Boise State University
ScholarWorks

Library Faculty Publications and Presentations | The Albertsons Library

10-1-2009

Assess, Improve, and Share: Using LibQUAL+TM to Provide a Quick and Easy Assessment for Accreditors, Administrators, and Users

Eric Forte
Boise State University

The Idaho Librarian, Vol 59, No 2 (2009)

Assess, Improve, and Share: Using LibQUAL+TM to Provide a Quick and Easy Assessment for Accreditors, Administrators, and Users

by Eric Forte

Abstract

Assessment in academic libraries is more important than ever as we strive to satisfy users, administrators and accreditation agencies, and present data to inform ongoing and future strategic directions. LibQUAL+TM yields a substantive set of quantitative and qualitative data that is relatively fast and easy to analyze, and is especially useful when significant skills and time to conduct meaningful assessment may not be present, such as in smaller academic libraries. Communicating the results and responses of assessment to stakeholders is a vital aspect of assessment and may in itself be indicative of the likelihood to enact positive change based on the data. This article surveys the landscape of LibQUAL+TM users' results reporting and describes a specific strategy to quickly summarize data and articulate results and responses to stakeholders.

Introduction

A culture of assessment is becoming ingrained in academic libraries of all sizes (Lakos and Phipps 2004). Whether satisfying our users, administrators, or accreditation agencies, libraries are rightly investing in tools to measure, analyze, and communicate user feedback in order to improve our operations in a fast-changing library culture.

Yet academic libraries—especially smaller ones—may not have staff versed in either qualitative or quantitative assessment measures. Further, obtaining this expertise can be time-consuming and costly, and especially difficult to nurture in smaller academic libraries with little flexibility in job duties. This is where LibQUAL+TM is remarkably useful. With a relatively small investment of time and money, libraries of all sizes can gather substantive quantitative and qualitative data, and with minimal data analysis expertise, interpret that data, act on the data to make improvements, and report on the resulting assessment and improvement process easily and effectively.

This article aims to lay out a quick, effective, and meaningful assessment and reporting strategy for academic libraries of all sizes using LibQUAL+TM, and suggests that writing and sharing the public report may be a key indicator of positive outcomes to the assessment process.

Background and Literature Review

Assessment in Libraries

There are many established and emerging methods of assessment in libraries and of library services, most of them well-documented. We can analyze local data on library use, such as circulation and reference statistics; conduct surveys; conduct focus groups or interviews; appoint student and/or faculty advisory panels; capture complaints and other feedback; conduct usability and wayfinding tests; or conduct various observational, anthropological, and ethnographic research[1].

Stein (2008) summarizes nine different evaluative methods, discussing pros and cons, as well as the effort, expertise, and

impact involved in each method. A simpler overview of assessment methods used in libraries is presented in Alemna (1999). For further resources about assessment in libraries, see Wright's (2007) broad-ranging assessment bibliography. Meanwhile, Radford's (2008) volume summarizes library research on all topics, from services to collections and assessment. Understanding these broader trends is a vital precursor to understanding and interpreting the local manifestations and variations of these trends as learned via LibQUAL+TM.

Ideally, a library might utilize all nine methods as part of their assessment efforts. Yet for the majority of academic libraries this would require an often unrealistic—and unavailable—commitment of time and resources.

LibQUAL+TM

LibQUAL+TM is a standardized survey of user experiences with library services. It is a "total market survey": it assesses users' perceptions of nearly all aspects of the library, and returns both quantitative *and* qualitative results, all via a single assessment tool. Developed and administered under the auspices of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL), it has been used at over one thousand libraries and provides detailed data on user perceptions and desires about their library[2].

LibQUAL+TM is made richer by its use of gap analysis. Users don't simply rate their satisfaction with a particular library service factor, they also offer a measure of each factor's value. So, for instance, not only might a library find out that users are dissatisfied with some service—say, group spaces, or journal collections—they can also see which services are most important to users, and prioritize responses accordingly.

