



2022 Report on the Experiences of Black Students at Atkins Library

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Executive Summary

This report describes the study our team conducted to better understand the needs and experiences of Black students at UNC Charlotte related to the spaces, services, and resources of Atkins Library. The research team for this study was comprised of representatives from the library's committees for Assessment, Diversity & Inclusion, and Student Engagement. To make this assessment, we used a multi-method approach that included focus groups and Photovoice discussions, in which participants took photographs that were then discussed in group sessions. All participants in the study were students at UNC Charlotte who identify as Black and/or African American. Deliberate steps were taken to reduce the influence of the potential biases of the research team and to ensure that participants felt comfortable sharing frank feedback on potentially sensitive topics. After analyzing the gathered data, the research team identified four prominent themes in the comments by participants:

1. Participants value and depend on our spaces and services
2. Inside the building, whiteness is almost all you see
3. Interactions here are mostly pleasant, but problems persist
4. Atkins should take action and commit to diversity without stereotypes

Using our findings, the research team assembled a list of five recommendations intended to better align Atkins Library with the needs and experiences of Black students:

1. Convene a group consisting of both students of color and library employees to oversee the changes recommended by this report and periodically review the library's progress.
2. Update art and décor with inclusivity and equity for Black students and students of color as a priority.
3. Develop new strategies for discovery and collection development for materials related to the Black community.
4. Diversify the library workforce at all levels of responsibility.
5. Make library employees more visible and approachable to students, especially students of color.

Introduction

In 2021, Atkins Library decided to undertake this study of the needs and experiences of Black students at UNC Charlotte, specifically as they relate to the library's spaces, services, and resources. Many factors contributed to this decision. However, we were inspired in no small part by the national discourse about systemic, anti-Black racism which—though it's certainly not new—galvanized again after the 2020 murder of George Floyd by police officers in Minneapolis, MN and the many protests that followed. This discourse, bolstered by grassroots social movements like Black Lives Matter, motivated conversations about how anti-Black racism manifests in many domains of American life, including in academia, and charged every institution to interrogate its role in sustaining those systems and to take proactive steps to redress them.

UNC Charlotte, though it is a predominately white institution, is among the most diverse schools in the University of North Carolina system in terms of race and ethnicity. Like many universities, it has been pursuing the goals of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) for some time, and has already undertaken many initiatives to support DEI-related goals. Atkins Library is proud of what we have already achieved with our own initiatives thus far. Our library's Diversity and Inclusion committee has led initiatives including—but not limited to—efforts to increase diversity in our hiring and retention practices, as well as the publication of a statement in response to violent brutality against Black Americans and an anti-oppression resources guide.¹ Our assessment team regularly seeks to better understand the needs of Black students through methods such as our biennial student survey and our ongoing Student Engagement and Success study.² Many of our ongoing initiatives and a roadmap of our goals for the future are outlined in the Atkins Library Racial Justice Plan.³

However, we recognize that our organization has gaps in our understanding, and we know that every gap creates an opportunity for harmful practices to persist. Until now, we have never conducted a study that focused exclusively on the needs and experiences of Black students at our university. While we have learned many helpful things through our more general feedback channels, these methods are not well-suited to encouraging a more focused conversation that prioritizes information that some might consider sensitive. To correct this, we sought to use alternative methods, and we were fortunate that two recent studies provided illustrative examples.

Duke University's internal report, "Understanding the experiences and needs of Black students at Duke,"⁴ provided us the most direct inspiration with its combination of Photovoice methodology and traditional focus groups. By expanding the range of expression available to participants into photography, Chapman et al. gathered significantly more effective feedback and gave participants more freedom to control the direction of the study than traditional methods would elicit. Their study also demonstrated a thoughtfulness about building relationships of trust between the participants and the researchers that we sought to emulate.

We also turned to Ohio State University's example, drawing from "Narratives of (Dis)Engagement: Exploring Black/Undergraduate Students' Experiences with Libraries."⁵ Although our study does not hew as closely to the methods of Folk & Overbey's study, which gathered data exclusively via individual interviews, we were certainly informed by its research questions, scope, and analysis. Following their lead, we designed our own study to focus on engagement with the library, rather than adopt the more all-encompassing scope of Chapman et al., with the goal of understanding the specific role that Atkins Library plays in students' lives and what circumstances inform their interactions with us.

¹ J. Murrey Atkins Library, "Final Report"; J. Murrey Atkins Library, "Diversity & Inclusion"; Ornat, "Anti-Oppression Resources."

² Croxton et al., "Student Survey"; Croxton and Moore, "Quantifying Library Engagement."

³ J. Murrey Atkins Library, "Racial Justice Plan."

⁴ Chapman et al., "Understanding the Experiences and Needs of Black Students at Duke."

⁵ Folk and Overbey, "Narratives of (Dis)Engagement."

Our ultimate goal in performing this study is to elevate the voices of Black students and eliminate any barriers that prevent us from fully hearing and understanding their perspectives, whether those barriers are physical, mental, or emotional. As a library at a university that serves more than 30,000 students, we make decisions every day which affect thousands of lives in ways both mundane and profound. It is our responsibility to understand the impact of yesterday's decisions so that today's decisions can improve.

In this case, reaching that understanding requires us to pay special attention to issues of organizational trust and to take steps that minimize the effects that our own biases could have on the direction of the study. We hope that we have done so effectively, and that our final recommendations reflect what the experiences of Black students at Atkins Library really are, rather than what we assume them to be. Following the release of this study, we hope to maintain our commitment to elevating the voices of Black students in decisions regarding how these recommendations are enacted.

Team

STUDY PLANNING TEAM

- Jon Moore, User Experience Librarian (study coordinator)
- Becky Croxton, Head of Strategic Analytics & Special Projects
- Tiffany Davis, Diversity Resident Librarian
- Tracie Krumbine, Patron Services Manager
- Natalie Ornat, Humanities Librarian
- Crystal Perry, Overnight Coordinator

RESEARCH ASSISTANTS

- Anthony Mungo, Graduate Assistant: Focus Group Facilitator
- Lamar Roberts, Graduate Assistant: Qualitative Data Analyst
- Sydni White, Circulation Desk Assistant and Focus Group Facilitator

Research Questions

The research team selected these 11 research questions to organize our investigation:

1. To what extent is Atkins Library viewed as a physically safe space by Black students?
2. To what extent is Atkins Library viewed as a mentally and emotionally safe space by Black students?
3. To what extent is the Atkins Library space viewed as inclusive by Black students?
4. To what extent are Atkins Library services viewed as inclusive by Black students?
5. To what extent are Atkins Library resources viewed as inclusive by Black students?
6. To what extent do students experience microaggressions or bias because of their race at Atkins Library?
7. What changes can Atkins Library make to ensure Black students feel supported and included? How can Atkins Library improve spaces, services, and programs to ensure Black students feel supported and included?

8. What library services, spaces, instruction sessions, and programs do Black students use and find helpful?
9. What role or purpose do Black students assign to the library?
10. What role or purpose do Black students assign to library employees?
11. Do prior experiences with libraries inform college library usage for Black students?

Methodology

RECRUITMENT

We pursued a variety of methods to recruit participants for this study. The majority of participants were recruited via a mass email announcement to UNC Charlotte students using the “Research Study Announcement” system and the recruitment script in Appendix E. We also shared digital flyers advertising the study using the library’s digital signs, social media, and website. Some course instructors were asked to share recruitment information about the study with their students. Instruction librarians were also asked to do the same in some library workshops.

We invited interested students to respond to an online questionnaire in Google forms which requested that they (1) provide an email address for further contact, (2) affirm their eligibility to participate, and (3) volunteer for one or both sections of the study. Potential participants were informed about what to expect from each section.

We advertised that participants would receive a \$15 online gift card for participating in a focus group or photovoice session and \$20 for participating in the photography activity, sent through the service GiftoGram. The maximum incentive a participant could receive (by participating in one focus group, one photovoice discussion group, and the photography activity) was \$50.

For all respondents who were both eligible and had selected at least one section, the study coordinator reached out by email to organize further participation. All participants were required to review and sign a statement of informed consent. Participants who signed the consent were further contacted to choose a scheduled discussion session using the service Calendly. Some participants also used the service Doodle confidentially to allow the study coordinator to identify common schedule availability.

PARTICIPANTS

The study solicited responses from a total of 25 participants. Aside from each participant’s attestation that they were a currently enrolled student at UNC Charlotte at the time of participation, that they identified as Black or African American, and that they were age 18 or above, no further demographic information was sought to better protect participants’ confidentiality.

Of the 25 participants, 20 participated in a focus group discussion session, 20 submitted photographs and captions, and 11 participated in either a photovoice group discussion session or photovoice individual interview. For further security, names were not collected in the notes for each session. To the extent that names appeared in transcripts, the study

coordinator censored these names before transcripts were shared within the study planning group or with the analyst. Each participant in a group session was assigned a code number for use in analysis. Participants who joined both a focus group and photovoice group were coded with a separate number for each.

DATA COLLECTION

To answer the research questions for this study, multiple qualitative methods were used in a sequential order: focus groups, Photovoice (including a photography activity followed by group discussions), and then member checking. Each phase, corresponding to the method used in that phase, built upon data gathered and analyzed in the previous phase.

