

IMPROVING CUSTOMER SERVICES: HOW DO OUR CUSTOMERS SEE US?

Natalie H. Wiest

Jack K. Williams Library
Texas A&M University at Galveston

ABSTRACT: In the Spring of 2002, the Jack K. Williams Library at Texas A&M University at Galveston administered the “LibQual+” evaluation to its user community. LibQUAL+ is a research and development project undertaken by the Association of Research Libraries in the U.S. in collaboration with Texas A&M University and with financial support from the U.S. Department of Education’s Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) through September 2003. LibQUAL+ is defining and measuring library service quality across institutions and creating useful quality-assessment tools for libraries; it is one of the ARL New Measures Initiative projects, which seek to develop innovative ways for libraries to describe their contributions to their institutions. The goals of LibQUAL+ are:

1. Establish a library service quality assessment program at ARL;
2. Develop web-based tools for assessing library service quality;
3. Develop mechanisms and protocols for evaluating libraries; and
4. Identify best practices in providing library service.

Service quality has always been a value for libraries--LibQUAL+ provides a measure of that value. LibQUAL+ currently tests a tool for measuring library users’ perceptions of service quality and identifies gaps between desired, perceived, and minimum expectations of service. The project will continue as an R&D endeavor through 2003, by which time it is anticipated that LibQUAL+ will evolve into an ongoing service quality assessment program at ARL.

My presentation describes the LibQUAL process and questionnaire and interprets the results in the context of our local user community.

SUBJECT DESCRIPTORS:

Libraries – User satisfaction (LC subject headings)
Library use studies – United States (WorldCat use)
Libraries ---Evaluation --- United States (World Cat use)
LibQUAL+™ (name of the actual survey instrument)

The Institution

Texas A&M University at Galveston is a branch campus of Texas A&M University in College Station. The main campus (College Station) enrolls about 43,000 students; the Galveston campus has 1600 students. The campuses are 140 miles apart. Galveston is a “special purpose” institution within the Texas A&M University System. The Galveston “special purpose” is limited to marine and maritime areas of study including the maritime college (training for merchant marine, coast guard, and naval careers), marine and coastal engineering, maritime business, and the largest enrollment in marine biology and marine sciences. Until one year ago, all students were undergraduates but a growing graduate program is under way.

Because of its branch campus status, Galveston has an enormous advantage in acquiring electronic journals that are contracted for the main campus. Galveston has historically subscribed to 400 magazines and journals. Thanks to being included on main campus subscriptions, there are now over 20,000 full text electronic journal titles available. Most of this enormous increase has taken place in the last 12 months.

The Incentives for Study

Both the main campus of Texas A&M University and the Galveston campus are involved in a pilot study from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) to revamp their accreditation process with the university as a whole due for accreditation review in 2002. By their own statement, SACS States: “The concept of institutional effectiveness is at the heart of the Commission’s philosophy of accreditation...” and that “each member institution is expected to document quality and effectiveness by employing a comprehensive system of planning and evaluation in all major aspects of the institution” (SACS 2001).

That was incentive enough for the Williams Library at Texas A&M University at Galveston (TAMUG) to look for an evaluation instrument that would give a valid measure of library effectiveness. Timing was very good for TAMUG in that the Evans Library at Texas A&M, specifically Dean of Libraries Fred Heath and Associate Dean, Colleen Cooke, had just developed an instrument called LibQUAL+™ as a tool for defining and measuring library service quality across institutions. LibQUAL+ was funded through the Association of Research Libraries with monies from the U.S. Department of Education’s Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education to develop innovative ways for libraries to describe their contributions to their institutions. The goals of LibQUAL+™ are:

- to develop web-based tools for assessing library service quality;
 - to develop mechanisms and protocols for evaluating libraries;
 - to identify best practices in providing library service; and
 - to establish a library service quality assessment program at ARL.
- (source: LibQUAL+ home page)

The LibQUAL+ Survey

To participate in the survey at this stage of development cost \$2000 for TAMUG. Several days of workshop and training associated with the ARL annual meeting are required for participating institutions. If you have any fears that the survey itself, its development or interpretation, are not well thought out or valid, you can put them to rest. For in depth information check any of the LibQUAL+ references at the end of this paper.