A nice summary of the origins and nature of LibQUAL+TM from its founders can be reviewed in Cook (2001). Saunders (2007) offers a very useful current assessment of LibQUAL+TM, looking back over its first six years and offering an overview of its pros and cons up to now.

The survey itself, including all technical aspects, is managed by ARL/LibQUAL+TM. For the most part, libraries need only identify the pool of respondents, send out a link to the survey, advertise and market the survey, and wait for the packaged reports to come back from LibQUAL+TM. At Boise State University we sent the survey via email to all faculty and asked campus statisticians and IT experts to pull out a sample of student email addresses from the campus database and sent the link to those students. A smaller academic library may simplify matters by sending it out to all students.

LibQUAL+TM asks respondents to rate twenty-two factors related to library service, collections, and space. These factors are included in every participating library survey. Additionally, libraries may choose five optional 'local' factors (which we did at Boise State). For each factor, respondents rate, on a scale of 1-9 (9 being the highest):

1. their *minimum* level of acceptable service;
2. their *perceived* level of service, as currently provided; and
3. their *desired* level of service.

The difference between minimum and perceived is dubbed the "adequacy gap," while the difference between desired and perceived is dubbed the "superiority gap. "

The results provide clues about how the library measures up against users' priorities, how the library is performing compared to expectations and desires, and where improvements are desired. By comparing results from various iterations of LibQUAL+TM in different years, a library can also gain insights into changing user perceptions over time. Further, we can learn from responses to LibQUAL+TM surveys at many of our peer institutions; such results are available to those who purchase LibQUAL+TM via their Management Center. Finally, LibQUAL+TM also includes space for respondents to make qualitative comments. So a single survey instrument can be used to offer insight into nearly all aspects of the library's operations, and yield both quantitative and qualitative data. The survey can conceivably be justified as a complete assessment program in and of itself, if resources for other assessment instruments are not available.

There are a number of articles discussing libraries' implementation and use of LibQUAL+TM and its results. A special issue of *Performance Measurement and Metrics* titled "The Maturation of Assessment in Academic Libraries: the Role of LibQUAL" featured articles discussing its use at non-ARL libraries such as Miami University (Sessions, Schenck and Shrimplin 2002) and Washburn University (Dole 2002). Similarly, a special issue of the *Journal of Library Administration*,

simultaneously published as a monograph (Heath, Kyrillidou and Askew 2004), also featured a number of articles detailing use of LibQUAL+TM. Of particular relevance to this paper are those about the use of LibQUAL+TM in strategic planning at an ARL library such as the University of Florida (Shorb and Driscoll 2004) and the somewhat smaller library of Bowling Green (Haricombe and Boettcher 2004). Among more recent LibQUAL+TM articles, Hoseth (2007) is notable for its practical advice, including the need to report results and outcomes to users, constituents, and peers.

Does Public Result Reporting in Itself Suggest Success?

An ancillary question relates to what, if anything might be inferred about a library's perceived adequacy simply by publicly reporting their LibQUAL+TM results. A small sample of libraries who administered LibQUAL+TM from 2006-2008 suggests the possibility that a public accounting of results *is in itself indicative* of a higher overall adequacy perception. This sample consisted of 102 U.S. libraries, none of which are members of the Association for Research Libraries. Libraries whose LibQUAL+TM results were presented on a public Web page—whether the complete notebook of results or an institution-prepared summary—had average adequacy scores for faculty, undergraduates, and graduates that were two-tenths higher than those that had not posted their results publicly. The correlation was stronger for those with lower adequacy scores. Out of the forty libraries with average adequacy scores *lower* than 0.3, six have public results, while thirty-four have no mention of the survey. Of those libraries with scores *higher* than 0.3, twenty-eight have public results, compared to thirty-four without (Table 1). Overall, the higher the overall adequacy scores, the higher the likelihood that at least a summary of LibQUAL+TM results could be found for public access on the library's Web site. Of course, the actual trend is more nuanced: higher-scoring libraries have little correlation between their scores and whether or not they report the results publicly. Lower-scoring libraries are much less likely to report results, however.

