Sensory Room Report

University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa

Center on Disability Studies

Academic Year 2024-2025

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cds CENTER ON DISABILITY STUDIES

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I. PROCESS

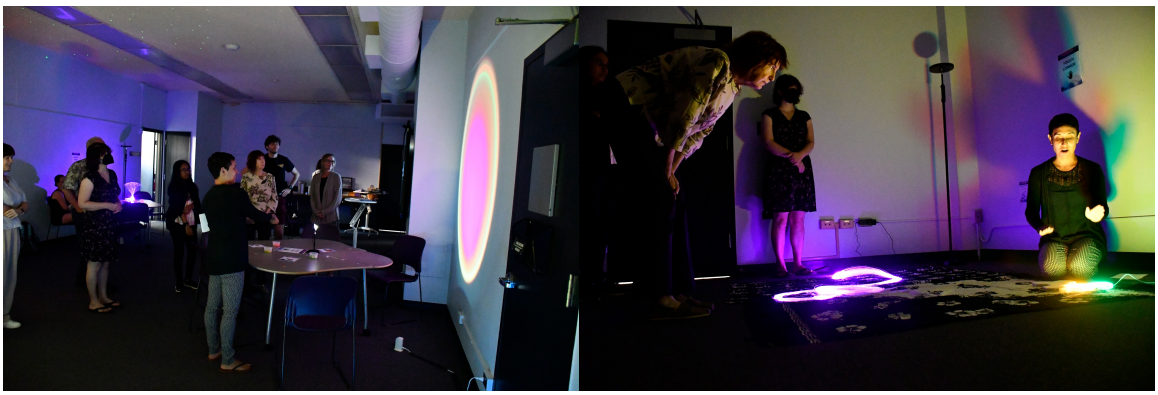
The Center on Disability Studies (CDS) and the OFDAS Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) collaborated to establish a sensory room at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (UHM), located in Kuykendall Hall 106 in the 2024-2025 academic year. Sensory rooms, increasingly popular in schools, hospitals, and community spaces, provide controlled sensory environments to promote self-regulation and stress management. This initiative positions UH Mānoa with its peer and benchmark institutions, 55% of which offer some form of sensory-friendly spaces.

Funded by the UH Foundation and the Oak Foundation, the project includes a fully equipped **13-item sensory room** and the CAMP+U professional development program for UHM faculty, administrators and staff. The free online course contains 5 modules focused on disability awareness, Universal Design for Learning, learner-centered educational technologies, and strategies for fostering classroom belonging and sensory integration.

Sensory Room Workshops for Faculty, Administrators, and Academic Staff

CDS and CTE hosted two hands-on workshops “*Welcome to Your Campus Sensory Room: A Hands-on Workshop for Faculty, Administrators, and Academic Staff*”, on October 3, 2024 for the Fall semester, and on January 28, 2025 for the Spring semester. Presented by Manca Sustarsic, Maria Teresa Houar, and Eun Bin Ladner-Seok, the workshop introduced faculty and administrators to the CAMP+U objectives, inclusive practices, sensory integration, and pilot findings on sensory outcomes from the 2024 Pacific Rim Disability Studies conference. In Spring, CDS partnered with Dr. Kevin Nute from the UHM School of Architecture who also presented his sensory video installation featured in the room during the Spring semester.

Following the presentation, the CAMP+U team guided the attendees (7 in Fall and 21 in Spring) through an interactive, hands-on exploration, allowing them to experience the benefits firsthand.



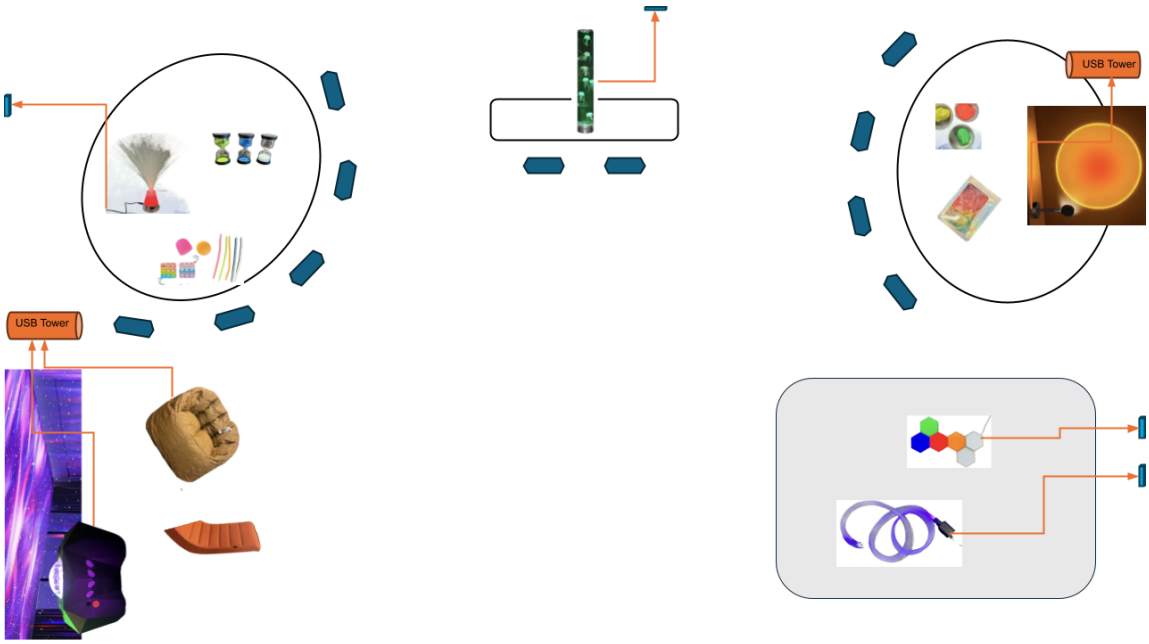
The CAMP +U team developed and supplied the following materials to the workshop participants:

- **CAMP +U Flier**
- **Research Brief**
- **Sensory Benefits Infographics**

The workshops were well-received by the attendees, who asked thoughtful questions about the proper use of sensory items, and were curious about ways to incorporate them into their classrooms. Following the session, participants spent additional 20-30 minutes exploring the sensory room independently, sharing positive feedback and emphasizing the importance of having such spaces on campus.

II. LOGISTICS

A mock plan was developed to help guide the set-up of the room. For this, the CAMP+U team kept track of the wall outlets and USB cords for proper installation purposes.



The CAMP+U team took charge of the initial room setup on October 3, 2024, starting at 9 AM and completing it by 11 AM. While using the mock plan as a reference, the team slightly adjusted the arrangement of the tables to better suit the space's composition and functionality. Due to other workshops hosted by the OFDAS in the same space, the sensory setup had to be dismantled and stored after each use. A Student Assistant, who observed the initial setup, handled room logistics on all opening days.

To support proper use of the sensory items, a Sensory Room Guide was created and placed on each table and wall near the equipment, offering brief instructions and the benefits of each item. Additionally, a Survey QR Code was positioned on each table and in key areas to invite visitors to share feedback on usage and experience in the room.

The composition of the room was divided into four main areas:

The **Calming Corner** features two chairs, an aurora light projector that illuminated the walls and ceiling, and a jellyfish lamp on an adjacent table.

The **Fidget Table** offers fidget toys, colorful sand timers, and a fiber optic lamp.

The **Tactile Table** includes sensory strips, scented silly putty, and a sunset lamp projection.

In the **Touch Corner**, visitors can sit or lie on the floor to interact with LED light strands and tap-activated hexagon lights.

III. MATERIALS

The CAMP+U team developed several materials for use in the sensory room and for recruitment purposes:

- Sensory Room flier
- Sensory Room mini fliers
- Survey flier
- Survey mini fliers
- Survey QR code handouts
- Sensory Room Guide/Kit
- Sensory Room Signage
- Research Brief (50 copies)
- Sensory Benefits Infographics (50 copies)
- CAMP + U video
- Sensory room promotional video/reel
- iPad included: Survey, CAMP +U website, CAMP +U registration form

Recruitment Procedures

Our recruitment strategy leveraged campus networks for broad outreach and visibility. The OFDAS has distributed the announcement to their mailing lists, including workshop registrants and teaching assistants. The “Sensory Room Mondays” announcement was featured in the weekly UHM News email. The CAMP+U team shared the flier with the Graduate Student Organization (GSO), East-West Center (EWC) student groups and dormitories, and over 80 registered student clubs and organizations on the UHM campus. The CAMP+U course featured three live PLC sessions, where the announcement was made to participating faculty, administrators, and staff. Furthermore, fliers were posted on bulletin boards across the UHM campus.

IV. SCHEDULE

The sensory room was open for a total of **22 days** across the academic year; 9 days in the Fall semester (57 hours) and 13 days in the Spring semester (91 hours), amounting to **148 hours** of the overall availability.

V. IMPLEMENTATION

This section highlights implementation details such as essential guidelines, sensory room monitoring, challenges encountered and solutions proposed.