Focus Groups

Participants were asked to join small group discussion sessions of between three and eight individuals. Participants had the option of joining these sessions in-person in a library conference room or virtually using Zoom. Each session was scheduled to last one hour, although most did not require the full time. These group sessions were designed to be semi-structured using a set of 10 major questions with the freedom for group facilitators to explore follow-up questions as needed.

In each session, one facilitator guided the discussion while another took notes. Facilitators used two documents to guide these discussions: the “ground rules for discussion,” attached in [Appendix B](#), and the “focus group guide,” which contained a script and the questions attached in [Appendix C](#). The guide contained the questions written by the study planning team, a short introductory script, and suggested follow-up questions. The 10 major questions were duplicated in a Google slides presentation which was presented to participants during the session.

The study planning team recruited current and recent graduate students as research assistants to serve as group facilitators in these sessions. We specifically encouraged students who identified as Black or African American to apply for these positions. We recognized that, although we had put together a diverse planning team, none of us were positioned to understand the current experiences of Black students. We felt that members of the Black student community would have more insight into the conversation.

We also recognized that it is already potentially difficult to share criticisms with people in positions of authority, and we wanted participants to feel comfortable knowing that we had minimized any opportunity for anyone outside the room, even the study planning team, to connect their specific comments with personally identifiable information.

When responding to questions, we encouraged participants to take roughly 15 seconds to first consider their answers. In-person participants were also provided with scratch paper to use for making notes about any responses they wanted to provide. We did this to create space for any participant who may have felt hesitant to speak to organize their thoughts before hearing what other participants had to say.

A digital recording device was used to capture audio from the session. Although we attempted to minimize the use of names while recording was active, the captured audio was

first reviewed by the study coordinator so that any names used in-session could be removed prior to analysis. This was done using the application Audacity. The study coordinator then transcribed the audio from each session into text. First, an automated transcription was generated using the service Otter.ai. Then, the study coordinator reviewed the automated transcript to identify and correct any transcription errors made by the automated service.

These transcripts were then analyzed thematically. With similar reasons as above, we recruited a graduate student to fulfill the role of qualitative data analyst and again encouraged students who identified as Black or African American to apply. The analyst used the software NVivo to code the data from each transcript. These codes were then collected into overarching patterns spanning multiple sessions, and finally organized into a set of themes which reflect the major insights we gained from these sessions.

Photovoice

The photovoice method consisted of two activities for participants. In the first activity, they were asked to capture photographs in response to a set of prompts written by the study planning team. They were further requested to provide a short caption for each photograph. Participants were encouraged to explore the library building to capture their photographs, but they had the freedom to choose other locations at their own discretion. We requested that each participant submit at least four photos. They were given a period of at least one week to capture and submit their photos. An example of the photography activity instructions provided to participants can be seen in [Appendix D](#).

In the second activity, participants were asked to join small group discussion sessions which were conducted and analyzed in much the same way as the focus groups. However, instead of using pre-written questions from the study planning team, group discussions were organized around the photographs and captions submitted by participants. Participants were shown a slideshow with a selection of photographs and captions and asked to reflect and share about their reactions to them, any feelings they brought up, or any other concept which stood out to them. Facilitators asked follow-up questions as needed.

Because we received more photographs than could be displayed or discussed during the sessions, the planning team first reviewed the photographs to identify any major thematic patterns. Then, a selection of photographs was used to represent each theme in the slides used by facilitators to guide the session.

Although we intended all sessions to be conducted as group discussions, scheduling conflicts made it necessary to conduct two sessions as individual interviews. With the exception of the number of participants involved, the details of these sessions were identical to the group discussions.

Member Checking

To reduce bias on the part of the study planning team, we employed member checking to give participants the chance to provide feedback on our interpretation of the data prior to publication. The objective of member checking is to allow participants to correct any possible misinterpretations, misunderstandings, or misrepresentations on the part of the researchers. In our situation, because the study planning team was intentionally kept separate

from many details for bias reduction and confidentiality, we determined that member checking was essential to confirm our findings. After analyses were made, an excerpt of the draft report was distributed to participants to solicit their feedback. [This section is incomplete and will be filled in with any details that come about as a result of your feedback.]

Analysis and Discussion

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF PHOTOGRAPHS AND CAPTIONS

To support the more holistic thematic analysis of all the data we received, we first performed a content analysis of the photographs and captions submitted as part of the photovoice photography activity. The results of that analysis are presented here.

From the photography activity, 74 photos and captions were collected from 20 individual participants. Of the seven prompts which participants could choose to respond to (one of which being a catch-all “other” prompt), all seven received submissions. The prompt receiving the most submissions was “What aspect of the library is most useful or helpful to you?” Of the pre-written prompts, “What microaggressions or bias do you experience because of your race or ethnicity at Atkins Library?” received the fewest submissions.

Each photograph and caption pair were organized into a spreadsheet. We analyzed each pair and applied two codes to them. The first code noted the subject depicted in the photograph, while the second code noted the major concept explored by the photograph and caption together. Of the codes that applied to at least two submissions, we identified 12 subject categories (plus a “miscellaneous” category) and 11 conceptual categories. The full results of this analysis are seen [Appendix F](#).

In **Figure 1**, we show an example of a submission which matched the most frequently-appearing theme, “lack of representation.” This theme included photos which called out the library for examples where either Black people or people of color in general were conspicuously absent, or, like in the example, commented on situations where the representation was either insufficient or problematic. The majority of photos in this theme implicated art and décor throughout the library, but others focused on materials in the collection or library staff.

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF TRANSCRIPTS

Again, to support the more holistic thematic analysis of all the data, we first performed a content analysis of the transcribed comments from the group discussion sessions. From the seven sessions, we had seven individual transcripts for analysis, each representing a 30 minute to one-hour conversation between group facilitators and participants.

Using NVivo and a codebook principally developed by the qualitative data analyst, we applied codes to the transcribed comments which described the variety of topics being discussed. Multiple topic codes could be applied to the same snippet of text if applicable. Across all transcripts, a total of 1,868 code tags were applied. We created a total of 75 individual topic codes, which were aggregated into a hierarchy containing 16 conceptual categories to create a final set of 91 codes.

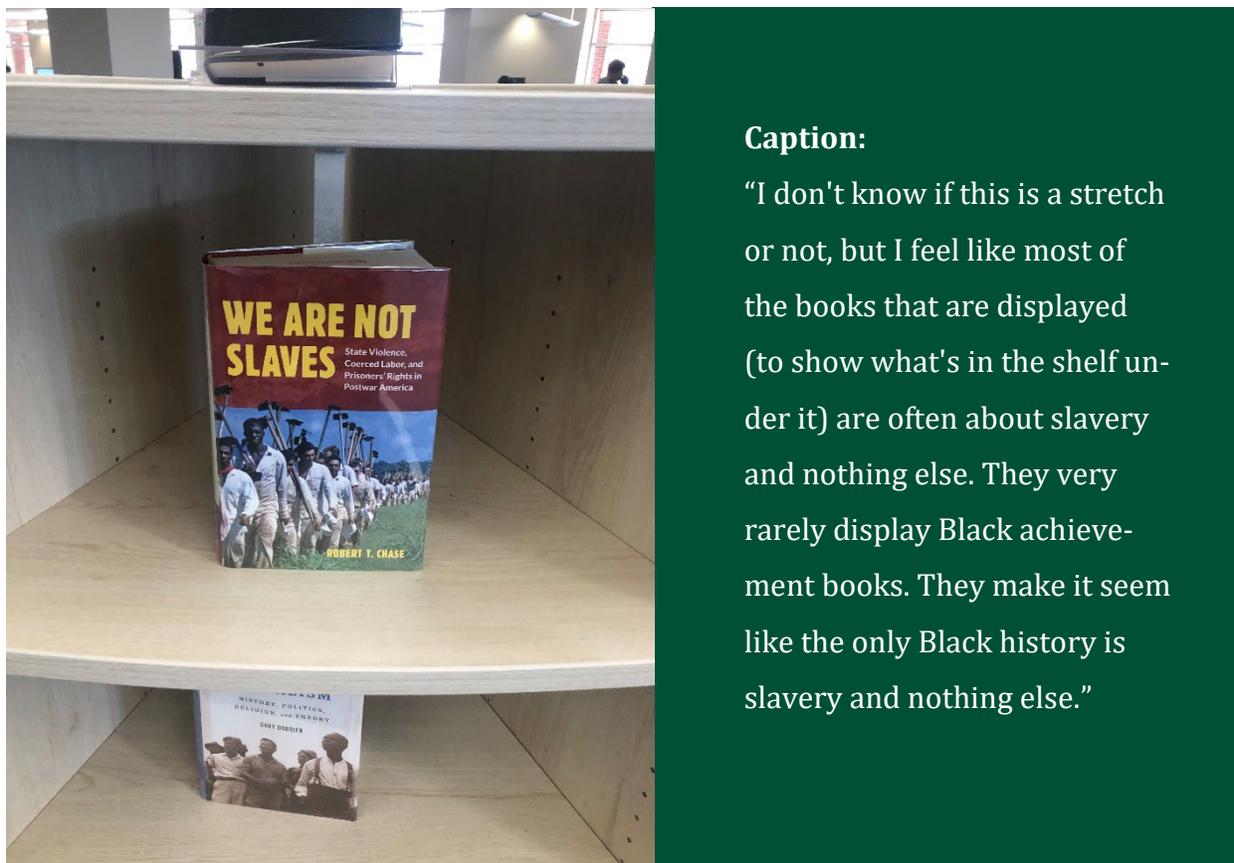
The broadest set of conceptual categories were, in order of the number of individual comments that were categorized within them, (1) positive experiences, (2) negative experiences, (3) suggestions, and (4) previous library experiences (i.e., experiences at other libraries prior to arrival at UNC Charlotte). **Figure 2** shows the proportion of each of these categories in the data. A full list of codes, and the number of session transcripts and text snippets to which they were applied, is found in [Appendix G](#).

