**LibQUAL+: Listening to Users**  
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**Background**

The University Libraries of Notre Dame conducted a user survey this past spring along with 167 other libraries across the United States and Canada. This survey, called LibQUAL+, measures library users' perceptions of service quality and identifies gaps between minimum, desired, and perceived levels of library service. By participating in LibQUAL+, we are learning not only how well we measure up to the expectations of our faculty and students but we are also learning how we compare with other institutions in terms of user satisfaction.

Locally, the survey was administered by sending emails to a randomly selected list of 1200 undergraduates, 800 graduate students, and 800 faculty, asking them to complete the survey on the web. 308 undergraduates, 255 graduate students, and 183 faculty completed the web-based survey. The largest percentage of respondents was from the humanities (20.8%) followed by business (17.45%).

The heart of the survey was a set of 25 questions relating to four different aspects of perceived library service quality:

1. Access to information focuses on collection breadth and scope, interlibrary loan services and hours of operation  
2. Affect of service includes all of the customer-service aspects of dealing with library users.  
3. Library as a place seeks to identify users' perceptions of many of the traditional environmental aspects of libraries- quiet place for study, comfortable, inviting, contemplative.  
4. Personal control consists of questions related to the user's ability to find information easily, independently, and remotely.

These service aspects were determined from ARL focus groups discussions to be those characteristics most important for library users. For each question, respondents were asked to provide a number response from 1-9 indicating their minimum acceptable level of service, their desired service level and their perception of actual service provided by the library. All respondents were invited to add any comments they might like (we received 305 written comments).

**Results & Initial Observations**

The University Libraries of Notre Dame results are, for the most part, well above the national averages.
Results showed high levels of satisfaction with the library's "affect of service" dimension, with superior scores in areas such as willingness to help users, consistently courteous and caring staff, and dependability in handling user's service problems. Our lowest scores were in the personal control and access to information dimension.

**Other observations:**

- The results suggest that users may be unaware of what is available by way of services and collections. Improved communication in a variety of forms might be called for.
- We must continue to work on improving the attractiveness and aesthetics of our library facilities. The state of the library building generated many disparaging and unsolicited comments from respondents. Renovations hopefully will address some of these concerns.
- Faculty desire more extensive collections in both print and digital form.
- Faculty responses to personal control questions indicate that they want us to continue to build our digital collections but that they have some difficulty using digital services.
- It is especially important to students and faculty that we improve the accuracy and functionality of our online catalog; reduce the turnaround time to receive interlibrary loan articles, and add to the depth and breadth of our book and journal collections.
- The highest scores for desired level of service are in the Personal Control dimension, indicating that quality of electronic access to information is very important to our patrons, as is the desire to be able to function independently, without assistance and without having to be present physically in the library.
- Users do not have confidence in the reliability of our online catalog, Aleph.
- Users want an easier way to renew and recall books using Aleph.
- Users find our electronic resources difficult to locate and navigate.

**Responding to customer input**

LibQUAL+ is a tool for evaluating service effectiveness from the customer's perspective. It is a tool for listening to users and then acting on the information we receive to improve or provide new services. One way of examining areas of greatest potential for service improvement is to look at those questions that scored highest on the desired level (most important to users) and where perceived service level is below or close to the minimum level of service. These include the following questions:

- Making electronic resources accessible from my home or office
- A library website enabling me to location information on my own
Easy to use access tools that allow me to find things on my own
Complete run of journal titles
Comprehensive print collections
Time document delivery/interlibrary loan

Below are some examples of new services that have been implemented or are in the process of being implemented as a result of LibQUAL+, either directly or indirectly. In many areas, the results confirmed what library personnel had already suspected and steps had already been taken to improve on weaknesses identified by the survey. LibQUAL+ has merely prompted us to respond more quickly in these areas. We will continue to analyze the results and consider additional service improvements.

§ Clioweb - a new web based service where users can track the status of their interlibrary loan requests

§ Find Text- a new service that allows users of certain library databases to connect directly from the bibliographic citation to the full text of the article, check library holdings, or request the article through Interlibrary Loan.

§ Redesigning the Electronic Resources Gateway- We are using focus groups to gather input about new gateway designs.