The web based survey itself first collects demographic information for the respondent (whose identity is completely anonymous) and then contains 25 questions (see Appendix 1) to which the respondent gives a ranking of 1 to 9, according to levels of service: “My minimum service level is ...; my desired service level is ...; My perceived service performance [at my institution] is...”.

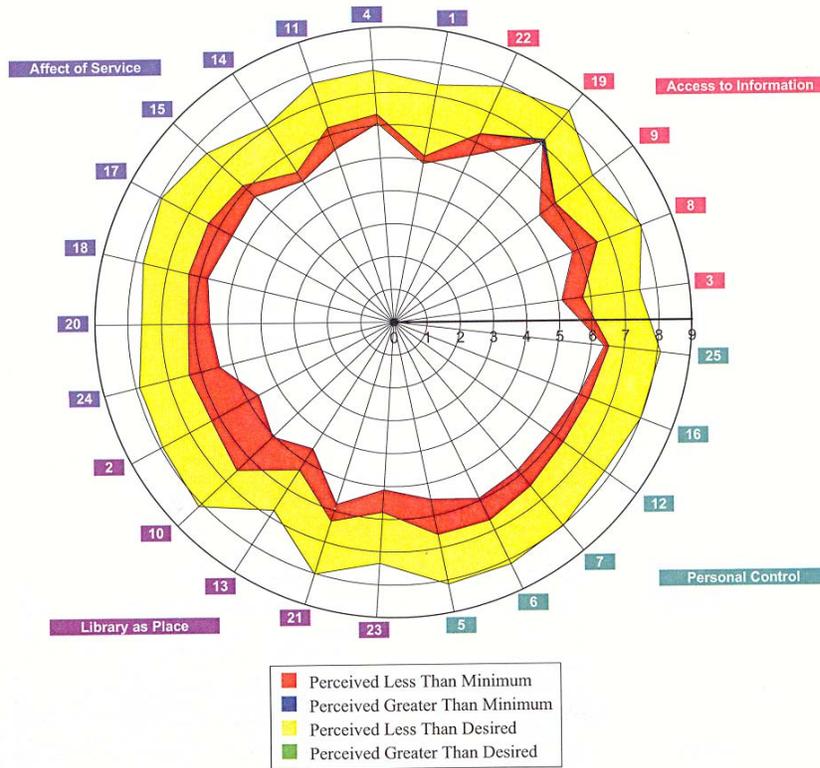
To have valid data a sample size of at least 900 undergraduate students is required. Because of the small size of TAMUG, we decided to sample the entire student body, and used their University-supplied email addresses to send notification and a request to participate in the study. From approximately 1200 students enrolled in the Spring Semester of 2002, 148 started the online survey; 80 finished it.

The Results of the Survey

ARL not only hosts all the surveys and answers on its own computers (or more accurately, those of the contracting agency, Texas A&M University), it also computes all the results and produces output in the form of three notebooks for comparison purposes: 1) results from all institutions surveyed (“Aggregate”, source: LibQUAL+ Spring 2002 Aggregate Survey Results); 2) from all ARL institutions participating (“ARL”, source: LibQUAL+ Spring 2002 Survey Results – ARL); and 3) for the individual institution (“TAMUG”, source: LibQUAL+ Spring 2002 Survey Results – Texas A&M University, Galveston).

The survey results are compared across four dimensions: access to information; effect of service; library as place; and personal control. Appendix 2 lists the dimensions and correlates them to answers to particular questions on the survey. All following graphs use these four dimensions for comparisons across institutions.