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

We conducted a thematic analysis of the data collected from the 74 photograph and caption submissions and from the seven transcripts of focus group and photovoice group discussions. The goal of this analysis was to synthesize the findings of our content analyses of each respective set of data into a collection of four major themes.

Each of these four themes represents a summary of what we believe to be the most common viewpoints among our study participants. Each theme is derived from what we observed to be frequently repeating patterns in the data. It is important to recognize that study participants were not monolithic and that any individual participant may or may not agree with the themes as presented here. It is also important to recognize that participants made many comments which were valuable and insightful but not necessarily indicative of a larger

Figure 1. A submission under the photo theme “lack of representation.”



pattern in our observations. Such comments are not included in this analysis, but we hope to find another appropriate outlet to share those insights.

The four themes which we present here are

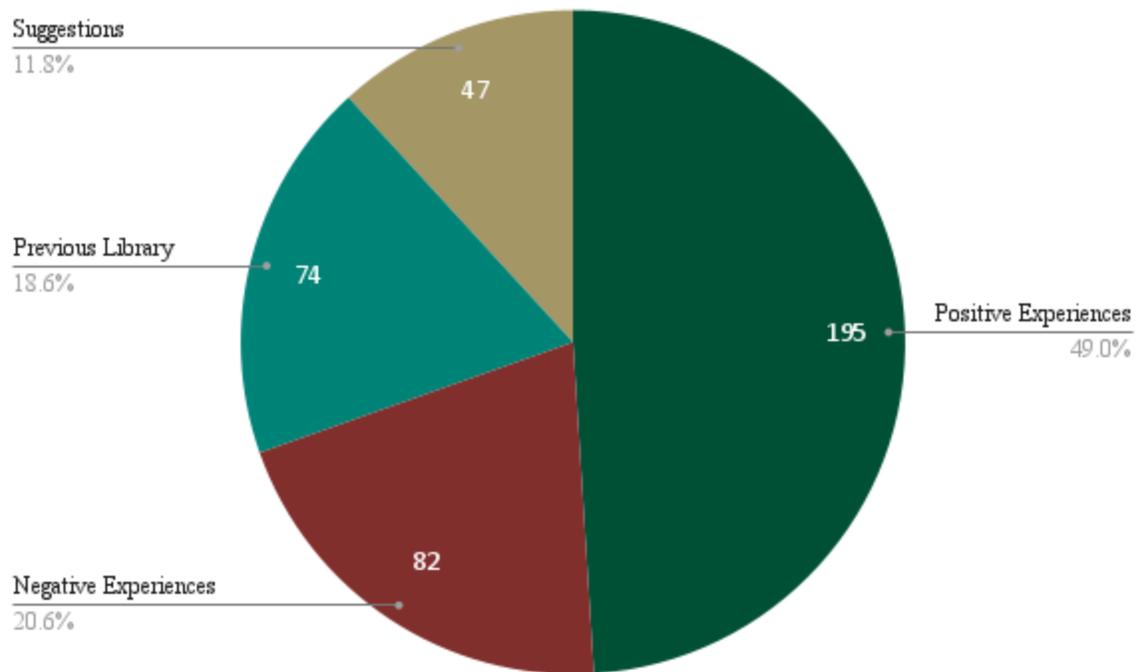
1. Participants value and depend on our spaces and services
2. Inside the building, whiteness is almost all you see
3. Interactions here are mostly pleasant, but problems persist
4. Atkins should take action and commit to diversity without stereotypes

What follows is a narrative depiction of these themes, with quotations from the transcripts and participant-submitted photographs providing evidentiary support. For the sake of brevity, not all quotations and photographs that apply to each theme are presented here — only a selection which the authors believe are most representative.

Theme 1. Participants value and depend on our spaces and services

We received comments that ran the full gamut of positive and negative experiences that participants have had with Atkins Library, but we undoubtedly heard more about good experiences than bad. While we do acknowledge that there are potential barriers to sharing negative experiences that may have limited what participants discussed, it's notable as we explore these themes that participants mainly chose to tell us about the ways that we as a library successfully support students. These concepts can give us a strong foundation on which to build any future initiatives.

Figure 2. The prominence of each major category of codes in the data



When discussing what participants find most valuable about the library in their own lives, library spaces typically top the list. Participants shared that there are many aspects of our spaces that feel welcoming. The library café, where Peet's is located, was mentioned particularly often.

I do think that [Peet's] is a really safe space. It's a much nicer coffee shop than at my undergraduate university. I think what it shows is that the library wants to offer a multitude of spaces...Also, wanting to appeal to different types of study styles. – PV1

The impression that Atkins Library's spaces accommodate different study styles well is something other participants mentioned, too.

The bottom floor, where the coffee shop is—that floor feels more innovative to me and has more of a variety of working spaces... I do like the variety there because each person's work style is different. – FG12

I feel like it's really helpful to have a choice to study, to use computers, meet up with friends, or get coffee. – FG10

Participants found value in the potential to use library spaces both collaboratively and individually, with neither one particularly overshadowing the other. Collaborative spaces were framed as a site where community and friend networks can be built:

I often think about work and socializing [when I think about Atkins Library]. When I'm going to the study rooms, I'm oftentimes going with my friends. – FG15

When I'm walking around, there's always someone at a table that's completely empty. There might be one or two people there, but the rest of the chairs are open. A lot of times people offer you to come sit, or they'll notice you looking for somewhere to sit, and they'll tell you what's open. I like that. I feel like more like a community there because they're always welcoming. – FG12

Figure 3. Peet's at the Library Café



Caption:

“Peet's Coffee is actually the first place I visited when I went in the library! That was the place I met my current advisor! Peet's has always felt like a safe place to sit and converse with friends.”

Figure 4. Supporting a variety of study and work styles



Caption:

“In this photo is a variety of working stations. I love this the most about the library because it supports variety of working styles. This space feels like an innovation lab and combines practical working styles. It feels like a space for everyone from architects to scientist to diverse students.”

Likewise, the presence of other people in the library can have a motivating and focusing effect, even when one is working alone.

...you're surrounded by other people who are also accomplishing some of the same tasks that you're trying to accomplish. It does make you feel welcomed, or promote a collective sense of focus, productivity, and foster a good environment for that.
- PV1

I think a lot of people go to the library to study because it helps you feel like you're in a productive mindset, especially when you're walking in and you see other people studying and really doing hard work. It just motivates you. - PV2

Conversely, one problem mentioned with the library's spaces was that there often just isn't enough space for everyone.

I feel like the study spaces during the daytime are limited, just because there's so many people here. - FG7

Figure 5. A place to find community



Caption:

“Busy times when students are walking in and out. It makes me feel like we are all a community.”

Sometimes it's crowded and you can't find a seat. It'd be nice if there was... some type of way we know it's full, so we don't go to every floor and check to see where we could find a seat. – FG12

On the other hand, participants equally appreciated how our spaces could impart a sense of privacy, quiet, and safety. Other people in the library can be a distraction, and many of our spaces provide a safe haven (something participants often associated with their childhood libraries as well). For this, participants highlighted the reservable study rooms.

One of my favorite things about the library is the study rooms... I have my own private area... we can be a little noisy sometimes. – PV5

It's nice to see that for someone who's just trying to find a quiet space, they can move into whatever space they would like without worrying about causing a distraction or being the distraction. – PV4

Figure 6. Finding some solitude in the study rooms



Caption:

“This is a picture of a private study room located in the middle of the second (technically called the first) floor of the library. It is study room 4D. It is a picture of what I find to be the most useful feature of this library. I greatly appreciate the solitude and (sometimes relative) quietness it has to offer. Those two factors alone have boosted my productivity tremendously. The most important feature of this photo is the sense of isolation (and subsequently calm) it provides from the hallway you access it by.”

