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Listening to Unaffiliated Users of the Academic Library

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Abstract

We know that unaffiliated users access books, reference services, and databases at our libraries, but how do they experience this access? The library science literature reveals a range of ethical concerns around how we serve unaffiliated users, meaning those who are not current students, faculty, or staff. Yet this literature is often based on librarian perspectives rather than on conversations with the unaffiliated users themselves. In this pilot study we interviewed 10 unaffiliated users to better understand their perceptions of a large academic library and how the library fits into their daily habits. Emerging patterns include a respect for the depth of academic collections, an appreciation of how physical spaces shape their campus experience, and a persistent sense of *nonbelonging* as people who are not students at our university—even if they are affiliated to another institution. In conclusion, we suggest ways that librarians can invite unaffiliated users onto campus as guests in the academic library community.

Keywords

academic libraries, community users, unaffiliated users, community outreach, qualitative methodology, recruitment, nonbelonging, library spaces

Introduction

Our Library at the University of California (UC), Berkeley, balances a core focus on campus research and teaching with a broader public service mission, reflected in its strategic plan to “better serve the public as an academic and cultural heritage institution by providing the community with a rich array of opportunities for learning, research and enrichment.”¹ We fulfill this mission through providing public access to our libraries and galleries, events and exhibits, special collections, and freely accessible online repositories of academic articles and digital archival materials.

Yet how do users from our community actually experience this access to an academic library? As subject liaisons we wanted to understand how people who are not current students, faculty, or staff use our libraries in a way that goes deeper than a survey. We take seriously our library’s mission to connect with the community and share the fruits of scholarly research—and yet we wondered how to accomplish this in the face of budget cuts, attrition in staffing, and loss of purchasing power that many academic libraries face. By interviewing community users we hoped to better understand and respond to their needs, learn how they integrate library visits into their personal and work lives, and offer better outreach on the part of our libraries.

The Berkeley Context

Our library, the UC Berkeley Library, is the largest in the state of California and the seventh largest in the nation.² University alumni as well as any California resident with a state ID may purchase a community library card for US\$100 a year. This community library card allows unaffiliated users to enter the large underground stacks in the Main library and borrow books, but does not permit off-campus access to databases or ebooks. Unaffiliated users who are not aware of, or who choose not to purchase a card, can still browse and use most databases and e-books at public use computers in most subject specialty libraries, but need a day pass from a reference librarian to enter and browse the Main Library collection and cannot access the undergraduate library which is for the campus community only.³

Given our position as subject librarians within the campus’ 24 subject specialty libraries, we hoped to interview users at three specialty libraries selected for the range of services they offer on campus:

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- The *Business Library*, within the Business School, has the busiest reference service point of subject libraries on campus and an all-online collection with no print books. Unaffiliated users assume it has better resources than public libraries, but many licenses are restricted to the currently affiliated campus community only.
- The *Anthropology Library* has a large print collection, is close to main streets on the south side of campus, and holds site reports for California archaeology often used by local organizations.
- The *Ethnic Studies Library* hosts archives in Asian American, Chicano, and Native American studies, and holds events for scholars and community members who have helped keep the library alive since its inception 20 years ago.

Literature Review

In starting this study, we struggled with what to call our target population. Weare and Stevenson (2012) suggested that *nonaffiliated* or *unaffiliated users* may be inaccurate terms as community users may affiliate with a university through past attendance or family connections even if they are not current students or employees. Other librarians called this group *external users*, *secondary users*, *outside users*, and *community users*. After strong debate among ourselves, we settled on Johnson's (1988) definition of *unaffiliated users* for simplicity: all users who are *not* our University's current students, staff, or faculty.

