

Institution Name: Illinois Wesleyan University (IWU)

Institution Characteristics: IWU is a small, private liberal arts college with four professional schools. As of Fall 2019, our FYE enrollment was 1620. The Ames Library is home to four librarians and seven staff members.

CARLI Counts Participant Name + Job Title: Stephanie Davis-Kahl, Collections & Scholarly Communications Librarian & Professor

Project Name/Title: Underrepresented Students' Sense of Belonging in The Ames Library

Single Sentence Abstract: The purpose of this project is to explore how use of the library space contributes positively to underrepresented students' sense of belonging on campus. Students' sense of belonging has been found to have an impact on how students engage in their studies and campus life and seek out resources and help. As a major student service on campus, the library has a vital interest in students' sense of belonging, and whether or not the library space contributes or not.

Motivation(s) for Project: As a campus, we are striving to become more aware of how our spaces and services reach and impact underrepresented students on campus. The library prides itself for being a welcoming space for students, but we had no data to inform our assumption. This study sets the stage for exploring whether or not our assumption is true.

Partners and Stakeholders: Office of Diversity & Inclusion, Student Affairs

Inquiry Question: Does using the library space contribute positively to underrepresented students' sense of belonging on campus?

Study Participants/Population: 310 students of color; the survey was completed by 26 students over the Fall 2019 semester.

Method(s) of Data Collection and Analysis: Survey

Findings: Respondents used the words "comfortable, quiet, relaxing, clean" to describe the library. A few also reported a sense of "solidarity; common purpose; we are all struggling to get through the semester together" when in the library, and expressed appreciation for our study rooms. Two respondents reported stressed and undeserving in the library: "it's really bad for my mental health sometimes," "Sometimes I feel far too stupid to hang out and study in Ames and I feel judged a lot of the time." One student reported feeling unsafe at night when walking home from the library. In general, respondents do feel a sense of belonging in the library.

When students were asked about other campus spaces that are formally dedicated to promoting a sense of belonging for our students of color, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, the Multicultural Center, and Evelyn Chapel were singled out the most often. The survey also asked students about what campus spaces helped them feel a sense of belonging. The top three responses were: My room, dining areas, and classrooms. In a follow-up question, when students

were asked how the space(s) specifically helped them to feel a sense of belonging, respondents cited the ability to be themselves (“I can be myself and I do not feel anxiety in these spaces.”), trusting the people around them are accepting (“I get comfortable with the people in my class and feel like I belong there alongside them,” “I surround myself in these spaces with people that make me feel like I belong,” “Surrounded by people who accept and respect one another,” and “These spaces specifically help me feel a sense of belonging by allowing me to interact with faculty, staff, and my peers. My professors have all been welcoming, staff and faculty are engaging and talking, and the peers I interact with more make me feel at home.”) Other respondents shared: “I feel safe in some of these spaces which is a welcoming feeling but I feel welcome by specific faculty and staff in some of these spaces. In others, I feel hated sometimes. It’s a confusing feeling.” A similar response was shared by another respondent: “In those spaces I can be surrounded by my friends. [...] I don’t feel like I belong in other places like classrooms.”

Finally, one respondent shared that their sense of belonging extends to others: “I feel most comfortable when the others I am with feel comfortable. If they feel like they don’t belong and I’m in their presence, I empathize with them.” The presence and quality of students’ sense of belonging in any space on campus, dedicated or not, is highly dependent on the people within that space and how safe the student feels with those people.

Use of Findings: While respondents did not report any negative interactions with library faculty or staff, this finding underscores the importance of continued awareness and professional development about diversity and inclusion on campus. Another piece of helpful information gleaned from the survey was that respondents are unaware of our Social Justice and Diversity Room, which was established two years ago at the request of two faculty members. The original purpose of the room was to highlight issues of social justice and diversity and to collect book donations for a “little free library” for anyone to take. Since the room was established, the librarians who were in charge of the room have left, so we are in the process of reconsidering the space and its purpose.

Next Steps and Other Results: We plan to share this information with the Library Advisory Committee, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, as well as Student Affairs.

Additional Reflections: This project was hopefully the first of a series of projects aimed to assess our work with diversity and inclusion.

Timeline: We plan to share our preliminary results with the groups listed above this semester, as well as with the students who were invited to participate in the survey. Discussions about the Social Justice and Diversity Room will take place over the course of the semester, especially as other discussions about library space are taking place.

## Bibliography/Works Cited:

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