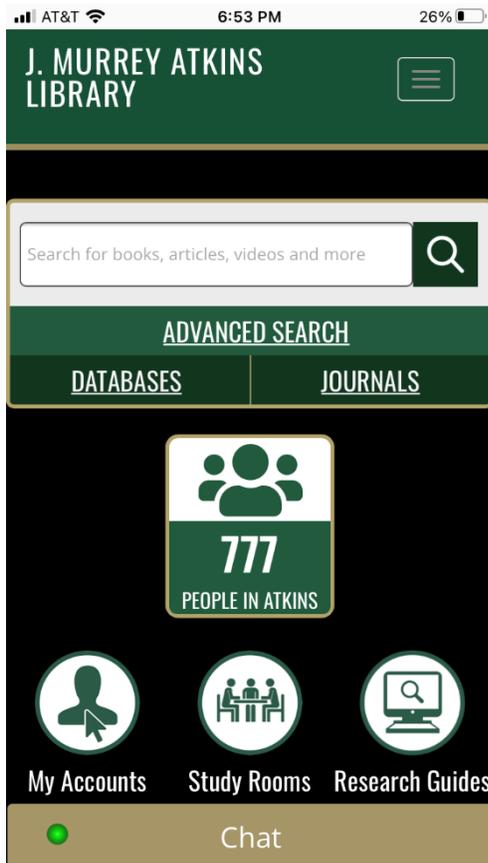
In addition to spaces, participants frequently shared their appreciation for the breadth and depth of the library’s services. Convenience was one value which was cited across both our spaces and our services.

I will say the word that comes to my mind when I think about the Atkins is the convenience... I think it’s just a one stop shop for me when it comes to finding everything that I need to help me with my academic work. – FG11

Online services like the catalog, study room reservation system, or the website generally, were first to come to mind as the most helpful services provided by the library.

I also think that the website is really helpful, especially where it says [how many] people [are] at Atkins. If you’re worried about social distancing, and making sure

Figure 7. The convenience of the library website



Caption:

“As a graduate student, the online library database is the easiest most helpful aspect of the library to me. I live 30 minutes from campus and it would be unreasonable for me to try and drive to the library every time I needed an article for my research.”

there’s not too many people, you can go at a better time that’s convenient for you.
– PV7

[My] most used resource would be the website because of the discipline-based databases... and also other features pre-pandemic, [like] being able to reserve a study room privately, [or] being able to see if some of your texts were available.
– FG1

If I’m looking for an article online that the school doesn’t have access to, I could ask permission through the library and download a copy of the article for 30 days, and that’s been a really big help with harder articles to find. – FG3

Occasionally, however, participants expressed frustration and confusion about usability issues with particular services, especially those dealing with technology.

There's this part of the website for Atkins Library where you can reserve a study room. That's really difficult to use on mobile. Less difficult to use on the computer, but I still dislike using the interface. – FG14

I agree with [a previous complaint about] the printer. I stopped using it because it just became more difficult and not really convenient for me. – FG5

One thing that participants consistently associated with library services was the utility of having access to a vast number of information resources. Every session mentioned library collections to some extent. Often, it was in the context of scholarly materials available online.

I'm in a heavy communication research methods course, and have had assignments like annotated bibliographies and literature reviews. Just using those websites to gain access to different PDFs, and journals, and different databases to get scholarly or peer-reviewed content is very helpful. – FG4

Because I'm a psychology major, there's a lot of like literature reviews through those websites that I'm able to access so those are really important to me. – FG15

However, participants shared just as much about the specific value they found in our collection of print materials. For some participants, there was something deeper about the tradition of print books that lent them a special value in and of themselves.

I still like this traditional style of getting myself informed, holding the books, feeling the pages... I just really want to keep the tradition of having this thing called books...

Figure 8. Convenient services to support print materials



Caption:

“I often prefer not to deal with people if I have to get something done, unless I'm ready and prepared to. I was getting ready to return the book that I had from the library, getting ready to face someone to return the book like I did when I checked out the book, but then I remembered that these lovely things existed. That saved me from having to mentally gear myself up to talk with someone to get that done.”

Figure 9. The value of the book



Caption:

“The selection of books featured near the entrance help me feel welcome. I noticed that there are some books by black authors being showcased, which is cool since representation is often scarce. I can count at least three by black authors, which is decent considering how diverse the bookshelf is already.”

I love the books. So what if I’m not reading everything? Just them being around gives me happiness. – PV11

I just walk to the second, the third floor just to look at books, because I just love books generally. – FG11

Physically going there, holding or reading a book, it is like a tradition... I've tried to jump on the bandwagon of reading virtual books or ebooks and it just doesn't feel the same as actually having a physical book and copy of it in your hand. – PV9

Others simply valued the convenience of casually browsing a physical collection and reading for personal enjoyment.

Sometimes while I’m in the study space, especially the upper levels, I will go and read a book or two or look at some stuff in the books. – FG14

I still enjoy reading, so I’ll go check out a book now and then. – FG9

With these comments, participants gave us insight not just into what is most valuable to them about Atkins Library, but also where they feel the positive impact of the library most strongly, especially in their academic life. For these participants, the library is both space and service (although, as we will discuss below, it is less often thought of as an organization of people). The library is a critical infrastructure that provides access to many of the most necessary resources of their university career. Because it is responsible for providing access, it is doubly important to understand what barriers the library puts between these resources and Black students.

Theme 2. Inside the building, whiteness is almost all you see

Of the comments we received related to negative experiences, by far the most frequent subject was a lack of representation and diversity in the library building. Most commonly, the library's art and décor were implicated for demonstrating a perspective which values the experiences of white men over others. The main floor was noteworthy for being a place where participants felt most excluded or unwelcome because of its overwhelming dedication to symbols or depictions of whiteness.

[When I think about Atkins Library,] I think about white men, because when I walked throughout the library, that's all I see in statues, pictures. I just think it's interesting that they're all over the first floor... to walk in and see those statues everywhere, and

Figure 10. Art and décor on the main floor of the library



Caption:

“The library's history that is displayed at Atkin's Library needs to be updated to reflect more African American leaders who contributed to the library's success.”

the pictures everywhere of white men or white people, it feels like there's no real diversity in art... At least the first floor, as I walk around, that's all I saw, and it made me feel uninvited because I feel like that's not what Charlotte represents now. – FG6

The main floor, where you first walk into the library, it feels more like a mid-century boy's club. – FG12

If I'm being blunt, like [on] that first floor, get rid of or relocate all of the art that's there now, as far as art, the statues, and the historical pictures... It does feel like a boys' club at that point. – PV6

In discussing their experiences of hostility and exclusion, participants frequently cited a particular painting hanging prominently in the stairwell between the first and second floor. The painting in question is seen in **Figure 11**.

There is an artwork that's by the stairs. It's a picture of men, older white men, all looking at one guy... I don't understand what's going on with the artwork in that library. – FG12

I'm from [another country], and when I first came here, I remember going to the library... For me, the center photo [depicting the painting in Figure 11] was very

Figure 11. Colonialism on display



Caption:

“Makes me feel unwelcomed. Knowing the time period of how the attitude and treatment that happened to black people is what makes me feel that.”

Figure 12. An example of inclusivity in the library's art



Caption:

“Giving comforting energy. The photo of a young brown mother with her child makes me feel warm and welcomed. love the representation.”

disturbing. I felt like, number one, I didn't see any females. I didn't see people of color, of course, and it was an era where I shouldn't expect it... I just thought, “can I fit into this society?” That was the first thought that came to my mind. “Am I welcome?”... I didn't know how much it impacted me until I talked about it... I felt, even in the library, which has always been as escape place for me... like, I'm being attacked. – PV11

In contrast, when sharing thoughts about inclusive art and décor in Atkins Library, one specific painting prompted participants to describe experiences of feeling represented and welcomed. This painting of a mother and child of color (depicted in **Figure 12**) hangs in the stairwell one floor below the painting in Figure 11.

I actually notice that one all the time... It depicts a brown mother, but I've always thought of it being a black mother, there... That's one of the few diverse pieces of art that I've seen, so I always notice that one. It just is so beautiful and colorful, and it's in a space where a lot of people can see it. – PV2

The black woman, holding the child and reading to the child, is something I really liked. I remember staring at it for a couple of minutes the first time I saw it... I think it's really inclusive artwork, and I hope we could see more of this in other places in the library, too. – PV11

The topic of inclusivity (or the lack thereof) in Atkins extended into conversations about our collections. Participants noted that perspectives in library displays centered around whiteness, even in some attempts to showcase the diversity of materials available in the collection.

Figure 13. Books by Black authors



Caption:

“More representation. More black authors.”

At the end of the day, to look for a book or to find a new author, you can pretty much tell that it's still going to dominate—it's going to be white dominant. – FG1

They make it seem like the only black history is slavery and nothing else. – PV10

In some cases, participants shared that Atkins does not take the steps it could take to feature the Black authors and authors of color that exist in the collections. Where such books have been featured, some participants questioned the library's sincerity.

There are a couple of books already in the library. We have lots of books, but it's not that easy to find on the shelf. – FG11

[The library] doesn't seem fully genuine, and fully concerned, about representing diverse groups. – FG1

That [display featuring books related to slavery] just made me feel under represented and misunderstood in a way, too, because... it's kind of performative how they're set out. – PV2

A few participants also brought up the issue of diversity among library employees, both in absolute numbers and in terms of the distribution of roles and authority.