Table 1: Libraries reporting LibQUAL+ results on their public web sites

n=102

	Yes, Public Results	No Public results
All Libraries	34	68
Adequacy >.30	28	34
Adequacy <.30	6	34

	Avg. Adequacy	Med. Adequacy
Yes Public Results	0.52	0.54
No Public results	0.32	0.31

Correlation: average adequacy and any public results	
Multiple R	0.317
R squared	0.1
Standard error	0.288

Details on public reporting	
Libraries with any public results:	34 of 102
Libraries with complete notebooks:	21 of 102
Libraries with public description of actions taken in response to results:	16 of 102

Interestingly, the trend exists despite the fact that there are no benchmarks for what might be considered 'good' or 'bad' adequacy scores using LibQUAL+TM. In fact, such benchmarks would go directly against the intent of the survey itself,

which purposely does not measure actual performance but only perceived performance. Yet even lacking norms, libraries whose scores tended to be lower are less likely to share that information publicly.

While the reasons for openly communicating (or not communicating) patron feedback to a library's users and stakeholders has not been explored in this context, clues may be found in the psychology, business, and information technology literature. Might a library fear that poor assessment results could have negative consequences from campus administration, and therefore be less likely to share? Information, if it is perceived to be negative, is less likely to be communicated to an "upward" power in a relationship (Cohen 1958). Yet even lacking concrete rewards or punishments for sharing negative information, individuals have a tendency not to share information if they believe its receipt could be simply unpleasant (Rosen and Tesser 1970). All of this might not be particularly significant to libraries and their sharing of feedback if not for the potential that *not* sharing perceived negative information could lead to further, future detrimental effects on the organization (Keil and Robcy 1999).

Failure to make open accounting of feedback perceived to be negative may increase the likelihood of future negatively perceived performance. If the potential exists that not sharing negative patron feedback may indicate future negative performance (and simply sharing negative feedback indicates better future performance), libraries should strongly consider making public reports of their assessment outcomes. This stands regardless of any perceived successes or failures of the services assessed. Hopefully a more public airing of results increases the likelihood of positive responses inspired by the survey results.

Gathering and Presenting the Data

Before preparing results for the public at Boise State University, we gathered key data in an easy-to-read format. LibQUAL+™ offers reports in SPSS or excel/csv formats. These reports include line-by-line (anonymous) results for each respondent. While SPSS and statistical skills are never a bad thing for libraries, our goal was to present a quick and easy assessment report to key stakeholders, from students to accreditors. So we used LibQUAL+™ Analytics (accessible to participants) and pulled our data from the Institutional Explorer, which contains data and charts for the numerous LibQUAL+™ participants who allow their data to be made available[3]. We downloaded our summary data for each of our key groups (undergraduate, graduate, and faculty). As seen in **Appendix 3**, for our working files we have taken the scores for these three groups and reordered them five different ways, making categories in order to easily communicate useful information to our constituents:

1. By the highest minimum score, which we dubbed "What Library Services Are Most Important?"
2. By the highest perceived score, which we dubbed "What Library Services Do We Do Best?"
3. By the largest adequacy gaps, which we dubbed "What Do We Need To Work On?"
4. By changes in our scores between our 2006 and 2008 surveys, which we dubbed "What's Improved Since 2006?"
5. By anonymous peer comparisons, which we dub "How Do We Compare?"

These five factors form the basis of our reporting and are presented with the outside reader in mind. While we chose to focus on these five for simplicity, we do occasionally make some reference to the data not covered above as appropriate or interesting.

Communicating with Campus Administrators, Accreditors, and Users

To form the basis of communicating the results of LibQUAL+™ and the tangible outcomes of the assessment effort, we write a simple report. This public report will begin with some housekeeping: a brief summary of the nature of LibQUAL+™ and its implementation at your library, much like the description above[4]. Further, an audience familiar with looking at statistical data will appreciate a few notes about the response rate. These notes need not be very detailed or rigorous. In our report, we first introduce LibQUAL+™, then followed with a brief section addressing respondents and response rate.

