A 15-year Retrospective on LibQUAL+

Library Assessment Conference
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Fred Thompson, University of Texas
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J. Stephen Town, University of York, UK
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LibQUAL+: A 15-year Retrospective

I want to spend a few minutes with you thinking about the purpose for which we have assembled here in Seattle, and reflect on why it is that we undertake library assessment, what we learn from that act, and who benefits. Necessarily, my departure point will be the LibQUAL+ protocol, for that is the instrument I know best. I was fortunate to collaborate with some outstanding methodologists and statisticians on LibQUAL’s design and launch. And while Bruce Thompson, Yvonna Lincoln and Colleen Cook could tell the story better than I, their unavailability this week leaves that role to me.

So why assessment? LibQUAL got its start around the turn of the millennium – and there are some significant data points around that date. For both higher education in general and libraries in particular, change was in the air. Colleges were beginning to grapple with the rapidly rising costs, and consumer discontent, with the rapidly rising costs of college-going. The demands for accountability and cost-effectiveness were omnipresent. It was the beginning of the consumer revolt against rising tuition costs and of taxpayer reluctance to fund higher education as a public good.

And academic libraries were caught in the same vise. The costs of library collections were continuing to skyrocket at rates as high, or higher, than health care and energy. Moreover, on each campus, libraries were having to compete for constrained resources against research laboratories, cyber-infrastructure, graduate stipends, and faculty compensation. Robust libraries were still highly prized in faculty circles, but now their journals and databases were competing against newer, and costlier, academic social goods.

And what could libraries say about their utility, their effectiveness? How well did they meet student and faculty expectations? How did they contribute to student success, retention, and on-time graduation? How did libraries enable faculty in their teaching, and in their research? In those days, there was not much we could say about our effectiveness. For as you recall, as the sun was setting on the print era in libraries, we still measured libraries by quantitative standards. How many books did we have on our shelves? How much money did we spend? And library rankings, if not university reputations themselves, perversely hinged on those metrics. I, at least – in those days – couched my budget requests in part on the level of library investment acknowledged peers of my university were making.

That, clearly, was not persuasive. At a meeting in Tucson in 1999, a gathering of leaders from across North American Libraries articulated the need to develop alternatives to expenditure metrics of measures of library performance. Participants recognized the focus on expenditures to be widely at variance with new demands for evaluation and accountability.

Meanwhile, the marketplace was already actively engaged in addressing the challenges of accountability. At the time of the Tucson New Measures conference, I was working at Texas A&M University where, some years before, three young professors had incubated the gap theory protocol SERVQUAL. By the time I had become aware of its reputation, SERVQUAL had established itself as the
service quality standard in the private sector. Size and expenditures had nothing to do with marketplace success said the instrument’s architects, Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry. Indeed, the marketplace was littered with bankrupt examples of bloated, ossified corporate failures. The only thing that mattered, the only strong correlate to marketplace success was customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction was the driver whether the company was an airline, a restaurant or an insurance carrier. To succeed, a company must meet or exceed customer expectations.

There, at the turn of the millennium, at Texas A&M University, an idea was born. To compete successfully, a library must direct resources to those dimensions of library operations its customers valued most, and it must ensure that student and faculty perceptions always exceeded their expectations. The rest is history. Fortunately, Len Berry, one of the SERVQUAL architects was still at Texas A&M. Over the years, the LibQUAL+ development team has worked closed with Len, “Parsu” and Valerie Zeithaml to first build and then strengthen LibQUAL+, the unabashed derivative of their private sector exemplar.

Too, we were fortunate to have the depth of faculty expertise interested and ready to join us in the design of LibQUAL+. And we were fortunate to have the library resources to enable us to travel around the country interviewing students and faculty to ground the questions needed to measure customer satisfaction in the library dimensions. Our readiness met a fertile ARL environment fresh from the New Measures conference. We had a robust infrastructure in the ARL statistical program headed by Martha Kyrillidou, and we had an interested and supportive cadre of a dozen ARL Library Directors stepped forward to volunteer for the first administration of LibQUAL+.

Likewise, the information landscape as itself transforming as we were preparing to launch. Even as our design team was imagining a complex paper-based administration of that first LibQUAL+ instantiation across 12 campuses, things changed. One day, Bruce Thompson walked in and observed to the rest of the team, “You know, I think we can administer LibQUAL+ on the web.” From that time, design shifted direction, and LibQUAL+ has never been anything but a web-based protocol. Remember, we are still at the beginning of the world we find ourselves in now. Google was incorporated only one year before the New Measures conference in Tucson. We were all feeling our way around the promises and limitations of the web. And we were learning as we worked. Indeed, I believe, of the hundreds of articles that have been published since the launch of LibQUAL+, our article on the meta-analysis of the efficacy of web surveys remains the most heavily cited.