I think the majority of the people that work at Atkins Library—from the security guards to the café workers, the research associates—that everyone that I've interacted with, pretty much, is white – FG2

I think that the representation seems to be the biggest concern... just wanting to literally see yourself... [to] see people, who look like us, that aren't just in service-based roles (although very important, and definitely significant for all of us—we need them), but also wanting to see ourselves in the scholarly librarian roles. – PV1

One participant summarized this theme very succinctly as:

I think that that's a key thing...that there's a lack of representation or a shallow representation. – PV1

It is particularly problematic that the main floor of the library, where most library users (and visitors) get their first impression, depicts an exclusionary perspective centered on whiteness. Even library initiatives that one might expect to counteract such a depiction, exhibits and book displays among them, are understood at least by some to center a white gaze on diversity. This speaks to the observation of others that Black voices are not equitably present in positions of authority.

Theme 3. Interactions here are mostly pleasant, but problems persist

When conversing about interpersonal interactions that participants have had in the library, it may be useful to distinguish between interactions with library employees and interactions with fellow library users. For the most part, the most frequently used descriptor of library employees was “helpful.” Participants typically had positive experiences to share, and these experiences were not exclusively related to the academic support functions of the library.

I remember one time I misplaced my wallet and they were all so concerned. One of them walked with me to the floor where I lost it and made sure we checked every nook and cranny... Just the way they expressed their concern was really something that touched me. – FG11

I haven't really spoken to many of the people that work at Atkins, but... I think like the people that I have talked to have been really helpful and very friendly. – FG10

[Library employees are] helpful because they will help you with anything that you need and they will do their best. – FG16

Library employees in the more visible roles, such as those at service points or stationed at building entrances, were likeliest to be mentioned, but other roles received attention, too.

I would say my word [to describe Atkins employees] is "very helpful" when I have approached them asking questions, or the times where they've had a little tabling when you first walk in. – FG9

Figure 14. A participant's confidence in equal treatment



Caption:

“Personally, I can't think of anything in particular that makes me feel welcome or unwelcome in the library. I've never really thought about if someone's gonna treat me different because of my race since I've been on campus in general, including at the library, and I think that's a good thing.”

The [security] attendant made me feel included, and I felt pretty safe as well... she was going around to everyone asking, can you verify that you're a student here and show them your ID? – FG4

However, the relatively few comments participants shared about library employees indicates that the general opinion may be somewhat close to the feelings of one participant, who said:

The [library employees] I interacted with were helpful, but ultimately, I don't really know any of them. – FG5

In one session, however, participants had negative experiences to share about library employees. Sometimes, the participants felt that the experience was explicitly a racial microaggression, but other times, it was discussed simply as poor service.

Near the beginning of the pandemic, they wanted us to start separating. Me and my sister... were at a table and one of the librarians told us we couldn't sit together... We understood it, but I felt it was hypocritical because he didn't tell [another] group that was about five or six people to separate... it made me think this was a racial thing, because he was white, and we were black, and those people were white. – FG5

I [used the library online chat] twice, and both times, they told me that they didn't know what I was looking for, [and] that they couldn't help me. That discouraged me from using it again. – FG17

Comments like these were uncommon, but they weren't limited only to library employees. In two sessions, participants shared stories about experiences in which other library users create discomfort by staring.

Whenever I come in on the main floor... I'll get this sense of discomfort. I don't know if it's the body language or the stares from other people, but it always feels uncomfortable. – FG9

[Peet's is] one area that makes me feel particularly welcome, and where I can actually talk out loud without getting too much attention, particularly because of my accent... my accent makes everybody turn to look at who's talking... So, I particularly like the Peet's café because it gives me that ability to be free to talk and not pull people's attention. – PV11

So, while the typical interpersonal experience in the library is positive, there is still work to be done. It was uncommon for participants to share experiences of microaggressions, but even in a sample of just 25 participants, multiple individuals did have stories to share.

Figure 15. Finding a refuge from distraction and stares



Caption:

“The single, private study desks are most helpful to me. I honestly have a hard time being out in the open because I get distracted and because people stare a lot which makes me uncomfortable. The single desks make me feel closed-in (on purpose).”

Figure 16. A participant's comment on stares from others



Caption:

“All eyes on me when I enter”

Library employees, for the most part, are seen as helpful and occupy a position of trust — a position that allows them to act with the support of students.

Theme 4. Atkins should take action and commit to diversity without stereotypes

Many of the participants had direct suggestions about how Atkins Library could better serve the needs of Black students. Expectedly, because many of the participants' negative experiences were associated with a lack of representation in the library, the most common suggestions focused on addressing this issue specifically, especially in terms of what's visible in the library.

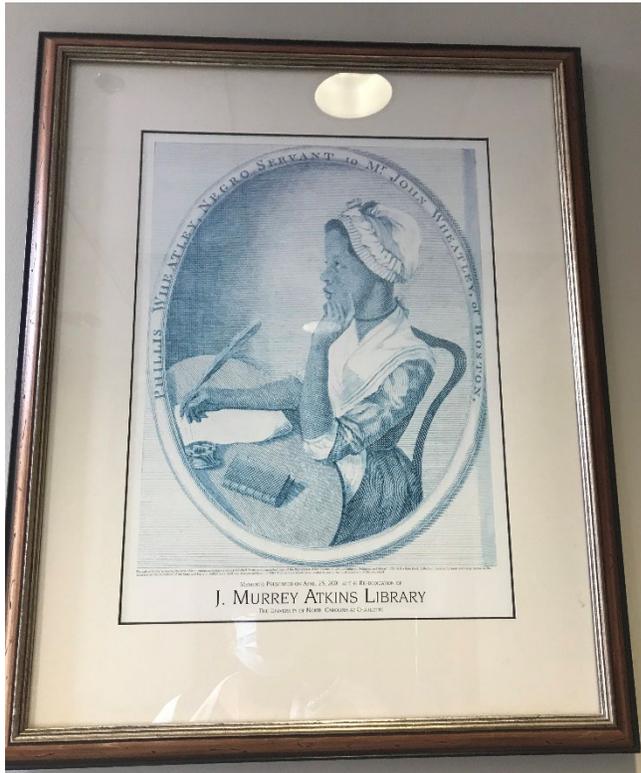
[Find] different ways to highlight the contributions of black people to the University of North Carolina, Charlotte and [put] those on display... [Find] people that were instrumental in the conception of UNC Charlotte, or have had a large impact... [That] would be really promising for young students to see themselves reflected in the artwork, in the displays, in the portraits. – FG2

[Add] more artwork that is more represented as black arts. Because it's something that is completely missing in the library. – FG11

[I want] something more modern or updated by way the décor... in terms of African American presence, not just some sprinkled pieces that represent [us], like Phyllis Wheatley here, but also statues that represent key African American figures that contributed to the library or the university, and other representations of staff and students as well. – PV1

Critically, participants' suggestions made distinctions between a shallow diversification informed by stereotypes and one which actually represents them. The need to show the

Figure 17. What it says when representation is hidden



Caption:

“I love to see more pictures of students and staff of color on the walls of the library but it would be nice to see these photos presented in prominent parts of the library. Right now these photos feel more like an after thought.”

contemporary achievements of Black students and the broader Black community was a frequent observation.

It'd be nice to see some type of representation that's more diverse. [An] accomplished Black man or woman represented [in the library]... [Something] that shows an accomplished student that's of color, and talks about his accomplishment, or her accomplishment. – FG12

As the pictures that show aren't black and white pictures from Martin Luther King's time... if it's about accomplishments, [show] present day Black people, not people who have escaped slavery, not that type of history. – PV6

I just feel like we have so much to show... we aren't just going to be showing Black accomplished athletes. And that brings up a very good point of what kind of stereotypes come up when it comes to Blackness and athleticism... Not only are black student achievements wrapped in education and art, but they're also wrapped in the different identities of queer people... just having images of "voguing," which was created by Black artists in the 1980s... I feel as though sometimes it gets drawn into this heteronormative way of viewing Black people and their accomplishments, but there's so much more... – PV4

Figure 18. A helpful service for a non-binary participant

RESTROOMS

Accessible restrooms are located on the ground floor, first floor, and second floor of the library.

- Ground floor accessible restrooms are located near the compact shelving graduate and silent study room.
- First floor accessible restrooms are located in the hallway behind the Information and Research Desk and near the vending machines.
- Second floor accessible restrooms are located across from Area 49.

All gender restrooms are located on the ground floor, and tower floors five, six, seven, eight, and ten.

Caption:

“I always worry about finding all gender bathrooms as someone who is non-binary and may present differently depending on the day.”

In addition to displays of artwork and exhibitions, participants also suggested ways the library could center Black authors in the collection. Many suggested that the library highlight books by Black authors in a way that makes them easier to find.

Sometimes, if you want to read a book by black author, it's not as easy to find like a search on the website, it'd be really cool if there was just a set collection where you can go – FG10

Looking at like each picture is making me think of having a section that you can go to that has books about Black people by Black authors. – PV9

[If] the books had pictures of the author... especially if it's a black author, not just stating it is, but actually have the picture. Because when I see pictures of people who look like me, it makes me feel like it's something I could accomplish. – PV3

Some participants also suggested diversifying the library's hiring practices, not just in terms of the Black student community but other communities of color as well.

