

Pennsylvania Libraries: Research & Practice

Research

Self-Care in the Library

A Case Study of a Multi-Use Space to Support Varied Campus Needs

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Author Bio

Librarians at West Chester University saw a need for spaces where the campus community could engage in activities that require a level of privacy. These activities include prayer/mediation, expressing milk, addressing medical or mental health needs, escaping sensory overload, and changing or adjusting clothing. Lacking the space to create multiple spaces dedicated to specific needs, the library instead created a Self-Care Space, a flexible room that could be utilized to fulfill multiple needs. This article will describe the Self-Care Space, report on room usage, and provide analysis of data gathered from users. This data shows that the Self-Care Space has been both used and appreciated by the campus community, meaning the space has potential to serve as a model for other academic libraries.

Introduction

Academic libraries work to support student success, in part, by trying to create inclusive spaces where all students can feel welcome; however, as diversity increases across many campuses, new space needs may develop. At the Francis Harvey Green Library, one emerging need was for more private space outside of study rooms to allow students and employees to address a range of self-care activities.

West Chester University is a suburban R2 university with approximately 17,000 students. Its campus occupies a small footprint in relation to the size of the student body and has a dearth of private spaces outside of restrooms where students (or employees) can attend to self-care needs. Seeing these emerging needs firsthand, the Francis Harvey Green Library developed a space to help support students in addressing them.

When developing the room, some potential needs identified included space for praying/meditating, expressing breastmilk, changing or adjusting clothing, taking medication or seeing to other medical needs, escaping from sensory overstimulation, and seeking a calm and relaxing space. These initial needs were based on knowledge of the West Chester University campus community, which includes sizable contingents of neurodivergent students, student veterans, and LGBT+ students. In addition, existing research was reviewed to better understand the self-care needs of other student groups, such as student parents and students with medical conditions. The need for a calm, relaxing space was inspired not by any particular campus group but by ongoing discussions on campus that students

(both at the researchers' institution and others) were experiencing extremely high levels of mental health issues. Also, while the focus was on student needs, it was also acknowledged that West Chester University employees could also have the same types of needs.

Given the shortage of usable spaces in the Francis Harvey Green Library, there was no capacity for creating multiple rooms to serve different needs—a situation that is common to many academic libraries. Instead, it was decided to develop a single, flexible space that could serve a variety of needs. The name selected for this room was the Self-Care Space in order to highlight that it was intended for multiple uses while trying to distinguish it from study or workspace.

After creating the Self-Care Space, the investigators conducted research related to the room's design, furnishing, equipment, and usage. Data was gathered in two ways. Motion sensors and a room reservation system were used to gather data about room usage. A mixed-methods survey was developed and offered to all room users to gather information about how the room was used and if it met user needs. The survey also solicited feedback on how to improve the space.

Literature Review

Research has established that sense of belonging is a very important factor in both college student retention and mental health, but that various groups of students (including, but not limited to, students from underrepresented minorities, students with disabilities, nonbinary students, and student veterans) frequently feel lower levels of belonging at their institution (Barry et al., 2021; Dolan, 2023; Gopalan & Brady, 2020; Gopalan et al., 2022; O'Keeffe, 2013). Picking up on this research, academic libraries have been seeking out ways that they can contribute to students' sense of belonging by ensuring that all students feel included and welcome in the library. In recent years, more scholarship has begun to appear that focuses on how libraries can make their spaces and services more supportive for particular groups, including students of color, students with autism, student parents, and first-generation students (Arch & Gilman, 2019; Elteto et al., 2008; Godfrey et al., 2017; Keyes, 2017; Walton & McMullin, 2021). As Riehman-Murphy & Mross (2019) suggest, "libraries cannot be everything for everyone, but as one of the main learning and study spaces on college campuses, it is important that they reconsider what support for student success looks like" (p. 126). This article will expand on the existing literature by focusing on students who may desire a private space within the library to address a variety of self-care needs. By examining this shared need, it brings together discussion of student groups that otherwise might not be considered in a single article.