Most of the library literature considered this user group from a management, cost-benefit, or service-provision perspective. Courtney (2003) surveyed 527 academic library directors and found that many academic libraries charged fees to unaffiliated users for time-consuming services but allowed them access either to foster community relations or in response to local tax support. While public institutions often felt an obligation to provide public access as part of their tax supported public education mission, most private institutions also provided walk-in access. Weare and Stevenson (2012) found that Indiana academic libraries allowed unaffiliated access but limited borrowing by user type (alumni, donor, teacher, visiting scholar, etc.) and restricted hours for security reasons at times. All institutions charged a fee to unaffiliated borrowers, some as much as US\$1,000 per year.

The literature on unaffiliated users is rife with the tension between serving the institution's primary academic users and an obligation to serve broader community needs in a knowledge economy where access to information is limited by income. Unaffiliated users are both welcomed and feared by academic librarians as they feel the weight of added labor, time constraints, public underfunding, and potential overuse by a minority of unaffiliated patrons. Staff who fear or dislike unaffiliated users may avoid promoting the library in

their communities (Shires, 2006), and article titles like Courtney's (2001) *Barbarians at the Gate* reflected the tension felt by some academic libraries toward this user group.

Perhaps because unaffiliated users have fewer other people (such as classmates or professors) to approach for help, some do require more information support from librarians. Verhoeven, Cooksey, and Hand (1996) found that while unaffiliated users were only 10% of their patrons, they asked a quarter of the questions at the reference desk. They also found that unaffiliated use of the academic library can lead to longer lines, fewer free seats, and "more wear and tear on librarians, machines and materials" (Verhoeven et al., 1996, p. 392). Jansen (1993) found unaffiliated patrons were asking 40% of reference questions at UC Los Angeles, and 51% at University of Illinois at Chicago. This may be because unaffiliated patrons know less about the library and therefore need more support (Jansen, 1993; Shires, 2006).

Another challenge in serving unaffiliated users is the cost to primary users in ways that may not be calculated into the library's budget allocation. Montana State University found in 1978 that unaffiliated borrowers borrowed 5% of items, but absorbed a third of the replacement budget through failure to return items (Jansen, 1993), and students at the University of Minnesota paid US\$500 toward the libraries each year, a fee not levied on unaffiliated users with similar access (Shires, 2006). Even attempts to fundraise from unaffiliated users may not be especially successful, as Dole and Hill (2011, 2014) found when requesting donations from 701 unaffiliated users. Only US\$145 was donated, suggesting to them that community goodwill rather than cash flow may be the result of more unaffiliated access to academic libraries.

Urban academic libraries also face heightened security issues. Weare and Stevenson (2012) noted instances of disruptive behavior creating an unsafe space for core users, and Muir (2011) detailed how Arizona State University has welcomed unaffiliated users while addressing problem behavior.

Because of these issues and reductions in most budgets and staffing, many academic libraries have tightened policies toward unaffiliated users. UC Berkeley Library limited access for unaffiliated users in 1991 due to overcrowding and "frustration over lack of services" (Jansen, 1993, p. 12) for their students, which a librarian reported resulted in "the most significant improvement in services to primary users" (Jansen, 1993, p. 13) in several decades.

Yet, academic librarians continue to welcome the broader community and seek to integrate their libraries into the community. Essays in Courtney (2009) highlighted productive, unexpected, and collaborative community relationships, while Rolloff (2013) detailed a shared city/university library service, and Sutherland, Hill, and Cox (2013) listed further reading about community engagement in academic libraries. As they engage in the fight for open access, many academic librarians draw on moral arguments that emphasize public access to research, government documents, and special

collections as a service to the common good. Lenker and Kocevar-Weidinger (2010) drew on ideas of duty, justice, and self-improvement in supporting nonaffiliated users, and Courtney (2001) asked librarians to negotiate for unaffiliated users in their licensing agreements and to make “conscious choices about allowing or denying access to unaffiliated users, rather than allowing those choices to be made by” (Courtney, 2001, p. 478) publishing companies and database vendors. As Bell (2013) noted, the public comes to us a way around a growing digital divide and for access to cultural programs, lifelong learning, and quiet spaces for study. In this way, he suggested, the academic library can support public libraries and can enhance local perceptions of library value and relevance.

