Library User Satisfaction Survey for Reference Services
Fall 2014

Executive Summary

A desire to go beyond the usage statistics captured by DeskTracker was firmly articulated by participants at the Reference Roadmap event held in February 2014. In response to this request, the Reference Services Committee decided to develop and administer a user survey that might provide some richer, more qualitative information on the relationship between users and reference services. What brings the user to the Library reference desk? What is the general attitude of the target audience towards our services? If they are satisfied with the services, what contributes to their satisfaction? Are the users confident that the answers they are receiving are accurate? Are we answering questions in what they consider to be a timely manner? Do the users have any suggestions on ways to improve our services? These questions were the focus of the survey that also captured the demographic of our user base in this case. Questions were primarily presented as Likert scales with frequent opportunities to enrich responses through free text entries.

The instrument ran from November 10 – 21, 2014. Materials soliciting participation were provided for the reference hubs in Funk ACES, Grainger, the Information Desk in the Main Library, and the Virtual Reference Desk. The vast majority of the responses received came as a result of a VR desk interaction. The response rate in this case was approximately 18.7% of the reference events for VR recorded in Desk Tracker for that same time period. Only those surveys which were deemed accurate and fully completed were included in our results. An incentive was offered to participants as the option of entering their information for a lottery that consisted of a grand prize of an I-Pad Air or one of three $50.00
gift certificates. These incentives were funded by the Assessment Committee of the University Library. (See Appendix 1 for a copy of the survey instrument.)

What did we learn? Almost half of the reference transactions are based on a need to find a specific item followed by requests for research assistance. The majority of our users are satisfied with our services and the factors contributing to this satisfaction include friendliness, quality of service and timeliness. Several themes were also teased out of the open-ended responses to questions related to satisfaction including the users’ feelings that their information needs were met, the service exceeded their expectations, and they had mixed reactions to referrals. This last item highlights the dichotomy of the librarian’s desire to provide complete and accurate information, and the user’s expectations of timeliness. Overall, the Library meets or exceeds the user’s expectations of timeliness.

The suggestions related to the improvement of our services fell into several categories. The vast majority of respondents indicated that they could not think of anything to improve our services, but we learned more through the review of concrete suggestions. These were related to an improved gateway interface, improved answers and a variety of other issues that related to reserving movies, the need for a specific item, adding money to the student’s print account and the ability to go directly to interlibrary loan instead of mediation by a librarian.

The suggestions for the future from the Reference Services Committee include more regular use of assessment to gauge user reaction at a qualitative level and the implementation of the survey over a longer time period or related to a specific hub. Finally, the implementation of qualitative methods such as in-depth individual interviews or focus groups targeting specific aspects of reference provision might provide us with more information on the needs and desires of our users.
Participation

During the survey period, 117 responses were collected. The data was preprocessed to remove entries that were not filled out beyond the initial consent (Question 1). This left 94 responses that were at least partially filled out. Out of 16 questions, the only required question was the initial consent. Therefore, not every participant responded to every question. Perhaps because the medium lends itself well to distributing an online survey, the majority of survey responses followed a chat reference interaction. The breakdown of initial point of contact is as follows:

- Online (chat): 87
- In a library: 6
- Phone: 1

Respondent Demographics

The first section of the survey collected some demographic information about the respondents. Question 2 asked participants to indicate their UIUC affiliation. Two patrons indicated their affiliation as “other” and identified themselves as UIUC alumni in the free response field. Figure 1 shows number of respondents by UIUC affiliation. The majority of respondents were UIUC undergraduates or graduate students. Question 3 asked students to report their general classification. Figure 2 shows participants’ student status and includes several responses from non-affiliated patrons who identified as students. While the majority of responses came from students in Masters programs, the distribution of student status is relatively even.
Question 4 asked participants to identify their department or major in a free-response field. In order to normalize this data and make this information more meaningful, each response was assigned to the appropriate University of Illinois College or Division. (N.b. Given the relatively small number of responses, coding this data by hand was manageable and allowed for a high degree of certainty.)
Figure 3 illustrates the college or division with which the survey respondents are affiliated. The majority of questions came from the College of Liberal Arts and Science, which is to be expected given the breadth of disciplines situated within the College (LAS). Notably, responses were received from a large number of participants associated with technical disciplines including the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences (ACES) and the College of Engineering.