[Hire] more BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) and AAPI (Asian American and Pacific Islander) staff, especially with the demographics that Charlotte has. I feel like that's super important not just at the front desk, but also in different support roles. – FG1

Just hire more people in those roles because most of the African American people that I see that work in a library, they are janitor people, people that come by and clean up – FG4

Figure 19. The atmosphere of Atkins Library



Caption:

“The photo features the first chairman of Charlotte college boards of trustees. The photo and other photos along with the name of the library, highlights his specific ethnicity and cultural group and his accomplishments. The library atmosphere and culture centers around this photo. The atmosphere feels like the photo was taken yesterday and we are walking among Atkins inner circle or private boys club.”

I know there's a lot of roles that are opening in the library, and I'm wondering, what efforts are taking place to provide a more diverse staff? – PV1

The commitment is key, and requires the library to move beyond shallow efforts.

Just [make] those continuous efforts... trying to go beyond the tokenism of, “oh, we filled our quota. We're good. Oh, we have that portrait of this influential black woman, but it's on the way out.” I think that would definitely mean more and feel more genuine – FG3

Findings

DO PRIOR EXPERIENCES WITH LIBRARIES INFORM COLLEGE LIBRARY USAGE FOR BLACK STUDENTS?

While specific influences are difficult to identify in these data, participants discussed some similar themes between their experiences at both Atkins Library and previous libraries they had interacted with prior.

Participants sometimes mentioned that they viewed their childhood libraries as being "safe havens" or refuges. Similar language was used about Atkins, especially relating to the study rooms and study furniture offering isolation or protection. It was also used as a contrast to Atkins to illustrate how Atkins is supposed to be a safe space, but in some cases isn't.

Participants often associated their childhood libraries, especially public libraries, with the hobby of reading books for pleasure. Some participants also continued to use Atkins Library to fulfill this role, sometimes as a break from academic work.

Childhood libraries were sometimes seen by participants as places for building up a community. Some participants also saw community-building as a valuable part of Atkins Library.

TO WHAT EXTENT IS ATKINS LIBRARY VIEWED AS A PHYSICALLY SAFE SPACE BY BLACK STUDENTS?

Participants did not share any comments indicating any experiences of physical harm in Atkins Library, either accidentally or purposefully. These findings are consistent with our recent survey data indicating that among all student responses, 90.1% agreed with the statement “I feel safe from physical harm at Atkins Library” and only 0.5% disagreed.⁶ Safety remained a recurring theme, however, and some comments about safety might be considered relevant specifically to physical safety.

At least one participant shared comments about feeling safe knowing that library security staff check for university IDs during the library’s late-night hours. Another pointed to the library requiring card-tap on entry during these hours, as well. These may indicate that students believe that without such measures in place, the library could potentially be physically unsafe during those hours.

Some participants also mentioned safety in regard to the private study desks and reservable study rooms. The enclosed nature of these spaces may contribute to a sense of physical safety in some students.

TO WHAT EXTENT IS ATKINS LIBRARY VIEWED AS A MENTALLY AND EMOTIONALLY SAFE SPACE BY BLACK STUDENTS?

Participants shared multiple comments about the mental and emotional safety of Atkins Library, some positive and some negative. Some comments valued the library, and especially the reservable study rooms, as “safe havens,” where their own mental and emotional safety did not feel threatened. Other comments, however, pointed to examples of artwork that celebrates and glorifies colonialism as something that made them feel “disturbed” and like they were being “attacked.” Such comments about the space, especially the first floor, were relatively frequent and indicated that such public areas were less likely to be thought of as mentally and emotionally safe compared to private spaces.

Though survey data from all students regarding emotional safety have similar numbers compared to physical safety, there is a slight discrepancy, with 87.3% agreeing with the statement “I feel safe from discrimination, harassment, and emotional harm at Atkins Library” and 2.1% disagreeing.⁷ Our findings suggest that the comments above may contribute in some way to that discrepancy.

⁶ Croxton et al., “Student Survey,” 7.

⁷ Croxton et al., 7.

TO WHAT EXTENT IS THE ATKINS LIBRARY SPACE VIEWED AS INCLUSIVE BY BLACK STUDENTS?

Students indicated that there is inclusivity to be found in Atkins Library, but that certain issues work against that inclusivity.

The library was often seen as a site of community-building and socializing, both among friends and among strangers. Collaborative zones like the large worktables and the dining area at the library café were noted for these especially.

What detracted from this sense of inclusive community is the general centering of whiteness in the art and décor, especially on the first floor. Particular busts, paintings, and other design choices on the first floor create the atmosphere of a “mid-century boy’s club.” There is very little representation on this floor of people of color or women.

In contrast, the second and third floors, which have been recently renovated, received more positive comments related to inclusivity. Additionally, the TJ Reddy painting of a woman and child that hangs in the stairwell between the first and second floor was singled out as a positive example of inclusivity in the space.

TO WHAT EXTENT ARE ATKINS LIBRARY SERVICES VIEWED AS INCLUSIVE BY BLACK STUDENTS?

Participants in this study noted that they felt that there was a dearth of events and programs from the library which they considered relevant to their experience of race. Some participants suggested that we organize events and programming that, in fact, we have done in the recent past. This is consistent with many similar comments we have received in surveys of the whole student body, which suggest that much of our marketing for events and programming is not reaching its target audiences. While we may wish to organize more programming as suggested by participants, we believe that it is arguably as important that we find alternative ways to promote the programming which is already happening.

In pursuing new and different programming ideas, participants expressed a desire to see the library organize more events in collaboration with student-run organizations. There are a number of student organizations on campus that may be interested in collaborating with the library on programming to highlight issues, events, and ideas important to Black students at UNC Charlotte.

Some participants also expressed a desire to see more diversity among library employees, especially in roles related to academic support and service points. Although not identified as a major issue, a few participants felt that the diversity of the UNC Charlotte community was not fully represented in these front-facing roles.

TO WHAT EXTENT ARE ATKINS LIBRARY RESOURCES VIEWED AS INCLUSIVE BY BLACK STUDENTS?

Participants called the library collection “white dominant.” While they did not believe that materials related to Black authors and the Black community did not exist in the collection, they indicated that these materials were unnecessarily difficult to find. Where such materials could be found, some participants believed that what the library had chosen to collect and

display represented a limited or stereotypical idea of Blackness connected only to the civil rights era and to the practice of slavery.

Online articles and databases did not come up in conversations about inclusivity related to race, but the library's online resources were identified as being especially convenient to a variety of students, including those living off-campus and those who are concerned about their health & safety during the pandemic.

TO WHAT EXTENT DO STUDENTS EXPERIENCE MICROAGGRESSIONS OR BIAS BECAUSE OF THEIR RACE AT ATKINS LIBRARY?

There were infrequent (but non-zero) references made by some students that they believed library employees had acted in a discriminatory way. Only one specified that they felt that a library employee may have discriminated against them on racial grounds, but the student was not certain that this was the case.

More often, participants frequently alluded to a sense that other library users were staring at them and making them feel uncomfortable. In one such case, the student felt that their accent was a distinguishing factor that singled them out for this experience. Other participants did not specify that this phenomenon was certainly related to race; however, it was an experience shared by multiple participants in this sample.

We believe these findings indicate that if microaggressions are occurring between employees and students or between students and other students based on race, they are likely to be uncommon or are potentially less of a concern to this sample of participants compared to other issues already identified.

WHAT LIBRARY SERVICES, SPACES, INSTRUCTION SESSIONS, AND PROGRAMS DO BLACK STUDENTS USE AND FIND HELPFUL?

While participants told us a great deal about the many aspects of Atkins Library that they found most valuable, we feel it's more important here to emphasize that we did not observe any meaningful differences between what Black students found valuable compared to what we know the general student body finds valuable according to previous surveys and assessments. The most critical finding in this case is that Black students value the same things as any other students about the library. The difference we observed, rather, was that Black students reported negative experiences (as explained elsewhere in this report) that created unnecessary barriers between them and the many spaces, services, and resources they value.

WHAT ROLE OR PURPOSE DO BLACK STUDENTS ASSIGN TO THE LIBRARY?

According to participants, some view it as a collaborative study place to work with friends and classmates, where people can socialize and build community. Others view it as a place to facilitate private study, or where one might go to escape from other stressors of university life. The library was valued as a provider of information resources to use in research and assignments, and participants found particular value in the presence of a print collection as a symbol of a "traditional" library. The library was associated with its website, which represented convenience. The library as an institution is seen as being responsible for how easy

or difficult it is to find certain resources and for fulfilling a duty to create a welcoming environment that encourages students to achieve.

WHAT ROLE OR PURPOSE DO BLACK STUDENTS ASSIGN TO LIBRARY EMPLOYEES?

Participants generally believed that library employees are helpful figures that exist largely in the background in the library space. They associate with employees the responsibilities of regulating the behavior of library users, both to maintain a safe environment and to avoid unpleasant social altercations. Besides fulfilling basic functions like checkout services, participants also saw library employees as the people who welcome you into the library and provide a sense of belonging. The diversity among library employees was identified as being important both to accurately and ethically represent the diversity of the campus and to provide an aspirational example to students interested in the various careers that libraries may provide.

Recommendations

The following recommendations offer our answers to the research question “What changes can Atkins Library make to ensure Black students feel supported and included? How can Atkins Library improve spaces, services, and programs to ensure Black students feel supported and included?”