One group of students for whom private spaces may contribute to feelings of belonging are students who wish to pray or meditate. Finding a place on campus to pray can be particularly challenging for Muslim students (Browne, 2015; Wexler, 2015). Some colleges and universities have responded by creating multi-faith religious spaces (Johnson & Laurence, 2012). Emily Mross and Christina Riehman-Murphy have published several articles addressing the need for prayer/meditation spaces specifically in academic libraries. Discussing a variety of space needs, including prayer and reflection, they found that "even if libraries do not designate specific spaces for these purposes, library users often make the available places work for their needs" (Mross & Riehman-Murphy, 2021, p. 126). In another article, Riehman-Murphy and Mross (2019) conducted a survey of more than 500 academic library professionals, finding that 50% had observed students praying or meditating in their library. This percentage was the same for professionals who worked at both public and private institutions, indicating these activities are occurring at libraries on all types of campuses. Survey participants reported students using spaces throughout their libraries, including "the stacks, study rooms, bathrooms, stairwells, and classrooms, in addition to designated spiritual areas, such as chapels or meditation rooms" (Riehman-Murphy & Mross, 2019, p. 469). This was also the experience of the University of Kansas Libraries,

where multiple “reflection rooms” were created after staff noticed students praying in more secluded but public areas of the libraries (Wachter, 2018).

Some attention has also been paid to what makes a good prayer or meditation space. One study involving focus groups found that students especially wanted spaces that are convenient and that they appreciated interfaith spaces, which allow a range of individuals to feel comfortable using them (Mross & Riehman-Murphy, 2021). Another feature brought up by students in the same study was the ability to reserve a room ahead of time. A sink or place to wash up was expressed as a desirable feature specifically for Muslim students. Another article described rooms that had been developed at a number of libraries and suggested including soft furniture, calming/neutral paint colors, and soft lighting, but avoiding symbols specific to any particular religion (Wachter, 2018). Rooms can be quite small, for instance repurposing a small study room or office may be a good option (Mross & Riehman-Murphy, 2018).

Finally, the scholarship on prayer or meditation also highlights why academic libraries are attractive locations for students. Libraries are often centrally located on campus, have longer hours than most buildings, are quiet, and usually offer some private or semi-private spaces. Plus, as already mentioned, the libraries are often a convenient location, both because of placement on campus and also because many students may already be spending substantial amounts of time there (Mross & Riehman-Murphy, 2018; Mross & Riehman-Murphy, 2021). These very same factors explain why students might want space in the library for other self-care activities where a level of privacy would be desirable or necessary.

Another group that might benefit from a private space for self-care is students on the autism spectrum. Many individuals with autism suffer from hypersensitivity to environmental stimuli, including noise, scents, light, pattern, and/or texture. Most academic libraries today are vibrant, busy locations, and while many students with autism do find libraries to be safe and welcoming spaces, they can also become overwhelmed by the many stimuli (e.g., noise from other students and equipment, bright overhead lights, patterned carpet or furnishings, smells from food, etc.) (Anderson, 2018; McMullin & Walton, 2019). Having spaces where autistic students can retreat from these stimuli and take a break can help support them.

Trans students are an additional group who might benefit from a private space, which they could use to change clothing or adjust gender-affirming garments. The scholarship to date on trans students and libraries has focused on the need for gender-neutral, single-user restrooms on campuses and in libraries (Drake & Bielefield, 2017; Krueger & Matteson, 2017; Poggiali & Margolin, 2019), but some articles have also addressed the need for additional gender-inclusive facilities on campus, such as locker rooms and student housing (Laidlaw, 2020; Patchett & Foster, 2015; Thorpe, 2017). The need for a space to change clothing could also extend beyond trans students to include students who may need to change clothing to transition from a school to work setting.