The CAMP +U Team developed Sensory Room Guide/Kit to aid in the self-facilitated experience of visitors and to establish protocols for the intended use of items. Visitors are asked to use hand sanitizer when entering and exiting the room to maintain cleanliness. The space is intended to be a quiet environment, so cell phone use and loud conversations should be avoided. All items in the room are meant to stay there, but

staff can provide a list of items if visitors would like to purchase them. If anything breaks or becomes dysfunctional, visitors are to notify a staff member promptly.

The Student Assistants (SAs) hired by the OFDAS monitored the room. Two desks were positioned at the entrance inside the room, equipped with a sign-in sheet, room guidelines, promotional fliers, an iPad, and a survey QR code. The SAs tracked attendance by managing the sign-in sheet and recorded the check-in and check-out times for each visitor.

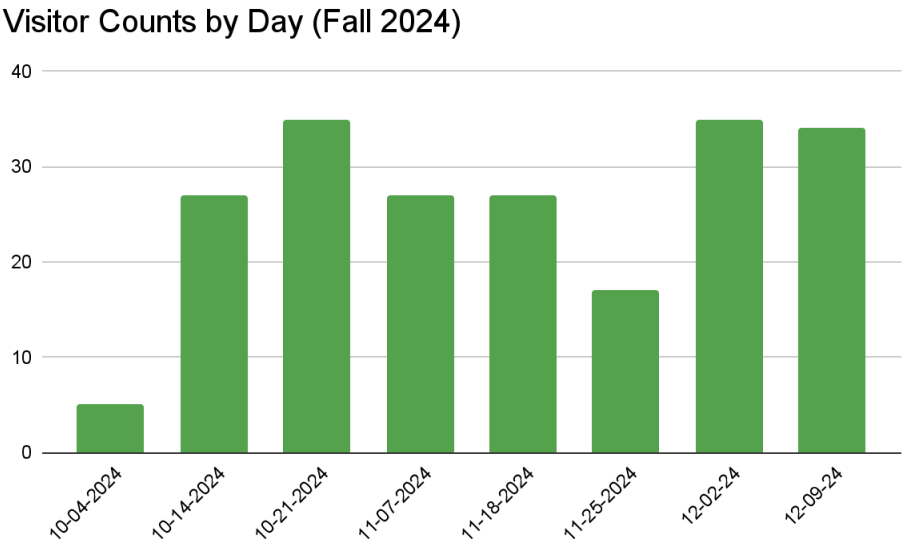
Key additions were recommended by the SAs and implemented such as having hand sanitizer available at the sign in and wipes available for sterilizing at the end of the day. The SAs also answered visitors' questions, and helped guide them through the room, when requested.

The OFDAS team identified several challenges at the end of Fall, including raising awareness among faculty to visit the room, the high consumption of tea provided to visitors free of charge, the need for additional seating options beyond the chairs, and wear and tear on certain fidget items. These concerns were addressed in Spring.

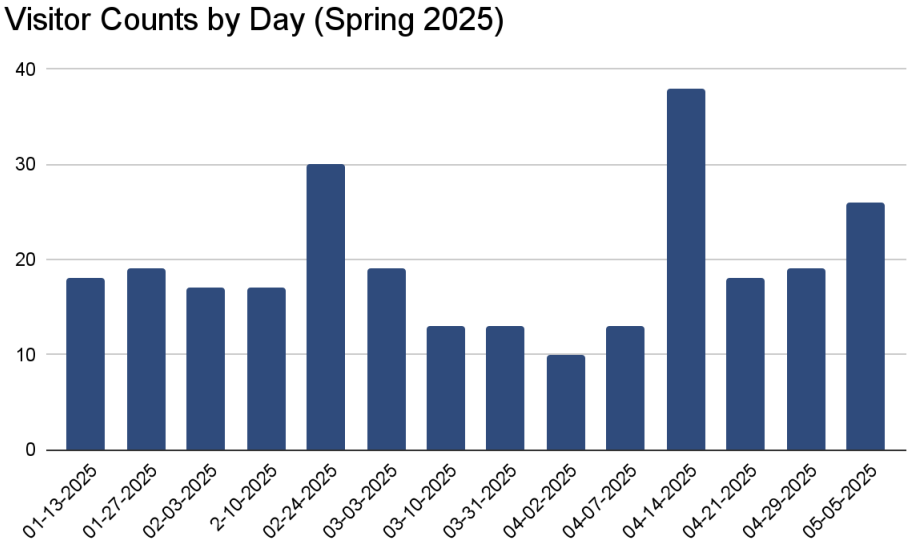
VI. ATTENDANCE

Attendance data was recorded by the SA and shared with the CAMP+U team weekly. Over the course of **22 days**, the room received a total of **477 visits total** with **357 unique visitors** (162 in Fall and 189 in Spring).

The charts below show the distribution of visitors to the sensory room across two semesters. In **Fall 2024**, attendance was relatively consistent, with several days exceeding 25 visitors. There was a dip in attendance during **Thanksgiving week**, but this was followed by a rebound in the final two Mondays before the end of semester. On average, there were **25.9 visitors per day** during the Fall semester.



Spring 2025 received fewer visitors per day, averaging **19.3**, but the room was open on more dates. As a result, the **total number of visitors in Spring exceeded that of Fall**. Visitor turnout peaked towards the end of the semester, with the highest number recorded on **April 14, 2025**. A slight decline was observed during March and early April, particularly around **Spring Break**. Attendance increased again in the final weeks of the semester, and just before the **finals week**.



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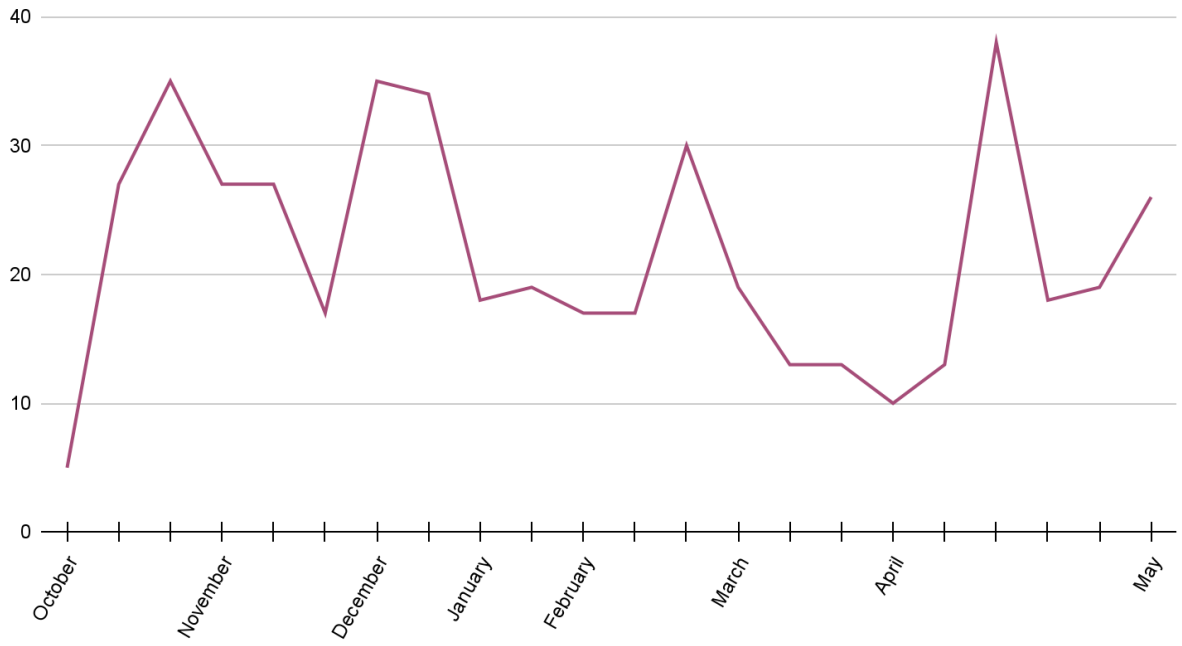
Visitor Count by Day for the 2024-2025 Academic Year

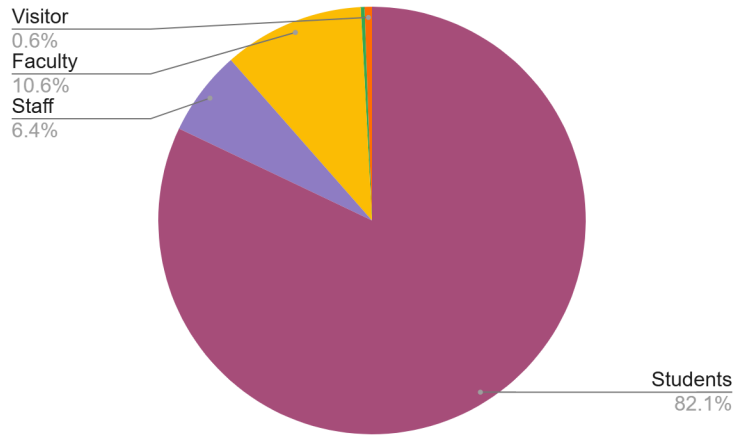


The line chart above illustrates the fluctuation in sensory room attendance across the academic year. Visitor numbers peaked during mid-Fall and again in late Spring, with a noticeable dip in mid Spring.