Similarly, Wilson (2005) cautioned against taking a negative tone toward unaffiliated users, noting that these users feel connected to academic libraries and “share their pride in the beauty of the campuses by bringing visitors to see the university” (p. 42). In Wilson’s art library, unaffiliated members are also donors, alumni, members of the artistic community, or prospective students—people who directly add value to the university and the academic library.

In sum, the library literature contained wide-ranging discussions on library responses to nonaffiliated users, arguments for serving them or for limiting serving to unaffiliated users in favor of greater service to primary users, and discussions of practical concerns around workload, financing, and security issues. Yet, we found few empirical studies of unaffiliated users, and none that drew on patron perspectives to help librarians better understand the experience of this community of users.

Method

In light of this, we decided to interview unaffiliated users of our “subject specialty” (branch) libraries, to discuss their experiences with our libraries in one hour interviews. Because librarians on our campus do not automatically have PI (primary investigator) status for interviewing human subjects, our lead researcher applied for and received an exception to campus policy, giving them ongoing approval to serve as a PI. We then developed a project proposal, applied for institutional review board (IRB) approval, and recruited users for this study.

Our semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix) focused on users’ experiences and usage needs from our academic library. Each interview lasted one hour and was conducted by two librarians in a private study room. In return, patrons got a US\$40 Amazon gift card (we advertised the card, but not the relatively high dollar amount, prior to the interview).

During the interview, one librarian took notes and managed mobile devices for recording, while the other led the interview. We transcribed all interviews; anonymized locations, research topics, and identifying information; and then

deleted the audio files. The project team members each read and annotated the transcripts (manually or in Atlas.ti qualitative analysis software), met to discuss and define emerging themes, and then returned back to the data to check our analyses and write up results.

Recruitment Challenges

Before discussing results, we would like to briefly note our challenges in recruitment as academic librarian readers may face similar challenges in recruiting unaffiliated users. We submitted our research plan to our campus IRB in January 2017 and received approval two months later. We started recruitment just as the semester ended in early May, hoping that the end of the school year would be a good time to catch unaffiliated users who come on campus while students and faculty take a break.

We considered mailing or emailing invitations to unaffiliated library card holders, but were concerned about bias (selecting only those unaffiliated users who held a library card), and also found that our library card agreements with unaffiliated users promise that we will only contact them for account-related correspondence—an agreement that precludes research. We also decided against requesting an interview after reference interactions, not wanting to create undue pressure on unaffiliated users.

Instead we used passive recruitment techniques, posting flyers with tear-off tabs around campus libraries requesting that unaffiliated users volunteer to be interviewed in exchange for an Amazon gift card. While convenience sampling is not an ideal qualitative sampling strategy, we had no known population to draw from (many unaffiliated users do not pay for a library card) and hoped to reach a broad range of users. When posters in four subject libraries did not result in responses, we posted on library Facebook pages and added a recruitment notice to our email signatures. We also posted on the neighborhood-based Nextdoor website, hoping that users active in the community might also be users of our libraries. This brought in seven queries although most of them mistook us for the public libraries—but it resulted in one qualified interview. We reached out to unaffiliated patrons we knew well, resulting in another interview.

In our third month of recruitment, a public librarian posted fliers for us at their library. Eight people contacted us, but none used the academic library. (We expected more crossover, given how often we refer patrons to the public library.) We selected only one recent alumna because of her extensive experience as an unaffiliated patron prior to enrollment at our university. (We did not want recent alumni for our study because they wouldn’t have had sufficient experience of the library as an unaffiliated patron.) In the following months, we posted flyers at several more libraries, with several more responses.

In sum, we interviewed 10 qualified users over six months, which was less interest than we expected in a paid interview

of users of a major urban public university. The lessons we take away from this are that we should have ramped up recruitment much earlier—and that recruiting this population may be difficult as they use the library intermittently. As we began to see recurring themes and hit our target sample size of 10, we elected to end formal recruitment and begin analysis. While recruitment was challenging, we believe this is a crucial group to understand and worth reaching out to meet with and listen to.