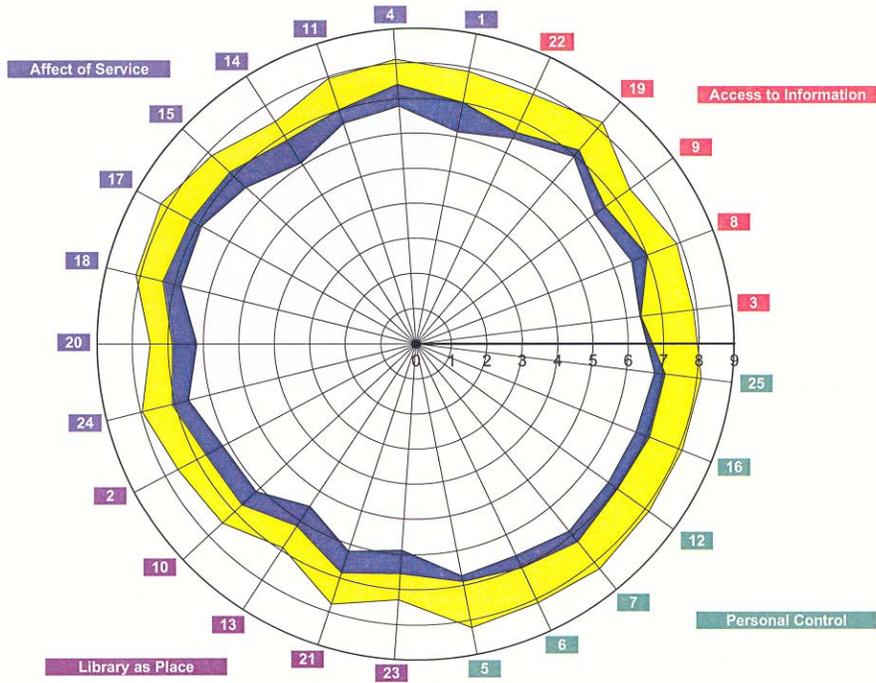
Graph 1, below, is a radar chart of responses of TAMUG undergraduates to the survey.



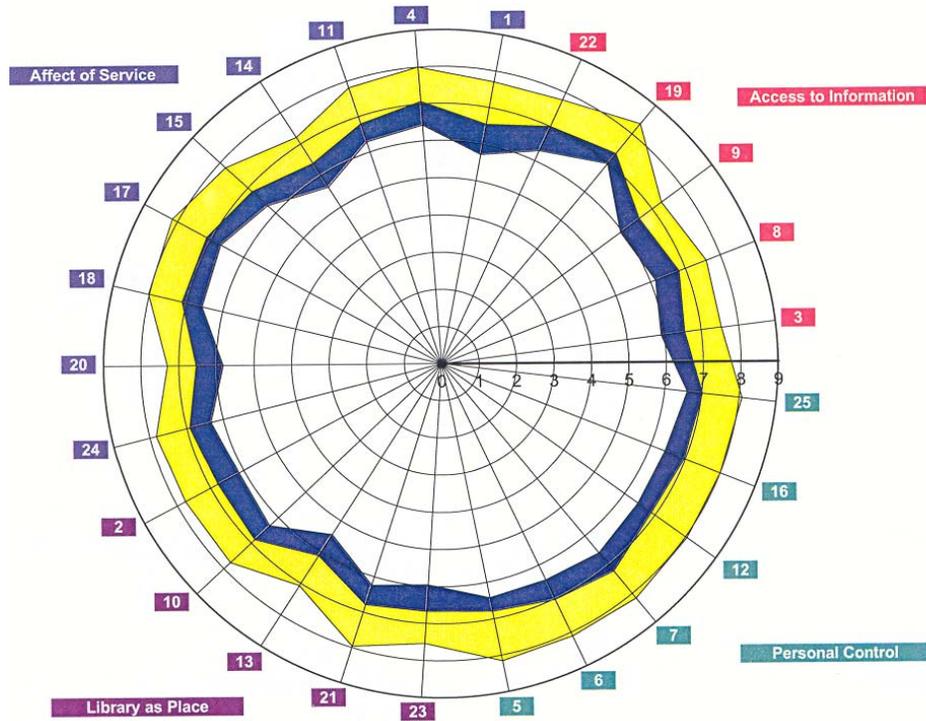
The four dimensions are in different quadrants of the chart: Quadrant 1 being Access to Information (upper right); Quadrant 2 (clockwise to bottom right), Personal Control; Quadrant 3, Library as Place; and Quadrant 4, Affect of Service.

