Introduction

During Winter Term 2010, the University Library conducted a voluntary survey of the campus community to garner opinions about the library’s facilities and services, specifically reference service. The survey was open to the entire Washington and Lee University community but the intended target group was undergraduate students. This survey’s purpose was to determine how students were using the library, at what times and in what situations, and how they believed we could improve on it. This endeavor is part of a greater effort on behalf of the University Library to constantly evaluate our performance from the user’s perspective. The idea for this survey came about in Summer of 2009; a committee was formed to develop and implement the survey. The committee consisted of Mary Abdoney, Yolanda Merrill, and Elizabeth Teaff.

Method

Creating the Instrument. The committee began meeting in Fall 2009 to develop the questions to be asked using the web-based survey tool SurveyMonkey.com. A sample of the final survey may be seen at http://tinyurl.com/y33hwov. In an effort to create unbiased questions, great care was taken to not lead the subject to a certain answer or create apathy about question answers. We also took great care to differentiate the various service points of the Information Desk, which had only been merged a year earlier. When asking questions about reference services, a picture of all of the reference librarians posed at the reference desk was
included so that subjects would not assume that work study desk attendants were reference librarians. Since the survey was directed at users of both Leyburn and Telford Science libraries, respondents had the opportunity to indicate that they did not use one or the other library in certain questions; we did not want students who did not ever use Telford Science Library to rate their satisfaction with it, and vice versa.

Finally, a print version of the survey was available in addition to the web-based version for those respondents who might not visit the library website or would otherwise miss the invitation to complete the survey (Appendix A). We were unable to control the number of times a person answered the survey, feeling that putting ID requests in place would infringe upon the respondents’ privacy. Instead we felt that respondents would use their best judgment to not take the survey more than once.

Advertising and Distributing the Survey. The committee debated how to advertise the survey in order to get the highest rate of response possible. While we focused on students, we welcomed respondents from the faculty, staff, law school, and other community members. These other groups provided valuable feedback that will be analyzed at a future date. In addition to signs posted in both libraries (Appendix B) we used Campus Notices, Facebook, and Twitter to advertise the survey, as well as the drawing for a $25 Visa Gift Card. The post in Campus Notices read:

Subject Line: Quick Survey on Library Reference Services

Would you please fill out this 5-minute survey on Reference Services provided at the University Library? We need feedback on how we are doing. Your effort may be rewarded by winning one of four $25 Visa gift cards. http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/W93XRQD

Thanks for your participation, The Library Reference Team
This notice ran for the first five days of the survey, from Monday, January 25 until Friday, January 29, 2010. The survey was open until Sunday, February 7, 2010. During this entire time, we used Facebook and Twitter to encourage those connected to respond to the survey.

The most successful way we advertised the survey was by sending a mass email to students who had items checked out of the library or who had carrels reserved in either of the libraries. By using the library’s integrated library system, Millenium, we were able to target students who actually use the library. Around 700 students received this email. The text of the email follows:

Hello,

Please take 5 minutes to complete our survey. Your help will aid us in future improvements to the University Library’s services and facilities. Here is the link: [http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/W93XRQD](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/W93XRQD)

One you have completed the survey, you may register to win one of several VISA gift cards.

Finally, the committee decided to “brand” the survey with a simple graphic, which was used on the signs that were posted in both libraries. For consistency, we used this graphic on the library website as well, integrating it into the style sheet so that every page on the library website would display this graphic, which linked to the survey (Figure A).

All of these methods of advertising and distribution proved to be successful, with 348 respondents starting the survey, and 318 completing it. This is the highest response rate of any survey conducted by the University Library in the past 4 years, and we believe that the combination of successful marketing and a generous incentive played a big role.
Results

Summary. Before examining the results of specific questions, it is important to look at the overall trends in the responses. Undergraduate students, the intended target of the survey, formed the overwhelming majority of respondents, with just over 86% of the total, which includes both the web-based and print surveys. (Figure B).

One problem we encountered was the result of making a printed version of the survey available. For ease and consistency, we added “logic” to the web-based version of the survey. For example, if a respondent answered that they had never used a service, the survey would automatically skip the question that asked the respondent to rate their level of satisfaction with that service. This is a very useful tool in web-based surveys because it prevents people who have no experience with a service, and therefore lacking an objective opinion, from answering those questions. Unfortunately, of the 19 paper surveys completed, 9 had logic flaws. When entering the results of those questions into the results database, the logic problems were omitted by removing the opinion based answers from the survey.
NOTE: From this point forward, this report will analyze the results from the undergraduate students only.

