Creating Inclusive Environments in Academic Libraries Through Universal Design

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ABSTRACT

A qualitiative case study conducted at a college in Mississippi in 2022 examined 7 students' perceptions of an academic library. Students registered with the campus disability service accommodation center for physical disabilities participated in the semi-structured interviews. While not asked about their disability, most chose to openly share this information; they were dealing with layers of disabilities, such as constant shaking, PSTD, and anxiety. A major finding was that no student participating in the study had ever checked out a physical library book. Building on that previous case study, this quasi-experimental research will be conducted through a combination of surveys and interviews, along with observations from the disability community. It seeks to examine how students with disabilities perceive the libraries' facilities, resources, and services in academic libraries. Student surveys and interviews will be conducted both before and after extensive library staff training on diversity, equity, and inclusion to determine the impact the training had on students with disabilities and their experience using the library. The study seeks to focus on virtual platforms, education of library staff, implementing a holistic universal design, and giving students with disabilities a voice (relatedness) and choices (autonomy and competence). By providing simple solutions with large impacts to academic library environments, more universities/colleges will have access to a usable holistic model for serving students with disabilities that can fit underfunded and understaffed environments. A follow-up posttest will be utilized to measure the impact the changes had on students with disabilities through surveys, interviews, and observations.

ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

Academic libraries; Education; Information needs; Social justice; Specific populations

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

academic libraries; advocacy; higher education; library services; students with disabilities