Aside from October marking the launch of the sensory room, the high visitation coincided with the **midterm period**. Similarly, the spikes in the final weeks of each semester likely reflect students preparing for **final exams**. It was observed by the SAs and the OFDAS Staff that during peak exam periods, students reported using the sensory room for stress relief and emotional regulation.

The dips in attendance line up with academic breaks and semester transitions. For example, the drop in late November is likely associated with **Thanksgiving holiday**, when many students leave the island to spend time with family. The decrease in March through early April matches the **Spring break** period. In some cases, instructors offer additional time off after Spring break, giving students up to two weeks away from campus. Prince Kūhiō Day, which falls shortly after Spring break, is a state holiday, and some students may have delayed their return to campus. This likely explains the lower attendance in early to mid-April.

Visitors by Affiliation

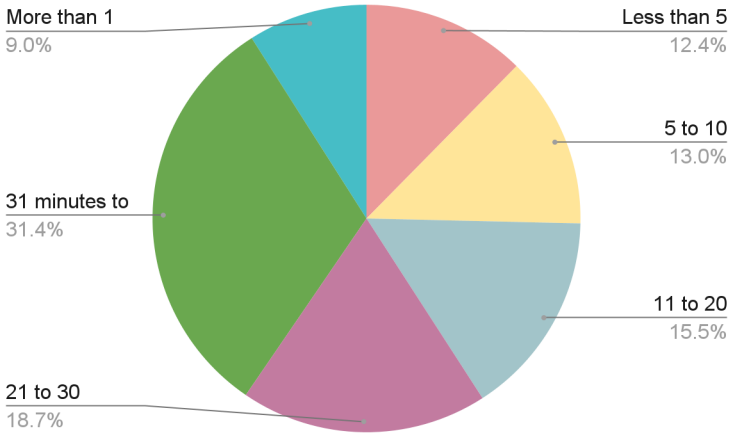


The sensory room was especially popular among **students**, who accounted for **293 (82.1%)** unique visits across both terms.

Faculty followed with a total of **38 (10.6%)** visits with **18** in Fall and **21** in Spring.

Staff recorded **23 (6.4%)** visits overall, with numbers fairly evenly split between the two semesters.

Time Spent in the Room



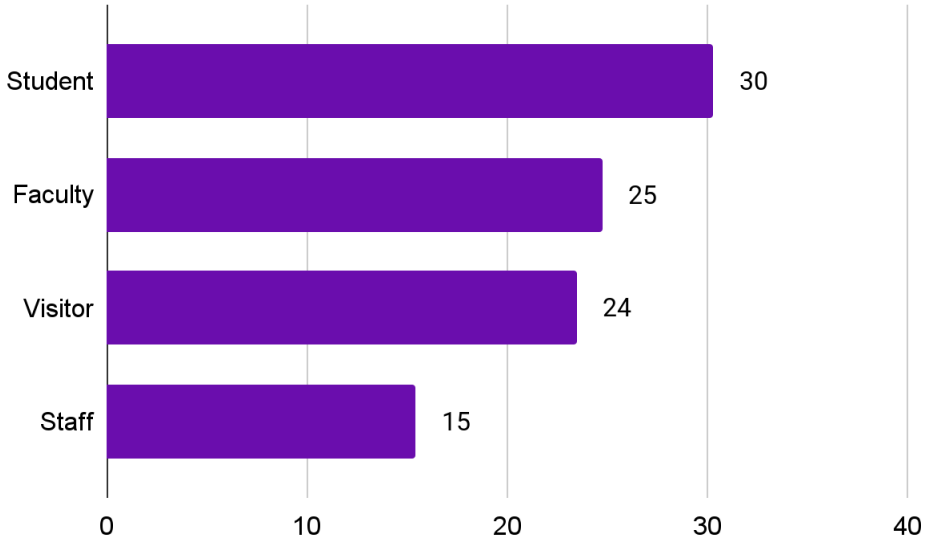
The highest number of visitors (**31%**) spent **31 min to 1 hour** in the room, indicating that this duration might be ideal for achieving the intended benefits of the space. Overall, all visitors stayed for an average of **29 min** in the sensory room.

The **11 to 20 min** and **21 to 30 min** intervals were also popular, attracting between 70-90 visitors each.

Visitors who spent **5 to 10 min** or **less than 5 min** might reflect those who were exploring the room or using it briefly for immediate stress relief.

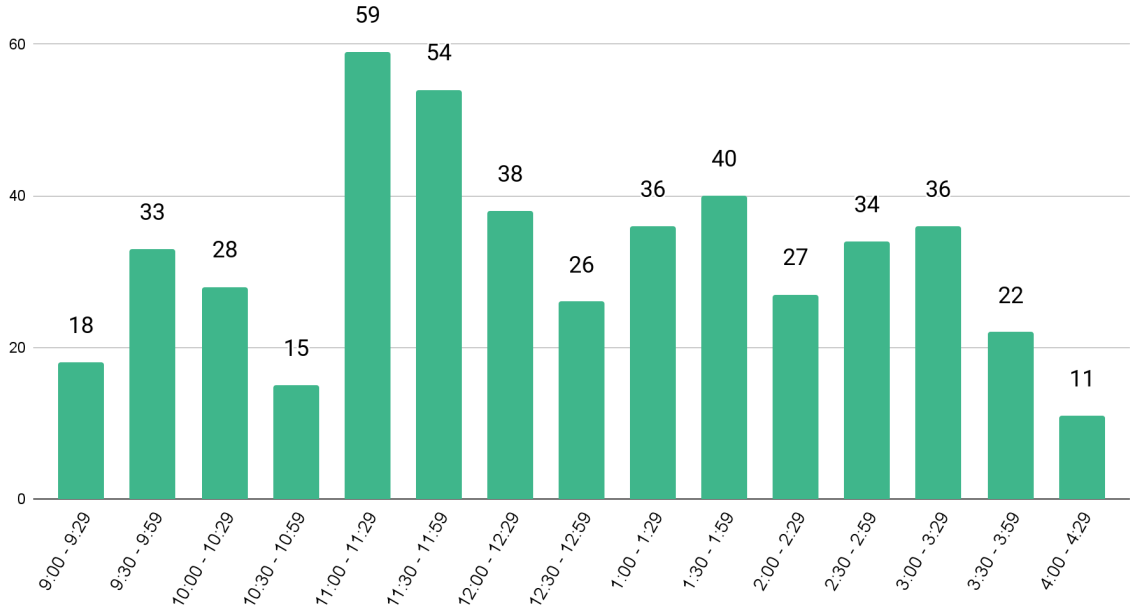
The least number of individuals (less than 50) stayed for **more than 1 hour**, suggesting that prolonged use is less common, possibly due to scheduling constraints.

Time spent in the Room by Affiliation



Students spent the most amount of time in the room with an average of **30 minutes**. They were followed by faculty who averaged **25 minutes**. Staff on the other hand, stayed for around **15 minutes**. Additionally, visitors averaged **24 minutes**.

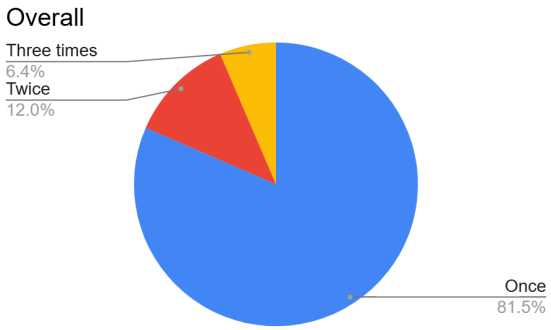
Visit Frequency by Time of Day



The busiest time slot of the day was **11:00–11:29 AM**, which recorded the highest number of visitors at 59, followed by the **11:30–11:59 AM** slot with 54 visitors. The **afternoon hours** remained moderately busy, with peaks around **1:30–1:59 PM** and **3:00–3:29 PM**, each drawing over 35 visitors.

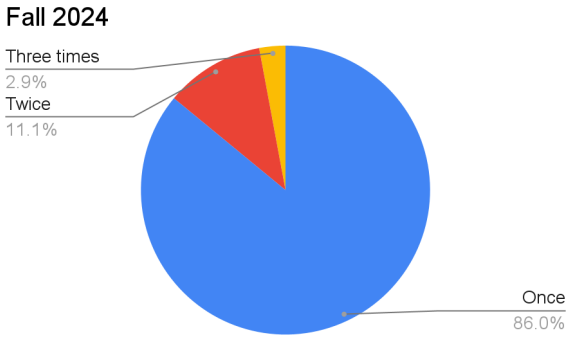
The time visitation patterns suggest that the sensory room is most frequently used during **late-morning and early-to-mid afternoon** around lunch time, likely aligning with typical breaks in students' class and faculties' work schedules.

