Dean's Innovation Grants

Final Report

Date: 9/30/20109
Project Title: Improving Library Services for Patrons of All Abilities
Project Team Members: Jennifer Rowe

Project Purpose

This was a research project designed to increase awareness and mindfulness of the needs of patrons with disabilities and to improve services offered to accommodate those patrons. Through an online survey of students with disabilities and a series of focus groups with UNT students with disabilities, the primary investigator hopes to learn what UNT Libraries can do to improve our services to accommodate the unique needs of our campus' students with disabilities. Results are to be shared at a conference for higher education professionals.

Project Activities

I developed and deployed a survey to UNT students, the target population for which was students with disabilities. The Office of Disability Access, The Toulouse Graduate School, and other groups distributed the survey by email and promos for the survey were posted on the Eagle Commons Library social media accounts. I randomly selected one survey participant to receive a prize (a new iPad) and that prize was presented to the winner: undergraduate student, Sekinat Quadri. She was thrilled to receive her new iPad! I included her signed form documenting receipt of the iPad at the end of this report.

I received 85 complete survey responses. The response rate to my survey was quite low; however, I was able to gather some important qualitative data, which I will discuss more in the Anecdotal and Best Practices sections below.

Of the 85 complete survey responses, 33 respondents indicated that they were interested or that they may be interested in participating in a focus group. I contacted people who, in their survey responses had expressed interest in participating in focus groups. I was unable to secure enough participants to actually conduct any focus groups though. I plan to make another attempt to recruit focus group participants, although that activity will fall outside the grant period.

To conclude my DIG project, I gave a poster presentation at the Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) "Equity and Excellence: Access in Higher Education" conference in Boston in July of 2019 (poster sessions are listed here: https://www.ahead.org/events-programming/conferences/2019-equity-and-excellence/2019-poster-sessions). I was able to engage with lots of people during my poster presentation and made some professional connections. The poster was informed by my literature review and when people came to engage with me about my poster, I discussed the results of the survey and asked them questions about their work with students with disabilities.

Budget – Total $3000

Original budget was:

$750 -- Supplies ($500 for ipad + $250 Dining vouchers)

$250 -- Printing/Promotional materials

$2000.00 – Travel ($845 for accommodations + $750 for conference registration + $300 for airfare)

Actual Expenditures were:

$399.00 – ipad prize give-away to one survey participant

$150.00 – UNT Dining vouchers for focus group participants

$19.00 – poster expenses

$415.00 – airfare to Boston

$870.00 – AHEAD conference registration

$803.85 – Airbnb accommodations and travel expenses in Boston

Total = $2656.85

Project Outputs/Outcomes

The survey provided valuable comments that can inform changes library services and facilities. The survey responses and the process of preparing my poster for the AHEAD conference have given me background information that will allow me to better advocate for the needs of students with disabilities on campus. Being at the AHEAD conference allowed me to network with campus disability professionals, establish professional connections, and to learn more about how they serve students with disabilities.

Anecdotal Information

Suggestions from survey participants, grouped into subject categories.

Getting to the library

- For a person with physical and mobility issues that has pain walking, it is difficult to access Willis with parking across the street or across the campus.
- An on-call golf cart service or something to allow access to the library from the parking lot?
- I think the would benefit from an entrance in the back. This would make it easier to access from wherever you are on campus.

Willis library

- Bathrooms at Willis are confusing to find and difficult to get to (two heavy doors to navigate through, which is almost impossible for people in wheelchairs) and bathrooms are too small (not enough stalls, the overall space is too cramped for people in wheelchairs).
    - o I definitely wish more stalls were available in bathrooms, both regular and wheelchair accessible.
    - o The bathroom entrances are challenging with the tight spaces.

- - willis bathrooms inaccessible

- More signage needed to promote the appropriate use for each floor. For example, large obvious signs that designate the lower level, third and fourth floors as quiet floors and the other floors as group study areas.
  - It needs more signs on the accommodations of each floor, where silent studying can take place,
  - Wilis Library: Present more public awareness about the function of the basement floor of the Library to students
- Furniture and aesthetic can be improved throughout the library
- Height adjustable tables. They're too low for my wheelchair.
- There needs to be more space between book shelves and also between all the seating.

Eagle Commons Library

- Eagle Commons Library is the most quitest place on campus to study, however, it is not wheelchair accessible to go upstairs. You then must take the elevator, but the elevator is pretty small and can be hard if study spaces are already filled. Possibly incorporating a way to have more quiet study spaces.
- Height adjustable tables. They're too low for my wheelchair.

Discovery Park Library

- The discovery park library gets crowded sometimes that there aren't places to sit in
- The factory at disco is best place on earth.
- Height adjustable tables. They're too low for my wheelchair.

