

# Assessment & Planning: First Generation Graduate Student Research Process Project 2023

## Purpose

This was an exploratory project to assess first-generation graduate student (FGGS) experiences, pain points, goals, and needs throughout their research process, and how their identities as a first gen student has shaped how they experience research. The ultimate goal of this project was to learn how we can better improve the online and in-person UW Libraries graduate student research experience while considering holistic student experiences.

## Methods

- This project was led by UW Libraries student employees from the ITSDS and Assessment departments. We conducted 6 interviews and 6 journey mapping sessions over Zoom, each for the duration of 30 minutes to one hour.
- Participants for this project included 5 PhD students and 7 master's students from various departments.
- After conducting interviews and journey mapping, we used a mixture of design thinking meetings with librarians and student employees and qualitative coding to analyze the data and formulate opportunities and recommendations.
- During the meetings, participants engaged in affinity mapping, generating "How Might We" (HMW) questions, and identifying and strategizing around leveraging the data to drive positive outcomes and inform future decision-making processes.

## Results

### Coding Results

The analysis of the interviews and journey mapping revealed several key themes. Participants faced difficulty in using and accessing resources, including issues with source reliability and the perception of time as a precious resource. Many students relied on platforms like Google Scholar instead of starting on the UW Libraries website, viewing the libraries as gateways to articles rather than comprehensive resource hubs. Participants

emphasized the value of support and guidance from mentors, advisors, and peers involved in their research. These relationships served as the primary source of assistance and played a vital role in their academic journey. Furthermore, participants observed that their peers appeared more confident in research and lab spaces, suggesting a potential lack of library self-confidence among some students. Some participants also felt the need to be independent and proactive in their learning due to their peers' perceived greater support from their families.

## **Design Thinking Meetings Insights**

In the initial meeting, the significance of departmental librarians in supporting students' research needs was emphasized. Staff also discussed participants' preference for familiar tools like Google and Zotero, along with their frustration regarding limited access to materials. The second meeting focused on understanding students' support sources, motivations for finding resources, and perceptions of the Libraries' impact on their motivation. It also explored the concept of centering and decentering the Libraries, emphasizing the need to prioritize user needs. The third meeting further discussed decentering the library's role in distant support and enhancing its position as a stop in the research journey. The importance of curating existing resources, leveraging relationships with advisors, professors, and mentors, and reframing research and library resources for broader student engagement were highlighted.

## **Opportunities and Recommendations**

Coding and the design thinking meeting insights revealed various opportunities in library perception, resource outreach, relationships and sources of support, student goals, coding assistance, and subject-specific help. These opportunities include centering student needs, partnering with other campus organizations, building awareness of library resources, leveraging student-advisor relationships, understanding diverse student goals, curating existing resources, and exploring community-centered models. Additionally, it is important to assess the needs of non-research-focused students, redefine how "research" is presented on the website, and collaborate with departments and subject librarians for first-generation graduate student support. Further research/assessment is recommended in these areas to better understand the needs and themes brought up in this exploratory project.