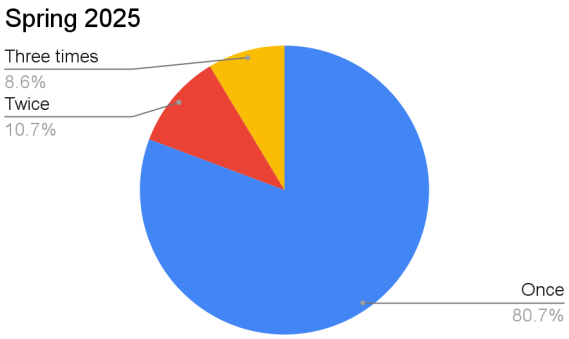
Participant Distribution by Number of Visits



The **majority (n = 291; 81.5%)** visited the sensory room only **once**, followed by those who visited **two times (n = 43; 12.04%**), and visitors who came in **three or more times (n = 23; 6.44%)**.

7 visitors went to the room **five times or more,** accounting for **2%** of the visitor count. The number of visitors (all of them students) in this group went from 3 (1.85%) in Fall to 5 (2.65%) in Spring, a **66% increase**.





In Fall 2024, the majority visited the sensory room once **(n = 147, 86%)**. A smaller group returned twice **(n = 19, 11.1%)**, while a few individuals returned regularly, visiting three or more times **(n = 5, 2.9%)**.

In Spring 2025, while the raw number of one-time visitors increased to **159 (7.55% increase)** this group accounted for **80.7%** of the visits. Compared to Fall, more visitors returned multiple times, with **21 (10.7%)** visiting twice and **17 (8.6%)** visiting three or more times. The percentage of visitors who returned **twice** grew by **9.5%**, while those who returned **3 or more times** had a more substantial increase equivalent to **70.6%**.

The comparison of attendance data between Fall and Spring suggests that while overall daily attendance decreased in Spring, **repeat visits** became more common, especially among students who incorporated sensory breaks into their weekly routines. These findings suggest a more sustained engagement with the space and a growing need for having a permanent room available to the student body.

VII. GROUP VISITATIONS

Upon request, the CAMP+U team offered guided tours of the sensory room. Each 20-minute tour began with a 10-minute presentation on the purpose and evidence-based significance of sensory integration in higher education. This was followed by a 10-minute hands-on workshop, introducing participants to the room's intentional design, functionality, and sensory items hands-on. On average, student groups spent 45 min in the room.

The room hosted **6 student groups** for guided tours: 3 in the Fall and 3 in the Spring. Each was arranged by request. In total, **58 students** and **7 instructors** attended. The groups included students from Exceptional Students & Elementary Education (ESEE) class, the Elementary Science Methods class, the Health and the Built Environment class, the Master of Education in Teaching (MEdT) program, the Human Development & Family Studies program, and members of the Autism Student Union.

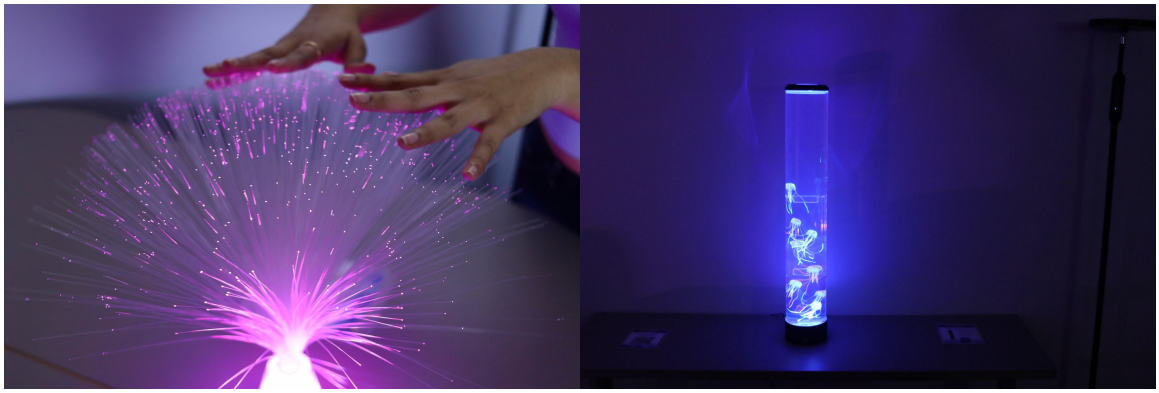
Group Visitation Summary and Feedback

During guided tours, students gravitated toward the calming and light corners, followed by the fidget and tactile stations, engaging with items like gumdrops and silly putty. Overall, student feedback highlighted the room's calming atmosphere. One student shared: *"Very calming room that I was excited to explore. Immediately felt peaceful when entering. The lighting and music was my favorite part along with the squishes."*

Students in Education expressed interest in sensory items that are suitable for young children, reflecting their career orientation. One student said, *"It was lovely and calming to get to be in this space,"* while another appreciated the practical applications for teaching by *"getting to know more about creating a calming space for my future classroom."* Another student highlighted a professional perspective of being *"curious about what it [sensory integration] would do for the benefit of my students as an aspiring teacher."*

Students in the Health and the Built Environment class were particularly drawn to the room's spatial design and features, noting the importance of light installations and comfortable seating options. They suggested the addition of natural light and plants to further enhance the built environment.

The Autism Student Union expressed interest in the visual sensory items like the jellyfish tube, aurora projection, and fiber optic light strands. Students expressed appreciation for the inclusiveness of the space, raising concerns about institutional accommodations they had experienced, as these fail to support students holistically. While they observed increased awareness of learning differences among "some instructors", there is a need for broader, campus-wide efforts to better support students with diverse learning needs. The union president shared appreciation in an email following the tour: *"Thank you for making this space so magical!"*



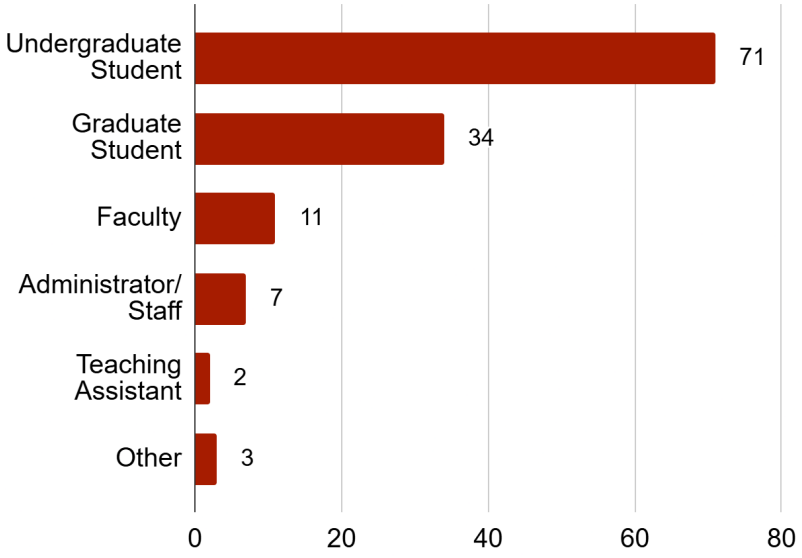
Instructors, too, expressed enthusiasm about the resources available in the sensory room, one of them saying: *"We wanted to share this resource with our students… I am glad it is a resource available for them right here on campus."* The other instructor also shared a positive experience, saying: *"It was exciting to choose which station to interact with. It was inspiring as a parent and educator."*

The overall group visitation feedback illustrates the room's versatility and its ability to inspire curiosity, playfulness, as well as personal and professional growth among students and faculty.

VIII. SURVEY FINDINGS

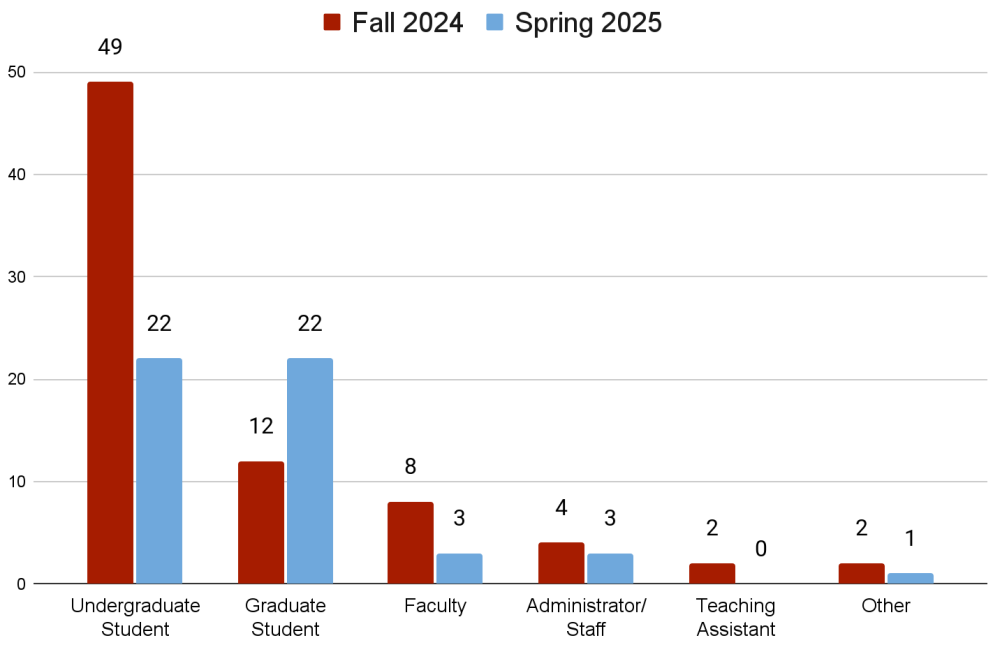
The survey questionnaire was designed to gather insights into participants' usage and experiences with a sensory room. It was structured as a self-administered questionnaire, allowing visitors to provide feedback after each visit. All questions were optional and the participation was voluntary. The questionnaire included a mix of question types, including multiple-choice, Likert-scale, and open-ended questions. **127 individuals** (**26% response rate**) participated in the survey, including those who visited the room multiple times.

