

Accessibility Advances at East Carolina University: Sensory Room in Joyner Library

A Signature Honors Project Presented to the Honors College

East Carolina University

In Fulfillment of the

Requirements for

Graduation with Honors

by

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Abstract

This project aimed to provide essential resources to neurodiverse students at East Carolina University, fostering a sense of inclusion within the university community. To develop an effective resource that addresses the needs of the neurodiverse population without ostracizing them, we conducted interviews with many students and faculty members. These discussions offered valuable insights into the experiences of neurodiverse individuals on campus and identified additional resources that needed to be developed. Through a combination of interviews and internet research, our team recognized the importance of creating a centralized resource to help both neurodiverse students and their peers. We designed a sensory room equipped with various features, such as alternative seating and sensory tools to provide students with options for decompressing during the typical school day in East Carolina University's Main Campus Library (Joyner Library). Building on the positive feedback received from the initial Sensory Room in Joyner Library, we inspired the conversion of six study rooms into alternative study spaces closely modeled after the original sensory room. This initiative aims to enhance the overall campus experience for neurodiverse students, ensuring they feel welcomed and supported.

Keywords: ability, collaboration, neurodiverse, sensory

Mission Statement

Our goal was to create more resources for neurodiverse students on East Carolina University's main campus. By creating an alternative study room or sensory safe space, we are working towards promoting a better college experience with resources to engage students' senses, improve focus, or de-stress.

How did we come to this?

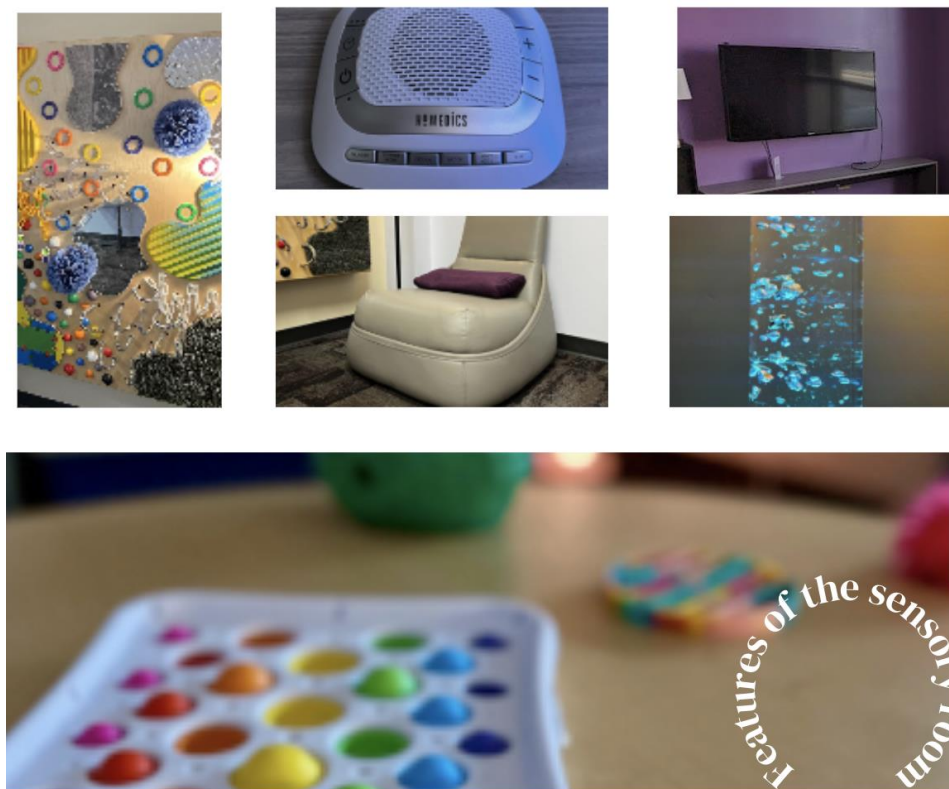
During the Honors 2000 course, our group was assigned to the wicked problem of "neurodiversity", and we have been diligently working on the project for the last four years. There was sufficient evidence that there was a lack of neurodiverse resources on the East Carolina University Campus. Our group completed multiple interviews with students, professors, and even the creators of the sensory space in ECU's Minges Coliseum. After many months of working with the library, we set up a sensory room for individuals with neurodiversity on campus.

Who is it meant for?

We found an overwhelming need for resources for those with neurodivergent students. In the past year, we have extended our reach to include those suffering from anxiety and depression as our research has shown people with these conditions benefit from using our room. The goal of this room is to provide a safe space for any student to escape from stressors.