One other self-care need is space for breastfeeding students to express milk. A lack of campus spaces to express milk can impact students’ ability to continue breastfeeding. Different studies have provided different numbers for the availability of lactation rooms on campus. While one study of campus administrators found that 94% of campuses had at least one dedicated lactation space (Henry-Moss et al., 2019), in another study that surveyed students, 19.4% reported that their campus did not have such a space at all, leading them to having to express in spaces like bathrooms or in their cars (Ryan et al., 2021). Another theme that appears across studies is the need for lactation spaces to be available in convenient locations that students can access quickly, so that they can fit expressing into their schedules (Adcock et al., 2019; Ryan et al., 2021; Sturtevant et al., 2021). In this regard, the factors that make academic libraries an appealing location for prayer or meditation spaces apply here as well. In particular, the longer hours that library buildings are open are of importance, as student parents in one study reported that expressing while taking night classes was especially challenging, since more buildings or rooms tended to be locked and most staff had gone home (Sturtevant et al., 2021).

An ideal lactation space would be one that ensures privacy (preferably a locking door), includes seating, a table, an outlet, and a sink, is not too loud and/or dampens noise, and is a pleasant environment (Adcock et al., 2019; Sturtevant et al., 2021; Henry-Moss et al., 2019). In one study, student parents specifically complained about lactation spaces that they felt were too cold and sterile and felt like “old hospitals or storage closets” (Sturtevant et al., 2021, p. 180).

Another group of students that may have more self-care needs than the traditional student demographic is veterans. Student veterans have been a growing group on many campuses, due to multiple U.S. military operations since 2001 as well as expanded veteran educational benefits (McCaslin et al., 2013). Student veterans tend to be older than traditional students (with only 20% falling into the 17-23 age range) and are more likely to be married, have children, and need to balance education with work (Borsari et al., 2017; McCaslin et al., 2013). Student veterans also report a high rate of both physical disability and mental health diagnosis (including PTSD, anxiety disorders, and depression), which can impact their college success (Bosari et al., 2017; Kelley et al., 2013; Misra-Hebert et al., 2015). Of course, medical and mental health conditions are not just limited to veterans.

Physical health conditions affect many students. A 2014 study on campus support for students with chronic conditions opens by stating that “twenty percent of US youth have a chronic medical condition and many attend college” (Lemly et al., 2014, p. 885). The 2019 National College Health Assessment provides a more specific number, reporting that 6.4% of respondents indicated a chronic illness (American College Health Association, 2019). In a 2017 study where researchers had students with chronic conditions complete health diaries, a large number of reported health incidents were related to managing their conditions and/or symptoms and medications (Ravert et al., 2017). All this indicates that there is likely to be a substantial group of students on any given campus who could benefit from a private space to take medication, see to other medical needs, or take part in a telemedicine call.

Addressing mental health can also warrant privacy for activities like online counseling appointments, meditation, and relaxation. Research shows that mental health challenges are extremely prevalent among college students. According to a 2019 study that reviewed data from the 2015 American College Health Association National College Health Assessment, 25% of students reported having been diagnosed with and/or treated for one of 15 mental health disorders in the past year (Liu et al., 2019). Another study published in 2019, based on data from more than 150,000 students on 196 U.S. campuses, reported a rate of 26.9% for depression and found a significant rise in the percentage of students who had made use of mental health services—from 18.7% in 2007 to 33.8% in 2017 (Lipson et al., 2019). COVID-19 had an additional negative impact on college student mental health. A 2021 systematic review and meta-analysis of 89 studies from around the world found an overall prevalence rate of 34% for depression symptoms, 32% for anxiety symptoms, and 33% for sleep disturbances (Deng et al., 2021). The same study found that the prevalence rates were much higher for the studies of American college students, with a pooled prevalence rate of 55% for depressive symptoms and 74% for anxiety symptoms. A slightly later study of U.S. students reported rates of 57.6% for depression, 41.5% for anxiety, and 40.8% for stress (Ding et al., 2023).

Altogether, this equates to a lot of students who could benefit from a designated and flexible space within the library to attend to self-care needs. Having such a space will also hopefully contribute to their sense of welcome and belonging both in the library and on campus. With this in mind, the planning for the Self-Care Space began.

Self-Care Space Description

Many decisions were made in the development and furnishing of the Self-Care Space based on the potential uses and users identified above.