Participant Distribution by Affiliation



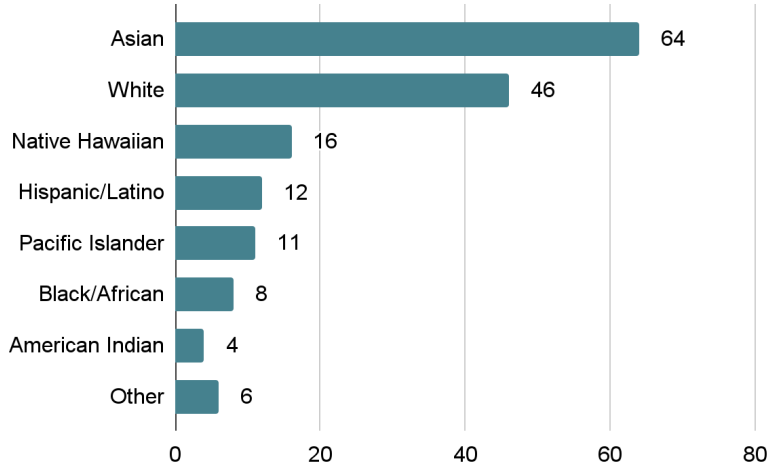
Majority of respondents **(56%)** were **undergraduate students** followed by **graduate students (27%)**. The rest **(17%)** included responses from faculty, administrators/staff, TAs, and visitors.

Participant Distribution by Affiliation



In both semesters, **undergraduate students** made up the largest group of visitors who completed the survey. The decline in responses may be explained by returning visitors who had already completed the survey previously and refused to do it again. **Graduate student** responses increased significantly, matching undergraduates in the Fall semester. Faculty and administrator/staff responses remained relatively low. Teaching assistants and others made up a very small portion of survey respondents in both semesters.

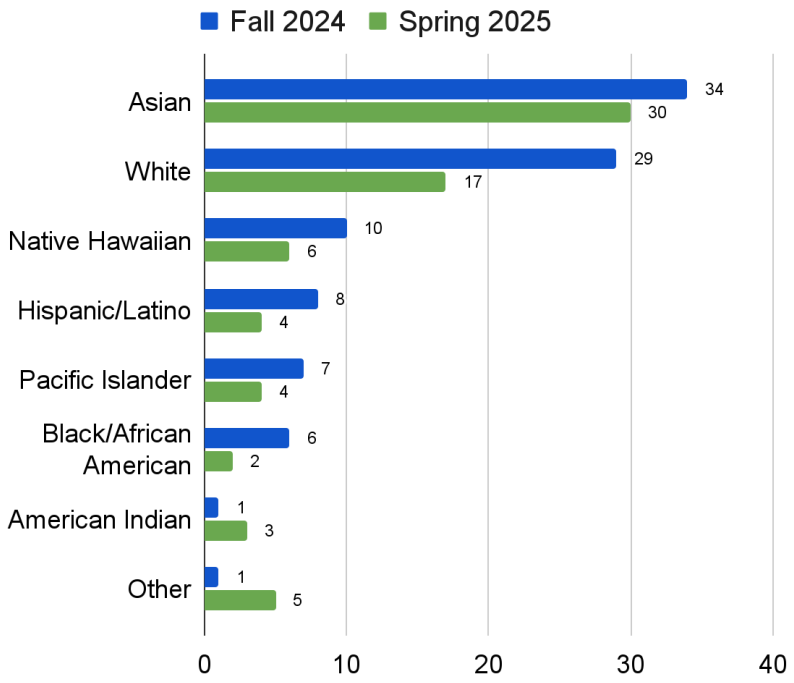
Participant Distribution by Race



Note: Respondents could select multiple responses.

In terms of race, Asian respondents make up the largest group **(64; 50.4% individuals)**, followed by White **(n = 46; 36.2%)** and Native Hawaiians **(n = 16; 12.6%)**. Hispanic/Latino respondents accounted for **9.4% (n = 12)**, followed by Pacific Islanders **(n = 11; 8.7%)**, Black/African Americans **(n = 8; 6.3%)**, and those identifying as Other **(n = 6; 4.7%)**. American Indian respondents comprised the smallest portion of the sample at **3.1% (n = 4)**.

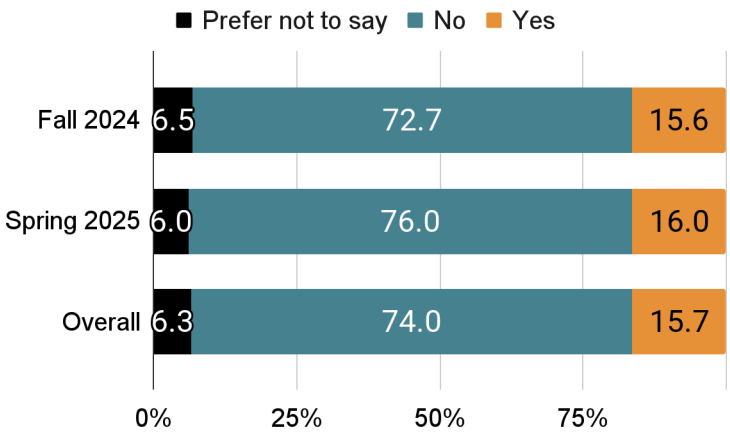
Distribution According to Race (Per Semester)



Note: Respondents could select multiple responses.

Asian respondents made up the largest proportion in both semesters, with a slightly higher number in Fall 2024. White respondents were the second highest across semesters. Native Hawaiian, Hispanic/Latino, and Pacific Islander representation remains relatively consistent across the two semesters, with only slight variation. The number of Black/African American, American Indian, and Other respondents is smaller in both terms.

Disability Status

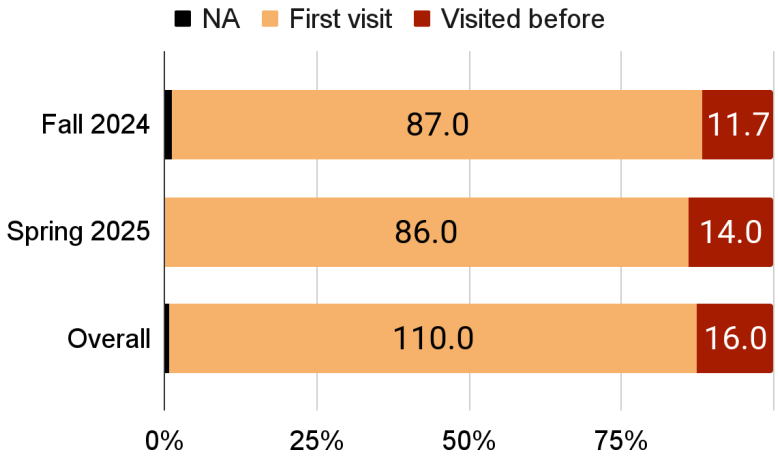


The majority of respondents across both semesters reported not having a disability.

Around **16%** of respondents indicated that they have a disability, with Spring showing a slightly higher percentage than Fall.

A small share of participants chose not to disclose disability status.