Results and Discussion

Of the 10 people interviewed, three were teachers, three were graduate students at other institutions, three were professionals, and one was retired. Participants ranged in age from 29 to 72, with half below 40 years and half above 50 years. Half were alumni who had graduated some time ago.

In our discussions, three core patterns emerged again and again: a sense of *not belonging* to the library as an unaffiliated user, reverence for the library as a depository of scholarship, and strong opinions about libraries as places with specific architecture and social positioning on campus.

Uses of the Library

Most unaffiliated users came to our research library to use books and databases, or for a focused study space. While most had asked a question at the circulation desk, only two had asked for research assistance—even though this is a group invested enough to answer a call for interviews!

In fact, patrons were often unaware of who was a librarian, or of the resources available to them. Kerry,⁴ a graduate student at a nearby university, used the library catalog at the Anthropology Library to find sources for her thesis. Yet, she didn't know if there was a librarian at the library, and wasn't sure if she could get access to ebooks (she can). Justice, another graduate student, was writing her doctoral dissertation. After compiling a bibliography of sources, she searched our catalog for printed books. When we asked if she used ebooks on the public computers, Justice replied that she thought as an "outside patron" she couldn't have online access. "I thought when I read the rules for my library card, it wasn't accessible to me," she said, thinking back to our unaffiliated user documentation. Jody, an alumna, came to the libraries to work on continuing education, but also didn't realize she could use e-resources, and didn't ask anyone.

Casey, an alumna, came to the library with a business information need. While the campus is close to where she lives, she hadn't realized she could use the library, saying, "I didn't know that you could sort of come in as a public person and sit in a library here." It was only when she toured campus with her son, a prospective student, that she learned about public access—and her own alumni access. And it wasn't until she signed up for our interview that she learned she could access scholarly articles even after graduation, at a

public terminal. In fact, given these repeated gaps in awareness about the materials available to unaffiliated users, our research interviews often ended with a reference consultation—and expanded access for users.

The Risk of Disconnection and the Fear of Nonbelonging

We wondered why our unaffiliated users were unaware of the resources available to them. In part it could be that librarians do not advertise enough because they may fear being inundated with more unaffiliated requests than they can handle. It may also be that unaffiliated users feel a sense of *nonbelonging* or not being a rightful user of the library.

While we view unaffiliated users as rightful users, our research participants repeatedly indicated that they didn't feel like legitimate users of the library. Jessie had some of the strongest feelings in this area. As a student of a nearby private university with a small library, she could really benefit from unfettered access to our large research libraries. Yet, she understood the library as belonging to *Berkeley* students, saying,

But then again, it's a school library. If I was a Cal student, I wouldn't want my library to be serving the public. I would want them to serve me as a student, and you guys have so many students.

Justice similarly wrestling with how much she should use the library, commented,

Because I'm a student, but I'm not a student here, sometimes I feel a little weird about being here . . . it's not that I feel like I don't belong, but sometimes I just feel like an outsider coming in [to a] different environment. It's a university so it feels like I'm home, but it's not really. But I'm really grateful that it is open to the community and we're able to access all these resources.

While at home in the university environment as a scholar, Justice still felt distance because she does not belong to *this* university library. Similarly, Kerry, the external graduate student, wishing she could get a short-term library card for the few months she is in town, commented, "a monthly pass would be nice because right now I feel like I am a thief." Even though resources are readily available, by lacking a pass that recognizes her as a temporary member of the University Library community, Kerry felt like she was sneaking into this scholarly space. Casey similarly tried to be unobtrusive, commenting that she felt, "I may get kicked out because I'm not supposed to be here so I'm just not going to make any waves."

We were surprised by the strong emotions in these statements. Our Main library, archives, and undergraduate library have limited access or require IDs to be shown, but our

branch libraries all allow free entry and exit. Yet these users still felt a sense of nonbelonging in the academic library. After attending a public event in the Main library, Skyler noticed the library's public computers, and started using them for personal health research. But she felt bad, recalling, "The whole time I've been there I've felt guilty like I'm not supposed to be here, I'm not a current student."