And so here we are, almost 15 years later, with over a million respondents to the LibQUAL+ instrument from more than a thousand institutions from around the globe. Over the years we have learned a lot about customer expectation across the service quality dimensions of Information Access, Affect of Service, and Library as Place. And we have learned much about how expectations may vary by type of library and geographical location. Stephen Town will share with you European perspectives. Steve Hiller will add depth and clarity about what LibQUAL+ does and doesn’t do and will underscore the importance of richly nuanced locally developed surveys. And Martha Kyrillidou will offer observations about the tool’s robustness and its future in tandem with other assessment protocols that have emerged since the call for New Measures.

But we cannot sit back. LibQUAL+ is only one tool by which we measure the health of libraries. LibQUAL+ tells us a lot about our strengths and deficits as we serve our local community. But however
important that local real estate may be, there are so many things that need to be known, planned or projected that LibQUAL+ and other instruments were not planned to do.

- What, for example, can we say about what libraries contribute to student learning outcomes across all types of colleges and universities?
- What, similarly, should the role of libraries in addressing the skyrocketing costs of traditional modes of scholarly communication?
- Should libraries redirect some of their investments in those traditional modes toward the promises of open access and toward the problems inherent in traditional academic credentialing practices?
- What will be the role of libraries in an academy increasingly less wed to place, that conducts research in global laboratories, and contemplates new learning platforms a thousand times larger than the current classroom?

We must engage the future and ask questions about what lies ahead on the research horizon. LibQUAL+ is part of the rich assessment legacy that will inform and propel ARL strategic thinking and design. And the deep cadre of informed, capable practitioners born of the New Measures movement will ensure its sustainability.

A dozen years after the launch of LibQUAL+, John Seely Brown warned ARL directors of what he called the “competency trap.” Because we are experts at our craft, because we are masters of our workflows, and because we know so much about our recent past performance, our problem-solving takes a predictable path. In times of exigency, we are inclined to do more of what we know to do. We often fail to step beyond our frame of knowing to understand new behaviors and to find new solutions.

We in this culture of assessment, know that our craft is not just about looking backward at recent performance, our craft is also about projecting ahead. Just last year, ARL projected ahead. It launched a Strategic Thinking and Design process that will enable us to understand trajectories in higher education and align our libraries in support of new and emergent roles. ARL leadership knows that existing strategic plans are insufficient to guide it into support of research universities twenty years hence. And it understands that our traditional investment in and understanding of our carefully tailored and sharply defined local institutional settings will be insufficient to sustain our collective future.

The new strategic plan will place a premium on collaboration across libraries, academic institutions and kindred institutions, making our constrained resources work for us to maximum effectiveness.

This culture of assessment of which we are a part will remain pivotal to ARL efforts to chart new directions for our organization and for all of our libraries. We will remain data-driven organizations as we make the concerted effort to move into collaborative space, building new scholarly communication engines, developing research collections that span our many campuses and reach beyond the traditional marketplace. In keeping with our culture of assessment, we will become learning libraries, creating truly integrated analytical environments that will enable our transformation. I look back over the past two decades of assessment in the research library community and marvel how far we have come. I commend to the young and agile among you the next two decades, and commend in advance the accomplishments you will achieve and the notable advances you will record. Godspeed.
LibQUAL+ Trends

Martha Kyrillidou
Association of Research Libraries
Size one does not fit at all!

To describe and measure the performance of research libraries and their contribution to research, teaching, learning and community service

- ARL Statistics™  
  *Since 1907-08*

- LibQUAL+®  
  *Since 2000*

- MINES for Libraries™  
  *Since 2003*

- ClimateQUAL™  
  *Since 2007*

- LibValue  
  *Since 2011*

- DigiQUAL®
Undergraduate Students
Faculty
• The evolution from print to electronic
• Shifting expectations and perceptions
• Focus on faculty
The Printed Library Materials I Need for My Work - Faculty
Print and/or Electronic Journal Collections I Require for My Work
A Library Website Enabling Me to Locate Information on My Own
LibQUAL+ Panel
LAC 2014

Stephen Town
University of York, UK
Summary

I An international tool
II A consortial experience
III Local insight & investment
IV A Director’s perspective
INTERNATIONAL
Scale

• 2,040,109 responses
• 2645 Institutions
• 21 Languages
• 31 Countries
Growth & Extent

• **Languages**
  - Afrikaans
  - **Arabic**
  - Chinese
  - Danish
  - Dutch
  - English (American, British)
  - Finnish
  - French (Canada, Europe)
  - German
  - Greek
  - Hebrew
  - Japanese
  - Korean
  - Norwegian
  - Spanish
  - **Swahili (Fall 2014)**
  - Swedish
  - Welsh

• **Countries**
  - Australia, Bahrain, Canada, Cyprus, Denmark, Egypt, Finland, France, Hong Kong, Ireland, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Singapore, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, UAE, U.K., U.S., etc.....

