

## Use of a Large Scale Survey for Benchmarking Library Service Quality

Submitted by Bonnie Allen, Associate University Librarian for Collection Development and Technical Services, OSU Libraries

A first step in service quality assessment is to get a snapshot of the current state. This will provide information related to the satisfaction level of service provided and to the level of service that is desired in order to be rated satisfactory or excellent.

The gap between the "now" and the "want to be" is a measurement that can be used to assess improvement toward an outcome. (See September 2003 OSU Perspective for use of the Gap Assessment Model).

One way to obtain the snapshot of the current state is by using a large-scale survey. Large-scale surveys have large sample sizes that can produce the most precise estimates possible for the population as a whole and for subsets of the population surveyed. The OSU Libraries participated in LibQual+ in 2001 and 2003 for the purpose of measuring sat-

isfaction with library service quality from the perspective of the users.

LibQual+ is a research project sponsored by the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) to establish a standard tool of service quality assessment in libraries. ARL began the project in 2000 and has now administered the survey to public, community college, and university libraries internationally.

In 2003, 308 institutions of various types and sizes administered the survey to 128,958 individuals, which included OSU Libraries. To date, OSU Libraries has conducted two surveys, in 2001 and 2003, and plans to repeat this survey in alternate years. At OSU, the 2001 survey had 329 respondents and 2003 had 185 respondents. Because LibQual+ has been a research project, the survey has evolved as the questions and dimensions of the survey were refined after each administration. The addition of different types of libraries such as public libraries and community colleges has

enabled libraries to see similarities and differences in user service demands on institutions with varying service missions. With each survey, rigorous statistical analysis has been conducted to validate results.

The survey instrument is administered by web to a randomly selected population. The dimensions or categories of questions include *access to information*, *affect of service*, *library as place*, and *personal control*. These particular dimensions were identified using qualitative data from interviews of faculty, students, librarians and scholars. The questions reflect the user's emotional needs as well as the more concrete criteria that define quality of services in libraries. The questions require the respondent to give minimum, desired, and perceived levels of service measured on a scale of one to nine.

The user response to library services is felt on emotional levels as well as more objec-

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tive ways. For example, a student's satisfaction with the services of the library is reflected in the feeling of welcome, respect, and assurance that the library staff will provide knowledgeable assistance. These feelings contribute to a sense of comfort and confidence in using the library. At the same time, more concrete criteria such as the operation

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## "Matching Service" To Help Students Pick Roomies

Submitted by Laurie Bridges, UHDS Marketing Coordinator

During the 2003 Spring Term, in response to the OSU results on the 2002 National Survey of Student Engagement, the stu-

dent group, Leaders for Positive Innovation, made recommendations to the Provost's Council about ways in which to engage OSU students better. (See September 2003 issue of OSU Perspective for student recommendations.)

One such recommendation involved finding better ways to facilitate students' finding each other, particularly new students. One idea that students proposed was a web-based system for roommate

selection for OSU Residence Halls and Co-ops. As of this month, OSU's Housing and Dining Services (UHDS) has launched a new and innovative program that provides

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## OSU Odyssey—What Do Students Think?

The OSU Odyssey experience was designed to engage faculty and new students in a way that would foster the student's transition to and connection with OSU. Throughout the implementation of this experience, students were asked to provide feedback that would help to guide the course development. Overall feedback was positive. Students who were enrolled in the Odyssey course during the 2003 Fall term had the following to say about their experience with the course.

- 65% enrolled in the OSU Odyssey course because it was suggested by their academic advisor.
- Student's mostly expected that they would learn about OSU services and activities; be helped to adjust to

OSU; and that they would meet other students. Few expected to increase their study skills.

In fact, when asked directly about the course:

- 79% agreed that the course had helped them adjust to OSU;
- 94% indicated that the course helped them become familiar with campus resources;
- 85% would recommend the course to other first year students;
- 68% indicated that the course had increased their sense of belonging at OSU; and
- only 45% indicated the course had improved their academic skills.

The faculty who teach Odyssey do so without monetary compensation, yet

students' are very appreciative of their work!

- 96% say instructors were well-prepared and used effective presentation styles;
- 97% said instructors were approachable, were available, and encouraged class discussion and participation; and
- 93% reported that instructors were sensitive to issues of diversity.

In essence most students seemed to be reporting that from their perspective, the Odyssey experience had fulfilled its major purpose.

For more information about this course and opportunities to become an Odyssey instructor or peer leader, contact Kris Winter, Interim Director, Student Orientation and Retention Programs at 737-0582.