Just over half of the respondents answered that they had used Reference Services at Leyburn and/or Telford libraries (Figure C). In order to make this question less confusing, the survey included a photograph of the Library Reference Staff positioned at the Reference Desk in Leyburn Library. Still, this question was open to wide interpretation by respondents considering the wide range of questions asked at the reference desk. The survey tried to ameliorate this problem by giving examples of reference questions. While 53% is certainly a favorable number, our ideal goal is to get almost every student using reference services at some point.

Of those students who had used reference services, over 87% were either satisfied or extremely satisfied (Figure D). We want every student who uses reference services to be extremely satisfied, whether or not
this is an attainable goal. However, the fact that over 87% of respondents were at least satisfied is a good indicator that we are on the right path. This is further supported by some of the comments left with this question, with over half of the comments completely positive.

The reference staff keep records of the types of questions asked. We record this information in a very general way with only two options: reference question or quick information. Our fourth question was quite helpful in alerting us to how students perceive the questions they ask. The largest amount of questions asked were technology questions, with database help coming in close behind. This question allowed respondents to choose multiple answers, as reflected in the chart (Figure E).

![Figure E](image)

The reference staff had been worried that our time was not used efficiently because of anecdotal evidence suggesting that most of the questions we answer are not necessarily research related questions. These results show that the respondents perceive their questions to be technology
related (possibly better suited to those staffed in the Help Desk) or directional, which may be answered by anyone working at the library and not necessarily reference staff. Fortunately, reference staff are still answering many questions related to using databases, the catalog, and recommending resources for academic research.

For the students who answered that they had never used reference services, they were asked why. Again, this question allowed the respondent to give multiple answers (Figure F).

![Figure F](image)

A large majority chose the answer “I can get to the library resources on my own through the library web site and catalog without assistance.” This is troubling because research suggests that students who perceive their research skills to be adequate are oftentimes the ones who are the most lacking in those skills when required to use them (Dupuis 1997, 94).

Out of the 134 respondents that answered this question, 94 chose this answer. While further investigation is necessary, one possible explanation is the tradition of librarians visiting
classes for a demonstration on how to use the library web site and find resources appropriate for their class or discipline. In the comments for this question, 5 out of 20 respondents claimed this as their reason. The majority of comments (11), however, claimed that they had not yet had any assignments that required the use of the library, and several respondents plan on using the reference librarians in the future when the need arises. Perhaps the survey served as a bit of advertising for the reference staff.

Respondents were asked how and when they use reference services. The main point of these questions was to make sure that we are staffing the reference desk at appropriate times. For the question concerning how students would like to ask reference questions, 116 answered that assistance at the reference desk was most convenient, with email following a close second at 107 (Figure G). There were a surprising number of respondents (96) who chose “walk-in meeting with a librarian in office” as their desired method, which is understandable considering the way our subject specialists advertise their services and availability both in person and on the library website.

![Figure G](image)

**Figure G**

**Question 6: How would you like to contact Reference Services?**

- Reference Desk: 116
- Walk-in meeting: 96
- Email: 107
- Chat: 36
- Research Appointment: 66
- Phone: 36
When respondents were asked when they want to use reference services (Figures H, I), the overarching desire seemed to be “whenever I need it” and the overlap on the answers suggests that some respondents checked every box available. They want reference service at their point of need. This was also true for the day of the week. Students want reference service when they need it, and since they cannot predict when that will be, they chose “all of the above.”

![Figure H](image)

**Figure H**

*Question 7: What hours would you prefer a librarian to be available at the reference desk?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Preference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12:2 a.m.</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 p.m.-12 a.m.</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-10 p.m.</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:30-8 p.m.</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6:30 p.m.</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5 p.m.</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3 p.m.</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 a.m.-1 p.m.</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-11 a.m.</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Figure I](image)

**Figure I**

*Question 8: What days would you prefer to visit the Reference Desk?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Preference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The last of the questions dealt with satisfaction with certain library services and the facilities of both Leyburn and Telford Science libraries. The responses were fairly positive, with some very opinionated comments. First the survey asked how satisfied users were with certain library services, with a general consensus that they are satisfied (Figure J).

