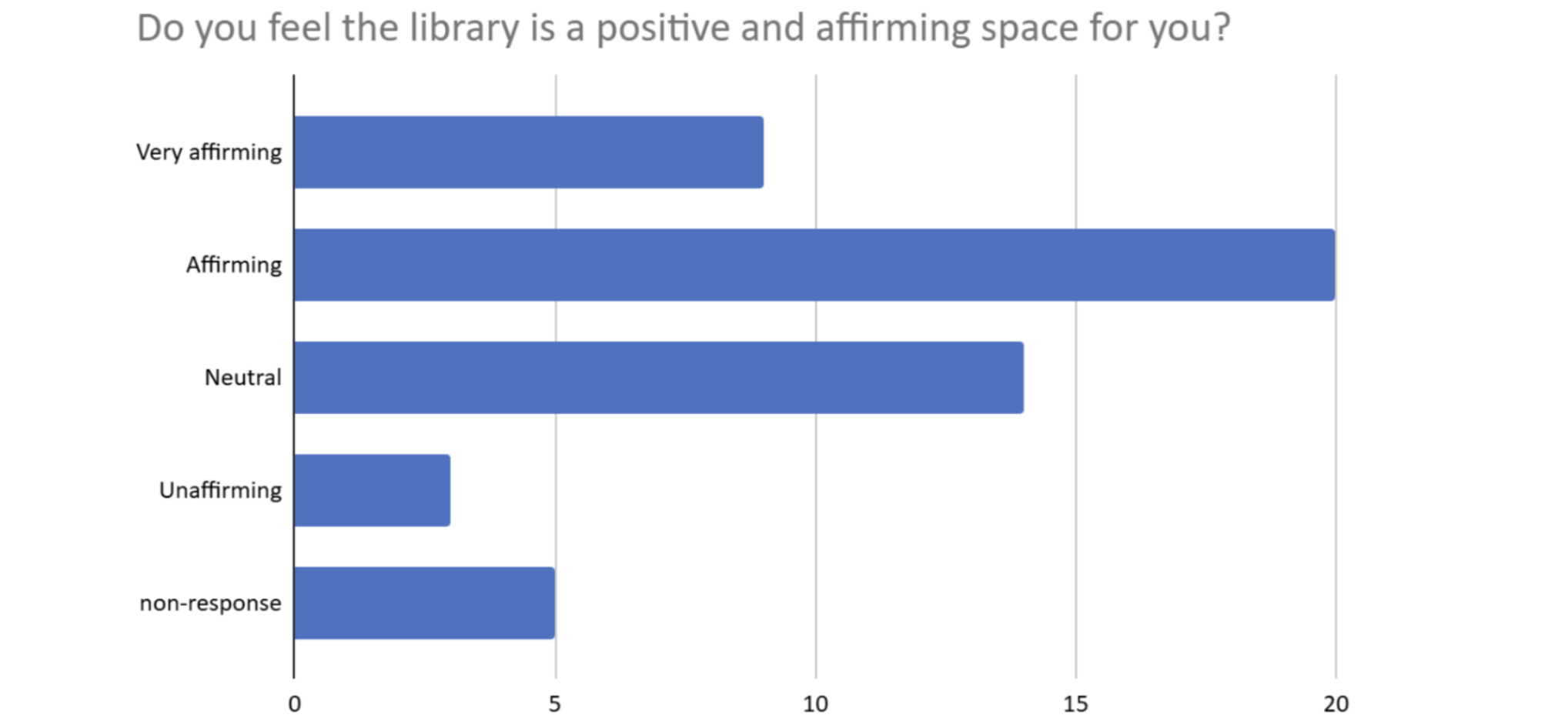
Students spoke highly of friendly custodial staff, courteous student employees, and helpful librarians. These comments and others emphasised both the friendliness of the staff but also appreciating the work itself.:

- **I appreciate the work that is being done to help marginalized populations, I often seek queer literature** for fun and for my coursework and I have found it easy to find, especially with the **subject guides** and **specific database filter for LGBTQ+ studies.**

LGBTQ+ Collection Development

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). Only 1 participant was dissatisfied. Participants commented there were **many ebooks, articles, and other electronic material available in LGBTQ+ topics**. Most mentioned this positively, but some also wanted more physical books (or the ability to find physical books on LGBTQ+ topics.

Library Space



Participants provided feedback about the physical space of the library. The **gender neutral restroom** was identified as a an area needing major improvement:

- “The gender neutral bathroom at McKeldin is often **closed** or often **dirty** -- I come to the library because I can safely use the bathroom, and **when it is unavailable, I have to study elsewhere**”
- “the gender-neutral bathroom on the ground floor is ***always* locked**, and I am only aware of the one. 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.”
- “There’s only 1 gender neutral bathroom in the building and it’s usually **gross**”

Students also suggested improvements to the “scary” elevator in McKeldin, loud fire alarms in STEM, architecture, or art libraries, and printers.

Next Steps

These data are preliminary, because the interviews have not been fully transcribed and analyzed. Data analysis will continue using NVIVO to aid in thematic coding.

The research team will work on turning the collected data into a **recommendation report** for the UMD Libraries community and will disseminate the findings to the library community at large by submitting to **academic journals**.

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