Finally, Question 5 asked participants how often they take advantage of library research services. Figure 4 illustrates the responses to this question, indicating that the majority of participants use library research services with some regularity (at least once per month). Figure 5 shows frequency of use broken down by UIUC affiliation. In our survey pool, graduate students were the most likely to use library research services more than once per week, while undergraduate students were the most likely to be using the service for the first time.
Figure 4 How often do you use library research services?

Figure 5 Frequency of use by UIUC affiliation

Reference Interaction Evaluation

The remainder of the survey asked respondents to evaluate the reference interaction that prompted their response.
Question Type

Question 7 asked participants to identify the category that best describes their question. In preparing the data, responses marked “Other” were examined in order to determine if they would better fit in another category. For example, a couple of questions about citing sources were moved into the “Research Assistance” category. Interestingly, one chat patron reported that they initiated the interaction simply out of curiosity.

- *I just wanted to know if someone was actually there and ready to assist.*

Figure 6 illustrates the breakdown of question types, showing that the majority of respondents came to the library for help finding specific items or research assistance. This is not surprising given the nature of the survey – patrons were not always informed of the survey after a very brief reference interaction, such as a quick directional question.

**Figure 6 Question type**

![Bar chart showing question types](chart.png)

Figure 7 shows the breakdown of question type related to how often the patron uses library research services. As indicated, first-time users were most likely to use the service for help finding a specific item or research assistance. Very regular users (more than once a week) were also most likely to come for help finding a specific item. This indicates that the procedure for locating items ought to be more
intuitive and/or that reference interaction focused on locating a known item should include a larger instructional component.

Figure 7 Question type by frequency of use

Satisfaction with Customer Service

Question 8 asked what other kinds of questions the respondent would like the library to answer. Out of 94 respondents, the overwhelming majority (75%) either did not answer or indicated that the library already answers all of their questions. Sample responses to this question include:

- *I think they are very knowledgeable. They have known everything I've asked.*
- *They already do a great job!*

This indicates that the scope of library reference services is well suited to meet user needs. The remaining responses to this question fell into three categories, some of which already fall within the scope of our services. Below are some sample responses from each category.

**Patron had additional questions or required more research help (15 responses)**

- *It's just hard because the database is so large but I feel like I don't feel a lot of related articles.*
- *The best online databases to search for scientific articles*
• Getting access to a book, documentary, article, etc.
• Narrowing search, verifying article titles,
• How to best use search terms, and which databases are best for each discipline.

Patron indicated an area in which library services might be expanded (4 responses)
• How to get grant money for requesting data purchases.
• Writing workshops
• How to know if a book still has copyright if it is older.
• Questions on research opportunities.

Patron indicated an interest in research help beyond the library’s collections (4 responses)
• Specific materials, how to use online materials, and how to secure e-materials for students
• I would want libraries to answer where else can I research things not in the library.
• Help in finding sources away from the library.
• Where I can locate additional sources if they are not available at our libraries.

Question 9 asked patrons to report their satisfaction with the customer service they received. As indicated in Figure 8, the majority of respondents (75%) Strongly Agreed that they were satisfied with the service received, 23% Agreed, and only 2% were Neutral or Strongly Disagreed. (N.b. Upon examination of the data, three Strongly Disagree responses were changed to agree because the patrons’ response to Question 10 “What contributed to your selection” indicated satisfaction with the service. For example, one patron reported that they were “delighted with the level of cooperation and swift response.” This indicates that the survey question was perhaps not clearly worded.)
Question 10 asked patrons to explain what factors contributed to their satisfaction with the customer service they received in a free response field. This data was examined and coded based on themes that appeared in multiple responses. Some responses fit into more than one category and were assigned multiple codes as a result. Responses were assigned to a thematic category regardless of whether they influenced the interaction positively or negatively. Figure 9 illustrates the factors that contributed to the level of respondents’ satisfaction with service they received. As indicated, friendliness and demeanor, answer quality, and timeliness were the most significant factors, which is not surprising. It is possible that the wording of Question 10 — “I was satisfied with the customer service (friendliness, attitude, etc.) I received today” — may have led respondents to overemphasize the impact of friendliness and demeanor on their response.
To illustrate how the data was coded, some sample responses from each category are shown below.

