

COUNCIL OF UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN LIBRARIES (CUWL)

# University of Wisconsin System Libraries: Report On Library User Experiences

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## Libqual Survey Qualitative Assessment

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CUWL report on UW System campus library users, based on a systematic analysis of the Libqual+ User Survey comments collected in Spring 2008.

# Council of University of Wisconsin Libraries (CUWL)

## Report on Library User Experiences - Executive Summary 2008-2009

### Introduction

The primary objective of this report is to provide insightful and meaningful data, based entirely upon user feedback, which informs library administrative decisions supporting users. It is hoped that through this preliminary analysis, innovative outcomes will be unearthed reflective of users' concerns and needs. The findings are presented in such a manner as to be applicable to the practical and fundamental work of the academic library, locally, collaboratively and statewide. It is intended that the findings inspire further assessment and evaluation planning that cultivates a system wide standard of excellence in library services and resources, regardless of campus.

### Overview

In the spring 2008, twelve UW System campuses and the UW College System libraries participated in a collaborative effort to assess user's opinion about library service quality using the Libqual+ User Survey. This report presents findings of UW System campus library users, based on a systematic analysis of the Libqual+ User Survey comments. The comments represent the qualitative data component of the survey. The quantitative survey results were previously reported to each campus library directly by Libqual+, referred to as Notebooks. Libqual+ is one method of assessing user 'perception of library 'service quality satisfaction' and experiences with academic libraries. The survey structures data around 'service quality dimensions' (i.e. Affect of Service; Information Control; and Library as Place). Each user comment has been analyzed and coded based upon the structure of these themes and the comment tone (e.g. positive, critical or neutral, etc.). Extraneous comments were separately grouped as 'Other', requiring closer review and analysis (e.g. survey instrument, suggestions). The Appendix should be referenced for a comprehensive operational definition of each dimension and the method of analysis.

Each campus survey requested users to select a discipline affiliation based upon the campus academic structure. The variation in disciplines and programs across system campuses required restructuring for the purpose of a system analysis versus a campus level view. The campus discipline areas were standardized according to the UW System Curricular Area Code Table. The Curricular Area Codes is *a systemwide coding structure that provides common identifiers for each curricular area offered by each campus*. The discipline areas include: Law and Medical School; Social and Behavioral Sciences; Humanities; Engineering and Physical Sciences; Agricultural and Life Sciences; Non-Clinical Health Sciences; Clinical Health Sciences; and Prorated – All Areas. The results of this analysis are beneficial in

determining further assessment measures that can inform library administrative decisions and ultimate service implementation. In addition to performing alternative assessment and evaluation measures, existing campus data should be reviewed to complete the picture of the impact library services, resources, and decisions have upon the user's academic experiences.

## General Findings

The following summary presents a birds-eye view of library user feedback based upon the Libqual+ dimensions interpreted as public services, collection information resources and systems, and library spaces. Over 3300 faculty, graduate, undergraduates and staff provided comments in response to the survey. Specifically, respondents included: 423 faculty, 396 graduates, 2372 undergraduates, and 172 staff (e.g. instructional staff and other).

**Public services (Affect of Service)** is very significant to our users, comments frequently included very specific recollection of service interaction in person, both favorably and not. Overall, users expressed exceptionally positive views of library staff and public services. However, a significant amount of comments identified student employees, distinct from 'professional' staff, as demonstrating negative customer service behaviors, and or unprepared to help users with research assistance. This issue of customer service was very pronounced by all user groups, across all campuses, but variations do exist indicating unique problems among professional and /or student staff on some individual campuses. There were numerous accounts describing the impact of 'professional' reference service on users research needs. Regardless of the mode in which resources are accessed, users expect knowledgeable and courteous staff assistance at the point of need.

Faculty and undergraduates cited the value of information literacy sessions, and expressed desire for expanded sessions to support faculty and improve research skills of students. Often faculty expressed interest in receiving, and appreciation for, liaison services to remain aware of library services and help in developing student's information literacy skills. Undergraduates as well cited the value of their experiences, and encouraged promoting library services in diverse ways, and working to ensure all students take library information literacy sessions early in their academic careers. Undergraduates made notable comments about the need to enhance library marketing efforts and strategies, perhaps using students.

**Collection, information resources and systems** comments were mapped to the dimension Information Control. User comments were not inordinate with peer academic libraries nationwide. User concerns included seeking 'current' collections, ready access to online journals and full-text, subject specific collection enhancements, and concerns about the complicated search process via library Websites and search engines. Although, Inter-Library Loan (ILL) services were commonly cited as an appreciated benefit by faculty and graduate students in absence of a comprehensive collection, requests for direct online access was predominate among respondents. ILL and Universal Borrowing (UB) was viewed more as a treatment (e.g. band-aid effect), rather than a cure. The library Website was a prominent issue as well, most comments focused upon the barrier that it poses to identifying and retrieving relevant results. The organization, navigational features, and strict search structures of the article databases and catalogs were repeatedly cited as impediments to research. It seemed as those

users don't view the Website as distinct from online catalogs or article database. There were frequent comparisons to the simplified and intuitive nature of Google's search engine. These comments imply a desire for obtaining information sources, *not* the search experience, which in numerous cases seemed to be contrary to their ultimate academic need – access to information.