§ My Library - is a user-driven, customizable interface to collections of Internet resources -- a portal. Primarily designed for libraries, the system's purpose is to reduce information overload by allowing patrons to select as little or as much information as they so desire for their personal pages.

§ Just in time acquisitions-books on demand- The Interlibrary Loan department has begun experimenting with purchasing books and dissertations to fill ILL requests that are difficult to fill or meet other specific criteria.

§ OCLC Direct Request- When searching WorldCat, users can now send directly to other libraries to borrow books via interlibrary loan.

§ "MY Account" allows users to view their library account online. Specifically it allows users to:

  VIEW your loan list.
  RENEW your materials.
  VIEW your hold/recall requests.
  DELETE your hold/recall requests.
  CHANGE your verification number.

§ Electronic Theses and dissertations
§ Enhancements to web OPAC

These improvements were already in the works before LibQUAL+ and were not done in direct response to its results. In other words, the comments were repetitious of comments we had already heard -- loud and clear -- but they sure did reinforce them! Therefore, many of these improvements should speak to the concerns expressed in the survey.

1. Installation of version 14.1 and patch 2, Fall 2002

a. Redesign of top, Navigation Bar to provide clearer, more rational groupings of options and to prepare for the addition of more new features. External links, manipulations of search results links and search options were each clustered together.

b. Revision of Basic Search screen, adding more options to Keyword and Browse searches. A popup help box, "When to use Keyword Searching or Browse" was also added.

c. Aesthetic improvement of the color scheme in the top, Navigation Bar and Basic Search screen.

d. Addition of a link to Law and other Catalogs to the top page in order to highlight their availability and the fact that the Law Library's holdings are not included in the University Libraries catalog.

e. Revision of results brief table display

   (1) The Owned/Out column was removed and the data included on a separate line under the title. This allowed for more descriptive labels, "Owned: X Checked Out: Y"

   (2) The title was bolded and the repetitive display of author information was suppressed making for a cleaner display

   (3) Starting dates for journals were suppressed in the left column to avoid confusion with holdings dates for individual volumes and issues.

   (4) When present, URLs were moved to a separate line underneath the title removing the need for a separate column and reducing the amount of right scrolling.

   (5) Line breaks were added between the end of location labels and the beginning of call numbers in the Locations column on the far right. Now call numbers always begin on their own lines.

d. Call Numbers added to the "Basket"

2. My Account information was added in October allowing users to check their loan list, renew materials, check the status of recalls and delete hold requests.
3. In the pipeline for spring.

a. Two "new stuff" functions. Screen Design and DAIAD are working together to come up with names (e.g., New Titles, New Acquisitions, New Arrivals, Newly Available, etc.) for the functions which will be compatible across the Libraries website.

(1) One function will provide the ability for a user to conduct a search, save it using My Account, and then indicate how often he or she would like the search to be run automatically and the results emailed to him or her. The system uses the old mediated searching terminology of SDI (Selective Dissemination of Information) but we feel a better name is needed. Since the Reagan years, SDI means Strategic Defense Initiative for many folks! This function is ready to go except for the label and should be available in January 2003.

(2) The second "new stuff" function is the ability to do a search for New Titles (New Acquisitions, etc.) immediately. The technical functionality is ready to go. We are polishing the number and choice of limits which will be made available (location, format, subject, and the definition of "new" -- one week, two weeks, four weeks, six weeks, six months, year, etc.) This function should be available early in the Spring Semester.

b. Once we have completed the "new stuff" projects, we intend to tackle multi-database searching. The functionality now works allowing a Z39.50, least common denominator search of other catalogs (including Law!) without leaving the ND Libraries Catalog. This provides a long sought capability but introduces a real problem to be overcome, navigation. How do we make as certain as possible that the user will be able to tell where they are in which system at any given time. Hopefully, we will have this resolved and have multi-database searching working sometime during the spring semester.

4. In the next release of ALEPH 500, version 16.x, the following two enhancements should speak to two concerns which seemed to have caused the most irritation.

a. 16.x will be frameless. This should reduce or eliminate several of the navigation problems experienced by our users.

b. 16.x will offer a text version with least common denominator searching. Think of a simplified/simplistic UNLOC -- no mouse clicks, text and command entry only.