

A Welcoming Space?

The Urban Academic Library and Diverse Students

Adriene Lim (Presenter)
Sharon Elteto
Rose Jackson
Portland State University
JCLC 2006 - Dallas, Texas

Overview

- Introduction and Background
- Context, linkages, and related research:
 - Assumptions
 - Diversity
 - Library as Place
 - Urban Academic Library

Overview

- “Welcoming Space?” Project
 - Research questions
 - Anecdotal study
 - Self-selected survey
 - Results of study and survey
- Discussion
- Next Steps

Introduction: Portland State University

Portland State University

- Background
 - Began as GI extension center
 - “Friendly College”
- Demographics
 - Now largest, most diverse student population in state
- Diversity initiatives in place
 - Training, grants, awards, scholarships
 - Hiring incentives, etc.



Introduction: Portland State University

Fall Term 2005 Statistics

Total Enrollment: 22,204

Gender: Men 10,107 45.5%

Women 12,097 54.5%

Average Age: 27.5

White, Non-Hispanic 14,604 65.8%

Declined to Respond/Other 2,301 10.4%

Asian/Pacific Islander 1,952 8.8%

Black, Non-Hispanic 675 3.0%

Hispanic 974 4.4%

Native American 286 1.3%

Multiple Ethnicity 297 1.3%

Introduction: Portland State Library

- Flood in 1948 destroyed all but 92 books



Vanport Flood in 1948

- Millar Library in 1966

1990 addition designed to surround, rather than replace, an ancient copper beech tree



Students now enjoy natural lighting and a view of the tree and the Portland South Park Blocks



Introduction: Portland State Library

Collections:

- 1.4 million volumes
- 14,000 journal subscriptions
- 200 licensed databases
- 36,000 electronic journals

Staff:

- 30 Librarians
- 45 Classified Staff
- 74 student hourly workers



Assumptions

- Diversity is not just a celebration of difference, but defined as equity and equality
- Diversity is an important factor to consider when making staff decisions, designing facilities, and developing library services
- Critical Race Theory is the framework for our questions
- Physical location remains a crucial and possibly important part of library users' needs and expectations

Context: Diversity

"Men constitute an under-represented group within LIS. Is ALA planning to provide scholarships to men to pursue careers in library and information science?"

- 1998, Response from poster on an e-mail distribution list to SUNY Buffalo's diversity scholarship announcement as quoted in *Managing Multiculturalism and Diversity in the Library*

"Get a ##@## grip. A library is a study center, not a therapy center for race and/or gender and/or sexual orientation-obsessed neurotics. Want to know how to improve the library? Buy more books."

- 2006, Comment submitted to Portland State Library's "Welcoming Space?" survey

Context: Library as Place

- "Library as place" and "place as library": paradigm shifting with little information about specific benefits, concerns, and risks for students of color
- Libraries adding value to educational experiences and to academic institution, but how are libraries affecting students' success rates, retention, etc.?
- Libraries serving significant social roles – perhaps affecting students of color more so than their White counterparts

Context: Library as Place

- LibQUAL 2006 – Portland State
 - Desired mean for "Library as Place" lower than other areas - Do users have relatively low expectations for Library as Place?
 - Library as Place overall scores:
 - Minimum mean 6.14
 - Desired mean 7.68
 - Perceived mean 6.60 (50 percentile rank non-ARL)
 - Adequacy mean .45 (33 percentile rank non-ARL)
 - Superiority mean -1.09 (30 percentile rank non-ARL)


Context: Diversity and the Urban Academic Library

- Urban Academic Libraries, in general:
 - Situated in large urban centers
 - Culturally, socially and academically diverse
 - Committed to promoting diversity among student body, faculty, and staff
 - Expanding access and affordability of postsecondary education

Project: Research Questions

1. Are people of color using and visiting the Portland State Library more often when compared to White Non-Hispanic people?
2. Are there significant differences in perceptions of the Library's "welcoming environment," in terms of facilities, services, and staffing when comparing the responses of people of color to their White counterparts' responses?
3. Are there specific factors that resonate greater with students of color that we should consider when planning for a new facility?