But it was when she saw the flyers for our research project that her perception shifted:

It's funny, the whole time I've been here I've felt a little guilty, like am I really supposed to be here and then I saw your research and I was like they actually want to talk to me . . . it's good to know I'm welcome even if I just come in and meditate.

Another user, Pat, brought her middle school students to campus to show them a research library. Yet, she still felt that "You don't feel like you could be part of this library because it's on campus and it's a luxury to be here." Because campus feels set apart and the libraries feel grand, the libraries don't feel like they belong to her. Harley similarly remembered how awed she felt when first seeing the architecture of the imposing Bancroft Library at UC Berkeley. To help his students around this intimidation, her professor sent Harley and her community college classmates to campus as a group, encouraging them to help each other ask questions:

We found how easy it was to actually get research materials, to be able to access them, it was wonderful. That experience was great, because it gave me the confidence to be able to go into any library. I saw the standard of how interested the people there were in helping me get the information that I needed . . . that as a first experience definitely set the bar for the rest.

Harley's experience showed us how much first impressions count, and how helpful the friendly librarians at the Bancroft were for establishing her experience in academic libraries as a whole. Yet the experience of our other unaffiliated users reminds us how persistent a sense of nonbelonging can be unless we deliberately tear down barriers to integration. We believe it is important to reach out to the users hidden in plain sight, those who are polite but uncertain. Through clear written materials and personal introductions we increase the chance they will feel like they belong and will make better use of our resources. And lest we think they will not appreciate it, we found an enduring sense of respect for the value of academic libraries among these users.

Academic Libraries Provide Connection Through Books and Events

While unaffiliated users felt tension around the question of whether they belonged on campus, they glowed when speaking of the treasures an academic library may contain. Pat, for instance, appreciated our *archival and foreign language*

materials which were essential for her personal research. While exploring decades-old records which are hard to access in her home country, she was able to address a personal ancestral puzzle for one of her friends. Flipping through the newspapers, she reflected,

somebody saved this paper and probably they thought it would never be used, but here it comes. A hundred years later, in a different part of the world somebody makes a request, and they're trying to find it in a physical library and it's amazing.

As Pat looked through old Slavic newspapers, she sought physical proof of relatives whom history and politics have obscured. Because she was an unaffiliated user viewing, but not borrowing, physical materials, she may not show up in usage counts. Yet the material was uniquely valuable to her, whether accessible in physical or digital form.

Others also come for *foreign language materials*, as with Jessie, who comes to download articles in Chinese for her dissertation at a smaller institution nearby. With the help of a librarian, she found articles on Google Scholar and saved them to a thumb drive for later reading at home. Similarly, Jamie was glad to find rare foreign newspapers here, and recalled coming to the news collection in earlier years to find

the only publication coming out of Bhutan at the time. This was before the internet. . . . there were books about Bhutan but the only news you could get about Bhutan was from this weekly or monthly newspaper that came out and it was stored [in the library] and so I would go there to look at it.

Unaffiliated users also singled out the libraries as providing a *sense of community* especially for independent young scholars attempting to stay connected to their disciplines in the absence of a formal affiliation. In particular, the Ethnic Studies and Anthropology libraries were called out as spaces that let users connect with prior generations. Kerry believed the Anthropology Library helped connect her to the scholarly community as well as to research in her field, while Justice found the warm nooks of the Ethnic Studies Library to be an inspiring space, saying,

I've learned a little about history of social movements at UC Berkeley and the birth of the Ethnic Studies program and department, the creation of the library. I feel like it's important to be in that space and use it. It's almost like an act of activism to be there to some extent. I think it's a kind of bi-directional active support: that it has resources that help me write my dissertation, and at the same time I want to make sure that this space is still supported.

Here, the library's history and collections drew Justice into the history of social justice on campus, as well as into a web of current scholarship and events.