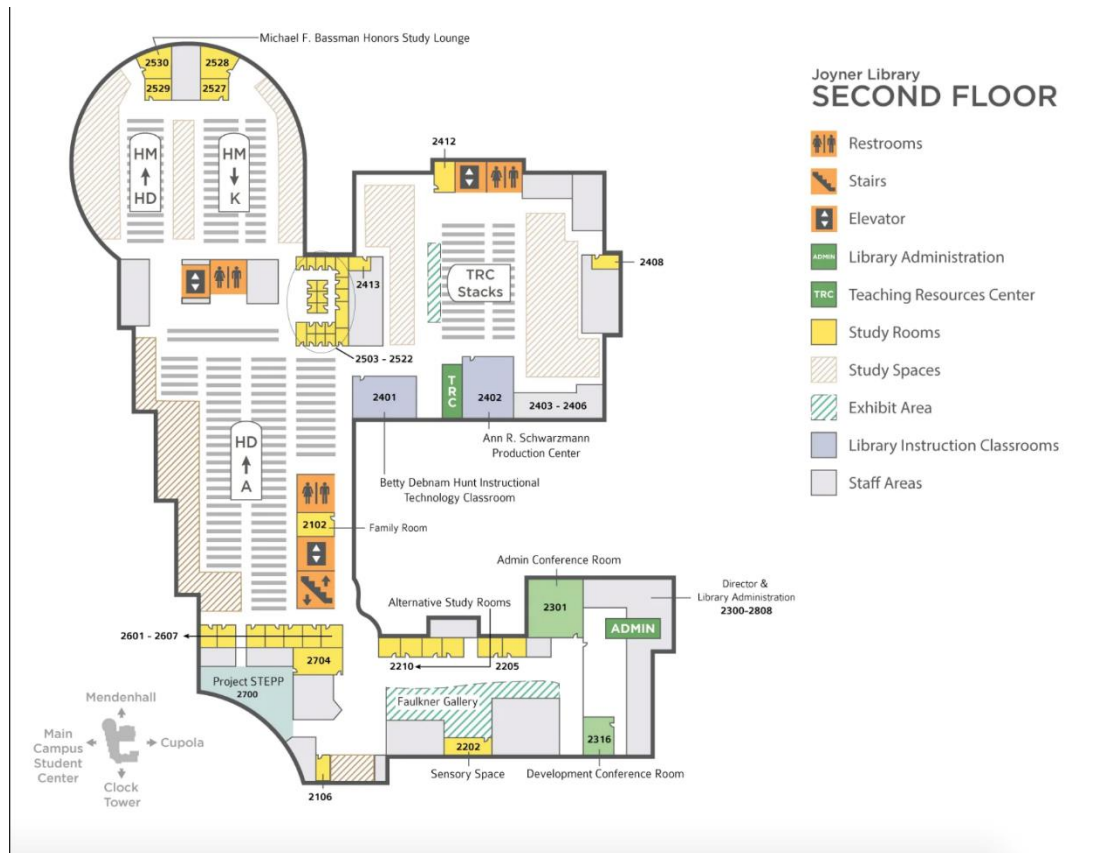
What is a sensory space and how is it used?

A sensory space is defined as, "A controlled and intentionally created space that provides multi-sensory resources to support a student's sensory needs to enable them to engage in learning (*Sensory Rooms and Equipment: Definition of Sensory Room* | education.vic.gov.au) ." With that definition in mind, we wanted to put engaging and calming features in the room to provide support and comfort to the room users. Some of the features included in the room are adjustable lighting, fidget toys, sound machines, a tactile wall, bean bags, and much more. Many feedback forms were displayed where we offered the opportunity for students to give feedback and make suggestions for the room. Our collaboration with Joyner Library allowed us to take student suggestions and ensure they are getting the best possible experience using this space.



Why we put it on ECU Main Campus?

We chose to put the sensory room on the college campus because since the pandemic the prevalence of students overwhelmed with anxiety, depression, and neurodiversity has increased drastically. The lead author, Jane Cooley Fruhwirth of a UNC-Chapel Hill study found the prevalence of moderate to severe anxiety in first-year college students increased 40% from 18.% before the pandemic to 25.3% within four months after the pandemic began; and the prevalence of moderate to severe depression in first years increased by 48%, from 21.5% to 31.7%. East Carolina University highlighted that only 24% of students disclosed their condition to the university therefore making it difficult to gather data on the issue.