Except for Interlibrary Loan, every service received a “Satisfied” rating most frequently. Interlibrary Loan’s most frequent rating was “Do not use this service” followed by “Extremely Satisfied” and “Satisfied” so we can conclude that Interlibrary Loan is doing a comparable job performance-wise. The highest rate of “Dissatisfied” occurred in the computer labs, at more than double the rate of all other services. The computer labs are an integrated service of ITS that are housed in both libraries, and often students are not aware that this is not the exclusive responsibility of the University Library. Fifteen comments specifically complained about the disrepair of computers and/or printers.
Despite the ratings, the library website seemed to draw a lot of attention in the comments for this question. Seven comments were very dissatisfied with the navigation of the library website as well as the library catalog. Most of these respondents used words such as “confusing”, “intimidating”, or “overwhelming” to describe their experience. Only two respondents made a point to mention that they were satisfied with the library website.

Questions 10 and 11 are location specific, and asked the respondents to rate their satisfaction with the two libraries’ facilities (Figures K, L). In both of these questions, there were quite a few respondents that answered that they did not use that particular library, and they have been omitted from the figures below. These graphs show only those respondents that actually use that particular library and/or feature of that library. In general, respondents are satisfied with the facilities in both Leyburn and Telford Science Libraries, but there are several areas that need to be addressed.
With regards to Leyburn Library, the biggest problem is the access to power outlets. Fifty percent of respondents chose either “Neutral” or “Dissatisfied” for this question, which is not surprising to anyone who has walked through the lower levels of the library and seen the power cords sprawling across aisles, often plugged in to extension cords or power strips. Twenty three respondents complained of the lack of access to power outlets on the lower levels of Leyburn Library in the comments portion of this question. With most students bringing laptops and other equipment to the library to work, the need for power outlets will only increase. The main floor of Leyburn Library should be the standard for the rest of the library, which is what the lower floors were compared to in many comments. Seventeen comments mention a preference for Leyburn Library’s main floor.

In contrast, respondents seem to be quite satisfied with Leyburn Library’s wireless Internet access, with almost 85% choosing either “Satisfied” or “Extremely Satisfied” for this question. For questions relating to lighting, furniture, and carrels, reactions are mixed. The neutral and unsatisfied responses show that users want a more comfortable library, with necessary updates to the lower levels of Leyburn Library.

Some of the comments regarding noise levels in Leyburn Library bear mentioning, even though respondents did not indicate that this is the biggest problem. Twenty two respondents felt the need to express their concern over the noise level in Leyburn Library. Most of these comments referred to the main floor. Some of these respondents also mentioned that usually it is library and/or Help Desk staff that are carrying on loud conversations. Others simply stated that “quiet zones” should be more clearly delineated. This should be an easy problem to fix with staff training and a few creative signs.
With regards to Telford Science Library, the results are a bit different. Contrasting with Leyburn, respondents are not satisfied with the wireless Internet access in Telford, with 36% choosing “Neutral” or “Dissatisfied”. Out of 20 comments, 4 mentioned how dissatisfied they are with the wireless access. Respondents seem most satisfied with noise levels and access to power outlets, which also contrast with the results for Leyburn. Seventy one percent of respondents are at least satisfied with the power outlets, which comes as no surprise considering Telford is a relatively new structure.

Respondents are the least satisfied with the furnishings in Telford. Over 38% of respondents chose either “Neutral” or “Dissatisfied” when asked to rate the furniture, and almost 33% chose the same when asked to rate the study carrels. While some of this dissatisfaction could be accounted for because of the age and disrepair of some furniture, which has not been updated or repaired since the Telford Science Library opened, it may also be a lack of study
space and work surfaces that is most troubling to the respondents. With only nine computer workstations and a handful of work tables, study carrels are the most abundant furniture available. However, there are not nearly enough study carrels (all of which are shared by two students for the year) or large group tables to accommodate student needs. Telford Science Library’s furnishings are simply not adequate for the collaborative and computational nature of most students’ scholarship, which often require group work on papers and presentations. Many students make up for this lack of space by using the Great Hall or departmental labs.

Finally, the survey asked respondents to rate their overall satisfaction with the University Library (Figure M). A very impressive 88% of respondents were either “Satisfied” or “Very Satisfied” with the University Library overall. With only 2.6% being dissatisfied, the University Library is successful at meeting students’ needs.

Conclusion

Room for Improvement. With the results of this survey, the University Library has proven itself to be meeting or exceeding the needs of the students it serves. However, some red flags also presented themselves, and the Library will work to address these. Perhaps the most
glimming need is an upgrade to the physical spaces on the lower levels in Leyburn Library.

Hopefully we will be able to slowly update the furnishings and infrastructure of these areas over the next few years to meet the increasingly collaborative and technology dependent scholarship our students engage in. Telford Science Library also has some facilitative areas that need improvement, such as the number of carrels and computer workstations.

