

Columbia University Libraries

August 10, 2006

TO: CUL

RE: Executive Summary LibQual+ 2006

FR: Jennifer Brown, Program Coordinator for Marketing and Assessment
Terry Kirchner, Access Services Director

In March of 2006 the Columbia University Libraries conducted a second iteration of the LibQual+ library survey. CUL's previous experience with LibQual+, in 2003, was an informative, motivating one that shed light on user perceptions of library services and collections. The survey proved to be a useful tool in identifying areas for improvement throughout the library system, as well as highlighting our strengths. Using the same survey tool on a three year rotation has allowed us to track our progress on key issues and gauge our ability to respond to user needs.

The intended goal in using the LibQual+ survey tool was to provide the Libraries staff and the Columbia University community with a broad view of the state of the library system. Because LibQual+ is a nationally recognized and widely used tool for assessing academic libraries, we are also able to compare our "big picture" of user perceptions with that of institutions across the country. The results of this survey will be incorporated into a three-year assessment plan for the Libraries that will enable us to take a closer look at the issues that have been raised and confirmed by the resulting data.

The survey measured users perceptions of the Libraries according to three categories: *Affect of Service*, *Information Control*, and *Library as Place*. The LibQual+ survey was distributed to 5,157 faculty, staff and students over the three week period between February 21 and March 12, 2006. A total of 282 valid responses were collected. Of the respondents 24% were undergraduate, 29% were graduate students, and 45% were faculty.

To learn more about the LibQual+ survey tool, please visit www.libqual.org.

The Big Picture

Respondents expressed overall satisfaction with the way in which they are treated in the library, the library's level of support for learning, research and teaching, and the overall quality of service.

Respondents expressed significant satisfaction with the following:

- The library aids my advancement in my academic discipline
- The library enables me to be more efficient in my academic pursuits

In reviewing the survey data, it became clear that there were four specific areas in which the Libraries could improve, as expressed by all segments of our user population. In these four areas, respondents gave CUL a zero or negative "score", meaning that the respondents'

Tuesday, September 12, 2006

perception is such that the library is not providing an acceptable or desired degree of service in these areas. These areas are:

- Dependability in handling users' service problems
- A library website that enables me to locate information on my own
- Print and/or electronic journals I require for my work
- Quiet space for individual activities

The data collected reflects the respondents desire to locate information without requiring assistance from library staff, need for quiet study space, emphasis on the value of a strong journal collection, and wish for a consistent level of customer service.

Faculty

A total of 129 faculty completed the survey. Faculty expressed that library staff are "consistently courteous" and gave strong scores for other *Affect of Service* categories, with the major exception being "dependability in handling users' service problems". *Library as Place* also scored consistently well with faculty. Faculty concerns were grouped primarily in the *Information Control* category, and reflect the faculty's strong desire to have more control over the information gathering process and resources, and may lead to the development of more technology-based library instruction for faculty, in a variety of forms. This is an area that CUL is dedicated to exploring further.

In general, faculty respondents stated that the Libraries are satisfying their needs for a physical work space, though more quiet study areas would be appreciated. Library staff provide an acceptable level of customer service, are knowledgeable and responsive to faculty needs.

Graduate Students

Students, both graduate and undergraduate, had a high level of confidence in the Libraries abilities to "instill confidence in users and give individual attention" which is a service priority throughout the library system.

The majority of graduate student respondents were from the following areas of study

Humanities	35.53%
Business	23.72%
Performing/Fine Arts	10.09%
Sciences/Math	9.07%

Graduate student respondents showed high levels of satisfaction in *Affect of Service*, and *Information Control*. *Library as Place* proved to be an area of concern; there is an obvious need for more quiet study space available to graduate students. Overall, graduate students expressed positive perceptions of library experience in all three core categories.

Undergraduate Students

Undergraduates displayed general satisfaction with the Libraries, giving high scores for *Affect of Service* categories and relatively high scores for *Information Control*. Undergraduates expressed needs for quiet space in the libraries and easier access to information, giving a

negative score for “making information easily accessible for independent use.” They confirmed that our level of service meets the expectations.

Recent Progress

Five “local” questions were selected by CUL staff to be included in the LibQual+ survey and reflected areas in which the Libraries have made significant efforts to improve service, most notably hours and document delivery. The following table reflects our progress in these areas by comparing “scores” from 2003 to 2006. Scores reflect users perceptions of service quality. Negative scores imply that the Libraries are perceived as not providing an acceptable or expected level of service.

	LibQual+ 2003	LibQual+ 2006
Convenient service hours	-0.07	0.20
Timely document delivery and ILL	0.08	0.33

As a result of the 2003 LibQual+ survey data, CUL made a concerted effort to expand the hours of operation, and make improvements in our ILL document delivery processes. Clearly, these efforts have been effective and well received by the users, and users perceive that we now provide a higher level of service.

Several additional issues that were brought to light through exploration of the 2003 data, were also tracked in 2006. CUL will have many opportunities in the coming years to address these issues, understand where and why progress has been made, and further explore persisting problems.

	LibQual+ 2003	LibQual+ 2006
Print and electronic journals I require for my work	-0.06	0.00
The printed library materials I need for my work	-0.18	0.04
Dependability in handling users’ service problems	-0.10	-0.15
Easy to use access tools that allow me to find things on my own	0.00	0.15

User Comments

The comments collected through the LibQual+ survey illuminated aspects of library service in which CUL excels, along with those that require our attention and development. Most importantly, the comments showed the users’ value of and need for a strong library infrastructure, online tools that are easy to use, and a staff that can assist them when problems arise.

The physical spaces and services, such as photocopying, printing, wireless internet connections, and plentiful, comfortable study space are priorities for our users. Availability of study space in Butler Library was a key issue in the 2003 comments, and revealed itself again in 2006. Of course, each respondent has a different view on what is at the root of the

space problem, but the overall sentiment, consistent over the past three years, is that more study space is desired.

That our users value a friendly, willing, accessible staff who can assist them with problems also became apparent. Many individual staff and libraries were praised in the comments. The comments also revealed areas where staff can make improvements in their interactions with users. This may relate directly to the low scores in “dependability in handling users’ service problems.”

Users expressed frustration in using online tools such as CLIO and e-journals. These areas will be explored more fully in the future.

Marketing was alluded to in the comments collected. Users expressed an interest in learning more about the services and collections available to them. One respondent stated: “I hope that the library can use its resources and better communicate the services and exhibitions that the various libraries offer.”

Usage Statistics

The data gathered regarding library use was encouraging, and showed a slight, but notable increase in regular library use.

- 23% of respondents said that they visit the library daily
- 48% of respondents said that they visit the library weekly
- 18% of respondents said that they visit the library monthly

- **53% of respondents said that they use the Libraries website daily**
- 40% of respondents said that they use the Libraries website weekly

This data clearly identifies the significant place the Libraries website plays in our delivery of services and information to our users. CUL is committed to making the website an assessment priority; recognizing its inherent value as a marketing tool as well as its primary function of serving as an information gateway for our users.

LibQual+ and the Future of Assessment at CUL

A three-year assessment plan is in development for the Columbia University Libraries. The primary function of the plan will be to provide a means to focus and coordinate assessment across the library system. The results of the LibQual+ survey, along with other data collected recently, will define the scope of our upcoming assessment initiatives, providing us with the information we require to explore new, innovative ways to offer services and provide access to the collections. The LibQual+ survey will be conducted again in 2009, as a means of gauging our progress, identifying successes, furthering the communicative relationship with our users, and understanding our organization in relation academic libraries across the country.