Project: Survey

We care about you!
Please take our survey on the Library Homepage!

<http://www.pdx.edu/library/>

- Web-based self-selected survey advertised with print and electronic posters
- Survey instrument – 24 questions
 - Informed consent assured
 - Social aspects, feelings about specific building-related factors, staffing aspects – multiple choice, Likert-style questions, closed and open-ended questions
 - Demographic information collected

Project: Survey

- Strengths
 - Focused on Portland State Library – localized, specific
 - Supplement to LibQUAL survey which lacked ethnic/racial demographic data
 - Very low cost, easy way to reach many users
 - Anonymity could result in more candid answers
 - Provides platform for further study

Project: Survey

- Weaknesses
 - Self-selected not randomized, so results are descriptive and qualitative only for the group of people who responded
 - Possibly provide some insights related to our user population, but cannot offer scientifically reliable results to make general conclusions about other library users

Project: Survey Participants

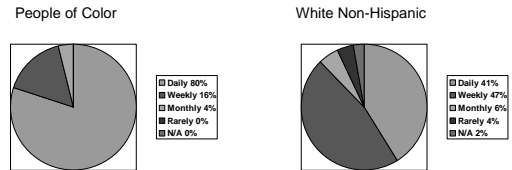
- Total responses, n=140
- Total completed surveys, n=123
- Demographic information:
 - Most under 30 years of age, n=84
 - Almost all were PSU students, n=109
 - University status = Undergrads 59%, Grads 30%, Other 11%
 - Majority were male, 57% M, 41% F, 2 NA

Project: Survey Participants

- Racial / Ethnic information, self-identified:
 - White Non-Hispanic, n=73 or 60%
 - Other, Non-White (Mixed Race, Arabic, Asian not American, etc.), n=20 or 16%
 - Asian American, n=15 or 12%
 - No Answer to this question, n=7 or 6%
 - African American, n=4 or 3%
 - Hispanic American, n=4 or 3%
- White Group n=73; People of Color n=50

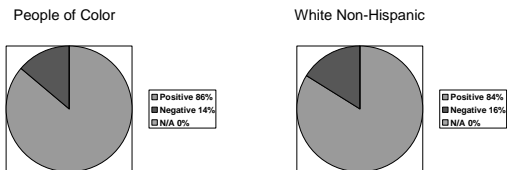
Project: Survey Results

- How often do you visit the Portland State Library?
 - GREEN SLICE - More People of Color indicated they visited daily, 80% compared to 41% of White Non-Hispanic group



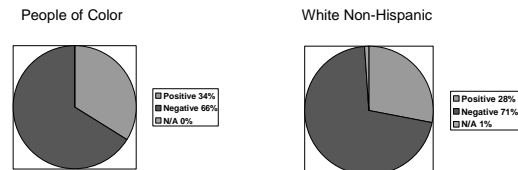
Project: Survey Results

- When you come to the Library, do you use a Library computer?
 - GREEN SLICE - People of Color responded positively at 86% compared to a similar rate for the White Non-Hispanic group at 84%



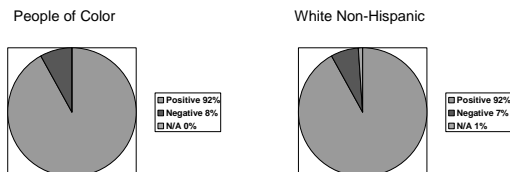
Project: Survey Results

- When you come to the Library, do you use your own computer / laptop?
 - GREEN SLICE = People of Color responded slightly more positively at 34% compared to the White Non-Hispanic group at 28%



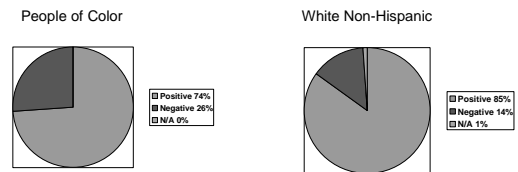
Project: Survey Results

- When you come to the Library, do you look for a quiet place to study?
 - GREEN SLICE = People of Color responded positively at 92% compared to a similar rate for the White Non-Hispanic group at 92%