What you should notice about this chart is the amount of red, “perceived less than minimum” responses.

For comparison, Graph 2, below, is the radar chart of undergraduate responses from the aggregate of all institutions participating in the study:



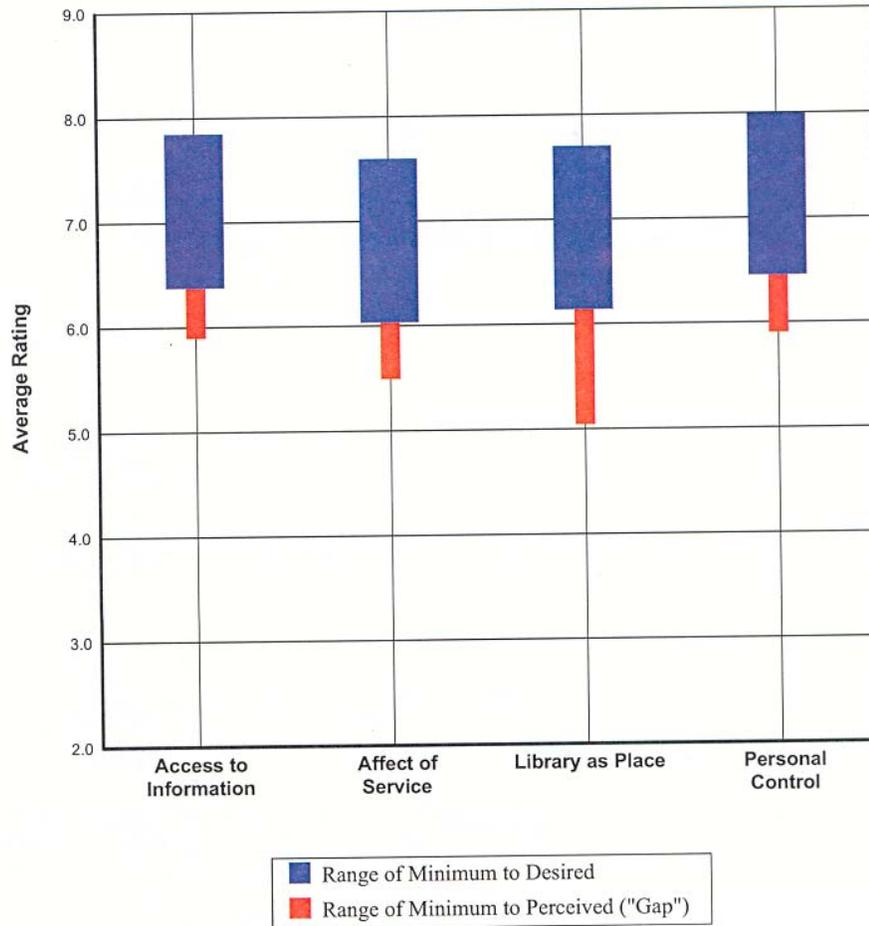
And below this note, graph 3, the responses for all ARL participating undergraduates:



By comparison, the aggregate and ARL charts have much larger areas in blue, or “perceived greater than minimum” responses. What this seems to be saying is that TAMUG library users perceive that their library is consistently delivering less than what they consider to be the minimum service they would like to be receiving. Although this is a true statement to make about the TAMUG undergraduate library users, the survey designers caution us that this does not necessarily mean that TAMUG library services are necessarily inferior to other institutions.