Respondents across all user groups expressed interest in comprehensive online access to full-text resources held throughout the UW System. A critical issue cited by faculty was the adverse impact limited collection resources have upon their research advancement, particularly in the sciences. Such system wide access to online resources would enable faculty and researchers to maximize opportunities for excellence in academic, instructional, and focused research.

**Library spaces**, was the theme that generated the most pronounced user comments for UW system campus libraries. This dimension included all aspects of the physical building (e.g. hours, access, layout, infrastructure, rooms, climate, and aesthetics), hardware/equipment related issues and overall library environment. The resounding subjects were designated group study spaces equipped with computer access; food and drink service; distinct individual quiet study spaces, and associated issues of 'enforced' noise level policies. It is believed that the combined timing of the survey and the characteristics of the spring academic semester, attributed to the concentration in critical comments about study spaces, and noise policies. Undergraduates wanted more computers, and designated stations to enable quick access and printing (i.e. PC vs. kiosks). A key issue also was the expectation of 'enforced' noise 'policies', cell phone usage, and social networking behavior (MySpace) on library owned computers. Undergraduates and graduate students voiced expectations of such policies and that staff visually uphold policies.

Another prominent issue was expanded library hours, particularly during critical campus exam periods and 'after hours'. Students expressed concern about the impact limited library hours had on their academic needs. This was a particular issue among self-identified 'non-traditional', 'distance education' and 'returning adult' students that work and expect access during evening and extended weekend hours. Campuses that have a higher percentage of commuter students and non-traditional students received numerous complaints and requests for expanded service hours for study spaces, but also expanded online access to full-text materials.

While observing user comments dispersing along clear themes, there were other aspects of respondents' experiences that may require more indebt analysis. One such issue in need of further exploration is service equity for distance, online program, and commuter students in light of the expansion in virtual academic programs.

There was a notable degree of strong criticism about the Libqual+ survey instrument and questions about the validity of the outcome, difficulty in answering the questions that seemed repetitious and unclear. Some respondents noted that the constraints of the instrument resulted in their refusal, or inability, to complete the survey, or entering data just to get to the comment section. These user comments should be carefully reviewed prior to implementing future survey instruments. Such comments have been coded and placed in the 'Other' theme group for review.

Upon careful review of all comments by user group, theme, and campus affiliation, you may observe specific issues and frequencies worth further analysis at a local level. It is imperative that efforts are made to connect with any user that provided contact information, for example, various faculty expressed an interest in talking with the library concerning collection issues.

## Notes

Libqual+ <http://www.libqual.org/>

University of Wisconsin Central Data Request –Code Book. Curricular Area Codes Table

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## SUPPLEMENT

### Method of Analysis

Content Analysis is the assessment method that was used to analysis the user comment data. This quantitative research method involves a systematic review, analysis and coding of qualitative data to identify patterns, frequencies and characteristics based upon keywords within the data source.

### Operating Definition of Themes

#### Affect of Service Theme

Affect of Service is interpreted as the dimension that represents library public services, that is direct interaction or engagement with users, established to serve user needs and informed by policy (whether formal or general operating procedures). Any comments concerning library administration are included in this area. The Administrative category represents comments associated with library policy, marketing and communication services, and as well as security issues. The Public Service category includes direct engagement with users via public service points in and through library services, this includes: personnel located in the library; providers of service on behalf of the library; and the representation of the library to users. Public service points include: reference, instruction, computer lab, circulation and liaison outreach.

#### Information Control Theme

Information Control broadly concerns information resources in all forms, and means of facilitating access. The associated comments address user access to collection resources that are directly impacted by operational resources (e.g. budget, applications, equipment), and internal service processes. The processes and resources are viewed as including technical services and collection management. Technical and access services includes: cataloging; inter-library loan (ILL); Universal Borrowing (UB); circulation; library Website(s); preservation and restoration; and equipment used to access and handle resources maintained by the library (e.g. microfilm, readers, DVDs, etc.). The collection management addressed comments specific to collection resources, regardless of format

(journals, databases, monographs, digital) and physical location or access mode (i.e. digital, Internet, off-site shelving, archives).

### **Library as Place Theme**

Library As Place is the dimension that represents environmental aspects of the library, including: facilities; infrastructure; study spaces; aesthetics; signage; technical hardware (e.g. printers, copiers, scanners, computers); hours of operation; and safety issues. User comments referencing broad environment or infrastructural aspects of libraries were subsequently coded and included in this section.

### **Other Non-categorized Comments**

All remaining user comments that did not speak specifically to the defined three themes, were placed in this category. Examples include comments about the survey and non-library users, or specific suggestions.