1. CONVENE A GROUP CONSISTING OF BOTH STUDENTS OF COLOR AND LIBRARY EMPLOYEES TO OVERSEE THE CHANGES RECOMMENDED BY THIS REPORT AND PERIODICALLY REVIEW THE LIBRARY’S PROGRESS.

Our findings suggest that there are a number of strategic goals that the library should pursue, but it is outside the scope of this study to define the specific actions necessary to achieve them. We believe that this group will be valuable in advising library leadership on these decisions and ensuring regular progress. This group should also be empowered to address any issues identified in this report for which we don’t make a specific recommendation. We suggest that the library steering committee approve the creation of this group and define its charge and the specifics of its implementation regarding membership, scheduling, compensation for student labor, and other details as required.

2. UPDATE ART AND DÉCOR WITH INCLUSIVITY AND EQUITY FOR BLACK STUDENTS AND STUDENTS OF COLOR AS A PRIORITY.

The current art and décor of the library, especially the works on the first floor, should be audited and assessed to determine what works should stay and what should be replaced with more inclusive options. We understand that our decisions regarding some exhibits and artwork may be subject to prior commitments made by the library, and suggest that both SCUA and the university’s Design Services be consulted in these cases to explore possible alternatives.

New art and décor could be sourced in a variety of ways, including for example:

- From the existing collection managed by SCUA
- From local artists in the BIPOC community
- Via recommendation by student groups
- From the collections of the College of Arts and Architecture
- From a wider variety of materials including maps, photographs, student works, dedications to alumni accomplishments, or interactive pieces

3. DEVELOP NEW STRATEGIES FOR DISCOVERY AND COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT FOR MATERIALS RELATED TO THE BLACK COMMUNITY.

Participants did not believe that materials on the topic of the Black community were sufficiently easy to find. New strategies to display works by authors of color and about communities of color, either physically or virtually, should be considered and tested. Library programming and events should prioritize the promotion of such materials whenever possible. Where specific resources were mentioned, these resources were

characterized as representing the Black community in a shallow or stereotypical way. The collection development strategy for such materials should be assessed to better understand the problem and find solutions. We are also aware that employees in SCUA are already doing work related to the equitable description of library materials, and our findings suggest that this work should be supported and encouraged.

4. DIVERSIFY THE LIBRARY WORKFORCE AT ALL LEVELS OF RESPONSIBILITY.

We are aware that the library has done a great deal of work in this area, as outlined in the Atkins Library Diversity & Inclusion Committee Task Force on Recruitment, Hiring, and Retention Final Report and adopted actions.⁸ However, the results of this study suggest that more work should be done. Some participants pointed out that they felt that diversity among library employees seemed to decrease as the level of prestige associated with the role increased. We should continue to work towards more diversity at all levels.

5. MAKE LIBRARY EMPLOYEES MORE VISIBLE AND APPROACHABLE TO STUDENTS, ESPECIALLY STUDENTS OF COLOR.

Because library employees are understood by students to be responsible for creating a welcoming environment and a sense of belonging, the library should encourage more interaction between library employees and students of color to foster these qualities. We suggest that certain initiatives should be prioritized:

- Consider ways that students might connect with a librarian for research support in ways other than by subject, like language, ethnicity/nationality, or otherwise similar life experience
- Create more opportunities for library employees to connect with students in informal ways and in less intimidating situations
- Improve the findability of the library's security office and advertisement of security services, security staff, and associated safety benefits

⁸ J. Murrey Atkins Library, "Final Report"; J. Murrey Atkins Library, "Actions."

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Appendix A. Glossary of Terms

The following definitions are those given in the “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Glossary” by the University of Pittsburgh Office for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion except where noted otherwise.⁹

African American, Black: African American and Black are not synonymous. A person may identify as Afro-Latino or Afro-Caribbean, for instance, or Haitian American or Jamaican American. A person also may identify specifically as African rather than African American, such as Ghanaian or Congolese.¹⁰

Bias: An inclination or preference, especially one that interferes with impartial judgment. Biases can be negative or positive (affinity bias) and can be innate or learned. People may develop biases for or against an individual, a group, or a belief.

Colonialism: The exploitative historical, political, social, and economic system established when one group or force takes control over a colonized territory or group; the unequal relationship between colonizer and the colonized.

Diversity: The wide variety of shared and different personal and group characteristics among human beings. The concept of diversity encompasses acceptance and respect. It means understanding that each individual is unique and recognizing our individual differences. These can be along the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies.

Equity: The proportional distribution of desirable outcomes across groups. Sometimes confused with equality, equity refers to outcomes while equality connotes equal treatment. More directly, equity is when an individual’s race, gender, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, etc. do not determine their educational, economic, social, or political opportunities.

Inclusion: Authentically bringing traditionally excluded individuals and/or groups into processes, activities and decision/policy making in a way that shares power. Inclusion promotes broad engagement, shared participation, and advances authentic sense of belonging through safe, positive, and nurturing environments. Inclusion is key to eliminating systemic inequality.

Microaggressions: Brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, sexual orientation and religious slights and insults to the target person or group.

People of Color: A collective term for men and women of Asian, African, Latin, and Native American (non-White) backgrounds; as opposed to the collective “White” for those of European ancestry.

⁹ University of Pittsburgh, “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Glossary.”

¹⁰ University of Iowa, “Style Guide.”

Stereotype: An exaggerated belief, image, or distorted truth about a person or group that is widespread - a generalization that allows for little or no individual differences or social variation. Stereotypes are based on images in mass media or representations passed on by parents, peers, and other members of society. Though stereotypes can be positive and negative, they all have negative effects because they support institutionalized oppression by validating oversimplified beliefs that are often not based on facts.

Voguing: An improvisational style of dance inspired by the poses of models in fashion magazines such as *Vogue*. Originally created in the Harlem ballroom scene of the 1960s to 1990s by individuals who were most often Black and Latino people of marginalized sexual and gender identities.¹¹ Voguing continues to be a popular style of dance today and is featured prominently in *POSE*, a recent television series.¹²

Whiteness: A broad social construction that embraces the white culture, history, ideology, racialization, expressions, experiences, epistemology, emotions, and behaviors, and reaps material political, economic, and structural benefits for those socially deemed white.

¹¹ Regnault and Baker, *Voguing and the House Ballroom Scene of New York City 1989-92*.

¹² Blake, "How 'Pose' Perfectly Re-Creates the Queer Ball Culture of 1990 New York."

Appendix B. Ground Rules for Conversation

GROUND RULES

1. **Keep today's conversation private.** Respect your fellow participants' privacy. Don't share any details about today's conversation with anyone.
2. **Give everyone a chance to speak.** Once you voice your ideas, let others have an opportunity to speak, too. Don't dominate the conversation.
3. **Be comfortable speaking up.** Even if you're normally hesitant to speak, we want to hear from you today. To encourage everyone to share, we may ask for comments from someone who hasn't spoken yet. If we do ask you to share a comment, it's okay to say "come back to me" or simply "pass."
4. **Speak one at a time.** Pay attention when someone else is speaking. Don't interrupt or start side conversations. If an idea comes to mind that you're worried you might forget before you get a chance to speak, use your scratch paper to write it down, then share after the current speaker finishes their thought.
5. **Respect other points of view.** We want to hear everyone's point of view. If yours differs from someone else's, that's okay. Share your perspective without arguing or criticizing.
6. **Speak your truth.** Share stories, experiences, and thoughts from your own perspective. Try to speak from the "I" position, rather than externalizing your perspective to "we" or "you."

WHAT'S THE SCRATCH PAPER FOR?

For today's discussion, we've provided some scratch paper to in-person participants that you can use to help organize your thoughts before answering a question. Zoom participants, if you like you can take a moment to grab some paper and a pen if you'd like as well. When we ask a question, we'll give you a few moments just to consider it and write down some ideas before you answer. If you're confused about the question, feel free to ask us for clarification while you're writing your notes. After that, we'll open the question up for discussion by the group.

Use your scratch paper however you like. You're welcome to keep the paper or throw it away at the end of the session.

Appendix C. Focus Group Questions

1. Before we talk about Atkins Library, I want you to think about your experiences with libraries before you came to college. How much did you interact with public libraries or school libraries, and how did you feel about them?
2. What words or feelings come to mind when you think about Atkins Library?
3. What words or feelings come to mind when you think specifically about the people who work in Atkins Library?
4. Think about all the different things that make up the library: study spaces, websites, books, articles, workshops, library employees, and service desks, and maybe even more. Have you used any of these things during your time at UNC Charlotte? If “no,” can you tell me why you haven’t used the library? If “yes,” which part of the library that you’ve used is most important to you?
5. Again, thinking about all the different things that make up the library, is there anything about the library that you’ve used that really didn’t work well for you?
6. Think about an experience when you felt especially welcome or included when interacting with the library. Can anyone tell us about an experience when you felt especially welcome or included when interacting with the library?
7. Think about an experience when you felt especially unwelcome or uninvited when interacting with the library. Can anyone tell us about an experience when you felt especially unwelcome or uninvited when interacting with the library?
8. Microaggressions are defined as “Brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, sexual orientation and religious slights and insults to the target person or group.” Have you ever experienced microaggressions or bias involving the library or at the library? If you have experienced microaggressions or bias involving the library or at the library, describe your experience. What did you do when it happened?
9. Based on your experience, what could the library do to be more supportive, welcoming, or inclusive of Black students?
10. Is there anything that we haven’t talked about today that you want to tell us?

