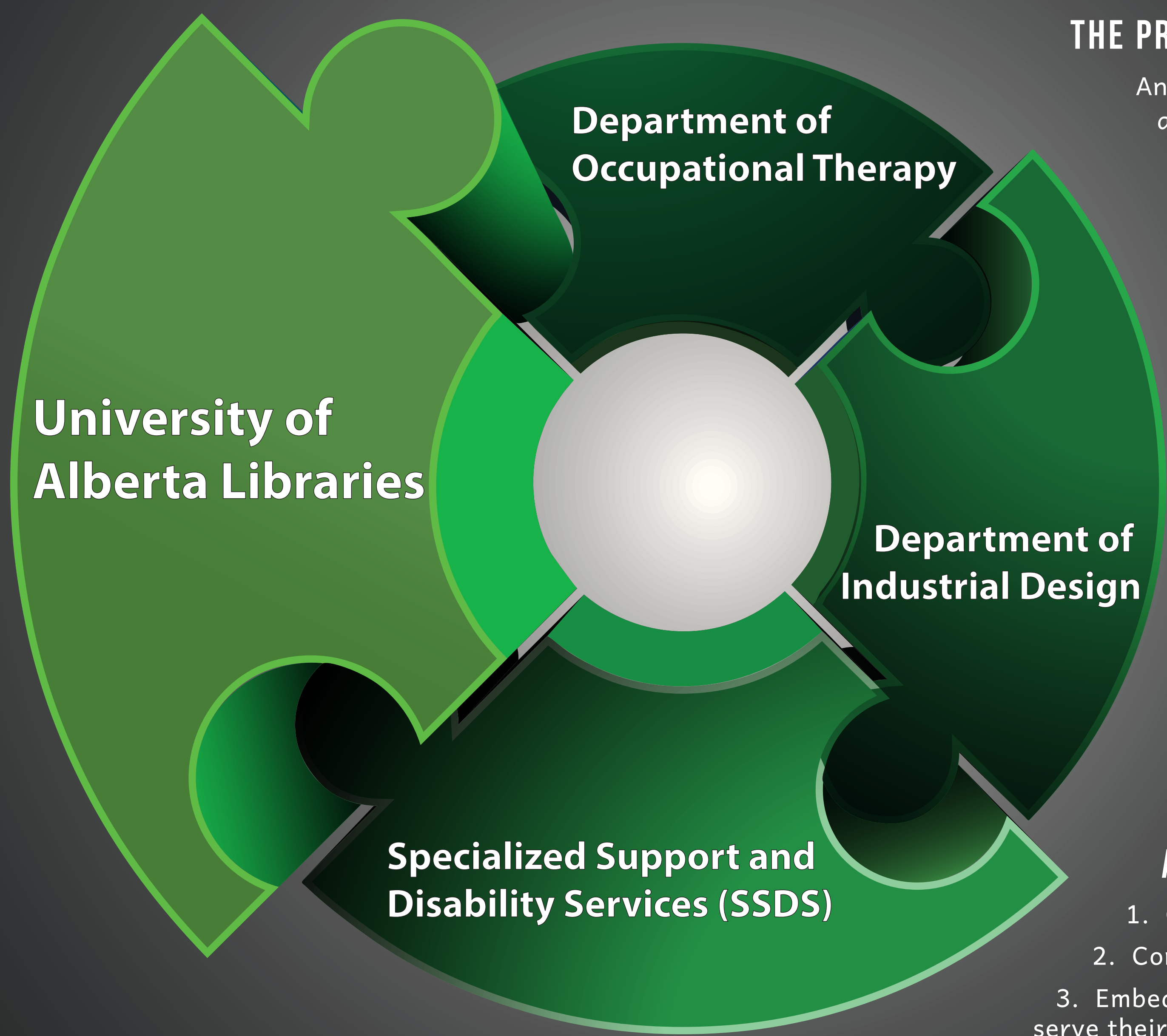


Disabilities and library accessibility: Partnering for success

Maria Tan and Denis Lacroix



THE PROJECT:

An innovative partnership between the University of Alberta's Libraries (UAL), Specialized Support and Disability Services (SSDS), and the Departments of Occupational Therapy and of Industrial Design to assess library spaces for patrons with disabilities.