Finally, unaffiliated users used library *events and exhibits* to connect to the people and ideas circulating through the University. Jamie recalled a film series in the Environmental Design Library as a “magical event” where the librarian screened a film for discussion—and gave away books he had privately acquired for free. Justice found the audience at Ethnic Studies Library events “more intimate and valuable than going to a conference.” Taylor visited the lunch poem events at the Morrison Library as well as author talks and conferences on Buddhism. And after Skyler attended a campus event in the Morrison Library, she reflected,

I didn’t actually realize that community was so welcome at UC Berkeley, I thought it was just students and faculty . . . I just loved that *Anthropology on the Front Lines* was held in the Morrison. It was amazing, it was beautiful. It was a series celebrating the life and work of Nancy Scheper Hughes. That was my most memorable experience in the UC Berkeley libraries.

As librarians, we think of libraries as connecting people with information. Yet these users helped us to reframe our libraries and highlighted how library events build connections between people in the broader community and overcome that sense of nonbelonging, and deepen a shared heritage and culture of learning on campus.

Academic Libraries Teach Us Through Their Sense of Space

Finally, our unaffiliated users connected not just to our collections and to other users but to the library spaces themselves as intellectual, reflective, and social spaces. As a teacher and mother, Pat brought her younger students to the grand public reading rooms of Doe Library, which they found to look like Hogwarts, “surprised to see these huge libraries because most of the kids haven’t seen libraries with these tables, big lamps and all this glory.” She sought to make an impression not only with the grand reading rooms but also with the physicality of rare books, encouraging teenagers to encounter their beautiful illustrations and the different feeling of reading a physical book.

Other unaffiliated users come to the academic library to focus. Like other third places such as cafes or coworking spaces, academic libraries are well-lit, have minimal distractions, are freely accessible, and create a subtle social pressure to study or write, as that’s what everyone else is doing. This environment can produce a sense of *flow*, a feeling of intellectual sharpness and depth that comes through sustained concentration. As Justice remarked,

It’s so hard to write . . . but when you’re there and things are flowing, and you just feel like all this creation is happening and is being channeled through you . . . I feel like it’s the best moments I have to write, it’s not at home, it’s not in other places.

For Justice, it’s not just the focus of libraries but also the experience of browsing during breaks that helps her to write, as “I look for one book and right next to it is another one with a title that is really inspiring, and so I just pick it up and it’s just kind of easy and inspiring.” She experiences the Ethnic Studies library in particular as “an intimate space, a good cross between, it feels like home but it also feels studious.”

Perhaps because we recruited in smaller subject libraries, our unaffiliated users appreciated the grandeur of the larger Main library but found it hard to study in, describing the Main stacks as “too big,” “impersonal,” “scary,” a stressful, labyrinthine place where “one gets lost,” with “no one to help,” “stressed out staff,” and “intimidating” security at the entrances. In the underground stacks, Harley recalled,

there’s rows that I can’t even pull out, and there’s student workers but they can’t really help you with going to find books, and you have to know what you’re doing . . . and if you don’t know what you’re doing, you’re lost, and it discourages you from coming back.

Given the urban location of the campus, signs warn patrons to watch their belongings, which can unsettle patrons who lack a locker or other means of storing personal items during a bathroom or snack break. Kerry requested a “little box or cart” to set books on so she can go to lunch and return, “because I wouldn’t take 10 books home anyway. But if someone sees the book and takes it [while I’m on break], then it’s gone.” Several unaffiliated interviewees requested lockers or short-term secure storage because they lack an office or carrel and are less likely than students to have someone to watch their things while they take a break.

Another challenge for many unaffiliated patrons are the *limited hours* of campus branch libraries. Unaffiliated users often have complex work and commute schedules and find shortened summer and weekend schedules make it hard to use academic libraries after a workday. Other unaffiliated users visit town for only a few months and would like a seasonal or monthly pass instead of having to pay for a yearly alumni or community user card.