After this introductory material, we move on to the heart of the report: the sections describing the results based on the five factors outlined above. While **Appendix 3**'s tables were for our internal use only and informed writing the report, each section of the report is complemented by brief summary tables as seen in **Appendix 1**[5].

Below is an example of how we presented the first of the five sections listed above, namely the "What Library Services are

Most Important?" section. Like each of the other four results sections, this section is anchored by one of the summary data tables (see **Appendix 1**). We then offer a brief overview, concise summary of the results by key group (faculty, graduate, and undergraduate), and a little contextual analysis:

WHAT LIBRARY SERVICES ARE MOST IMPORTANT?

To interpret what is most important to the Boise State University community, we looked at which factors received the highest *minimum* and highest *desired* ratings, as summarized in Table 1. Results were returned for the university as a whole, as well as by constituent group. However, since the needs of faculty, undergraduates, and graduate students are quite divergent, it is more useful to look at these stakeholder groups separately.

Faculty focused on information access and control. Their top priorities are: remote access to materials; journal collections; a useful library Web site; electronic information sources; and good access tools. Most customer-service factors ranked as somewhat less important, while factors relating to the physical facility were least important to them. For faculty, there was generally a close alignment between the items with the highest *minimum* ratings and those with the highest *desired* ratings.

Undergraduates, in contrast, show little overlap between their highest *minimum* and highest *desired* items. At minimum, they want modern equipment, as might be expected of a tech-savvy generation. The library's role as a computing facility may also come into play here. They also want courteous, willing, and knowledgeable library staff. Their desires, on the other hand, are weighted towards information access and equipment, especially the ability to locate information on their own.

Graduates demonstrate characteristics of both faculty and undergraduates: their top minimum priorities are related to access and information (Web site, tools to access, etc.), but dependable and knowledgeable service are also important. Their top desired priorities are generally similar to their minimum priorities, but with more focus on information over service.

Nationwide, LibQUAL+™responses are nearly identical to those of Boise State University in terms of priorities. A study of responses (Thompson, Kyrillidou and Cook 2008) from some 38,000 faculty yielded the same top five items and the same bottom three items, with variations in the exact order. The same study included over 136,000 undergraduate responses, of which the top four items matched those of Boise State undergraduates. The fifth priority nationally was journal collections, while at Boise State it was "making information easily accessible for independent use."

Comparing the 2008 Boise State survey to the 2006 survey, faculty placed increased importance on remote access, as well as on confidence-inspiring and willing customer service. The items that fell the most in importance for faculty are printed materials and (interestingly) *courteous* service. While the library's physical space was already the faculty's lowest priority in 2006, its importance fell further in 2008. Undergraduate desires have changed very little from 2006 to 2008, except that for them, too, items related to group physical space have fallen in importance.

The rest of the reporting of results is straightforward: we simply repeat the above outline for each of the next three sections. So our second section begins:

WHAT LIBRARY SERVICES DO WE DO BEST?

To analyze our perceived strengths and weaknesses, we looked at the perceived *current* levels for each factor, with highest and lowest rankings summarized in Table 2.

This section goes on to offer analysis in style similar to the first section above, with concise summaries of the results by key group (faculty, graduate, and undergraduate), and contextual analysis. We follow with our third section, which begins:

WHAT DO WE NEED TO WORK ON?

This section is based on the biggest gaps in 'adequacy,' interpreted as the difference between *minimum* and perceived *current* levels, summarized in Table 3. These gaps closely mirror the biggest gaps in

'superiority,' or the difference between *desired* and perceived *current* levels. Information-related factors had the poorest showing in all three groups.