Locking Door

Given the need for privacy within the room, it was essential that the room could be locked. Originally, the room operated under an honor system, where students who had booked the room could simply walk in. However, after a few incidents of use outside of the designated purpose, the space was moved to a system where patrons book the room ahead and then stop by our main help desk for a key. While this system does have the downside of reducing users' ability to use the room with complete anonymity, it has ensured that users are able to access the room at their reserved times. This supports users who may need to access the space at a specific time, for instance for expressing milk, taking medication, or prayer.

Location

The selected room was a generously sized office space (23' by 11.5') on the top floor of the library. Several factors contributed to the selection of this space. First, this floor of the library is designated as a quiet study area, which complements many potential uses of the room, including meditation or prayer, escape from sensory overload, expressing milk, and general relaxation. Second, the location added to privacy. Going to the room does not require users to walk through any highly used areas and the limited amount of seating on the floor means that few other patrons are around to see users entering or exiting the room. There was no location available in the library that included a sink (and no possibility of adding one at the time), but a third factor in selecting the location was its relatively close proximity to restrooms.

Design

A conscious decision was made to try to give the Self-Care Space a different look and feel from the rest of the library. One of the benefits of the selected space was that it had a switch to control the overhead lights and had windows to provide some natural light—allowing users to control the light level in the room, something that cannot be done in other public areas of the library. Two table lamps were also added to the space to allow for even more lighting options. The existing carpeting was covered with padded floor tiles with a wood grain pattern. This was intended to both add softness to the floor for activities like prayer or meditation and to add some warmth to the room through the wood-tone colors. Beyond the flooring and a wood-toned storage cabinet, soft neutral colors were selected as much as possible—white, gray, and cream. Sound dampening tiles were installed on the walls and door, and paper shades were added to the windows. These were intended to both give the room a softer feel and to help absorb sound. While the room is not soundproof in either direction, there is a clear drop in sound levels when one enters the room and closes the door.

Furnishings

Once inside the room, a fabric screen is used to delineate a smaller portion of the room, adding an extra layer of privacy for those who need it. Within this enclosed space is a lounge chair. The chair has a built-in swivel table and there is also a side table adjacent to it with one of the table lamps. This setup was created with expressing milk in mind, but could also be useful in other situations, such as seeing to medical needs. The enclosed space also has a hanging rack with a mirror to support changing or adjusting clothing. Outside of the enclosed area is a seating area with two padded floor chairs and a side table with the other table lamp. On the opposite wall is a cabinet used to store equipment. A substantial portion of the middle of the room has been left empty to allow space for prayer or meditation or simply sitting or lying down. A shoe rack by the door includes a padded bench to invite users to remove their shoes if they wish. A hardy plant was also added to bring in a touch of nature.

Equipment

The following equipment was purchased for the room to support the purposes originally envisioned: a white noise machine, a sensory light projector, a seasonal affective disorder lamp, sound canceling headphones, yoga mats, weighted blankets, and some fidgets.

Methodology

The Self-Care Space was opened for initial use in October 2021. Data collection for this study was initiated on February 11, 2022, immediately following internal review board approval during the spring semester at the university. Collection concluded on December 18, 2022, the end of the fall semester. Data was collected from three sources during the study. These included motion sensors, which were mounted on the entrance to the Self-Care Space; the online room reservation system; and a Qualtrics survey.

Motion Sensors

Sensors were put in place on the inner door frame of the Self-Care Space to provide estimates of how frequently the room was being utilized. The sensors tracked entrances and exits separately to allow for the removal of instances where an entry and exit occurred within 60 seconds of each other. This was done to help prevent false counts, when library employees or the researchers would examine the room periodically throughout the day.

Reservation System

During the fall and spring semesters the Self-Care Space was available for 96.5 hours each week. This corresponds to when library employees are available at service points in the building. While the Self-Care Space was left open for walk-up use, the university community could reserve the room in 30-minute increments for a total of 60 minutes per day via an online process using Springshare's LibCal software. While a university email address was needed to perform this action, the researchers do not have administrative access to this reservation module. Reservation data has been shared with the researchers following deidentification processes.