Future Study. After implementing some of the changes outlined above, it is important that we solicit opinions from students regarding their comfort and use of the University Library’s facilities and services. Our ideal goal is to have 100% of our students using the library, and to be extremely satisfied with all experiences. While this may be a lofty goal, it is one that will certainly prevent complacency among the library staff.
Library Satisfaction Survey

1. Please select your status:
   - Undergraduate student
   - Law student
   - Faculty
   - Staff
   - Other

University Library Reference Staff at Reference Desk in Leyburn Library

2. Have you ever used Reference Services at the University Library (Leyburn or Telford Science)?
   - Reference Services are defined as asking a librarian for help with:
     - locating articles
     - searching the Annie catalog
     - finding statistical information
     - locating resources for research paper
   - Yes
   - No
Library Satisfaction Survey

3. Please rate your Satisfaction with the result.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Satisfaction</th>
<th>Dissatisfied</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Extremely Satisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Comments

4. What types of questions have you asked a Reference Librarian?

☐ Directional (e.g. where is the bathroom, how do I check out a book, what are the hours of the Writing Center)

☐ Technology (e.g. printing problems, copier problems, need paper, etc.)

☐ Annio Catalog (e.g. how to search the catalog, what is the call number for a DVD)

☐ Databases (e.g. locating and using databases such as JSTOR and Scopus)

☐ Recommendation of specific database or resource

☐ Referral to another librarian

5. Why have you not used Reference Services?

☐ I can get what I need on Google and don’t need any help.

☐ I can get to the library resources on my own through the library website and catalog without assistance.

☐ It’s too intimidating to ask for help.

☐ The librarians always look busy and I don’t want to bother them.

☐ I did not know this service existed.

☐ Other

Comments
Library Satisfaction Survey

6. How would you like to contact Reference Services? (check all that apply)
   - Phone
   - Research appointment with a librarian
   - Chat
   - Email
   - Walk-in meeting with a librarian in office
   - Assistance at the reference desk
   - None of these
   
   If you selected "None of these" please explain:
   
7. What hours would you prefer a librarian to be available at the Reference Desk to assist you with your research? (check all that apply)
   - 9 a.m. - 11 a.m.
   - 11 a.m. - 1 p.m.
   - 1 p.m. - 3 p.m.
   - 3 p.m. - 5 p.m.
   - 5 p.m. - 6:30 p.m.
   - 6:30 p.m. - 8 p.m.
   - 8 p.m. - 10 p.m.
   - 10 p.m. - 12 a.m.
   - 12 a.m. - 2 a.m.
   - n/a
8. What days would you prefer to visit the Reference Desk? (check all that apply)

- Monday
- Tuesday
- Wednesday
- Thursday
- Friday
- Saturday
- Sunday
- n/a

9. Rate your level of Satisfaction with the following Library Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Dissatisfied</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Extremely Satisfied</th>
<th>Don't use this service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interlibrary Loan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Circulation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Computer Labs in Library</td>
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<tr>
<td>Course Reserves</td>
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<tr>
<td>Library Website</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Comments

10. Rate your satisfaction with the Facilities in Leyburn Library

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facility</th>
<th>Dissatisfied</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Extremely Satisfied</th>
<th>Don't study in Leyburn</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lighting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Wireless Internet Access</td>
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<tr>
<td>Furniture</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carrels</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Access to Power Outlets</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noise Level</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Comments
Library Satisfaction Survey

11. Rate your satisfaction with the Facilities in Telford Science Library

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lighting</th>
<th>Dissatisfied</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Extremely Satisfied</th>
<th>Don't study in Telford</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wireless Internet Access</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Furniture</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carrels</td>
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<tr>
<td>Access to Power Outlets</td>
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<tr>
<td>Noise Level</td>
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</table>

Comments

12. What is your overall satisfaction with the University Library (Leyburn and Telford Science)?

- Very Dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Neutral
- Satisfied
- Very Satisfied

13. Do you have any suggestions for improvements at the University Library (Leyburn and Telford Science)?

Thank you for participating. To enter to win a $25 Visa gift card, go to
http://library.wlu.edu/services/survey.php
The University Library needs your help!

Take our 5 minute survey!

Enter to win a $25 Visa Gift Card!

Go to library.wlu.edu
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Dupuis, Elizabeth A. "The Information Literacy Challenge: Addressing the Changing Needs of our Students through our Programs." *Internet Reference Services Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (1997): 93.