Likewise, our fourth section begins:

WHAT'S IMPROVED?
This section looks at gains in adequacy from the 2006 survey to the 2008 survey, based on *current perceived* levels for each factor, summarized in Table 4. These results can be particularly interesting.

In each case we go on to offer similar reporting and analysis relevant to the section. These first four sections, therefore, summarize what patrons want, what they think we do well, and where the gaps are between what they want and what we provide. It is vital to lay out both the library's successes, along with the challenges that lie ahead. All in all, the data allows a surprisingly broad assessment and discussion of the library's performance, easily communicated in a short report.

Discussing Peers

One of LibQUAL+TM's greatest assets when communicating assessment results to administrators and accreditors is the ability to compare results with other institutions. These comparisons are guided by two key factors per the LibQUAL+TM agreement for using other institution's data: the need to keep other library's data completely confidential, and the reminder that we are only comparing user perceptions of our services, and can therefore not make value judgments in regards to actual performance. At Boise State we used a list of peers that will remain confidential for this paper, as for our report. Institutions were identified with a nomenclature of Institution A, Institution B, and so on (see **Appendix 2**). In our case, the comparisons—whether or not they can be said to reflect reality rather than only perceptions of that reality—made us look good, so we were happy to use them. For our public report, this section begins as follows:

HOW DO WE COMPARE?
Nine peer libraries (identified in several ways) have completed LibQUAL+TM surveys over last three years and made their data available on a confidential basis. Three of these peers repeated LibQUAL+TM surveys during this period, for a total of 14-15 survey instances, including our own (one library did not survey faculty or graduate students in their 2008 survey). An important caveat in comparing LibQUAL+TM results is that we are comparing *perceptions* rather than objective criteria.

FACULTY PEER SUMMARY:
Boise State's 2006 LibQUAL+TM instance had the most faculty responses of all peer surveys, while the 2008 response totals ranked 7th out of 14. (This pattern is typical; libraries often experience lower faculty response rates in subsequent surveys).

In overall adequacy, Boise State's 2008 faculty scores were a close second behind Library A, based on perceptions. Our 2008 results were actually the highest rated for service and library as place (the latter by a wide margin), but Library A scored much better on information, enough to propel it to the highest overall score.

In information control, which includes collections and access tools, Boise State's 2008 results ranked 4th out of 14. In fact, the three institutions above us were the only peers whose faculty rated their information controls as even meeting *minimum* levels, reflective of nationwide findings of faculty's nearly insatiable appetite for information[2]. Boise State did improve markedly from 2006, however, when we ranked 10th out of 14.

In the service categories, not only was 2008 Boise State ranked highest, it showed a marked improvement from 2006 as well, when it ranked 7th out of 14.

Of the two other schools with repeated faculty surveys, Library B made almost no progress from 2006 to 2008 and remains below faculty's minimum standards in overall performance. Library C actually saw a decline of several tenths from 2006 to 2007, sliding below minimum overall standards.

The section continues with similar peer analysis for the undergraduate results and the graduate results.

LibQUAL Comments

Beyond the peer data, the next vital aspect of LibQUAL+™ is its qualitative comments. These comments can be analyzed (whether by hand or with statistical text analysis software) to present further trends and they should be summarized and reported on. If a library is fortunate, such comments will (1) generally corroborate the quantitative data; (2) provide details and deeper insight into the quantitative data; and (3) provide insights that did *not* surface in the quantitative data. Each of these goals is vital as part of assessment and to communicate with stakeholders. For our report, we summarized and presented the comments as follows:

> **LIBQUAL+TM COMMENTS**
>
> The LibQUAL+™ survey also includes space for respondents to make qualitative comments. About half of all survey respondents included comments (of undergraduates, 313 responded, and 141 included comments; graduates 53/27; faculty 107/60). Of those that did comment, approaching half of all comments in each category were either praise or comments along the lines of "nothing to add." That still leaves some 100 comments that included concrete suggestions or complaints.
>
> Among **undergraduates**, there were three primary themes in comments: noise in the library, the availability of computers, and the friendliness of staff. Many undergraduates commented on excessive noise and cell phone use in the library. In LibQUAL+™, undergraduates considered "quiet space for individual activities" pretty adequate—it was the 8th highest ranked out of 27 categories for most adequate service. One might surmise, however, that when excessive noise is a problem, it is particularly immediate and annoying, and therefore likely to inspire later comment. The second main theme was the desire for more computers. While "modern equipment that lets me easily access needed information" was also rated as adequate, it is the single most important item for undergraduates; to see it stressed again in comments only reaffirms the importance of our computing equipment. The final oft-mentioned theme by undergraduates was rudeness of staff. Like noise, this could be an issue that, when it occurs, is particularly galling. While service factors are rated highly in LibQUAL+™, the two lowest rated of the eight customer service categories may be those most closely related to the theme of rudeness: "employees who are consistently courteous" and "employees who deal with users in a caring fashion."
>
> Undergraduates also commented several times about a desire for more group study spaces, despite group spaces being among the most adequate library services according to undergraduates in LibQUAL+™. Further, there were several comments about the difficulty in using online access tools, corroborated in LibQUAL+™ by low adequacy scores for "ease of using library's online article indexes", "easy-to-use access tools that allow me to find things on my own", and "making information easily accessible for independent use." (In fact, these were the three least adequate measures in the entire library according to undergraduates).
>
> The small size of the **graduate** sample yielded an equally small number of comments. Still, multiple graduate students reiterated undergraduate frustrations with online access tools, which is in line with grads ranking of "ease of using library's online article indexes" as our least adequate service; graduates also anticipated faculty by commenting on the need for more journals and resources ("print and/or electronic journal collections I require for my work" being their second lowest rated item for adequacy).
>
> **Faculty** comments, meanwhile, were very focused on the need for more journals and resources, which is also clear from their ranking of "print and/or electronic journal collections I require for my work" and "the electronic information resources I need" as our least adequate services in LibQUAL+™. Faculty also remarked several times on the customer service issues of rudeness that undergraduates also addressed.

Responses to LibQUAL+™: Using the Results to Make Improvements and Inform Strategic Planning

Finally, we must respond to what we learned, and communicate and document the *tangible outcomes* from LibQUAL+™. This is *the most important part* of the report. Without clear action based on what we learn, assessment isn't assessment. Improvements and a course of action based on data are very important to administrators and accreditors. The suggestion above that a public report is an indicator of future success is depending largely on the assumption that a public report makes efforts to use the results to make improvements more likely to occur.

While internal documents have more details, we created a section on the public report with which to publicly summarize our responses and initiatives based on our results. Of the small sample of 102 libraries and their public presentation of their LibQUAL+™ results, only sixteen actually outlined their responses to what they learned (publicly). Unsurprisingly, these sixteen were among the highest scorers in the sample, further evidence that the library that airs results is more likely to be perceived as successful. Here, then, is how we presented our "Next Steps:"