Survey

The survey asked users about their role on campus (e.g., student or staff), how they learned about the existence of the room, how they used the Self-Care Space, whether they expected to use the room again, and to provide feedback on how the service could be improved. It was developed using Qualtrics to allow for virtually received responses to better ensure respondent anonymity and assist with data collection. In addition, passive study recruitment was utilized to ensure anonymity of respondents, as they may opt to share sensitive information related to their use of the Self-Care Space. Flyers were posted in the Self-Care Space and a notice was placed on the room's reservation page to make users aware of the study. Participants that chose to enroll in the mixed-methods study could do so anonymously; however, they were given the option of following a link to a separate questionnaire where they could indicate their email address to be entered into a drawing. Two participants were selected to receive a \$50.00 gift card to an online retailer.

Results and Discussion

Motion Sensor Data

Door sensor data indicates a total of 2,357 entrances to the Self-Care space throughout the entire length of the study. The room saw the largest amount of monthly use in October 2022, where 382 entrances were recorded. Room

entrance data varied regarding daily use and no clear pattern was observed other than weekday compared to weekend use. While weekday use was more substantial than weekend use, the Self-Care Space continued to be used during weekend hours. Groups of individuals using the room may also skew data, further complicating analysis.

It is important to note that room access policies were re-evaluated in the month of December 2022. During regular room inspections, staff observations indicated that the Self-Care Space was not always being used for intended purposes. In some instances, groups were using the room for extended periods of time for group study. This type of use inflated entrance counts when larger groups utilized the room, while hampering room turnover. Due to these observed occurrences the Self-Care Space was shifted to a reservation only, keyed access service. This policy was implemented on February 1, 2023, which falls outside of the bounds of this study. While the data from this source may be inflated for the stated reasons; nevertheless, it shows consistent use of the space.

Online Reservation System Data

The room reservation data collected during the range of the study show a total of 538 online bookings. Table 1 reports room reservations by month.

Table 1

Monthly Room Reservation Distribution for February 11 – December 18, 2022

	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Hours Booked	2	10	20	12	1	3	11	23	33	15	21

Two hundred seventy-nine of these bookings were confirmed by students using the space. The confirmation process requires users to check in by clicking a link that will appear in their institutional email when they arrive to use the room. If this link is not utilized within 15 minutes following their reservation time, the reservation will be removed from the system. While the confirmation procedure is advantageous for room availability, users may fail to respond to the cancellation link, even though they are present in the Self-Care Space. This limits the researcher’s analysis of the reservation data, as the system does not distinguish between user-initiated cancellations and automatically generated cancellations, which are potentially erroneous. Taking this information into account, the data showed that December 2022 had the largest amount of booking submissions with 92 reservations, while October had 61 user-confirmed uses of the space. This would correspond with midterm and final examination periods at the university. Table 2 notes how many total hours the space was formally reserved and confirmed by users during the length of the study. The data shows that the reservation system was used to book the Self-Care Space most frequently on Wednesdays with 33 hours of bookings.

Table 2

Day of the Week Room Reservation Distribution for February 11 – December 18, 2022

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Hours Booked	27	25	33	32	22	1	9
Occupancy Rate	4.56%	3.84%	5.15%	4.95%	4.99%	0.47%	1.97%

Survey

Information related to the mixed methods survey was available to individuals that physically entered the Self-Care Space. Two flyers were present in the room, which described the survey and provided a QR code to potential respondents, allowing them to complete the survey via their personal cellular devices. Paper surveys were not present in the room, due to the potential collection issues, and the need to ensure privacy for all respondents. This passive data collection method resulted in 47 completed surveys. Undergraduate students were the largest demographic opting to participate with 42 respondents identifying as such. There were also three members of the public, one graduate student, and one staff member that indicated their usage of the Self-Care Space. No members of the faculty indicated that they had used the room via a survey response.

Table 3

Responses to Survey Question 2: How Did You Learn about the Existence of the Self-Care Space?