Few studies "focus outwardly toward users" with disabilities or include the "social or attitudinal aspects associated with disabilities" (Hill, 2013).

DEFINITIONS:

Disabilities: "long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various attitudinal and environmental barriers, hinder [how people with disabilities] full[ly] and effective[ly] participat[e] in society on an equal basis with others" (UN Enable).

Physical Accessibility: Maneuverability within library spaces (including, but not limited to the service desk, book stacks, study spaces, lavatories).

Specialized Support and Disability Services (SSDS): since 1980, SSDS provides equalized educational opportunities to UA students with a variety of disabilities.

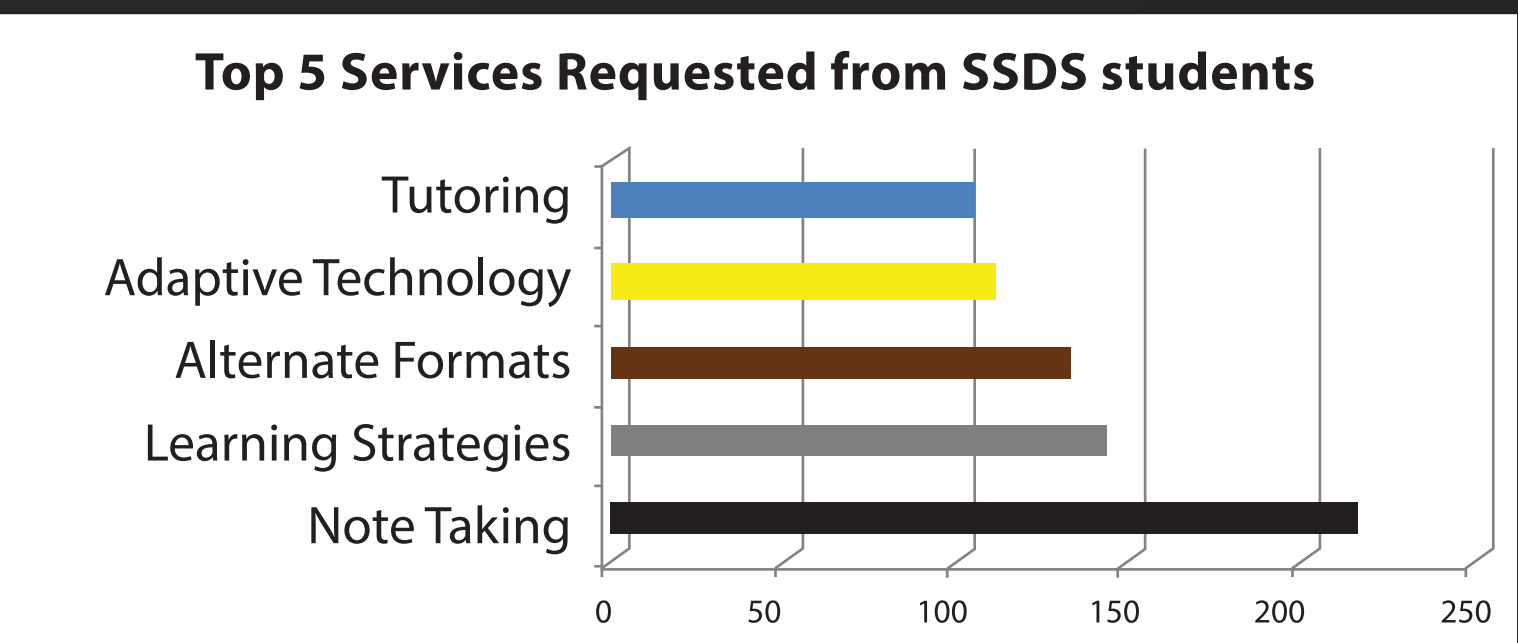
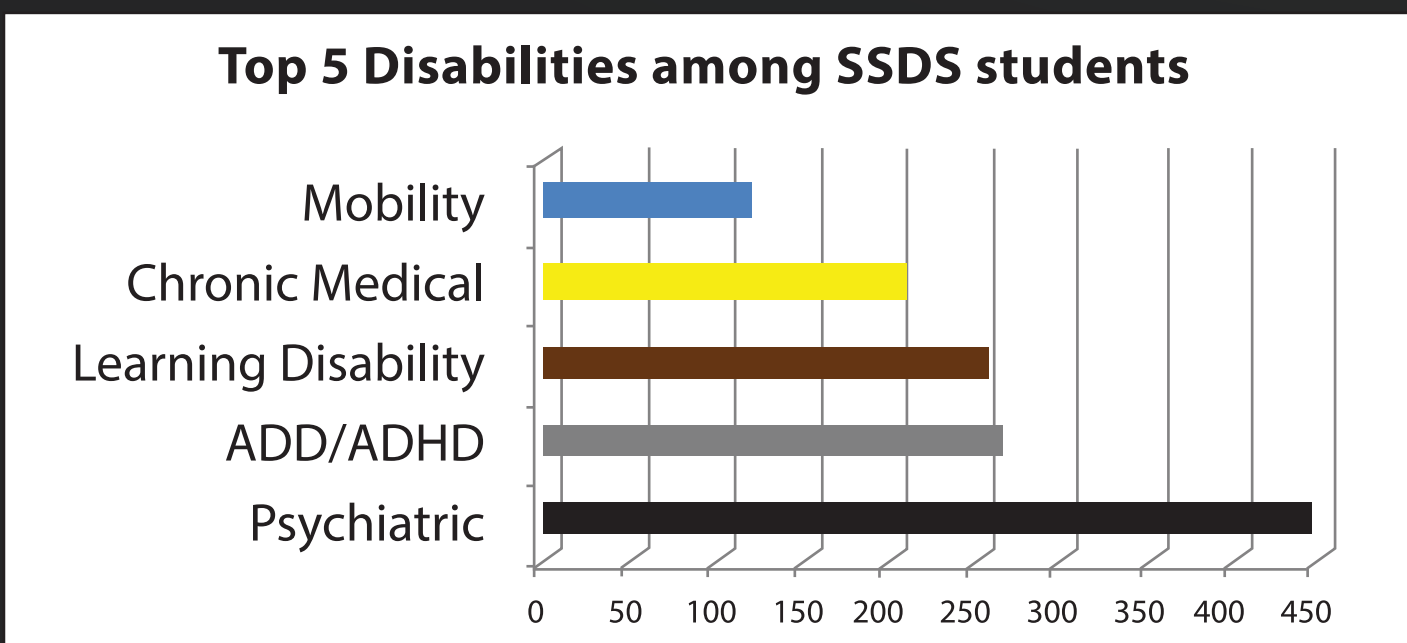
RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