> **WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?**
>
> Respondents to the LibQUAL+™ survey provided a great deal of information on what is important to them, what we do best, and what we need to improve. In general terms, collections and information access are highly important to all user groups, but are also the areas perceived as least adequate. Respondents generally think we do well on customer service and are satisfied with the physical facility.
>
> The Library has made significant gains in providing electronic databases and journals since 2006, as reflected in faculty results from the 2006 and 2008 surveys. Nevertheless, electronic resources and journal collections are still rated as inadequate by faculty. As noted above, trends suggest that this is a somewhat insatiable need; nonetheless, LibQUAL+™ scores from 2006 to 2008 also suggest that faculty recognize and value the priority we have placed on expanding our journal collections and other electronic resources. While the budget climate has recently become challenging, we will make it a priority to retain the recent gains we have made and strategically look for ways to expand holdings and access even further.
>
> The online and electronic tools needed to access information are consistently seen as inadequate by many users. This is an area we are already tackling. We are working to improve the Library's website, provide better searching capabilities, overhaul our catalog interface, and provide more powerful and intuitive access tools to both identify and use our many databases. The clear message of deficiency reported by LibQUAL+™ has made this area a particular priority.
>
> In some fields, the print collection is still highly valued, but rated as inadequate. Since sample sizes shrink quickly when broken down by discipline, we will need to follow up with faculty members and verify these results. With better data, it may be possible to more carefully target purchases of new print materials and meet the needs of faculty and students.
>
> We have also begun to address undergraduate desires for more and better computing. We have begun by adding an additional 20 workstations, and are identifying workstations to upgrade.
>
> Regarding some of the items that came out in undergraduate comments but were not necessarily so visible in the regular LibQUAL+™ rankings… while at the moment we have not made any plans to expand the official quiet space in the library (floors 3-4 are quiet, 1-2 are not), we have stepped up enforcement, and are making hourly rounds to identify and educate users who are making excessive noise in quiet spaces. Further, our separate silent study room opened concurrently with the survey; perhaps it will have a positive impact.
>
> We continue to stress friendly customer service among all of our front-line personnel, and have conducted targeted training in an effort to improve customer service. While we've done some more comprehensive training via online courses, we are watching for further opportunities for customer service training.
>
> Albertsons Library has participated in the ARL Assessment Program to further our assessment understanding and expertise, highlighted by a two day visit from ARL assessment experts to discuss current assessment practices and future directions.

All of our LibQUAL+TM results and comments are taken along with our other varied input to establish an environment of continuous assessment and improvement.

Final Touches: Getting the Results to the Stakeholders

We added an Executive Summary onto the front of the report. Concise as the report is, it's still long enough that many administrators might wish for a brief summary. Here, then, is our Executive Summary:

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Results from the wide-ranging LibQUAL+TM survey administered at Boise State University in Spring 2008 reveal general satisfaction with library services. Faculty value information sources most highly, and consider current information resources to be less than adequate, although much improved from the previous survey in 2006. They rate customer service as more than adequate, and are generally not as interested in the library's physical space. Online access tools are also seen as somewhat inadequate. Nonetheless, they see improvement in each of the 27 categories since 2006. Their qualitative comments also express the need for more information resources, better access tools, and in some specific areas, better customer service.

Undergraduates value modern equipment and service, and score the library highly on both measures. Undergraduate ratings in general are slightly up from 2006. They rate nothing as less than adequate, but see online access tools to have the most room for improvement. In qualitative comments, they state the desire for more and better equipment, better quiet study space, and less rude service.

Graduates value access tools and information resources most highly, and consider both to be in need of improvement. They rate customer service and library physical space factors highly.

In comparing LibQUAL+TM responses to those of various peer institutions, Boise State University ranks 3rd out of 15 among undergraduates, 2nd out of 14 among faculty, and 1st out 14 amongst graduates. Our service and library as place measures are ranked extremely well in comparisons; our information resources are less highly ranked, and allow the few others to score higher than us overall.

Based on both the quantitative and qualitative data from LibQUAL+TM, the library is improving our collections, information resources, and our access tools, and is continuing to strive to improve customer service and library space.

Conclusion

Assessment increasingly forms the basis of library strategic planning and of our priorities and performance in general. We must respond clearly and openly to what we learn with tangible, documented actions. Communicating about the results and outcomes of assessment is vital, and a possible indicator of perceived success. But like everything else we do, assessment must be done as efficiently and strategically as possible, and we must assess resources spent on assessment as critically as we assess resources used on our services, collections, and spaces. LibQUAL+TM provides an opportunity to quickly and relatively cheaply assess our services, and more importantly, to present the results of the assessment to key stakeholders.