	Responses
From a Librarian/Library Staff	11
Word of Mouth	10
From a Flyer	2
From Social Media	1
Other	20 (Website 7, Walked by, 13)

The researchers wished to discover what method of promotion led respondents to use the space (see Table 3). In addition to several predefined options, a text box was included in the survey to allow for write-in responses. Social media and flyers impacted the smallest number of respondents; together, these methods lead three respondents to discover the Self-Care Space. Seven respondents noted that they became aware of the room via the library website. Word of mouth (n = 10) and direct promotion (n = 11) from a library employee led to respondents utilizing the room. However, the act of simply walking by the room was the method that the largest group of respondents stated led to their discovery of the Self-Care Space, which was indicated by 13 individuals. Given that very few respondents discovered the room through marketing materials, the researchers believe they could continue to increase room usage through additional marketing.

Respondents also noted their specific type of use/s of the Self-Care Space in a portion of the survey that allowed qualitative, open-ended responses (see Table 4). These responses were examined for thematic overlap and were coded by the researchers. The themes that were present in the responses included: meditation or yoga, emotional health, sensory or quiet, unspecified relaxation, study, library tour, online counseling, online meeting, and changing clothes.

Table 4

Responses to Survey Question 3: What type of activity did you use the Self-Care Space for?

	Responses
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Meditation/Yoga	13
Emotional Health	9
Sensory/Quiet	7
Unspecified Relaxation	5
Study	5
Library Tour	2
Online Counseling	2
Online Meeting	2
Changing Clothes	1

The findings demonstrate that many respondents (n = 13) used the Self-Care Space to engage in meditation or yoga. This outcome is not surprising, as these were uses planned for during the room creation process (inclusion of soft flooring and yoga mats). Yoga and meditation are often utilized as relaxation activities, which connects this category to the next most popular category, responses related to emotional health.

Responses (n = 9) that were coded in the category of emotional health are indicative of qualitative entries, including “crying,” “... alone time from my roommate,” and “to de-stress”. In an especially elaborate response, one individual stated that they use the Self-Care Space “for relaxation and stretching purposes. For example, if I am having a bad week, having some time alone in a quiet space is very helpful. Since I live with other people, I would use this space to escape.” This demonstrates a need for spaces where one can have time to themselves in campus settings for a reason (wanting time away from roommates) that goes beyond the situations discussed in the literature review above. Another comment (discussed later in the article) was from a commuter student, another demographic that had not been considered when the room was developed.

The next most popular response category was sensory or quiet, which reflects West Chester University substantial population of students with autism. While the Francis Harvey Green Library has open quiet areas that exist on all six floors of the library, except the third floor, these areas are commonly well-populated with other individuals and include other types of stimuli, such as bright lighting, scents, patterned furniture or carpet, and motion. Individuals who are sensitive to those types of stimuli can benefit from having an area where quiet is paired with low lighting and reduced stimuli. A total of seven responses corresponded to this theme. Select qualitative responses that matched this description were “anxiety,” “I use it to get away from any noise...,” and “quiet time, stim breaks.”

Other respondents indicated that they used the space for unspecified relaxation activities (n = 5). Since the term “relaxation” was used specifically in qualitative responses, the researchers applied great care to avoid inferring context or meaning that went beyond what was noted specifically. Other remarks (n = 5) noted that the Self-Care Space was used to study. While this is not an approved use of the room, it is understandable that students would enjoy studying in such an environment, as it is furnished in a manner that is different from the remainder of the library. The researchers believe that room-use for studying has diminished following the change in policy requiring a key for access.

Two respondents specified that they used the room during a Library Tour. It is likely that these responses were provided by students that were touring the entire library, which also included a specific stop inside of the Self-

Care Space. Tours of this nature were offered to students in the psychology program along with students that are part of the Dub-C Autism Program. Tours of this specific space were also provided to faculty and staff aligned with counseling, student success, and campus autism support program prior to the beginning of this study.