Project: Survey Results

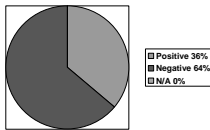
- When you come to the Library, do you come to do research?
 - GREEN SLICE = People of Color responded less positively at 74% compared to the White Non-Hispanic group at 85%



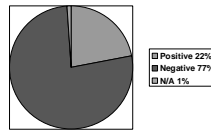
Project: Survey Results

- When you come to the Library, do you meet with a group on a project?
 - GREEN SLICE = People of Color responded more positively at 36% compared to the White Non-Hispanic group at 22%

People of Color



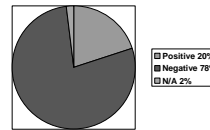
White Non-Hispanic



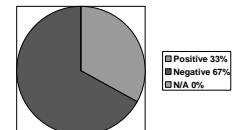
Project: Survey Results

- When you come to the Library, do you get help with a research project?
 - GREEN SLICE = People of Color responded less positively at 20% compared to the White Non-Hispanic group at 33%

People of Color



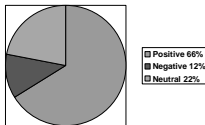
White Non-Hispanic



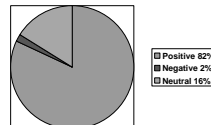
Project: Survey Results

- When you study alone, do you feel safe?
 - GREEN SLICE = People of Color responded less positively at 66% compared to the White Non-Hispanic group at 82%

People of Color



White Non-Hispanic



Project: Survey Results

- Physical factors that positively affected users' perceptions of being "welcomed at the Library"
- Basic factors important to the two groups:
 - Open long hours
 - Access to research materials
 - Minimal noise
 - Computers and wireless network
 - Ability to move furniture
 - Lots of tables and chairs
 - Strong lighting

Project: Survey Results

- Some factors were rated "Very Important" and "Important" differently by the two groups

Factor	People of Color	White
Campus View	34%	43%
Natural Lighting	80%	69%
Central Location on Campus	62%	70%
Access to Technological Help	68%	48%
Access to Research Help	68%	60%

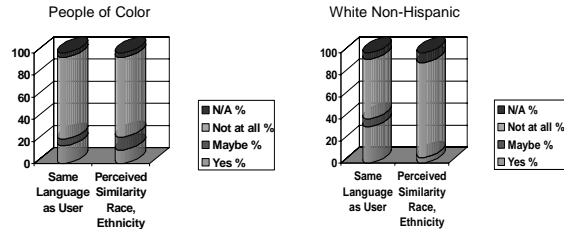
Project: Survey Results

- Some staffing aspects were rated Frequently/ Occasionally at different rates by the two groups

Factor	People of Color	White
Experienced a communication problem with research staff?	22%	9%
Receive good service at the reference desk when the staff member is perceived to be a different race or ethnicity than you?	80%	66%

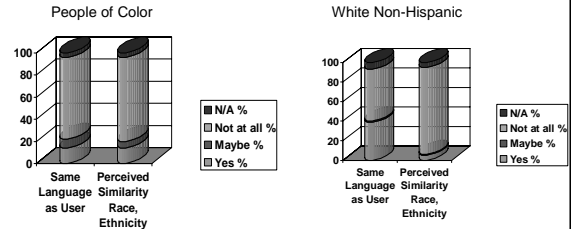
Project: Survey Results

- Factors positively affecting decision to approach the **reference desk** for help
 - Both groups indicated that it would not deter them if reference desk staff were perceived to be not of the same race/ethnicity, but Whites were slightly more positively influenced if staff were perceived to speak the same language.