Notes

1. Customer service guru A. Parasuraman summarizes key strategies in: P A. Parasuraman. The SERVQUAL Model: Its Evolution And Current Status. (2000), presented at ARL Symposium on Measuring Service Quality, Washington, D.C. SERVQUAL was a key inspiration for LibQUAL+.
2. "About LibQUAL+" provides an overview and history of LibQUAL+. Available at: **http://www.libqual.org/About/index.cfm**.
3. Available to LibQUAL+TM users at **http://www.libqual.org/Manage/index.cfm** (requires login).
4. The complete text of Boise State University's public report is available at **http://library.boisestate.edu/libqual/2008/libqual2008summary.pdf**.

5. The Boise State University library's Carol Silvers formatted the tables for **Appendix 1** and provided extensive editing and input for the report itself.

Bibliography

Alemna, Anaba A. "Library Evaluation: Some Options for Academic Libraries." *Aslib Proceedings* 51, no. 7 (July/August 1999): 243-46.

Cohen, Arthur. "Upward Communication in Experimentally Created Hierarchies." *Human Relations* 11 (February 1958): 41-53.

Cook, Colleen, Fred Heath, Bryce Thompson, and Russel (Trey) Thompson. "LibQUAL+: Service Quality Assessment in Research Libraries." *IFLA Journal* 27, no. 4 (2001): 264-268.

Dole, Wanda. "LibQUAL+ and the Small Academic Library." *Performance Measurement and Metrics* 3, no. 2 (2002): 85-95.

Haricombe, Lorraine, and Bonna Boettcher. "Using LibQUAL+ Data in Strategic Planning." *Journal of Library Administration* 40, no. 3 (2004): 181-195.

Heath, Fred M., Martha Kyrillidou, and Consuella Askew. *Libraries Act on Their LibQUAL+ Findings.* Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press, 2004.

Hoseth, Amy. "We Did LibQUAL+ - Now What? Practical Suggestions for Maximizing Your Survey Results." *College and Undergraduate Libraries* 14, no. 3 (2007): 75-85.

Keil, Mark, and Daniel Robey. "Turning Around Troubled Software Projects: An Exploratory Study of the Deescalation of Commitment to Failing Courses of Action." *Journal of Management Information Systems* 15, no. 4 (1999): 63-87.

Lakos, Amos, and Shelley Phipps. "Creating a Culture of Assessment: A Catalyst for Organizational Change." *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 4, no. 3 (2004): 345-361.

Radford, Marie L., and Pamela Snelson. *Academic Library Research: Perspectives and Current Trends.* Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2008.

Rosen, S, and A Tesser. "On Reluctance to Communicate Undesireable Information: The Mum Effect." *Sociometry* 33, no. 3 (1970): 253-263.

Saunders, E. Stuart. "The LibQUAL+ Phenomenon: Who Judges Quality?" *Reference & User Services Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (2007): 21-24.

Self, Jim. "Bound for Disappointment: Faculty and Journals at Research Institutions." *ARL Bimonthly Report* no. 257 (April 2008): 7-11.

Sessions, Judith A., Alex Schenck, and Aaron Shrimplin. "LibQUAL+ at Miami University: a Look from Outside ARL." *Performance Measurement and Metrics* 3, no. 2 (2002): 59-67.

Shorb, Stephen, and Lori Driscoll. "LibQUAL+ Meets Strategic Planning at the University of Florida." *Journal of Library Administration* 40, no. 3 (2004): 173-180.

Stein, Merrill, Teresa Edge, John M. Kelley, Dane Hewlett, and James F. Trainer. "Using Continuous Qyality Improvement Methods to Evaluate Library Service Points." *Reference & User Services Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (2008): 78-85.

Thompson, Bruce, Martha Kyrillidou, and Colleen Cook. "Library Users' Service Desires: A LIBQUAL+ Study." *The Library Quarterly* 78, no. 1 (January 2008): 1-18.

Wright, Stephanie, and Lynda S. White. *Library Assessment. SPEC Kit, 303.* Washington, D.C.: Association of Research Libraries, 2007.

Eric Forte is Associate Dean for Public Services at Boise State University's Albertsons Library.

*The Idaho Librarian is a publication of the **Idaho Library Association**.*