Additional qualitative responses noted that the Self-Care Space was used for online counseling sessions (n = 2), online meetings like job interviews (n = 2), and the changing of clothing (n = 1). These responses aided in confirming the intentional activities the room was planned for. However, the lack of responses mentioning other intended room uses, including prayer and breastfeeding or milk expression again suggest to the researchers that they need to increase their distribution of marketing materials and direct communication efforts.

Question 4 asked room users whether the Self-Care Space had fit their needs (see Table 5). Thirty-one respondents stated that the space fit their needs for the specific activities, five individuals stated that the room somewhat met their need, and there were no instances of respondents noting that the room did not fit their needs.

Table 5

Responses to Survey Question 4: Did the Self-Care Space fit your needs for that activity?

	Responses	Percent
Yes	31	86.11%
Somewhat	5	13.89%
No	0	0.00%

The survey also asked respondents to indicate if they were likely to use the Self-Care Space in the future (see Table 6). Twenty participants noted they would use the room on a daily or weekly basis, and 16 individuals stated they were likely to visit the space a few times during the semester. No (n = 0) participants indicated that they would abstain from using this space in the future. Answers to this and the prior question both indicate that the room satisfied or fully met the needs of individuals that responded to the survey.

Table 6

Responses to Survey Question 5: Do you think you will use the Self-Care Space in the future?

	Responses	Percent
Yes, on a Regular Basis (Daily or Weekly)	20	55.56%
Yes, Occasionally (A Few Times a Semester)	16	44.44%
No	0	0.00%

The survey requested that users note how the Self-Care Space could be improved via a text entry box (see Table 7). These responses were coded into the following themes: item suggestions, furniture suggestions, lighting, additional self-care spaces, room design or signage, reservation time, personal care item suggestions, and cleanliness.

Table 7

Responses to Survey Question 6: How Could the Libraries Improve the Self-Care Space?

	Responses
Item Suggestions	8
Furniture	6
Lighting	4
Additional Self-Care Spaces	4
Room Design/Signage	4
Longer Reservation Time	3
Personal Care Items	2
Cleanliness	1

Qualitative entries related to item suggestions (n = 8) provided a variety of ideas to consider, such as having assorted fidget toys. The researchers had originally provided spinners and squishable stress toys but have now expanded the variety of fidgets offered based on this feedback. Anyone considering developing a similar space should be aware that users will take these items with them; however, their low price point means they can be replenished at minimal cost.

Some survey responses also indicated that respondents did not always notice what was already provided. For example, one respondent asked for “a nature sounds speaker...;” yet, this item was currently available in the room. The researchers have observed that the instructions for this device go missing frequently, which may lead to a lack of awareness concerning its purpose. The researchers have secured instructions for the speaker on the wall near this item to help address awareness and use-related questions.

Lastly, some item suggestions were deemed inappropriate for the space. These included requests for candles, oil diffusers, and blackout curtains. The use of oil diffusers would not be consistent with the use of the room as a low-sensory environment, because of the scent. There is also the potential for the contents to be spilled accidentally. Candles and curtains each present a safety risk (fire and self-harm respectively). Safety was also a consideration in the selection of the mirror that is included in the Self-Care Space. It is an acrylic, shatterproof item. While the potential for self-harm can never be ruled out, applying care while selecting items, furnishings, and décor should remain top of mind in any facility designing a private space.

Remarks concerning furniture (n = 6) were also present in the responses. These requests noted adding further seating; a place to lie down; and in one instance, pillows were asked for. The researchers felt these requests did not fit the purpose of the room, as additional seating might lead to the area becoming a haven for study versus self-care. Additionally, furnishings that encourage individuals to sleep in the room were not deemed appropriate.

There were comments that were favorable regarding the Self-Care Space as a whole, as four respondents noted they would like to have additional spaces on campus that served this purpose. There were also remarks about lighting

where respondents noted that they wanted “lamps and dim lighting” and “lighting that wasn’t as harsh.” This was another case of users missing equipment (two table lamps) that was already available in the Self-Care Space. There were also four responses that were specific to the design of the room. These comments addressed adding additional décor, wall hangings, and the use of bright colors. While the researchers will consider adding additional decorations, they consciously applied minimalist design principles to allow the room to be a place where an individual can retreat to if they need an environment with fewer stimuli. Bright colors and excessive decorations would counteract this use. With the Self-Care Space being used for a variety of purposes, balancing the needs and requirements related to various populations within the campus community is essential for the continued success of this endeavor.