1. What is the landscape of students with disabilities at the UA?
2. How accessible are the physical spaces at the UA Libraries for patrons with disabilities?

APPROACH:

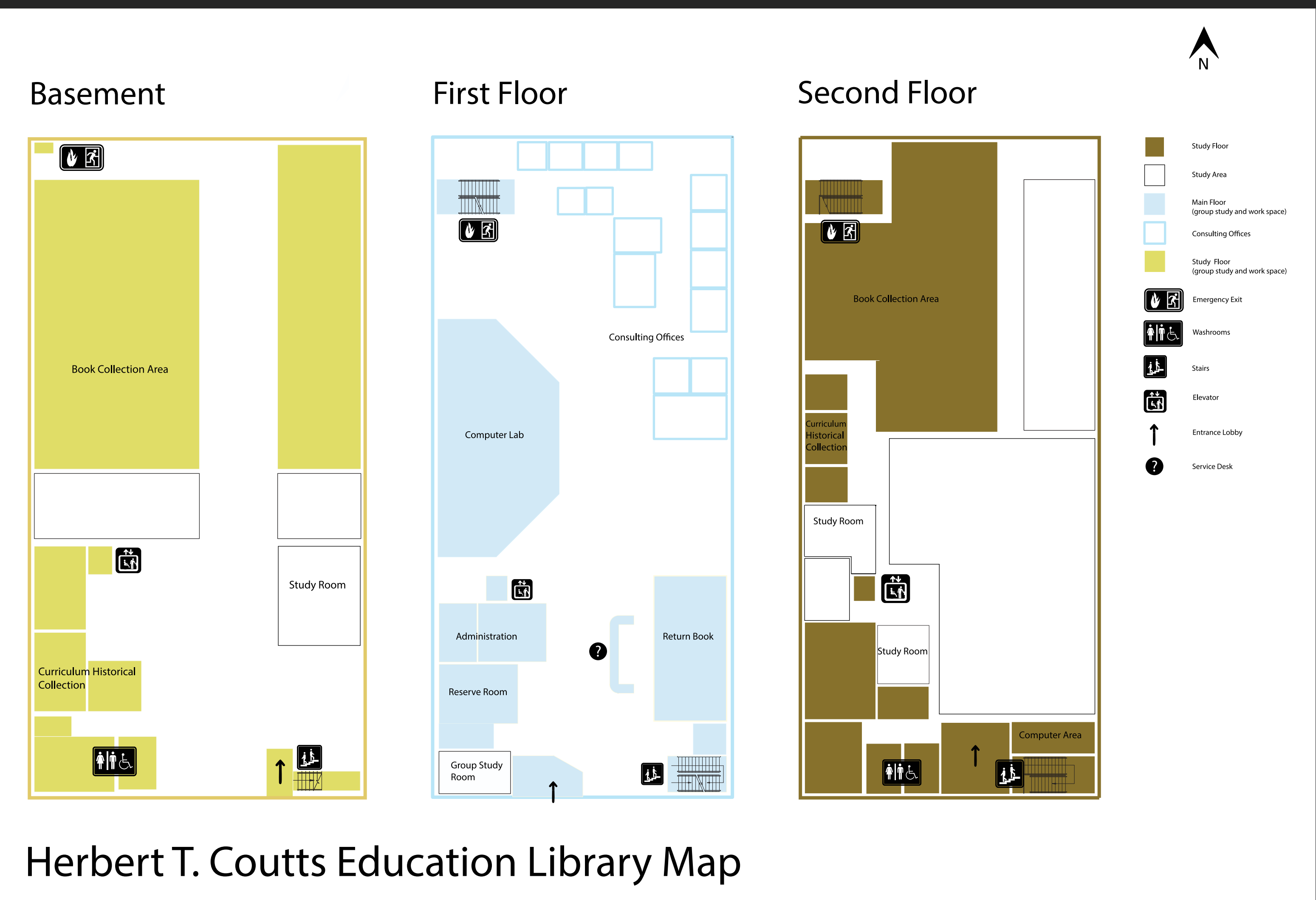
1. Compiled statistics from SSDS on types of disabilities and their prevalence among UA students.
2. Conducted a physical accessibility audit of the Herbert T. Coutts Education Library.
3. Embedded a librarian in the UA SSDS office to gather feedback from students about physical accessibility of library spaces and serve their information needs.

This project initially set out to investigate physical barriers to resource and service use in the spaces at the University of Alberta Libraries.



FINDINGS:

- More than 1000 students were registered with SSDS
- Disabilities went beyond mobility issues; psychological and cognitive disabilities were the most common
- E-preferred library collection policy will help provide students with alternate formats