Finally, some unaffiliated users observed sharp differences in the funding available to different libraries based in unequal endowments in the associated disciplines. Harley saw the *varying investment in libraries* as indicative of a university that values some fields more than others, where the funds available to each library signal “what the university believes is important.” When the gym is well-stocked with staff, food, and space until the early hours of the morning, and small specialty libraries are not, she asked, what does that say about campus?

Similarly, Justice compared the well-endowed and ornate professional libraries like Law and Business to the more hidden Ethnic Studies Library. When Justice found it, she thought,

I really love the Ethnic Studies Library . . . and I've been thinking about the discrepancy between the luxury of Doe Library and how everything is set in marble, and how the Ethnic Studies Library is stashed away and there's a very small plaque at entrance. I don't want to say it's almost anonymous on campus, but I bet if you asked a lot of students if they knew about it, they wouldn't.

Yet, large or small, our unaffiliated users kept returning to the spaces of the academic library for its browsable shelves and personal space to settle in and study. In a distracting world, libraries allow for focus over time. As Jody reflected,

Cafes are more bustling, I may like the music, I may not, but I feel guilty that I stay there for 5 hours. Here I don't feel that. I can be here for 5 hours. I can study. So I don't go to cafes that much anymore.

Conclusion

As we listened to unaffiliated users of our campus libraries, we gained a deeper appreciation for their experiences and our gaps in service to them. We learned that they come to the academic library for a focused space to work, for unique resources, for cultural and learning opportunities at library events, and for a sense of community with the scholarly world, yet often feel alienated by a sense of *nonbelonging*, as interlopers who subtly lack a right to the resources we make available to them.

Appendix

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. To start, tell me how you came to use the University of California, Berkeley Libraries.
2. What typically bring you to the libraries?

Prompt: business use, genealogy, local history, events, research, personal interest.

3. Which services or resources do you use most often?

Prompt: books, databases, archives, events, book talks, consultations.

4. How do you find out about services, events, or other resources at the libraries?

Prompt: social media, library guides, websites.

5. How do you decide when to use a public library versus an academic library?
6. Why do you come to this library on campus in particular?
7. Have you had formal connections with University of California, Berkeley in the past?

Prompt: alumni, emerita, past employee, family member.

8. What has been your best experience with the University of California, Berkeley Libraries?
9. Can you tell us about a time when you had difficulty getting resources or help from the library?

Prompt: physical accessibility (wheelchair-accessible, etc.), limited hours, library privileges, not sure who to ask, transportation/parking, language.

10. What would make the libraries, website, or librarians more useful or accessible for you?

Given the value they place on library spaces, events, and resources, and yet the distance that kept them from asking for help, we believe it is important for academic librarians to actively draw quiet unaffiliated users into better use of library resources and spaces.

We have all experienced the unaffiliated member who overuses resources, acts entitled, and pushes others out of the way. Other times, we're too busy to reach out. Yet leaving policies vague often hurts those who need us the most. It wasn't until someone told Kerry that the library was open to all that she visited, and "had I known that before, I would have used it much more." And as Casey commented, our alumni brochure talked about "privileges" but not "what world are you opening up that I'd be able to use these privileges *for*." While we thought we were welcoming, then, our unaffiliated users weren't sure if we really were open to them or what we were welcoming them into.

Perhaps for this reason, we found that qualitative research with unaffiliated users not only helped our own understanding but directly helped these users. As we talked, our research interviews turned into reference interviews where we helped patrons gain greater access to the resources already available to them. As we listened, our users experienced a greater sense of belonging to the library and to the life of the university. And as a result of this listening, we have begun to advertise our events more widely, to improve signage and brochures, and to make ourselves more present in our libraries—and most of all, to respect and advocate for the experience of our unaffiliated users.

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Notes

1. See <https://stories.lib.berkeley.edu/direction4/>
2. See <http://www.ala.org/tools/libfactsheets/alalibraryfactsheet22>
3. See <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/using-the-libraries/library-cards> for policies and privileges granted to unaffiliated library card holders.
4. All names are pseudonyms.

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