Distribution by Number of Visits

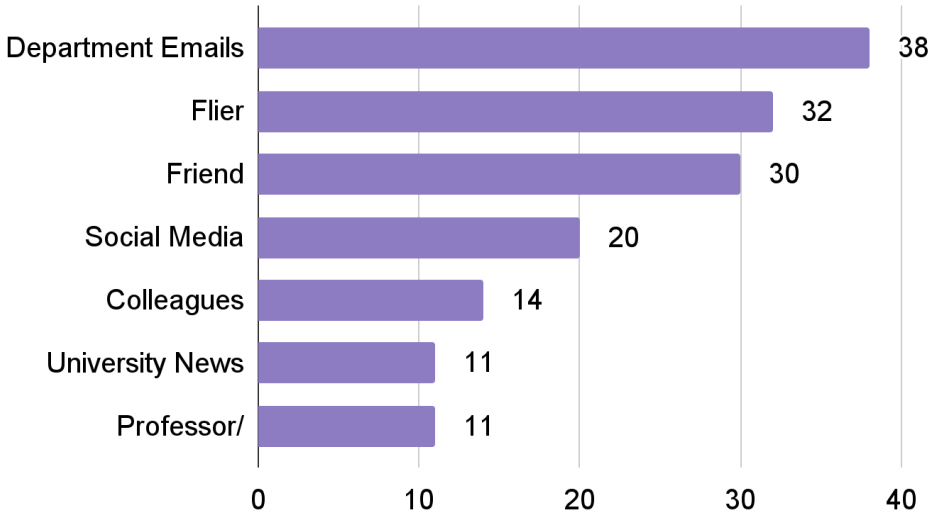


Most respondents in both semesters were visiting the sensory room for the **first time** (**87.0%** in Fall and **86.0%** in Spring).

Returning visitors made up a small portion of the total, with a slightly higher percentage in **Spring (14.0%)** compared to **Fall (11.7%)**.

Overall, this pattern suggests that the space attracted new visitors in the Spring semester, and also maintained a group of returnees who completed the survey.

Recruitment Source



Department Emails (29.9%) and **fliers (25.2%)** were the most common ways visitors heard about the sensory room, suggesting that official communications and visible on-campus materials were the most effective outreach tools.

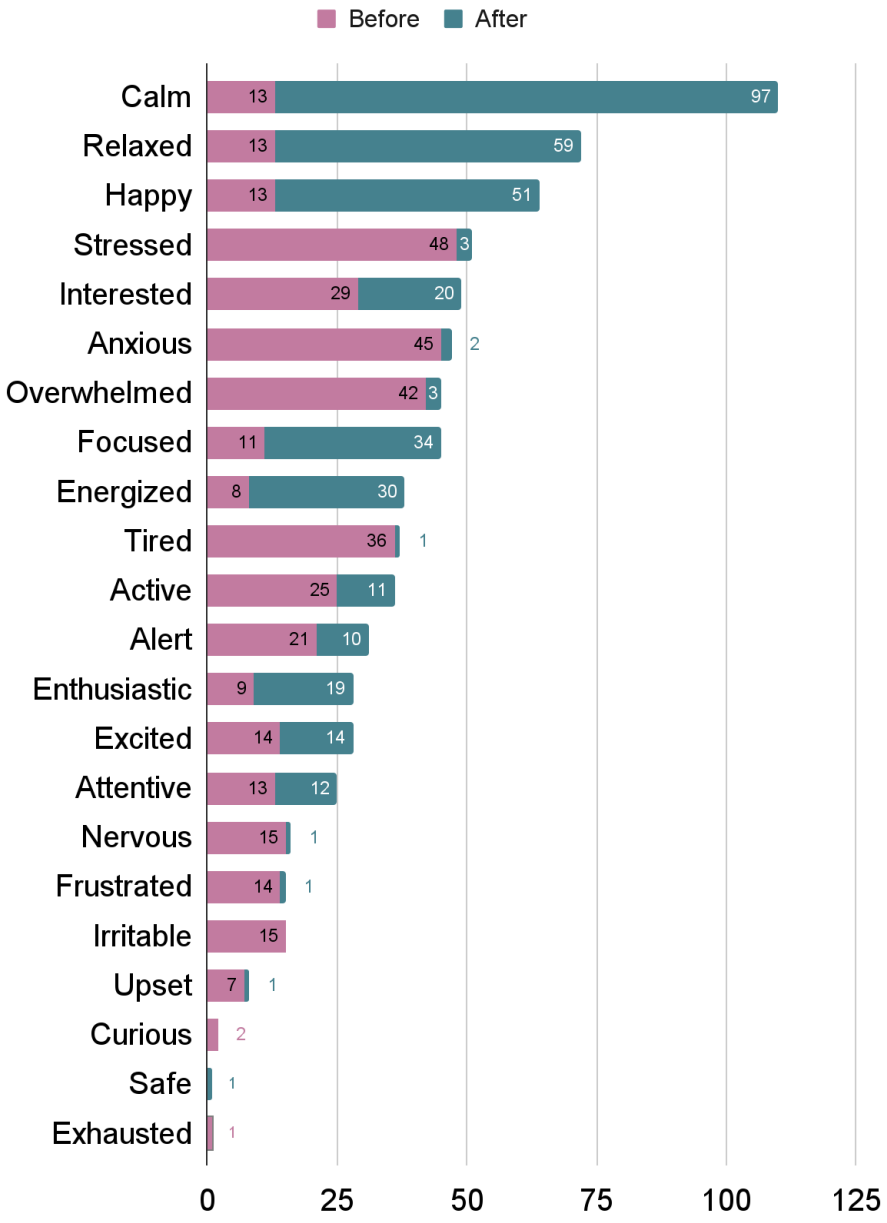
Friends (23.6%) and **Social Media (15.8%)** followed, showing that personal networks and online platforms also played a key role in raising awareness about the room.

Fewer respondents indicated **Professors/Instructors (8.7%)**, **colleagues (11%)**, or **University News (8.7%)** as their source of information.

These results suggest that a mix of formal announcements such as institutional emails and fliers along with word-of-the-mouth sharing helped increase awareness of the sensory room.

Participants' Feelings Before and After Sensory Room Experience

Self-reported emotional states before and after the sensory experience revealed that positive emotional states such as calmness and relaxation significantly increased post-visit.



After the visit, more people reported feeling ***calm*** **(80%),** ***relaxed*** **(48%),** ***happy*** **(42%),** ***focused*** **(28%),** ***energized*** **(16%) and** ***enthusiastic*** **(15%)** compared to pre-visit. For example, the number of people who felt ***calm*** increased from 13 before the visit to 97 after, which is equivalent to a **646% increase**.

At the same time, reports of **stress, anxiety, feeling overwhelmed, and tiredness** dropped. ***Stress*** was one of the most common feelings beforehand, but only 3 individuals reported it afterward. Similar drops were seen in feelings of *anxiety*, *overwhelm*, *tiredness*, *nervousness*, *frustration*, and being *upset*, while *irritability* and *exhaustion* were completely alleviated.

The number of visitors who reported feeling ***interested*** declined by **31%**. This decline may be attributed to their initial curiosity about the sensory room, which was during their visit. Similarly, the number of respondents who reported feeling *active*, *alert* and *attentive* pre-visit declined post visit, while the number who felt *excited* remained the same.

Overall, the self-reported emotional scale findings suggest that the sensory room was effective in supporting individuals' sensory regulation, fostering calmness and reduced mental strain.

Motivation to Visit the Sensory Room

An open-ended survey question asked respondents about their motivation to visit the sensory room. Responses revealed a range of reasons, including **curiosity**, a desire to **explore the new space**, and to experience **sensory benefits**. It appears that for many, they were unfamiliar with sensory friendly spaces, as per the following visitors:

> *I had no idea what it was, so I thought I'd take a look.*
>
> *We were curious as faculty about the sensory room and wanted to share this resource with our students.*
>
> *I was encouraged to stop by and also partially because I had a slight headache. After leaving the sensory room, it did help with my headache.*

Majority learned about the room through **email** announcements, **fliers** posted around campus, or directly from their **instructors** who shared about it in class:

> *I saw the flier and it sounded fun.*
>
> *I was encouraged to stop by for a couple of minutes, but ended up staying for more than 10 minutes. It was a great method to relieve some of the stress I had.*
>
> *My Professor told me about it and I was interested in visiting it especially since school can become overwhelming and we all could use a way to destress.*

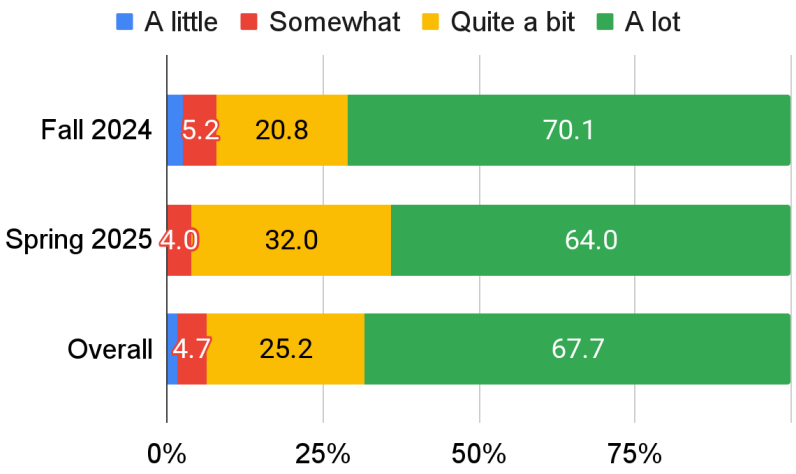
Word-of-mouth was another important way of drawing people to the room, via friends, classmates, or partners who shared their experiences. This shows the importance of spreading awareness of new resources on campus, as illustrated in these quotes:

I was motivated to visit the sensory room after a friend introduced it to me. I was drawn by the idea of having a soothing and calming space where I could fully relax and unwind.