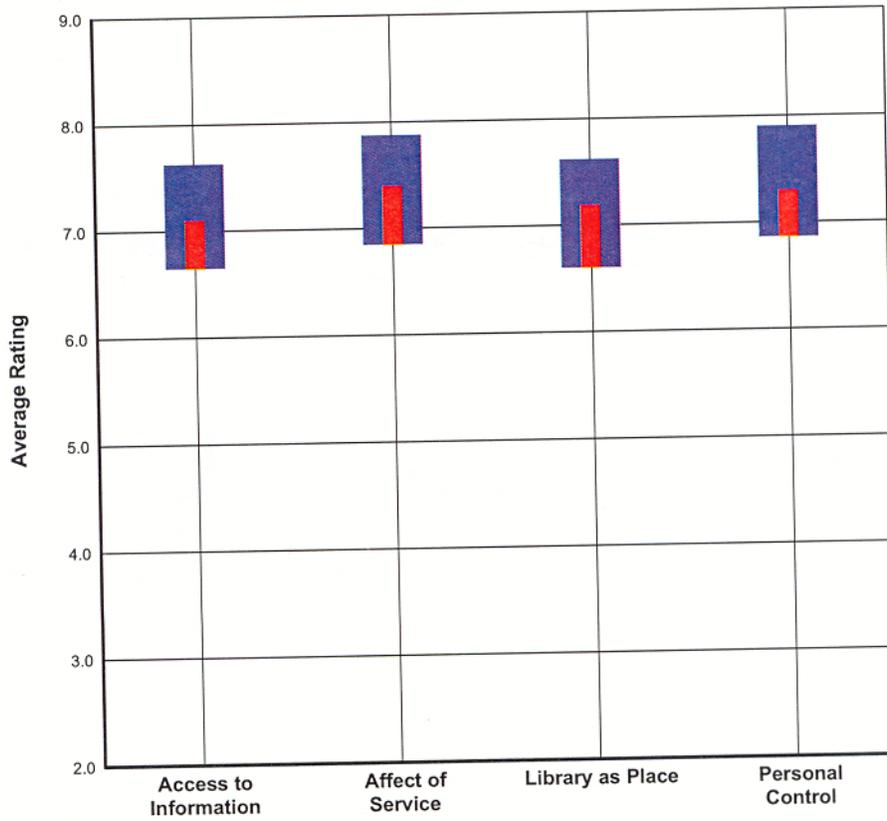
Another way to chart survey results is by graphing the four dimensions as aggregates.

The graph below is again for TAMUG undergraduates:

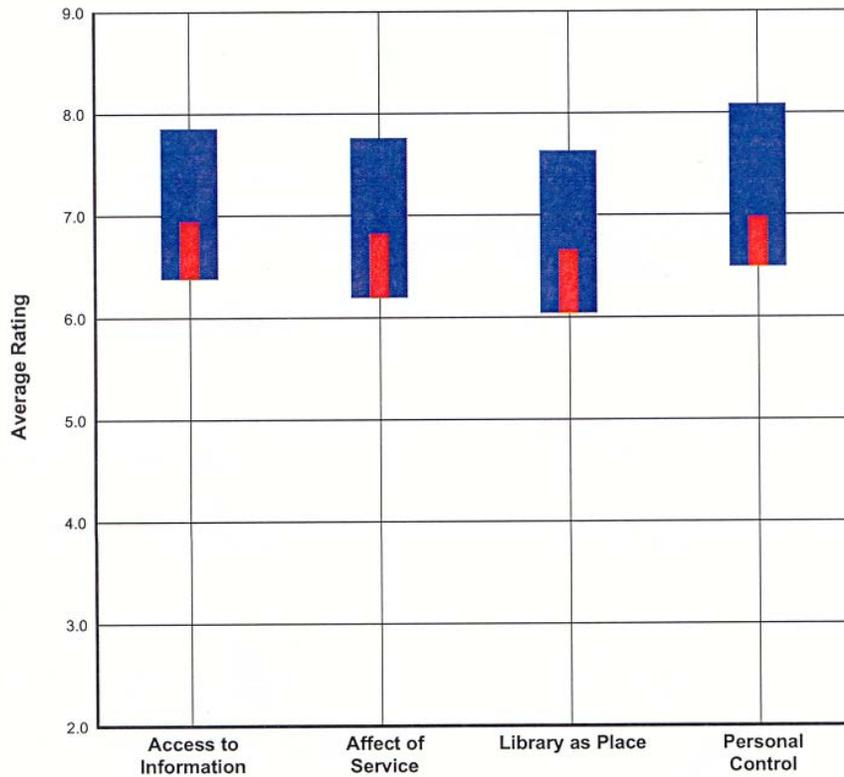


Now the gap between minimum desired and minimum perceived is very obvious. Note that on no dimension is the perceived level of service within the range of minimum desired.

By comparison, the aggregate results for four year institutions' undergraduates is below:

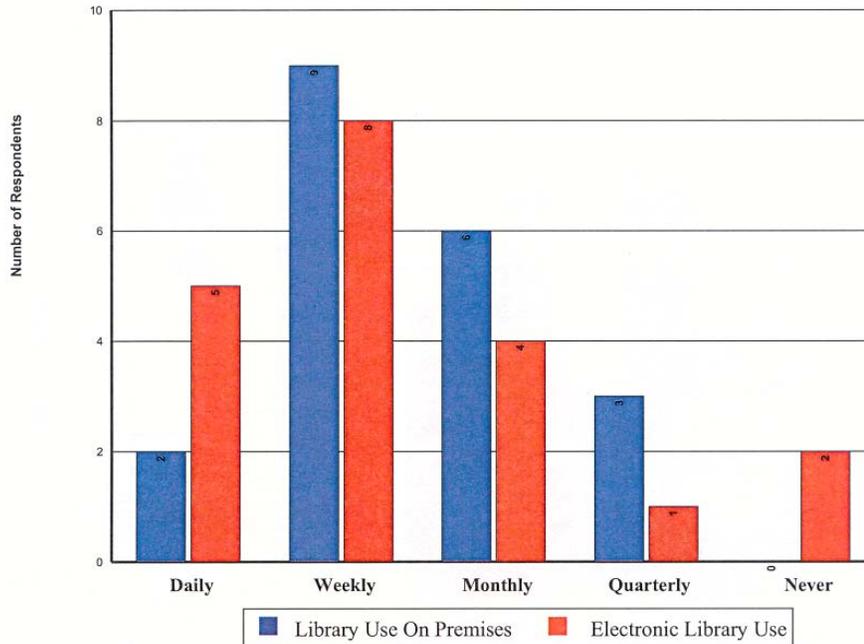


And below this the results for four year institution undergraduates at ARL institutions:



For both aggregate and ARL institutions, undergraduate students perceive they are receiving at least the minimum services that they consider to be desirable. Does this mean that TAMUG students have very high expectations as compared to students at other institutions? By a numerical score that doesn't seem to be the case, but why/how are they so displeased about the services they are receiving? We are currently very crowded in our facility as enrollment has gone to its highest level ever, with no increase in seating capability and in fact more crowded seating as shelving has been added for new materials. In contrast to many other libraries, our daily usage figures have gone up rapidly; both the campus learning resource center (personal use PCs) and campus meeting rooms are in the building and they draw even more students into the building.