Project: Survey Results

- Factors positively affecting decision to approach the **circulation desk** for help
 - People of Color were slightly more positively influenced if staff were perceived to be of the same ethnicity. Whites were more positively influenced if staff were perceived to speak the same language.



Project: Survey Results

- Possible improvements listed and marked with "YES" or "NO" answers to the question, "Which of these factors would make the Library more welcoming for you?"
- Survey noted that multiple answers could be chosen, but White participants chose 142 factors compared to only 51 factors by People of Color

Project: Survey Results

- Users of both groups less interested in:
 - Family restrooms
 - People of color 4% > White People 2%
 - Child-friendly facility
 - White people 7% > People of color 4%
- People of Color more interested in:
 - Writing Center in Library
 - People of color 48% > White People 27%
- White People more interested in:
 - Coffee Kiosk
 - White people 56% > People of Color 10%
 - Vending Machines
 - White people 27% > People of Color 14%

Project: Survey Results

- Free-text answers for "What would make the Library a more welcoming place?"
 - Users of both groups mentioned repeatedly:
 - Improve overall cleanliness
 - Offer more hours, preferably 24/7
 - Reduce access for non-PSU affiliates, e.g. "homeless," "members of the public," and/or monitor them more closely – some expressed resentment at sharing space and resources
 - Provide more computers and expanded resources
 - Improve customer service skills for staff

Project: Survey Results

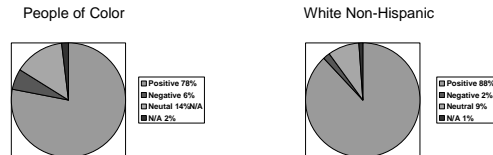
- White People submitted noticeably longer free-text answers in greater numbers and asked for more specific improvements than did People of Color:
 - Color copiers
 - Fax machines
 - Virtual tours
 - Coffee, snacks
 - New carpet
 - Cell phone lounge
 - Help phones in specific areas
 - Lockers for storing personal items, etc.

Project: Survey Results

- People of Color submitted shorter, more general free-text answers than did White people
- Two specific incidents were reported via survey:
 - Hate language on restroom walls
 - Safety issues for female non-native speakers with "homeless people harassing" them

Project: Survey Results

- Do you feel the Library is a welcoming place?
 - GREEN SLICE –People of Color responded less positively at 78% compared to the White Non-Hispanic group at 88%



Discussion

- People of Color compared to White counterparts:
 - Use Library at disproportionate numbers
 - Use Library for group projects and for social reasons slightly more than their White counterparts
 - Use the Library more than do their White counterparts but paradoxically still felt that the Library was slightly less welcoming of them
 - Felt less safe than did their White counterparts
 - Showed less concern about service provided by similar racial/ethnic groups and with same language than first expected

Discussion

- **Library as Place** matters, e.g. overall physical building characteristics and amenities were important to all respondents regardless of race/ethnicity
- People of color rated and mentioned natural light as being very important more so than did their White counterparts
- When improvements were desired, people of color wanted more access to technological assistance and writing help than their White counterparts

Next Steps

- As the Library prepares to build a new facility, we must keep in mind that place, safety, natural lighting matter
- Integration of other services, such as access to technological and writing assistance is important, especially for students of color
- Library's social role, "counter-space" role is critical for students of color

Next Steps

- Use work done thus far to conduct focus-group studies to tease out thematic differences seen between People of Color and White Non-Hispanic people
- **Areas of Inquiry for Focus Groups**
 - Collaboration/groups, access to technology, social/cultural connection, study space, safe/secure/physical environment, languages spoken, staff of color, Web site-virtual representation of Library

Recommendations / Next Steps

- Present results to Library Administration and Faculty for possible incorporation of ideas into the Library's Strategic Plan
- Articulate linkages to the University's Diversity Plan
- Additional research needed to ensure that the importance of academic library use in students' success and retention rates is investigated and documented

Thank you!
For more information:

- Sharon Elteto
eltetos@pdx.edu
- Rose Jackson
rosej@pdx.edu
- Adriene Lim
alim@pdx.edu