Qualitative Assessment on a Shoestring: Developing a Cost Effective Strategy to Analyze LibQUAL+ Comments

Introduction

Duquesne University is an urban Catholic university with about 10,000 students in ten schools. Gumberg Library serves the community with 17 librarians and 27 support staff (FTE).

LibQUAL+ Administered in 2009

- Open to all students, faculty, and staff
- 1,441 responses

Challenges

- Volume and varied depth of comments
- Only 2 staff members tasked to project
- No budget available for data analysis software
- No experience using qualitative analysis software
- Free software available but limited functionality

697 comments comprising 30,000 words

Process

LibQUAL+ Analysis Task Force (LATF)

- 2 public services librarians
- 2 technical services librarians

Microsoft Access — Comments Database

- Readily available
- One LATF member had experience using Access
- Grouped respondents’ demographic data with comments
- Ability to assign codes to comments and create queries/reports

Qualitative Analysis

- Two LATF members independently read all comments
- Five major themes emerged after several iterations and refinement:
  1. Library Building
  2. Hours
  3. Service
  4. Systems
  5. Collection

Solutions

Coding

- LATF members thoroughly read comments
- Developed codes, definitions, and rules
- Created a coding manual
- Coded in teams of two (technical services/public services)
- Revised application of coding manual to address vague comments consistently
- Most comments received more than one code

Analysis and Recommendations

- Identified key points within major themes
- Examined connections between themes — quiet study applies to Building and Service
- Compared themes and comments to quantitative LibQUAL+ results
- Identified needed improvements that had not emerged from quantitative results
- Analyzed frequency of concepts expressed as ILL complaints
- Tried to understand factual errors in respondents’ comments
- Discerned true meaning of complex comments — collection dissatisfaction expressed as ILL complaints
- Used demographics to contextualize comments

Outcomes

Report to Library Management Team

- Made recommendations based on analysis and discussion

Quick Fixes

- Diplomatic quiet zone enforcement
- Added tables and chairs
- Increased frequency of study carrel cleaning

Easily Implemented Solutions

- More electrical outlets for laptops
- Opening earlier
- Informed website redesign
- Increased targeted course-integrated instruction

Strategic Challenges

- Larger building
- Improved collections
- Additional computers and printers
- Library strategic plan 2010-15
- Using key comments to convey problems to University administration

You can do it too

- Manageable with limited staff time (~20 labor hours)
- Methodologies correlate well with librarians’ skills
- Employs readily available software
- Low cost/high return

Library Assessment Conference 2010 — Building Effective, Sustainable, Practical Assessment

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Gumberg Library