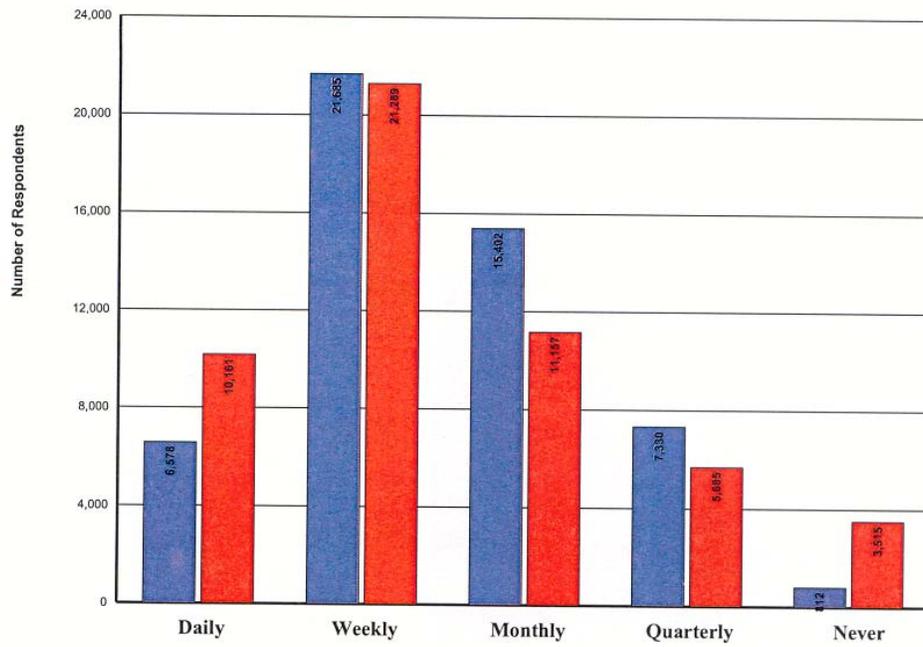
Another interesting view of TAMUG undergraduates is from bar graphs showing library usage. The graph for TAMUG is below:



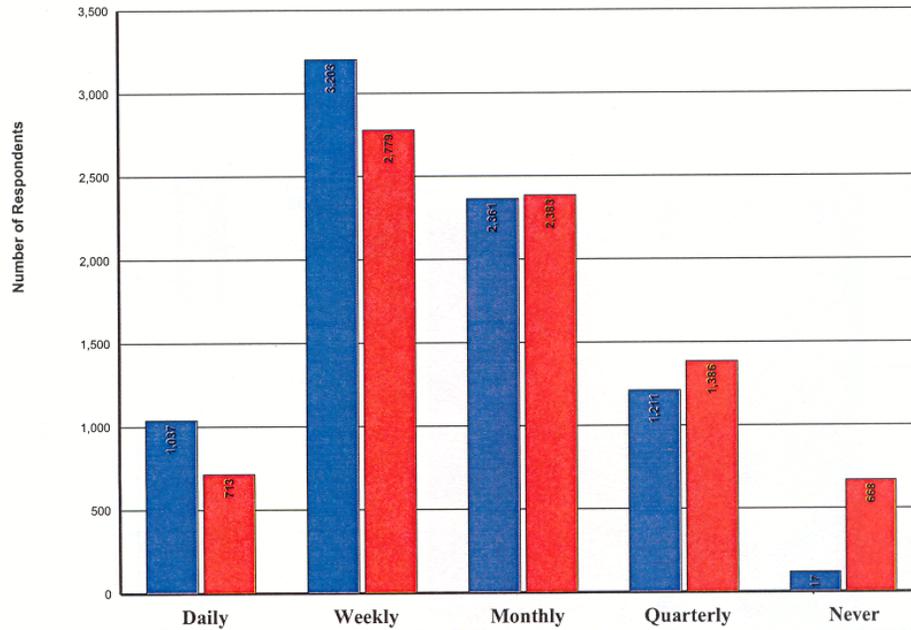
On the bar graphs, blue indicates library use on premises; red is electronic library use.