## First Year Students Tell Us About Their First Year at OSU

In May, 2003, a sample of OSU first year students were asked to participate in a project designed to begin to understand the experience of first year students and OSU's influence on that experience. Approximately 50% of the full-time, first-time, first year students were asked to complete the Your First College Year Survey (YFCY). The return rate was 40%.

The YFCY was developed by the Higher Education Institute at UCLA and The Policy Center on the First Year of College at Brevard College. The survey was designed to measure curricular and co-curricular experiences during the first year and to follow-up on some items from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program Freshman Survey (CIRP) that is administered annually to entering first year students nationwide. (For more information on the YFCY or the CIRP consult: [www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri/heri.html](http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri/heri.html))

The following is merely a sampling of some of the results from the survey.

### Most . . . (75-100%)

- felt successful in adjusting to the academic demands of college;
- were satisfied or very satisfied with library facilities and services;
- felt bored in class;
- used the internet for research/homework;
- socialized with someone of a different racial or ethnic group;
- worked 5 hours or less either on or off campus;
- rated their general knowledge and knowledge of a particular field as much stronger or stronger than when they entered OSU;
- frequently or occasionally felt overwhelmed by all they had to do;
- definitely or probably would choose OSU again if they could make the choice over again; and

- rated raising a family as essential or very important.

### Many . . . (50-74.9%)

- were inspired in courses to think in new ways;
- felt depressed at some time during their first year;
- reported that their social life frequently or occasionally interfered with schoolwork;
- felt the same as when they entered OSU about their ability to write college-level papers;
- came to class late; and
- had a laboratory component to class, were required to write multiple drafts of papers, and participated in group discussions in class.

Some differences between entering students' perceptions and their perceptions at the end of the first year included:

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### First Year Students (Continued from page 2)

- a decline in their self-rated skills and abilities in academic ability, drive to achieve, math ability, physical health, persistence, popularity, and public speaking ability;
- an increase in smoking cigarettes, drinking beer, wine, or liquor, feeling bored in class, studying with other students, feeling depressed, and using the internet for research or homework;
- an increase in financial concerns for those students who had expressed major concerns about financing college when they entered OSU; and
- a significant increase in expectations for the future in terms of achieving in a performing art, influencing social values, helping others in difficulty, having administrative responsibility, writing original works, being involved in environmental clean-up, developing a meaningful philosophy of life, promoting racial understanding, being a community leader, and integrating spirituality into my life.

For more information about our first year students consult the complete report at: [http://oregonstate.edu/admin/student\\_affairs/research/com\\_reports.html](http://oregonstate.edu/admin/student_affairs/research/com_reports.html).

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hours, the timeliness of document delivery, and the quality of the collection also contribute to user satisfaction as these elements impact the user's ability to complete work.

With such a range of experiences contributing to the overall satisfaction with services, the Libraries' first objective was to gauge the university community's satisfaction with the quality of its services and to pinpoint any area for further assessment. Secondly, the Libraries needed comparator information to evaluate the library service quality in a larger context. Because of the scale of LibQual+, the Libraries were able to accomplish both objectives. We obtained a snapshot of user satisfaction and the user's range of acceptability for service quality for each dimension.

At the same time, specific areas of concern can be identified for specific user groups. These questionable areas can then be investigated for greater understanding, assessment and ultimately improvement. By having the aggregated results from the other participating schools, we are able to have the comparisons that place our results in context. With LibQual+ results we have a benchmark for service quality and a place to

start our assessment program.

The LibQual+ survey results have been reported to each participating institution in a variety of ways. Each institution receives its own results and that of the aggregate of all institutions participating that year. The data is reported by the dimension (grouping of questions in a particular service area), by individual question, by user status (undergrad, grad, faculty, library staff), and user subject discipline. The resulting scores report the gap between the perceived levels of service either above or below the minimum required. The range of acceptability of service, which is the range between minimum and desired levels of service, is also reported.

The comparison information from LibQual+ provides a context for our evaluation which can lead to other questions about the users we serve. To some extent, the comparisons provide a scale for the responses to the individual questions as well. By looking at the responses received at the other institutions, we can see where our users are either generally more critical or forgiving in their scoring, more demanding by having higher minimum requirements, or more accepting by having a wider range of acceptable service levels.

Overall, LibQual+ research and surveys have provided the Libraries with a sense of

### For Further Reading

Granello, D. H., (2001). Promoting cognitive complexity in graduate written work: Using Bloom's Taxonomy as a pedagogical tool to improve literature reviews. *Counselor Education & Supervision, 0011-0035, 40(4)*.

