



# **SUPPORTING STUDENT WELL-BEING AND NEURODIVERSITY THROUGH DESIGN AND PROGRAMMING**

DESIGNING LIBRARIES FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY XII

UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER

SEPTEMBER 30, 2025

# TODAY'S SESSION

## PRESENTERS

- **Marisa Nemcik**, Associate Vice President, CannonDesign
- **Kelly E. Miller**, Associate Dean for Learning and Research Services, Director of Mindfulness and Well-Being Programs, University of Miami Libraries
- **Joan K. Lippincott**, Associate Executive Director *Emerita*, Coalition for Networked Information

## TOPICS

- Overview
- Focus on addressing needs of neurodiverse students
- Focus on student and staff well-being

# TOPICS

- Neurodiversity or Sensory Spaces
- Well-being Spaces
- Creating environments, connections, and programs – not just spaces

# QUESTIONS FOR YOU

- Do you currently have a specific space(s) in your library for promoting well-being for students?
- Are you planning such a space?
- Do you currently have a specific “sensory space” or space(s) in your library intended to support neurodiverse students?
- Are you planning such a space?

# WHY ARE LIBRARIES CREATING THESE SPACES?

- “Nearly eight in 10 students (77 percent) indicated that mental or emotional difficulties negatively impacted their academic performance for one to six or more days in the past four weeks.”
- College student populations contain significant numbers of neurodivergent students
- “In spring 2024, about half 49% of students reported that they had felt lonely”
- Libraries can provide environments and programs that support students’ well-being, sense of belonging, and academic performance
- Students often identify libraries as safe spaces.

Statistics from ACE Key Mental Health in Higher Education Stats 2024

# A NEW ERA OF NEURODIVERSITY

Meant to embrace the positives of a unique mind by moving away from negative labels.

**Accounts for**  
**1 in 3**  
**students**

*\*15-20% of the US population*

Autistic Spectrum Disorder

Dyslexia

Trauma

Cultural Diversity

Developmental Disabilities

ODD

Specific Learning Difficulties

ADHD

Anxiety

OCD

Auditory Processing

Sensory Integration Disorder

ADD

Gifted

Tourette's

Developmental Coordination Disorder

Slide courtesy of Marisa Nemcik, CannonDesign

# A Constellation of Needs, Programs, Spaces



# WHO ARE CAMPUS PARTNERS?

- Neurodiversity Offices
- Wellness Programs and Health Services
- Office of Spirituality
- Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access Committee



# NEEDS ASSESSMENT

- Environmental scan
  - Which campus units and others should you consult?
  - What facilities already exist?
  - What programs already exist?
- What are the primary needs?
  - What data can you consult?
  - Can you convene focus groups or conduct interviews?

These sensory spaces provide students with sensory needs the opportunity to regulate their responses to the environment they study in.

## Development

These spaces were developed by UCD Library with input from:

- Student user surveys
- UCD Access and Lifelong Learning
- Linda Horgan, Cork Occupational Therapy. External Consultant
- Reddy Architecture + Urbanism
- UCD Estates

<https://libguides.ucd.ie/accessibility>

# SCAN OF LIBRARY PUBLIC SPACES – ILLINOIS STATE

**Milner Library** ISU ReD: Research and eData

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**MILNER LIBRARY PUBLICATIONS**





### Multicultural Organizational Development (MCOD) Scans of Public Space in Milner Library, Fall 2023: External Report

**Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access Committee,  
Milner Library, Illinois State University**

Download Full Text (423 KB)

61 DOWNLOADS  
Since May 08, 2024

 **PLUMX METRICS**

 INCLUDED IN

Library and Information

**Description**

In November 2023, Milner Library's Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (IDEA) Committee conducted Multicultural Organizational Development (MCOD) scans of the library's public spaces, wishing to follow up on a previous series of MCOD scans conducted in 2021.