My girlfriend was talking about it and I wanted to see how it was like. I also heard about this last semester from someone from my class.

I usually get really overstimulated when I'm at the Campus Center. I have noise canceling earbuds and listen to pink noise to help muffle the sound but given my earbuds work at full volume, it starts to cloud my head and it gets hard to relax and collect my thoughts. My friend took me here and I genuinely really like it!

Overall Satisfaction with the Sensory Room



Overall, satisfaction with the sensory room was high. The majority of respondents rated their satisfaction as “A lot” (67.7%) or “Quite a bit” (25.2%).

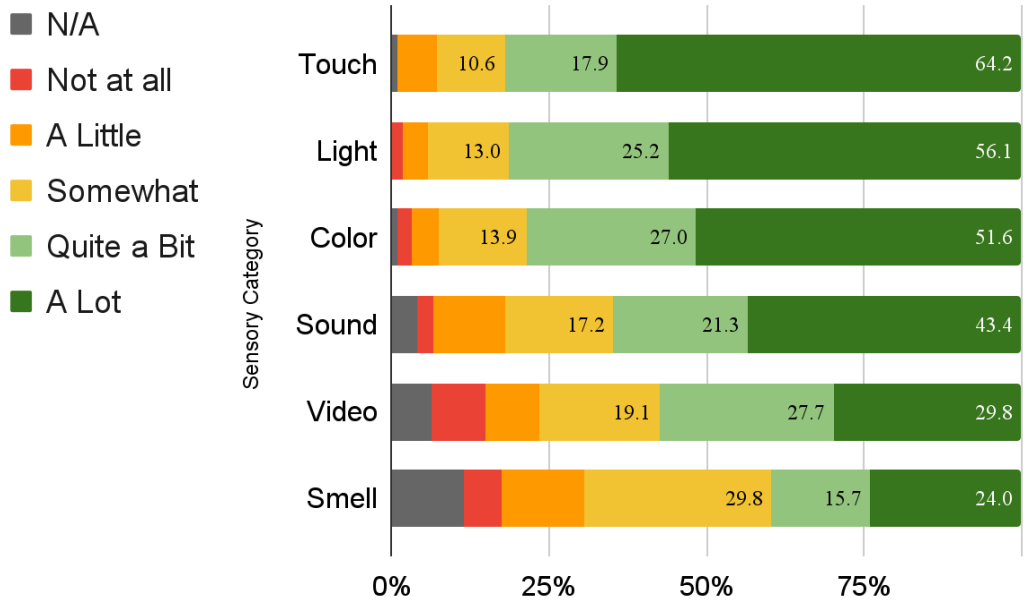
A small percentage reported lower satisfaction, with 4.7% selecting “Somewhat” and 1.6% selecting “A little.”

Note: Values are in percentages.

In **Fall 2024**, satisfaction was especially strong. Most respondents selected “A lot” (70.1%), followed by “Quite a bit” (20.8%). Lower satisfaction levels were minimal, with 5.2% choosing “Somewhat” and 2.6% choosing “A little.”

In **Spring 2025**, satisfaction was slightly more distributed. “A lot” was selected by 64.0%, and “Quite a bit” by 32.0%. Lower ratings were limited, with 4.0% selecting “Somewhat” and 0% choosing “A little.”

Satisfaction Levels by Sensory Category



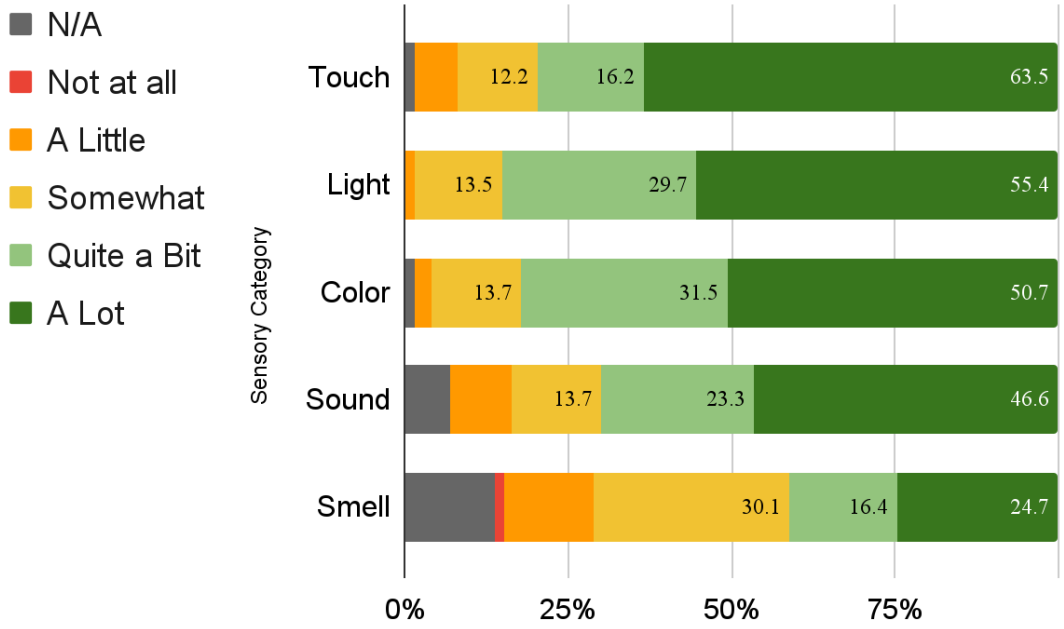
Note: Values are in percentages.

Across all sensory categories, the most common response was “A Lot,” indicating high levels of satisfaction with the sensory elements overall. **Touch** received the strongest feedback, with 64.2% of respondents rating it as highly impactful. **Light** and **Color** followed closely, with 56.1% and 51.6% selecting “A Lot,” respectively.

While **Sound**, **Video,** and **Smell**, and were still positively rated, they showed a more even distribution across response options. For example, Sound had 43.4% rating it “A Lot,” while Smell and Video had lower top ratings (24.0% and 29.8%) and higher percentages in the “Somewhat” range (29.8% and 19.1%, respectively). Smell had the highest percentage of participants selecting “N/A” (11.6%), indicating they may not have experienced it at all.

These findings suggest that tactile, visual, and lighting elements were the most consistently impactful, while other sensory features received more varied responses. This likely reflects the diversity in individuals’ sensory needs and their unique preferences in engaging with specific sensory stations or items in the room.

Satisfaction Levels by Sensory Category (Fall 2024)



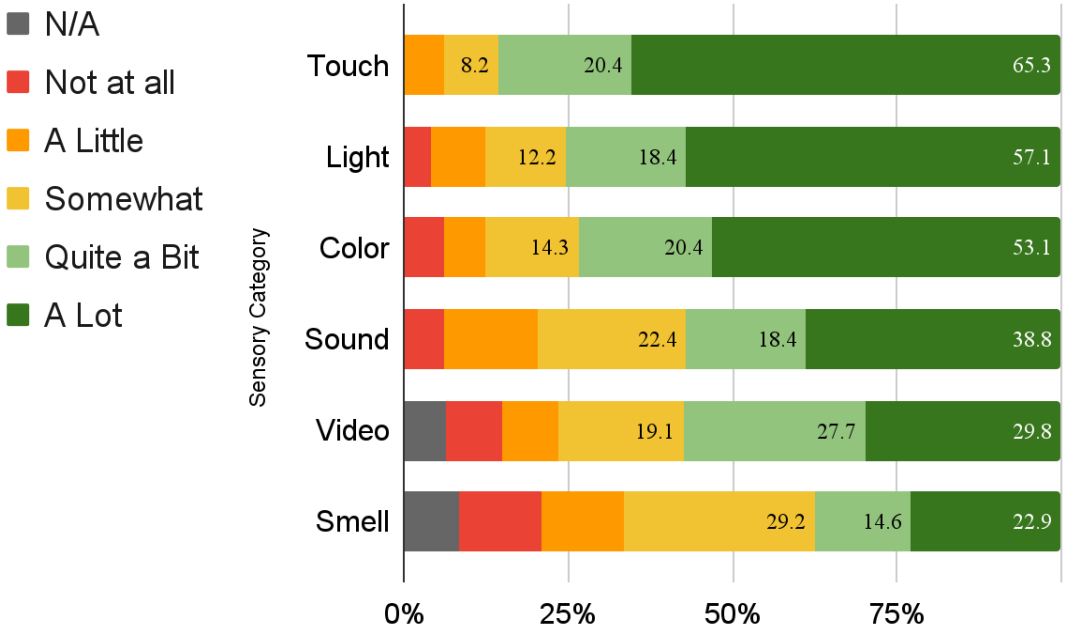
Note: Values are in percentages.