• **Types of Institutions**
  - Academic Health Sciences
  - Academic Law
  - Academic Military
  - College or University
  - Community College
  - Electronic
  - European Business
  - European Parliament
  - Family History
  - Research Centers (FFRDC) Libraries
  - High School
  - Hospital
  - National Health Service England
  - Natural Resources
  - New York Public
  - Public
  - Smithsonian
  - State
  - University/TAFE

• **Consortia**
  *Each may create 5 local questions to add to their survey*
II

THE SCONUL CONSORTIUM
Background

• 2003 – Pilot study with 16 Libraries
• 75 Participants (~60% of market)
• ~70% of RLUK Libraries
• 51% Repeat Participants
• 2010 – Irish CONUL consortium
III

YORK

INSIGHT & INVESTMENT
York LibQUAL+ Trend

University of York Library Survey Trends

Mean Rating (0-9)

- Minimum Mean
- Desired Mean
- Perceived Mean

Consistent with the NSS

Library, IT and Learning Resources NSS Results

- Library Score

Year:
- 2009
- 2010
- 2011
- 2012
- 2013

Scores:
- 65
- 70
- 75
- 80
- 85
- 90
Investment

2008

2013
Radars 2010-2011

2010

2011
York TechQUAL 2014
Review of Progress: IT Survey

IT Services Survey 2011 vs 2014 Overall Results
(Comparable Qs)
IV

A DIRECTOR’S PERSPECTIVE
Adequacy Gaps 2008-2013

-ve +ve

Affect of Service (Customer Service)

Information Control (Content/Access)

Library As Place (Space/Environment)
Adequacy Gaps 2013

2. Overall Adequacy Gaps by Q

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- Affect of Service
- Information Control
- Library As Place
2013 - Undergraduates
2013 - Postgraduates

The University of York
Information

Language: English (British)
Institution Type: College or University
Consortium: SCONUL
User Group: Postgraduate
LP05: Group Space

[Graph showing data trends over years for Group Space]
IC03: Printed Materials
IC04: Electronic Resources
IC01: Access from home/office
IC06: Easy to use access tools
Driving initiatives ...

- Process review
- 24/7/362
- Loans review & fines
- Induction & marketing
- Collection profiling
- Student experience & morebooks
- Staff surveys and culture
- Programme office & assessment librarian
Benchmarking

• Comparing our results to Libraries using the survey in 2014 from:
  – SCONUL (UK & Irish Libraries)
  – ARL (North American Research Libraries)
  – Specific Libraries
Consortial comparison

Overall Consortium Comparisons: Gap between Perceived and Desired

York

SCONUL

ARL
Affect of Service: Consortium Comparisons

- York
- SCONUL
- ARL
Library as Place: Consortium Comparisons

York

SCONUL

ARL
THE Top 200 participants

- University of California (33)
- Columbia University (13)
- University of Delaware (174)
- University of Geneva (124)
- Durham University (80)
- Georgia Institute of Technology (28)
- KTH Royal Institute of Technology (117)
- Lund University (123)
- McGill University (35)
- McMaster University (92)
- Ohio State University (59)
- Pennsylvania State University (49)
- Rice University (65)
- Texas A&M University (159)
- Universität Basel (74)
- University of Montreal (106)
- Université Paris-Sud (114)
- University College London (UCL) (21)
- University of Arizona (103)
- University of British Columbia Library (31)
- University of British Columbia Okanagan (31)
- University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) (12)
- University of Colorado Boulder (97)
- University of Edinburgh (39)
- University of Glasgow (117)
- University of Leeds (139)
- University of Manchester (58)
- University of Massachusetts (132)
- University of Sheffield (112)
- University of Toronto (20)
- Wageningen University and Research Center (77)
- University of York (100)
Affect of Service - 2013 Superiority Means

- University of York
“The York Uni library is really good (especially in comparison to other similarly ranked universities) but there is always room for improvement! (e.g. more study spaces in Harry Fairhurst)"

*Undergraduate, 18-22, Female, HYMS*
“The one thing that really bothers me, and its only a small thing - but none-the-less is there, is the speed at which you can buy a coffee from the library cafe! The staff are possibly the slowest servers of coffee that I have ever seen! I can quite easily lose 20-30mins in the cafe just trying to get a coffee to go.......!!”