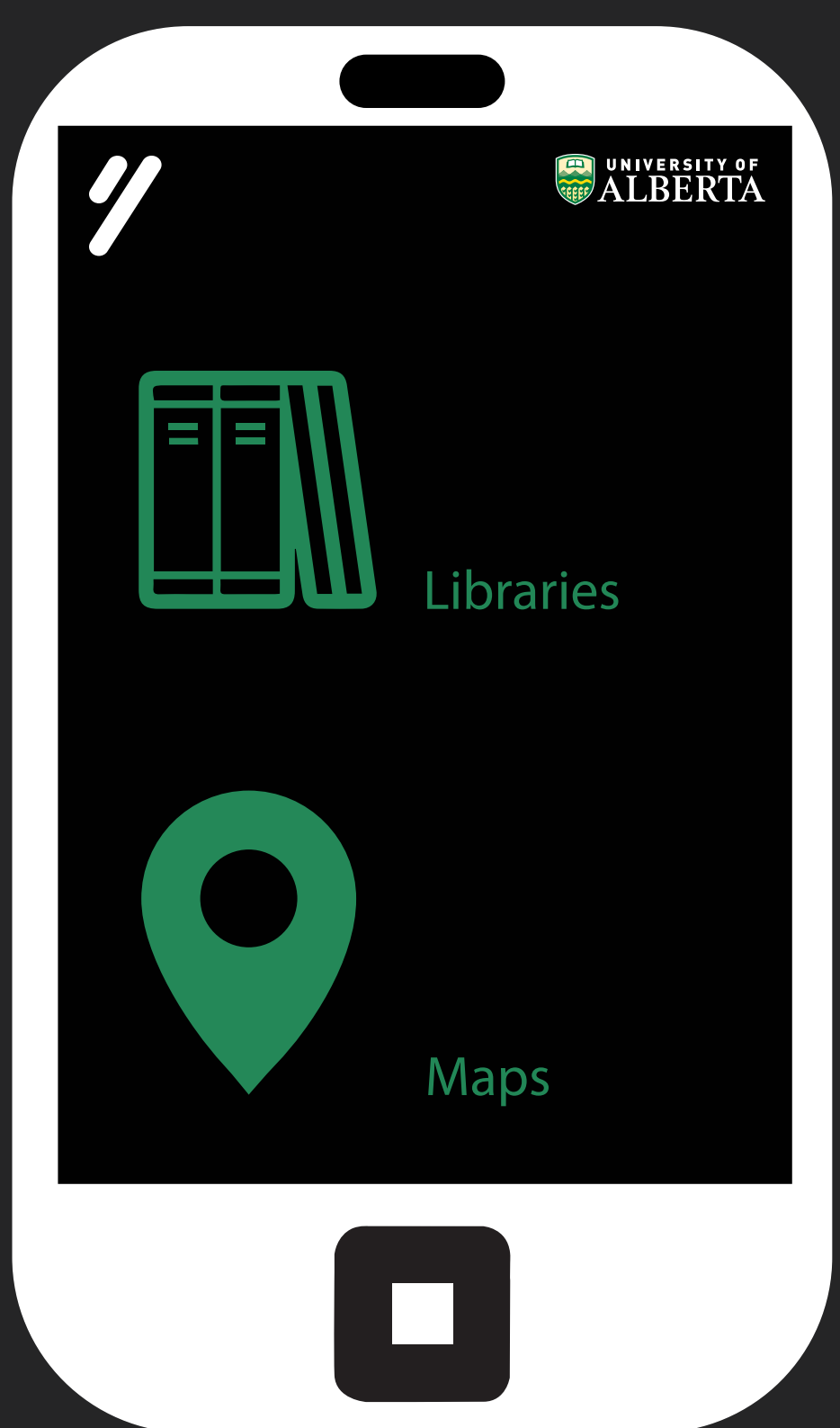


ACCESSIBILITY AUDIT:

- Scope of accessibility audit focused on specific mobility and visual limitations
- Way-finding and wheelchair access issues identified
- Recommendations: signage, navigation aids, call button/smart phone app for assistance

“The colours that can be seen by most people regardless of the colour disorder:

yellow, blue, brown, black, white, grey.” (Li)



“A map app that has pertinent landmarks within the library marked could help any visitor effectively navigate the library.” (Truscott)

“This app would direct users to automatic door entrances, wheelchair ramps, elevators, bathrooms, and parking.” (Ettrich)

“Another portion of the app could include measurements of areas such as elevators, doorways, and between bookshelves, ensuring that those with mobility aids will be able to fit into these spaces.” (Ettrich)

FUTURE DIRECTIONS:

- Extend audit scope to include library features that impact cognitive and perceptual load
- Conduct survey and interviews with SSDS students to understand challenges to accessing library spaces and services better
- Continue embedded librarian service
- Team-teach with SSDS instructors information literacy sessions on Finding a Research Topic and Beginning the Research Process
- Participate in Hacking Health Edmonton to develop a geolocation-based library assistance app.

References:

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Herbert T. Coutts Education Library Map by Anastasiya Valetka and Jiayi Li
Poster Illustration by Nicole LaPointe

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