**Publication Date**

5-2024

<https://ir.library.illinoisstate.edu/mlp/38/>

# LOW-SENSORY ROOMS AT BOBST LIBRARY NYU



<https://www.nyu.edu/about/news-publications/news/2023/october/N-38.html>



# SENSORY SPACES – UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN



# SENSORY SPACES – UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN



## How do I book a space?

See our [booking information](#) for details on how to book a space

## Sensory Study Room

The **Sensory Study room** on Level 3 of the James Joyce Library supports students with sensory needs.

It provides students with sensory needs the opportunity to regulate their responses to the environment they study in.

## Sensory Transition Room

The **Sensory Transition room** on Level 3 of the James Joyce Library is for students who are finding self-regulation challenging. This space allows them to disengage, to regulate, and to re-engage again before moving to another space in the Library.

Features include:

- Variety of seating to meet individual needs, support movement and provide relaxation
- Walk way space for people who manage sensory load through pacing



# SENSORY-SEEKING SPACE

Montana State University Library

Support students who benefit from floor time, fidgeting, physical activity

“Loved the space! The Legos were fun and I like the chalk board! Thank you!! Good job!”  
(Undergrad student)



**Fig. 1:** MSU library sensory-seeking space

<https://creativelibrarypractice.org/2025/06/24/making-room-for-everyone/>

# WELL-BEING

An optimal and dynamic state that allows people to achieve their full potential.

*Two interdependent types:*

- *Individual*
- *Community*

*Well-being is a multifaceted goal and a shared responsibility by the entire institution*

Slide courtesy of Marisa Nemcik, CannonDesign



# WHAT KINDS OF PROGRAMS ARE IN THESE SPACES?

- Mindfulness sessions and training
- Meditation sessions
- Peer wellness consultations by social work students
- Exam week programs for de-stressing
- Games, coloring books, therapy dog visits
- Room reservations and access



# WHAT KIND OF SPACE(S) WILL ENHANCE STUDENTS' WELL-BEING?



VASSAR — MEDITATION SPACE & QUIET ROOM

<https://miscellanynews.org/2015/09/16/features/quiet-room-provides-escape-without-ever-leaving-campus/>



VANDERBILT — MEDITATION & MINDFULNESS ROOM

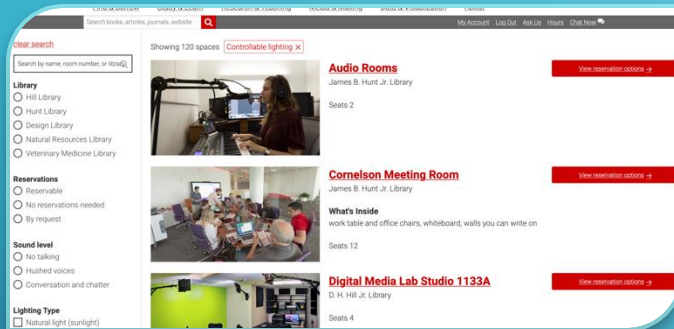
<https://newsonline.library.vanderbilt.edu/2025/03/peabody-librarys-new-reflection-room-promotes-meditation-and-mindfulness/>



SUNY PLATTSBURGH WELLNESS ZONE

<https://www.plattsburgh.edu/news/news-archive/feinberg-library-adds-spaces-to-meet-students-academic-social-needs.html>

# WHAT KIND OF SPACE(S) WILL ENHANCE STUDENTS' WELL-BEING?



## ROOMS WITH CONTROLLABLE LIGHTING

<https://www.lib.ncsu.edu/spaces>



## RETREAT, RECHARGE, REFUEL

<https://schulich.yorku.ca/wellness/>



## ARTWORK IN STUDY AREAS

Chinese University of Hong Kong Library

[Photo: Joan Lippincott]

# MOVING FORWARD

- Clarify your goals
- Conduct needs assessment
- Identify campus partners
- Identify interested library staff
- Consider right-sizing
- Integrate space/programming/staff resources/technology
- Procure funding and implement
- Support your students!