Appendix D. Photography Activity Instructions

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Take at least 4 photographs in, around, or related to Atkins Library in response to the prompts below.
 - See the “Guidelines for Photographs” section for more information about how to take your photos.
 - If you don’t have a method of taking digital photos (such as a smartphone or digital camera), email me at jmoor276@uncc.edu, and we’ll provide you with an alternative camera from the library’s Area 49 Desk.
2. After taking each photograph, go to the Google form Submit a Photograph and Caption.
 - Consider bookmarking the form, so it’s easy to find.
3. For each of your photos, select the prompt it responds to, upload the photo, and give it a caption.
 - See the “Guidelines for Captions” for more information about writing your captions.
4. **Submit your photos and captions by Tuesday, 3/22.** We may not have time to process photos submitted after the deadline to be included in the study.
5. Attend your discussion session in Atkins Library room 246B or by Zoom. Please RSVP to the session if you haven’t yet.

PROMPTS

- What most represents Atkins Library to you?
- What aspect of the library is most useful or helpful to you? (Consider all aspects of the library: physical or online resources, services in the building, online, or in class, etc.)
- What makes you feel safe, welcome, or included at Atkins Library?
- What makes you feel unsafe, unwelcome, or excluded at Atkins Library?
- What bias, intentional or unintentional, do you experience because of your race or ethnicity at Atkins Library?
- What about the library needs to change to better support Black students?
- Other (submit any photo and caption you think we should see)

GUIDELINES FOR PHOTOGRAPHS

- You don’t need to take a photo for every single prompt. Aim to respond to at least 4 prompts, but feel free to submit as many photos as you like.
- Don’t worry about making your photo look “perfect” or “artistic,” but if you’d like to do so, please do!
- You may only take photos which depict other people if the other people are either in a general-use library space (e.g. a study floor, reading room, etc.) or in an outdoor, public area of campus.
- Do not take photos which depict other people if the other people are in a library space which is reserved for a private group at the time of photographing.
- Do not take photos which depict other people if the other people have requested that you refrain from photographing them.

- Take photos anywhere, but keep them relevant to the library. Consider taking photos in or around the Atkins Library building or of the library website. Consider visiting multiple floors of the library to take photos. You may also consider taking photos somewhere completely different if it helps you answer the prompt in some way.

GUIDELINES FOR CAPTIONS

- Write one to three sentences which give some context to the photograph. Consider explaining:
 - How does the photograph relate to the prompt?
 - What's most important in the photo?
 - How does the subject of the photo make you feel?
- If you want to identify yourself as the creator of the photo, you may do so in the caption.
- Do not reveal names or any other identifying information of anyone besides yourself in the caption.

Appendix E. Recruitment Script Example

Subject: Earn \$15 to \$50 for helping to improve Atkins Library by participating in a study

Atkins Library is conducting a study about the experiences of Black students with the library. If you're a student at UNC Charlotte who identifies as Black or African American, we invite you to participate!

In this study, we have two opportunities to participate. If selected to participate, you may do one or both of the following:

- **Focus Group:** \$15 online gift card (Giftogram), 1-hour discussion session plus about 30 minutes of online communication. Participants will join a small group of other students to answer questions about your experiences with the library. Members of the library's research team will be there to ask questions, take notes, and create an audio recording of the session.
- **Photovoice:** \$35 online gift card (Giftogram), 1-hour discussion session, 2-hour photography activity, plus about 30 minutes of online communication. Participants will take photographs that represent their point-of-view, and then join a small group of other students to discuss these photographs. Members of the library's research team will be there to ask questions, take notes, and create an audio recording of the session.

This is completely voluntary. It's your choice if you would like to participate. If so, respond to the eligibility survey at go.charlotte.edu/BlackStudentExperience.

Prior to the publication of any data gathered from this study, participants will have the opportunity to review a draft of the final report and provide feedback to ensure the accuracy of the findings.

You'll receive an online gift card through Giftogram if you're selected to participate. The discussion sessions will be conducted in-person at a campus location, with optional participation using Zoom. Your information will be kept confidential. We'll use the information you share with us to make improvements to the library for students.

If you have any questions about the study, please email Jon Moore, User Experience Librarian, Atkins Library at jon.moore@uncc.edu.

Thank you,

Atkins Library Black Student Experience Study Research Team...

Appendix F. Content Analysis of Photograph Submissions

Table 1. Submissions received per prompt.

Prompt	Submissions
What aspect of the library is most useful or helpful to you?	20
What makes you feel safe, welcome, or included at Atkins Library?	18
What most represents Atkins Library to you?	17
What about the library needs to change to better support Black students?	10
What makes you feel unsafe, unwelcome, or excluded at Atkins Library?	5
What microaggressions or bias do you experience because of your race or ethnicity at Atkins Library?	2
Other	2

Table 2. Submissions received per photo subject

Subject depicted in photo	Submissions
Open Study Spaces	11
Art and Décor	9
Library Materials	8
Website or Online Services	7
Reservable Study Rooms	6
The Main Entrance	5
Library Technology and Equipment	5
Exhibits on Display	5
The First Floor	4
Single-Seat Desks	4
Miscellaneous	4
Peet's Coffee	3
Library Staff	2
Multiple from above	1

Table 3. Submissions received per conceptual category

Conceptual category	Submissions
Lack of representation	15
Privacy or quiet	9
Convenience	8
Inclusivity	7
Safety	6
Collaboration or socializing	6
Comfort or relaxation	5
“Library-ness” ^a	3
Unfriendliness	2
Neither welcoming nor unwelcoming	2
Multiple ^b	2
Discovery	2

^a This theme includes photographs and captions about what it means to be a library.

^b We attempted to assign each photograph to only one theme based on what was most prominent, but these photographs represented multiple of these 11 themes prominently and equally.

Appendix G. Content Analysis of Transcripts

Table 4. Hierarchy of content codes and frequency of their appearance in transcripts

Code	Transcripts	Individual References
Positive Experiences	7 ^a	195
Useful Spaces	7	89
Beneficial Aspects of Spaces	7	63
Welcoming	5	9
Quiet or Silent	5	8
Facilitates Collaboration	4	8
Private	5	8
Other Beneficial Aspects of Spaces	4	8
Convenient	3	5
Focus	3	4
Innovation and Technology	3	3
Motivation	3	3
Safe	2	3
Spacious	2	2
Around Books	2	2
Most Useful Study Spaces	7	26
Reservable Study Rooms	4	6
Peet's	5	5
Ground Floor	2	4
Area 49	3	4
Graduate Silent Study	1	3
Tower Floors	2	3
Other Useful Study Spaces	1	1
Useful Library Services and Programming	7	58
Most Useful Services and Programming	7	34
Online Catalog and Databases	4	11
Study Room Reservation	5	7
Service Desks	2	3
Other Useful Services and Programming	3	3
Online Occupancy Indicator	2	2
Welcome Tables	2	2
General Website Use	2	2
Book Sale	1	2
Workshops	2	2
Benefits of Library Services and Programming	6	24
Access to Information Resources	5	14
Helpful	3	4
Convenient	2	3
Community	1	2
Other benefits of Services and Programming	1	1
Useful Resources and Collections	7	23
Print Books	5	9
Online Articles	3	8
Laptops and Computers	2	3
Whiteboards	2	3
Helpful and Welcoming Employees	4	19
Other Helpful and Welcoming Employees	4	11

At Building Entrances	2	3
At Service Desks	2	3
Enforcing Policy	2	2
Positive Examples of Representation and Diversity	4	5
Other Postitive Examples of Representation and Diversity	3	3
Inclusive Artwork Depicting Mother and Child	2	2
Other Positive Experiences	1	1
Negative Experiences	7	82
Lack of Representation and Diversity	6	49
In Art and Decor	6	32
In Collections	5	9
In Staff	2	8
Problems with Services or Technology	4	22
Other Problems with Services or Technology	3	7
Reserving Study Rooms	2	4
Not Enough Study Space	2	4
Printing	1	3
Limited Food Options	1	2
Elevators	1	2
Rudeness and Microaggressions	3	6
Employees Being Rude or Discriminatory	1	3
Other Library Users Staring	2	3
Other Negative Experiences	1	3
COVID-related Deterrence	2	2
Previous Library Experiences	3	74
Used Public Libraries	3	16
Positive Experience	3	13
Used School Libraries	3	12
Liked Reading	2	7
Didn't Use Much	3	6
Negative Experience	2	5
Safe Haven or Escape	2	5
Always Liked Libraries	2	4
Part of the Community	2	3
Volunteering	1	3
Suggestions	6	47
Diversify Library Art and Decor	6	12
Show Black Achievement and Contributions	4	10
Feature Authors of Color	4	10
Hire More Diverse Staff	2	4
Communicate and Advertise	1	4
Be Consistent	2	3
Offer Programming	3	3
Other Suggestions	1	1

^a The numbers for transcripts and references for categorical codes are inclusive of their subcategories.