I am pleased to see that none of our respondents stated they had never used the library on premises. With the incredible wealth of electronic resources, however, it is disappointing to see many had never used those resources – clearly we need to do a better job of educating our students about the e-resources. By contrast with the aggregate and ARL graphs that follow, you can see that a lot more of our students come into the building on a more regular basis.

Aggregate library attendance is below:



ARL library usage by undergraduates is below:



When I look at the survey results, I am reminded of several statements I have heard regarding user services and libraries:

“... a measure of library quality based solely on collections has become obsolete” (ARL)

“This new survey instrument is designed to measure ‘outcomes’...service quality and satisfaction” (LibQUAL+)

“the customer is always right”

“Comparisons between institutions gives insight, but norms make fact and not value statements” (LibQUAL+ documentation)

All the above should be taken into consideration when we look at what we do.

I selected only a few of the large number of LibQUAL+ graphs and charts that are available. I have presented results to the TAMUG administration for academic and research interests and they have been enthusiastic about the use of the instrument, and

the need to continue using it. We will probably make this an annual, or at least biannual process for evaluation of library service. Clearly we have work to do, but at least we have a good idea of what areas need the most help.

References:

Libqual+ home page. [Online]. Available: <http://www.arl.org/libqual/> [Accessed: October 1, 2002].

Libqual+ Spring 2002 Aggregate Survey Results. Vol. 1. Summary Statistics and Graphs. Association of Research Libraries/Texas A&M University. 2002. spiral notebook

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Libqual+ Study bibliography. [Online]. Available: <http://www.coe.tamu.edu/~bthompson/servqbib.htm> [Accessed: October 3, 2002].

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APPENDIX 1.

What does it look like?

The survey is a five page, web-based instrument. The first pages collect demographic information. A print example from the survey:

When it comes to...		My Minimum Service Level Is		My Desired Service Level Is		Perceived Service Performance Is		N/A			
		<i>low</i>	<i>high</i>	<i>low</i>	<i>high</i>	<i>low</i>	<i>high</i>				
1)	Willingness to help users	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	N/A
2)	Space that facilitates quiet study	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	N/A
3)	Complete runs of journal titles	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	N/A
4)	Employees who are consistently courteous	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	N/A
5)	Making electronic resources accessible from my home or office	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	N/A
6)	Modern equipment that lets me easily access the information I need	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	N/A
7)	A library website enabling me to locate information on my own	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	N/A
8)	Timely document delivery/interlibrary loan	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	N/A
9)	Interdisciplinary library needs being addressed	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	N/A
10)	A haven for quiet and solitude	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	N/A

APPENDIX 2.

Four Dimensions: 25 associated questions

Dimension 1. Access to Information

- 3) Complete runs of journal titles
- 8) Timely document delivery/interlibrary loan
- 9) Interdisciplinary library needs being addressed
- 19) Convenient business hours
- 22) Comprehensive print collections

Dimension 2: Personal Control

- 5) Making electronic resources accessible from my home or office
- 6) Modern equipment that lets me easily access the information I need.
- 7) A library website enabling me to locate information on my own
- 12) Easy-to-use access tools that allow me to find things on my own
- 16) Making information easily accessible for independent use
- 25) Convenient access to library collections

Dimension 3. Library as Place

- 2) Space that facilitates quiet study
- 10) A haven for quiet and solitude
- 13) A place for reflection and creativity
- 21) A comfortable and inviting location
- 22) A contemplative environment

Dimension 4: Affect of Service

- 1) Willingness to help users
- 4) Employees who are consistently courteous
- 11) Dependability in handling users' service problems
- 14) Giving users individual attention
- 15) Employees who deal with users in a caring fashion
- 17) Employees who have the knowledge to answer user questions
- 18) Readiness to respond to users' questions
- 20) Employees who instill confidence in users
- 24) Employees who understand the needs of their users