Partnering with Black students to learn about their library and campus experiences

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Duke University Libraries
To learn more, see full report:

bit.ly/BlackStudentReport
BACKGROUND

Inspiration and methodology
“Diversity strengthens us”

Duke University Libraries Strategic Plan, 2016-2021
Reviewed 2015 COFHE Enrolled Student Survey findings

Noticed disparities in responses across user groups

Wanted to know more about underrepresented minority groups

Included this study in assessment goals we report to the University
USER STUDIES

- **1G students**
  - 2016-2018

- **Black students**
  - 2018-2020

- **International students**
  - 2020-2022
GETTING STARTED

**Formed team**
Five staff members, including two graduate student assistants

**Reviewed literature**
Researched what other universities and libraries are doing in this area

**Scanned environment**
Learned more about Black students at Duke and the support services in place
Experiences on campus
- To what extent do Black students consider Duke University to be inclusive?
- What services and spaces help students feel supported?
- Do Black students experience microaggressions in Durham, at Duke, or in the Libraries?

Experiences with the library
- To what extent do Black students consider the library to be inclusive?
- What library services and spaces do students find useful?
- What changes could the Libraries make to ensure that Black students feel supported and welcome?
STUDY DESIGN

PhotoVoice

Discussion groups

2020 biennial survey
Qualitative community-based participatory research method originating in global public health

Participants take photos ahead of time in response to a series of prompts

In group discussion, participants view all photos, and conversation is driven by photo content, not a script directed by a moderator
PROMPTS

- What makes you feel supported, safe, or like you belong on campus? (and in the Libraries?)
- What makes you feel unsafe or unsupported on campus? (and in the Libraries?)
- What library services (e.g., study spaces, research materials, visits from a librarian to your class, workshops, and other programs) do you use and find helpful?
Have you experienced microaggressions or bias in your **time at Duke**? Take a moment to **write your thoughts** about microaggressions or bias at Duke on the blank paper in front of you. Then we’ll discuss as a group.

Based on your experience, how might the **library** be more supportive, welcoming, or inclusive of Black students?
**Problem**
- Did not want to have White people lead the discussions
- Our dept has no Black staff
- We didn’t want to ask other library staff to spend extensive time on project

**Solution**
- Recruited Black graduate student moderators with experience in qual research
- From Psych & Neuroscience, Sociology, Cul Anth depts
- Peers x 2: Duke students and Black
- Very successful!
RECRUITMENT

Undergraduates
Graduate students

Direct email

Duke Institutional Research

International House, student group listservs
ANALYSIS

Graduate moderator analysis

Staff research team analysis

Graduate student moderator’s report: https://dukespace.lib.duke.edu/dspace/handle/10161/20251
ANALYSIS

- Transcribed discussion groups
- Reviewed analysis and report by graduate student moderator
- Affinity mapping by team
- Developed findings based on mappings and Pamela’s report
QUESTIONS & OBSERVATIONS
FINDINGS

Based on report and affinity mapping
To what extent are Duke University and Duke Libraries viewed as inclusive spaces?
Duke is a historically White space

- Campus culture, curricula, and spaces center White experiences, history, and values
- Systemic bias in the classroom
- Students experience microaggressions constantly
- Bias reinforces the idea that their belonging at Duke is qualified
Overall positive view of Libraries

- Libraries meet diverse learning needs
- Numerous services and resources are valued
- Some negative interactions with students/staff
- Some aspects of library spaces are unwelcoming, particularly those that center White history and culture
Duke and DUL, while not perceived as actively hostile or racist, are complicit in their silence.
What does it mean to be Black at Duke?
To walk invisible, to speak for all
It’s like I have to prove something to somebody: I’m here for the same reason that you are.
What does it mean to be Black at Duke?

Being Black at a predominantly White institution
Students don’t take it upon themselves to get educated about the Other. The only time my classes are predominantly Black is if it is an AAAS class. But I walk into my AAAS classes and I see people who already know what’s going on...People who do need this class, they aren’t going to take it. They don’t care.
What does it mean to be Black at Duke?