Friendliness and demeanor (28 responses)

- The Librarian helping me was super cool(!: first responder that seemed personable and not so technical and automatic.
- The chat was super friendly and helpful!! Don't know why I didn't come sooner!
- She/He was friendly and appeared eager to help with my question. I feel comfortable that with this individual's help I could easily write my research paper and should have no trouble doing my presentation.

Answer quality (27 responses)

- They sometime are unsure and make me more confused on where they get their information from
- He/she went above and beyond answering all of my questions about using research resources.
- The librarian did not seemed to be going through a script, I was allowed to control the pace of going through the question. They helped me find an alternate solution when we could not find the full text of the article in the UIUC network.
Timeliness (27 responses)
- The person I was chatting with took very long to respond to my question.
- Librarian1 answered all of questions promptly and professionally.
- The help I received was quick, easy, and efficient.
- I got to get my answer as soon as possible

Instruction (6 responses)
- I learned how to use the Interlibrary Loan service to requests an article that I needed for my research
- instructions were clear
- Walked me through step by step process

Patience (3 responses)
- very patient, willing to help
- Very helpful and tried to help even when couldn't right away
- they were patient with my questions and offered great help

Other (4 responses)
- the reference interview seems to have improved over the course of three years.
- Great reference interview.

Perceived Answer Quality
Two of the factors above, answer quality and timeliness, were the focus of additional survey questions. Question 11 asked respondents to evaluate the answer they received with respect to completeness and accuracy. The question also included the option to comment on how the answer met their expectations. Figure 10 illustrates how patrons perceived the quality of the answers they received. The overwhelming majority of respondents felt that their question was answered both completely and accurately.
Several themes run through the comments made on Question 10. Several examples of responses from each category are listed below.

**Patron’s information need was met (17 responses)**

- I was able to find the book I was looking for.
- They were able to answer my questions and I understood what they were talking about.
- I was directed to site in which I found my answer.

**The service exceeded expectations (10 responses)**

- It exceeded my expectations.
- I never thought that online reference would be so easy to use and would provide me with such complete service.
- We found that the university did not have access to the article I wanted but the librarian helped me go through the inter-library loan process to find it from another library. This went above and beyond what I expected.
Patrons had mixed feelings about referrals (3 responses)

- I have a high level of reassurance that I'll have all my questions answered with the contacts Librarian 1 provided to me during business hours tomorrow. I'm on Pacific time, so the contacts I need have gone for the day.
- I was referred somewhere else
- I have to contact another library department to solve my problem.

Patron’s information need was not met (3 responses)

- I will try back in a few weeks. I think I'm a little early for the new Bronze Tablet.
- She said she couldn't find the music score and neither could I
- they couldn't fix my issue

Expectations of Timeliness

Questions 12 and 13 evaluated respondents’ satisfaction with respect to timeliness. First, patrons were asked if their question was answered in the amount of time they expected. Figure 11 shows the breakdown of responses. The majority of respondents believe that their question was answered in a timely manner.

Figure 11 Expectations of timeliness were met
Question 13 asked patrons to describe their expectations for timeliness using a free response field. The data was coded based on categories drawn from the responses. Some responses were assigned to more than one category. Figure 12 illustrates patrons’ expectations of timeliness.

**Figure 12 Expectations of timeliness**

Some examples from each category provide insight into how the responses were coded and help to illustrate patrons’ expectations.

**Expected fast response** (42 responses)
- *a couple minutes, less than 5*
- *A minute or two after sending the initial message*
- *fast, or let me know its gonna take a second*
- *Just be prompt. No long delays in responding*
- *Within 5 minutes*

**Anticipated wait** (6 responses)
- *Within twenty minutes, it was answered in ten.*
- *anything within 24 hours.*
- *Anytime within the next week.*
Service met expectations (14 responses)

- Great! Quick and to the point.
- quick and it met my expectation
- Reasonable. Did not get impatient with the time it took to get my question answered. Seemed to happen very quickly actually.