Palomba, C.A., & Banta, T.W. (1999). *Assessment essentials: Planning, implementing, and improving assessment in higher education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Phillips, S. (2001). Beyond measuring service quality: Learning from the voices of the customers, the staff, the processes, and the organization. *Library Trends, 49(4), 635-662*.

the value placed on the library by its users. Included in the overall findings are:

- User's high need for self-reliance in use of the library.
- Users want library staff to be caring and helpful with undergraduate satisfaction, with service being most influenced in this way.
- Knowledge, courtesy, approachability of the library staff are very important to every user group.
- Access to electronic resources raises expectation of service while introducing new reliability issues.
- ILL is acceptable access but inefficient for researcher's elimination of sources.
- The condition of the facility becomes an issue only when it impairs self-reliance.
- Comprehensive collections are uniformly valued as key to academic success, especially to faculty.

At OSU, the surveys have confirmed the library's belief that our users are

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**OSU Perspective:  
 What is it?**

The **OSU Perspective** was developed to provide assessment and other information about our students and programs. We hope that by making this information available to OSU faculty and staff, we can stimulate conversation that helps keep students and student learning at our core.

The **Perspective** is published quarterly both in print and on the web: [http://oregonstate.edu/student\\_affairs/research/perspective.html](http://oregonstate.edu/student_affairs/research/perspective.html)

Ideas and suggestions for subsequent **OSU Perspective** publications are welcomed.

Please contact Rebecca Sanderson, Ph.D., Student Affairs Research and Evaluation Office, 102 Buxton Hall, 541-737-8738, or email: [rebecca.sanderson@oregonstate.edu](mailto:rebecca.sanderson@oregonstate.edu).

**Roomie Matching**

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students with a "roommate matching service," allowing them to handpick their roommates online if they decide to live on campus.

Through the OSU service, roommates will be matched using a software program known as "The Roommate Network," which was developed internally by UHDS professional and student staff. "We hope to alleviate some of the typical freshman anxiety by giving incoming students greater control in selecting and meeting their roommate before school begins," said Eric Hansen, assistant director for UHDS. "We believe giving the students the tools to select their roommate will help make their transition to college—and their new living space—much easier."

For more information about this program contact Eric Hansen, assistant director of UHDS at 737-7708.

on the whole satisfied with the services offered. In every area we exceed minimum in user service demand. The *library as place*, which includes questions on the comfort and suitability of the facility for study and learning, exceeds even the desired level. Frequency of usage of the library and its resources is high. Over half of every user group reported that they visit the library at least once a week with about 20% reporting daily use of resources on the library premises. Use of the resources provided by the library via the library website is used most by graduate students with over half reporting that use at least once per week. Although all groups reported using Yahoo or Google or other non-library gateways for information, faculty and undergraduates are equal in high daily use of these search engines.

The 2001 and 2003 surveys, reported less than minimum levels of collections by OSU graduate students and faculty. For both groups, the printed library material and the print and electronic journal collections were less than minimally required. Comparisons of levels of collections reported at other academic institutions showed below minimal rates by the same groups. Some of the comparator institutions have collections twice the size of OSU and yet had the same low rating by their graduate students and faculty.

OSU is no less concerned by the dissatisfaction of its students but the rating indicated in the large scale reports a problem or condition that is not specific to OSU. There is considerable evidence that collections of university libraries have eroded during the past decade as the result of high inflation rates for periodical collections and the cuts to higher education. It is also true that quantity of information has expanded with greater access through the internet and other web-based commercially produced databases. With this information and by placing the library's assessment in a greater context, we were able to understand our assessments more clearly and consider other explanations for

lower ratings.

OSU administers other large scale surveys that provide insights in the overall satisfaction and quality of services on campus. Such surveys outside of the unit's main service area provide context as well an additional check on the unit's survey. One such survey is YOUR FIRST COLLEGE YEAR. The Division of Student Affairs recently released the 2003 YOUR FIRST COLLEGE YEAR (YFCY) survey. This survey provides a profile of freshmen as well as the social and academic experience of the first college year. The library was able to take advantage of the opportunity of the YFCY survey by placing questions relating to library research instruction and overall satisfaction with the services at the library. The findings of the library questions in this survey corroborate the results of the LibQual+ survey, providing the library with an assessment by a specific group of users. The information in the YFCY regarding the student need for greater interaction with faculty and the anxieties of first year students about the demands of college will be used in the library as it seeks to differentiate the needs of each user group.

In summary, large scale surveys provide the context for the best estimates possible for assessment of services by the general population of users. At the same



time, these surveys can provide more specific information for subgroups of the population. By taking advantage of the administration of general surveys from other areas of campus, the library has obtained additional supporting data for its surveys. The general information from the YFCY will

inform our service programs to undergraduates to address specific needs of this group as they adjust to college life. With the interest in assessment on every campus, it will be increasingly more important to coordinate large scale survey efforts so that our students aren't "over surveyed."