Additional responses (n = 2) included requests for personal health care items, such as tissues and hand sanitizer. While the room did include spray bottles and paper towels, these were items that had been forgotten and have now been added. Some users (n = 3) also noted that 30 minutes was too short of a time period to utilize the space. The policy, which allows individuals to make two 30-minute reservations per day, has been reviewed and maintained for the present. The researchers feel that longer periods would encourage non-intended uses like napping and studying and might also block access for other users. If a user needs to use the room for longer, they can consult with library service point staff and reservations can be extended (pending availability). There was also a single comment about air quality in the space.

Table 8

Responses to Survey Question 7: Are there any additional comments you would like to add about the Self-Care Space?

	Responses
General Positive Comment	12
Additional Self-Care Spaces	2
Cleanliness	1
Item Suggestions	1

The final question on the survey asked respondents for any additional comments regarding the Self-Care Space (see Table 8). The majority of the remarks were general positive comments, but there were also requests for additional Self-Care Spaces, a furnishing recommendation, and a single negative remark regarding cleanliness. While many of the positive remarks were general statements of thanks, one entry stood out clearly, demonstrating the importance of having a room dedicated to self-care within the library:

Having access to this space has dramatically improved my life being a commuter, I spend all day at West Chester, which before was doing damage to my physical health and mental health and having a space i can use on campus since i don't always have the option to go home has really made a huge difference in my West Chester Experience overall and my mental and physical health as a whole.

This statement demonstrates the potential impact and importance related to having this type of room available to campus communities.

Future Directions

One challenge has been making students and employees aware that the space is available. While additional and continual promotion is required, as the Self-Care Space is tucked away on the quiet 6th floor of the Francis Harvey Green Library, these efforts are a continual practice. The researchers are examining various campus populations that they could contact to spread awareness of this room and its purpose. Future study will assist with determining which approaches are the most successful in this specific campus environment.

Conclusion

Academic libraries are constantly working to adapt to student needs, including how students use library spaces. Changes in student demographics mean that more students than ever have at least an occasional need for a space that allows for some privacy. Academic libraries are ideal locations to help fill this type of need because they often have extended hours and a central campus location. They have addressed some of these needs in the past by developing spaces dedicated to a specific purpose, such as lactation rooms, low-sensory spaces, and prayer rooms. Lacking the space to develop multiple spaces to meet the needs seen on their campus, the Francis Harvey Green Library developed a flexible Self-Care Space that could be used by a variety of individuals for a range of purposes. Usage and survey data indicate that the room has indeed been consistently utilized for a variety of purposes and its existence has filled a void in the library and on campus. This multi-use self-care space model is one that could be adopted by a wide range of libraries, but is especially appealing for those that face space constraints.

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Appendix

Survey

- 1) Please select your primary role at West Chester University from the choices below:
 - a. Undergraduate Student
 - b. Graduate Student
 - c. Faculty
 - d. Staff
 - e. Member of the Public
- 2) How did you learn about the existence of the Self-Care Space?
 - a. Word of mouth
 - b. From a flyer
 - c. From a librarian/library staff
 - d. From social media
 - e. Other, please specify:
- 3) What type of activity did you use the Self-Care Space for? [Open]
- 4) Did the Self-Care Space fit your needs for that activity?
 - a. Yes

- b. Somewhat
 - c. No
- 5) Do you think you will use the Self-Care Space in the future?
- a. Yes, on a regular basis (daily or weekly)
 - b. Yes, occasionally (a few times a semester)
 - c. No
- 6) How could the Libraries improve the Self-Care Space? [Open]
- 7) Are there any additional comments you would like to add about the Self-Care Space? [Open]

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