In Fall 2024, satisfaction with the sensory room varied by sensory category, but most participants rated their experiences positively. **Touch** received the highest ratings, with 63.5% of respondents selecting “A Lot” and only small percentages indicating lower levels. **Light** (55.4%) and **Color** (50.7%) followed, also receiving strong “A Lot” ratings with additional support in the “Quite a Bit” category (29.7% and 31.5%, respectively).

Sound was somewhat less positively rated, with 46.6% selecting “A Lot” and a wider spread across the other categories. **Smell** had the most mixed feedback. Only 24.7% rated it “A Lot,” and it had the highest percentage of respondents selecting “Somewhat” (30.1%) and “A Little” (13.7%), along with the highest “N/A” responses (13.7%).

These patterns suggest that tactile and visual elements were most effective for participants in Fall 2024, while responses to smell and sound were more varied and may reflect either individual sensory preferences or limitations in those features.

Satisfaction Levels by Sensory Category (Spring 2025)



Note: Values are in percentage.

In Spring 2025, participants continued to respond most positively to **Touch**, with 65.3% selecting “A Lot.” **Light** (57.1%) and **Color** (53.1%) also received strong ratings at the highest level of satisfaction.

Feedback for **Sound**, **Smell**, and **Video** was more mixed. Sound had fewer top ratings (38.8%) and a larger portion of “Somewhat” responses (22.4%). Smell showed lower satisfaction overall, with only 22.9% selecting “A Lot” and more participants choosing lower categories, including 12.5% who said it did not help at all. Video had a wide range of responses, with the highest share in the “Quite a Bit” category (27.7%) and fewer top ratings (29.8%).

These results show clear preferences for tactile and visual elements, while other features received a broader range of feedback.

Overall Experience in the Sensory Room

The word cloud visually represents the most frequently used words that people used to describe their sensory experience. Participants consistently described their overall experience as **calming** and **relaxing**, noting the welcoming atmosphere and the friendly OFDAS Staff in the room.

The space provided a soothing environment that allowed visitors to feel a sense of **comfort** and **calm**. Most visitors were initially unsure of what to expect, but were drawn into the quiet, dimly-lit space. For many, this change in atmosphere from the neurotypical campus environment created a sense of safety and tranquility.

As shared by one student:

> *I sat down in the corner with the stars and auroras and became unable to leave that spot until the room closed. For those 30 minutes I felt a calm I rarely experience. As someone with ADHD I find it difficult to be able to satisfy all my sensory inputs in one go but this corner managed to provide that in just the right amount to where my synapses were no longer screaming for stimulation and my mind became clear.*

The various sensory elements contributed to a **peaceful ambiance**, making it an ideal space for stress relief around midterms and finals, as explained by these students:

> *Finals are so stressful, I love coming in here to relax and forget about it for a brief moment until I go back into chaos.*

> *I feel that the world is rough, and that I need to navigate it by myself. So thank you for coming from a place of understanding - that a social space like a sensory room is very much needed.*

Visitors enjoyed the selection of **tactile items**, frequently referring to fidget toys and kinetic sand. These features allowed people to interact in a **playful** way. Several visitors opened up about their experience:

> *I just felt like a kid again, I didn't feel any judgment playing with the items and I just felt comfortable to let my guard down.*

> *It is very fun to go to this safe place and play like a child for a while.*

> *It allowed me to be a child again. Nice little break in my busy schedule.*

While most found the space ideally suited for a quiet reflection or emotional regulation, others used it **productively** to get homework done or to collaborate with peers on group projects. The sensory room supported those who usually struggle to concentrate at home or elsewhere on campus:

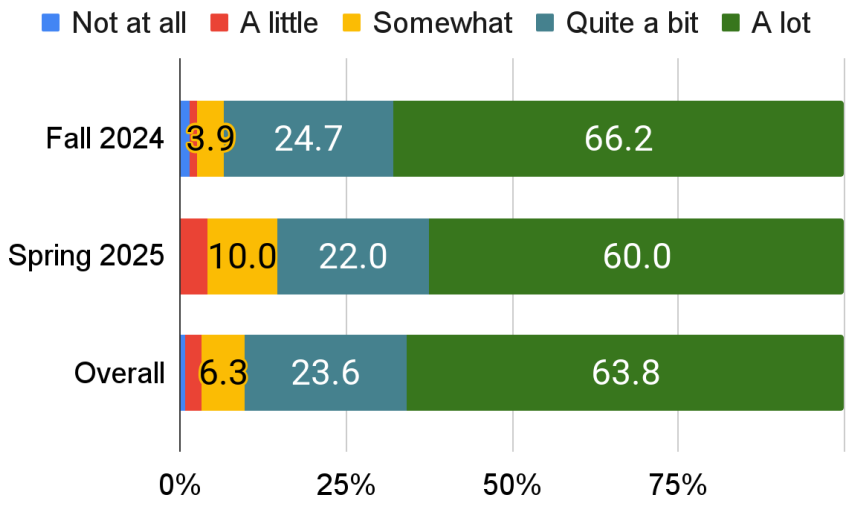
> *The music and the ambiance helped me focus on getting assignments done. Also the massage chair helped relieve some physical stress as I was working!*
>
> *I get my homework done here 'cause I can't do it at home and I usually want someone with me to motivate me to do it. When I'm in here I can do it on my own and have it done in a couple hours.*
>
> *My group needed a place to finish our project and our groupmate referred to the sensory room. We got a lot done and the fidget toys were a nice thing to play with while we worked.*

Faculty members perceived the room as a valuable resource on campus, as captured by one of them:

> *Unique experience. I'm wondering if my students will stop by on occasion if they need it… If this helps others, I'm glad it's a resource available for them right here on campus.*

Overall, this feedback suggests that visitors see the room as a well-needed resource on-campus, a space to de-stress, feel welcomed, and reconnect with themselves.

Likelihood of Participants Recommending Sensory Room to Others



Note: Values are in percentage.

Overall, the majority of respondents indicated they were highly likely to recommend the sensory room to others. **63.8%** selected “A lot,” and another **23.6%** chose “Quite a bit.” Only **6.3%** selected “Somewhat,” **2.4%** “A little,” and **0.8%** “Not at all.”

In **Fall 2024**, recommendation levels were especially strong, with **66.2%** selecting “A lot.” In **Spring 2025**, this dropped slightly to **60.0%**, with a small increase in moderate responses such as “Somewhat” (10.0%) and “A little” (4.0%). These results suggest strong endorsement of the room from participants across both semesters.

Suggestions for Improvement

Respondents generally expressed appreciation for the calming environment, but also provided several suggestions to enhance the sensory usage and experience.

A recurring theme was the desire for more **variety** in sensory items. Several visitors suggested expanding the range of **textures** beyond rubber and velcro, such as introducing new tactile items like tatami mats, triangle lounge pillows, and balance boards that allow subtle movement while standing. Others recommended fidget toys with soothing sounds, like groan sticks or fidget caterpillars. There were requests for more **seating options**, and adding **blankets** for warmth and coziness. One student imagined a small, enclosed “dome-like cave” to sit in solitude and darkness, offering shelter. Moreover, there were calls to incorporate **relaxing scents** or **diffusing oils** to enhance the olfactory senses.

Other suggestions touched upon adjustments to lighting and music, including the **removal of LED lights** and the incorporation of **warmer lighting**. Some recommended adding spaces with reduced white light to create a visually calming atmosphere. Similarly, visitors in the Spring semester asked for options to **reduce screen light** (for the video installation) to minimize stimulation. One student mentioned how exiting the room into a bright and noisy hallway could be jarring, and called for gentler sensory transition. While most visitors enjoyed the calming **music**, some regular visitors suggested exploring new genres, such as instrumental 80s Japanese city pop, with a more **upbeat** energy. Feedback also suggested that music could be **louder**, potentially contributing to a more soothing environment.

Although hand sanitizer was available at the front desk, a few visitors shared concerns around hygiene, especially the shared use of tactile items. They asked for greater availability of **disinfectant wipes**, making sure that the equipment is sanitized after use.

Finally, there was strong interest in expanding access to the sensory room through **longer hours** and **daily availability**, to better accommodate diverse schedules, including those of non-traditional students who arrive early or stay late on campus. Several visitors suggested establishing a **permanent** sensory space in locations like the Student Success Center or Hamilton Library. Overall, the feedback reflected deep appreciation for the sensory room and its value as a campus resource.

IX. CONCLUSION

The Sensory Room initiative at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (UHM) successfully created a calming and inclusive space that supported self-regulation, stress management, and emotional well-being for students, faculty, and staff members. With 477 visits during the 2024–2025 academic year and overwhelmingly positive feedback, particularly from students, the data reflect a clear demand for sensory-friendly spaces on campus. The increase in repeat visits from Fall to Spring also suggests a trend of sensory breaks becoming a meaningful part of students' weekly routines.

Visitors reported notable emotional benefits, including increased calmness and reduced stress levels, with 93% expressing high levels of satisfaction with the space. These findings highlight the value of sensory-friendly environments in promoting well-being across the campus community. They also highlight the need to establish permanent sensory rooms as part of broader institutional efforts to support student success.

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