Male, Postgraduate, Age 31-45, Education
“I am totally satisfied with the library”

Female, Postgraduate, Age 31-45, History of Art
LibQUAL+
One Size Doesn’t Fit All (In 2004)

Steve Hiller
University of Washington Libraries
University of Washington LibQUAL+ Experience

• Participated in first group of 12 test institutions in 2000

• Ran survey in 2001*, 2002 and 2003 before “final” survey issued in 2004

• Have not participated since 2003

*6.8 magnitude Nisqually earthquake during survey period. 56 questions on 2001 survey!
University of Washington Libraries
Assessment Methods Used

• Large scale user surveys every 3 years ("triennial survey") beginning in 1992
  – All faculty, sample of grad and undergrads; separate surveys for each group
• In-library use surveys every 3 years beginning 1993
• LibQUAL+™ 2000-2003
• Data mining
• Qualitative methods
  – Focus groups; interviews; user centered-design
  – Observation (guided and non-obtrusive), ethnographic
  – Usability/Wayfinding/Personas
• Information about assessment program available at: http://www.lib.washington.edu/assessment/
Why LibQUAL+ at UW?

• Gain experience with a Web-based survey tool
• Work with a less costly survey method utilizing a standardized survey instrument
• Identify service gaps
• Compare results with peer institutions
• Track user satisfaction and needs during non-triennial survey years
• Complement existing assessment program
• Participate in a national assessment activity
Cost Efficient Survey Method

Direct Costs (average per survey)

- UW Triennial Survey (paper) $20,000
- 2004 (Web + some paper) $10,000
- LibQUAL+™ $2,250

Library Staff Time (average per survey)

Design and Development, Distribution

- UW Triennial Pre-Survey 500 hours
- LibQUAL+™ Pre-Survey 5 hours

Analysis and Reporting

- UW Triennial Post-Survey 500 hours (plus)
- LibQUAL+™ Post-Survey 100 hours
Participate in a National Assessment Effort

• LibQUAL+™ has created a network of libraries concerned about assessment and service quality
• Peer-to-peer support has emerged as a complement to the ARL support infrastructure
• Opportunity to use a standardized assessment instrument with hundreds of other libraries
Track Satisfaction During Non-Triennial Survey Years

**UW Survey 2001 (Scale of 1 to 5)**

- Faculty: 4.3, 4.2, 4.1
- Grad: 4.5, 4.4, 4.3
- Undergrad: 4.6, 4.5, 4.4

**LibQUAL+(TM) 2003 (Scale of 1 to 9)**

- Faculty: 7.8, 7.6, 7.4
- Grad: 7.2, 7.0, 6.8
- Undergrad: 6.8, 6.6, 6.4

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LibQUAL+ 2003: UW Mean Scores by Dimension & Group

Place
- Faculty
- Undergrad
- Grad Student

Affect
- Faculty
- Undergrad
- Grad Student

Access
- Faculty
- Undergrad
- Grad Student

Control
- Faculty
- Undergrad
- Grad Student

Minimum
- Faculty
- Undergrad
- Grad Student

Perceived
- Faculty
- Undergrad
- Grad Student

Desired
LibQUAL+ 2003 Peer Comparison (ARL Top 40):
Overall Faculty and Grad Student Satisfaction
LibQUAL+
Considerations in Analyzing and Using Results

• Responses based on user expectations and experiences
  – May vary within/between institutions and groups
• Composition of respondent group varies and differs from total population
  – Cannot use an overall “institutional” score
• Number of responses for each group are critical
  – Large response allows analyses at the subgroup level
• Standard result sets may be difficult to analyze and use
  – Using the complete data set (with a statistical analysis package) greatly enhances analysis and understanding.
• Comments are what they are; add context and meaning
Why UW Decided Not to Use LibQUAL+ (2004)

• Satisfied with our “triennial survey:
  – Ability to customize
  – Use
  – Different surveys for faculty, grad and undergrad
  – Can include questions directly related to strategic plan and priorities
  – (Our survey questions have been adapted by a number of libraries)

• LibQUAL+ response rates 50% to 60% of triennial survey
  – Need a larger sample size for more granular results
  – Survey fatigue

• Comparisons between institutions difficult to make due to respondent population and composition
LibQUAL+: Another Tool in the Assessment Box

- Excellent for libraries new to assessment
- Cost-effective, easy to apply, complements other assessment efforts
- Ability to identify service “gaps” adds important context
- Helpful to know what you’re doing right and where improvement needed
- Opportunity to compare results with comparable peer institutions is valuable and provides broader measure
- Viewed positively by institutions, stakeholders and accreditors
- Can complement other methods and other user surveys (including institutional ones) to provide multidimensional perspectives
Qualitative and Quantitative methods complement each other

LibQUAL+ Likert scales and comments are both useful

(and if you do a few in depth interviews you might have even more fun)
• LibQUAL+ captures library service quality across countries and languages
• Universal values – is library one of them
  – Affect of service
  – Information Control
  – Libraries as Place
Size One Doesn’t Fit most people

UW survey for 3,199.00 for the first 12 libraries that will sign in email

martha@arl.org