(ECU Joyner Library, 2024)
Library Collaboration

The establishment of the sensory room was made possible through the invaluable support of ECU's Joyner Library. When the proposal to create this space on campus was presented, the board of Joyner Library enthusiastically embraced the idea. They collaborated with the non-profit organization Friends of Joyner Library to secure funding for the project. This additional revenue was instrumental in transforming the sensory room into its current state and enabled the realization of various design requests.

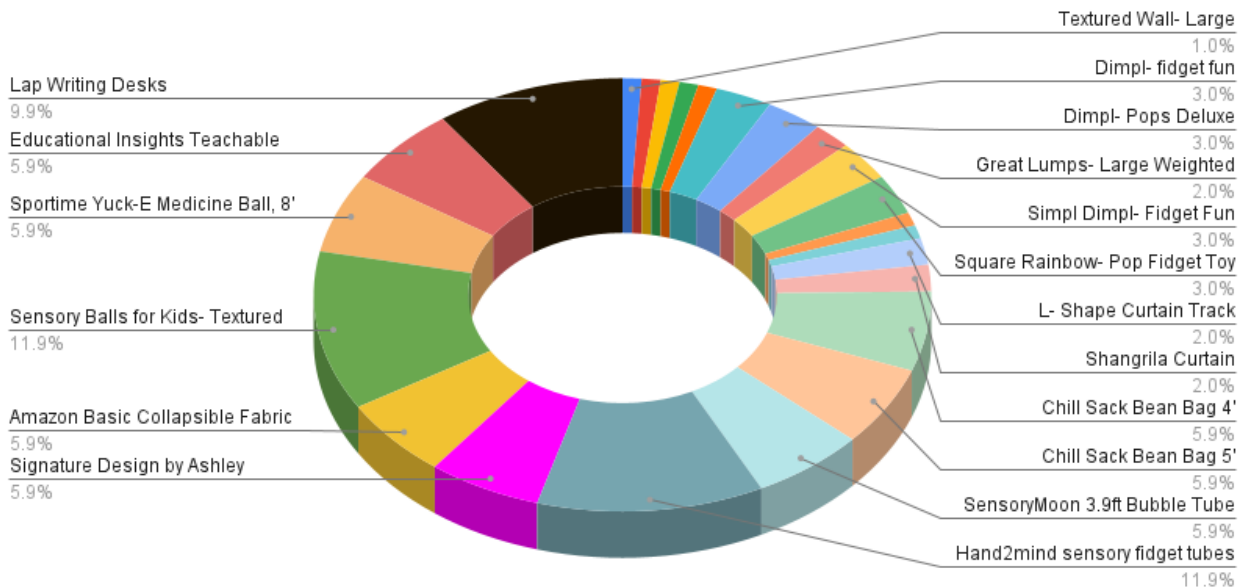
Furthermore, Joyner Library took the initiative to repurpose underutilized furnishing and acquire new materials for the room based on feedback from students. Inspired by the success of the sensory room, the library also developed five rentable group spaces with a similar design ethos. These new rooms incorporate features akin to the original sensory space, including alternative lighting, comfortable seating, and white noise machines.

These enhanced spaces provide users with increased privacy, allowing them to decompress or take a break from overwhelming stimuli. This thoughtful addition has significantly contributed to

the room's utilization, as many individuals have expressed that the provision of private areas was essential to their comfort and well-being.

Total Construction Costs

Percentages taken out of total \$10,040.66 spent on room



Final Steps and Conclusion

We are so proud of the project that originated in our Honors course and has grown to be a working room that we hope to expand on in the future. This room wouldn't have been possible without the collaboration of the Joyner Library staff, for which we are very thankful. Our vision for the future of the room focuses on plans to sustain the room after our graduation by expanding knowledge of the room and setting up a club or honors legacy. By creating readily available resources on East Carolina University's main campus we have promoted a better college experience with resources to engage students' senses, improve focus, or de-stress.

References

Sensory Rooms and Equipment: Definition of Sensory Room | education.vic.gov.au. www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/sensory-rooms/guidance/definition-sensory-room.

Stop the Stigma | *Office for Institutional Equity and Diversity* | *NC State University*. diversity.ncsu.edu/news/tag/stop-the-stigma.

Related Portfolio Materials:

[PowerPoint](#)

[Sensory Room Budget Sheet](#)

[Sensory Room Website](#)

[Sensory Room Page on Joyner Library Website](#)

[Joyner Library Map \(2nd floor\) featuring Sensory Room](#)