Duke Libraries and Duke as complacent and complicit
I don’t see an active attempt to make it welcoming. Depending on...what your experience has been like as a Black student on campus, I think there would need to be a purposeful and very explicit attempt to make it welcoming. Not to say there’s a malicious attempt to make it unwelcoming.
I feel safe from discrimination, harrassment, and emotional and physical harm at Duke Libraries

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I feel safe from discrimination, harrassment, and emotional and physical harm at Duke University

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What does it mean to be Black at Duke?

Microaggressions at Duke and in Durham
There are subtle reminders everywhere you go. It’s not intentional, but it’s all the time. Or that maybe you got here because you’re Black and they are trying to meet a quota.
Systemic injustice perpetuated through the curriculum
We were absent in the scholarship. Not just Black people – any people of color. And when it was there, it was highly problematized...Every time people of color are mentioned, it’s in some kind of negative context. We’re deficient in some sort of way.
In my program, we are often looking at regressions in which race is a factor. And the way that professors interpret the coefficients on that is lazy, or sloppy...Being Black is related to other variables in the regression like education, wealth...My program is [a high percent] international students, a group of people who don’t have exposure to Black people, and they will just receive this as ‘Black people means less X, Y, Z.’
How spaces and services help students feel supported
On white and Western dominance of physical spaces
PhotoVoice caption on image of Gothic Reading Room:
“concentrated white dominance”
In the library at the [professional] school, there’s this room...A bunch of huge paintings of old White guys...It means something...the absence of other people being represented in this school says a lot. If they wanted to do something about it they could...There have been people of color who’ve been through Duke and have gone on to do great things.
Picture of the 3rd floor library bookcases. Walking around literature dedicated to Western European thought can be alienating. Sometimes an emphasis on monumental contributions from other places of the world (i.e. Africa) would come off as more inspiring.
There is not a Black studies library here, or a section [in one of the libraries]. That’s something that is definitely missing and is conspicuous by its absence.
How spaces and services help students feel supported

Affinity spaces are critical and signal what Duke values
Community space and representation.

P1 & P2

Having spaces such as the Mary Lou Williams Center for Black culture makes me feel more included on campus. This is because it highlights and celebrates what it means to be Black in the United States, which is usually not as prolific at Predominantly White Universities (PWI).
I think rental textbooks are really nice... Thinking, ‘oh no I have to buy this $200 math book online – no, you can rent it from the library until you know whether you’re even supposed to be in that math class.’ Knowing that I can get through the first part of the semester without having to worry about textbooks is big.
How spaces and services help students feel supported

Person-to-person interactions make a difference
First semester sophomore year when I was [at the library] really late, there was this one security guard who I saw just going around and around, and each time he would wave. Then I was studying there just two nights ago, I just saw him again and he waved, and it just felt really good.
The staff is very nice and very welcoming...They’re always cracking jokes, or just always there to help me. That’s what makes me feel like I belong.
QUESTIONS & OBSERVATIONS
RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on findings
RECOMMENDATIONS

- Increase **diversity of Duke University Libraries staff**.
- Dedicate a **library space to Black scholarship**. Include art, photographs, or exhibits related to Black culture and history – at Duke or in Durham, or internationally. Highlight library resources from Black scholars.
- Develop library security staff orientation: provide information about the **important role security staff members’ behavior plays** in students feeling welcome or unwelcome.
Recommendations

- Charge a group to further explore use of library spaces by fraternities.
- Increase portraits, artwork, photographs, or other visual representations of people of color to balance the number of portraits of white people in library spaces, including the renovated Lilly Library.
- Work with Black students and faculty to develop more exhibits and events that highlight Black students’ experiences and Black scholarship.
SHARING FINDINGS

- Duke Libraries staff discussions
- Conversations with campus stakeholders
- Presentations at local and national conferences
- Implementation team formed to move recommendations forward
Six staff members, led by Joyce
Informed by workshop groups
Charged to review and implement recommendations
Identified campus and library partners
WORK UNDER WAY

- Diversifying scholarship in the curriculum
- Increasing visual representation of BIPOC in the Libraries
- Developing policies to report harassment
- Conversations with campus leaders re: fraternities’ use of our spaces
- Conducting research to support other recs
More info about this study or other user studies:
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bit.ly/BlackStudentReport
QUESTIONS & OBSERVATIONS