Need for designated library space for students with disabilities

- There is no privet/quiet room where to use the digital magnifier and computer with Jaws/Magic at the same time. It is in the busy common area which makes it hard to study.
- Wosh there was library space for students with disabilities to go into a quiet space tonuse a computer with an enlarged screen or with equipment to transcribe documents, etc
- Appropriate furniture should be provided for people with chronic pain
- The lower floor of Willis is very helpful for me as a student with ADHD because it is quiet (Can we have a designated area similar to Lower level, with varied seating and quiet, with tech for students with disabilities?)
- Height adjustable tables. They're too low for my wheelchair.
- It would be great to have a Apple Large desktop in a private study room.
- Potentially that the printer be a little lowered for people who might need a wheelchair to print. As well as more printers at Eagle Common because it is pretty packed at times.
- Computer areas that are more secluded

Tech issues

- The system for printing documents requires someone with vision to give authorization to print where the printers are located.
- More working outlets needed
  - Willis quiet floor outlets work only half the time.
  - The Charging Tables need to be upgraded though out the library in Willis
- The one major aspect of UNT library spaces that are not accommodating for students with disabilities are the computers. There are very limited computers that have the assistive technology (i.e., JAWS screen-readers) that students with visual impairments can utilize. I have never been able to independently use a computer at any UNT library space because they did not have the assistive technology that I needed. I think there was one computer with the JAWS screen-reader on it at Willis; however, it was always taken by a student that probably did not have a disability because it was not specifically reserved for students with disabilities. I have not really been able to use the physical spaces of UNT libraries as much as I would or could have during my time as a student, and I feel that this has been a great disservice to me.
- Enlarging technology or transcribing equipment needed
- More digital magnifiers (at least one in every floor and in a privet study room) and access to a braille printer
- Personal scanners that work and that are configured correctly.
- Potentially that the printer be a little lowered for people who might need a wheelchair to print. As well as more printers at Eagle Common because it is pretty packed at times.

Staff issues

- NONE of the workers have been willing to communicate by writing and continually ask me to lip read. I dont go anymore because no one there uses asl and many things that Deaf students need are complicated and need an interpreter. But university requires 3 days to schedule interpreters so.
- Interpreters on hand.
- Just ensure the staff are readily available to assist in any way like reaching a book or accessing a computer.

Promotion of services and resources

- Please advertise the services that you all offer a bit more. I didn't know about a lot of the things that were available to me in the libraries and they would have made things significantly easier for me to function. :)

Resources needed

- Audiobook offerings
- Perhaps a larger collection of audio books?
- More online film databases access like Kanopy.

Best Practices

In preparation for my poster presentation, I conducted a review of the literature on academic libraries serving students with disabilities. Several best practices emerged during the course of that literature review, ones that I recommend the UNT Libraries implement. One very common theme that I found was that libraries should have a committee or workgroup that focuses on issues related to diversity and serving students with disabilities. This workgroup should include people from different departments/divisions of the library, whose jobs in some way intersect with issues of access and accommodations. I recommend that the UNT Libraries create a workgroup or committee to consist of public services individuals who have an interest in disability access, an individual from TACO, an individual from External Relations, individuals from each of the other library divisions, plus an ex-officio member from outside the library (someone from the Office of Disability Access or the CLEAR Accessibility Coordinator).

Libraries are also encouraged to frequently review and update their policies for serving students with disabilities and to make those policies public on the library website. The UNT Libraries is overdue to revise our disability access policy and this work could be initiated by a disability access workgroup. Another best practice recommended to libraries is to conduct regular accessibility audits. Accessibility audits can go beyond the website and electronic offerings to include auditing the physical spaces and services as seen through the lens of students with disabilities. In addition, frontline library staff need to maintain current knowledge of how to use adaptive technology in the library. It is not adequate for staff simply to know where the adaptive technology is located and to have a general idea of the purpose of each item. Frontline staff need to be frequently refreshed and re-trained on how to use software such as Magic and Jaws and equipment such as the Kurtweil 3000. Another key best practice that appears in the literature is advertising and promoting accessible features, services, and resources across the campus. Too many times, students simply do not know what services and resources are available in the library. If students know that the library is concerned about serving their needs, they are more likely to visit the library and take advantages of the services and resources the library offers. Signage should be clear and visible, directing students to collections, restrooms, and service points. Accessible furniture, such as adjustable height desks should be available in every library seating area. Librarians should implement universal design concepts in their instruction sessions. Finally, whenever possible, the library should hire individuals with disabilities; it is important to have employees with unique perspectives as individuals with disabilities.

Program Continuity

The project work can continue through a library diversity/disability access committee or workgroup, which could address the remaining best practices together. I would like to make another attempt to recruit students with disabilities to participate in focus groups, to gather additional feedback.

Below is the form that I had Sekinat sign, to document that she had received the iPad.

Participants in the IRB-19-90 Research Study- Survey of students with disabilities and their use of the UNT Libraries, had the opportunity to enter to win a new iPad, valued at $429.00. One study participant, Sekinat Quadri, was randomly selected and notified at email address, SekinatQuadri@my.unt.edu, of winning the prize on May 3, 2019. This document serves as proof that the iPad purchased with DIG grant funds was given to a study participant in accordance with the original research proposal.

I, Sekinat Quadri, acknowledge that I received my iPad on May 7, 2019.

Signature _____