Service exceeded expectations (5 responses)

- I anticipated I would need to wait a little in order to explain my situation and give time to the librarian to assess how to help me. I was satisfied in what we accomplished in a short amount of time.
- Within twenty minutes, it was answered in ten.
- Actually did not expect an answer. Was delighted with the level of cooperation and swift response.

Service did not meet expectations (3 responses)

- there were many other factors that i did not anticipate including in my answer, which led to searching more. so time became a bit of a hindrance when i realized that my question will take a lot longer than i originally expected.
- it could have been quicker
- I asked 10 minutes before my lecture began but didn’t expect that it would take half of my lecture period to get a response.

There seems to be some discrepancy in how respondents interpreted this question: some patrons described their expectations for the overall length of the interaction, while others were focused on the response time. From the responses, it is clear that the initial response or acknowledgement should come quickly (in less than 5 minutes).

Overall evaluation

The final two survey questions asked respondents to provide an overall evaluation of the librarian and to suggest improvements to the library’s research services. Question 14 asked respondents to evaluate the librarian’s performance based on several predetermined indicators. Respondents were asked to select all applicable
options. Responses to Question 14 are illustrated in Figure 13 below. Overall, this data indicates that librarians are doing a good job at conducting reference interviews and interpreting patron questions: 87% of respondents said that the librarian demonstrated a good understanding of their question. However, the level of instruction in reference interactions could be improved, as only 59% of respondents indicated that the librarian had clearly explained the necessary steps to them. Finally, 56% of respondents believed that the librarian had the knowledge to answer their question, while only 22% were referred to another specialist. These numbers seem low; however, it makes sense to consider them together – especially given the fact that the majority (86%) of participants indicated that their question was answered accurately and completely. Even so, librarians could do more to incorporate the appropriate referrals into future reference interactions.

The final question asked patrons to suggest potential improvements to library research services. The majority of participants who responded to this question indicated that they did not have any suggestions for improvement and that they are satisfied with the service in its current state. The rest of the responses fell into several themes: the patron was expecting a better answer, the interface could be
improved, or a miscellaneous suggestion, often directly related to the particulars of their question. Figure 14 shows the breakdown of participants’ responses, followed by several examples from each category.

Figure 14 Suggestions for improvement

Nothing (34 responses)
- *nothing! I'm totally gonna use this more often now.*
- *Nothing much. I had a good experience!!*
- *none, she/he was fantastic!*
- *it was all great!*
- *The experience was fast and efficient. I would not change anything.*

Better answer (5 responses)
- *Let me know what they were referencing as their information source.*
- *nothing really, maybe letting me know how to log in to Science Direct?*
- *More knowledgeable librarians.*
- *the librarian could have accurately answered my answers.*

Better interface (5 responses)
- *nothing (except the interface seems clunky)*
• I wanted to send an encouraging thanks but it cut the conversation too quickly. --
  "I've used this "Ask a Librarian" chat before and you all are always super helpful!!"
• Overall, I am very pleased. It might be helpful to start off the sessions with a
detailed summary so that the librarians are prepared to help the student
immediately once the chat session begins. Sometimes, it seems like it is a waste
of time repeating an assignment and your research issues in a conversation
format.
• cat emoji options

Other (6 responses)
• It would have been more awesome if I can request/reserve my movie. Instead, it's
  not in the policy so I understand.
• If you had the specific music score I wanted! :)
• If the library interloan system showed the results I need through a general search
  so I don't have to bother a librarian.
• a gift of .50 cents worth of printing money added to my account

Conclusion
Overall, responses to the Library User Satisfaction Survey for Reference Services
indicate satisfaction with library research services—with a particular focus on chat
reference. Survey participants indicated that friendliness and demeanor, answer
quality, and timeliness are the most relevant factors in determining their
satisfaction with the service. The majority of respondents indicated being satisfied
with the customer service they received, the quality of the answer provided, as well
as the timeliness of the response. However, there is room for improvement in our
services, especially with respect to providing instruction and incorporating
referrals. Additionally, responses suggest several fruitful avenues for expanding
the scope and overall quality of library reference services. Finally, with a view
toward the future, the confluence of access to information via our website and the
user needs leads us to suggest that an improved website experience is at the heart
of improving the reference experience. Although reference service is highly
valued, it would be even better for the user if he or she did not have to ask the question.

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