

University Libraries Assessment Committee

2007-2008 Report:

Work, Vision, and Recommendations

Respectfully submitted by

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The Work of the Committee

The Committee met regularly over the course of the year, creating reports on completed work as well as exploring, refining and executing new projects. In October 2007, members of the committee participated in a Managers Forum and an Open Forum. At both events, the results of three completed activities were presented:

The Interlibrary Loan Survey designed by Sarah Vaughn and Annie Epperson. The Survey was conducted in 2006 and analyzed in 2007. The recommendation indicated by the findings of this survey, to clarify wording and eliminate confusing terminology on web pages associated with public services departments, have been acted upon. We no longer refer by name to the WebZap product.

Results of the Summer Closure Survey administered and analyzed by Mark Anderson and Annie Epperson. This survey was more of an outreach activity than a true assessment. The data generated proved interesting, providing insight to the Administration as contingency and business continuation plans are being crafted.

The 2007 LibQual⁺ survey results, including quantitative and qualitative findings. Findings from the survey are summarized below

Quantitative analysis indicated that undergraduate students are generally fairly satisfied with our collections, service and instruction, however graduate students and faculty indicated some dissatisfaction with collections, particularly electronic information resources.

Qualitative data also indicated that collections, specifically electronic information resources, are seen as lacking by some of our patrons. Among the qualitative data were comments suggesting that patrons are relying more and more on electronic information resources as a part of distance, or online, learning programs. The physical library is less and less important as more and more programs are offered via distance methods.

As an assessment activity for the 2007/08 year, the Libraries Assessment Committee decided to focus on learning more about one of the populations that had expressed dissatisfaction with collections, facilities and services: the graduate students. As discussed above, this population indicated in the LibQual⁺ survey that the Libraries fall below their minimum level of expectation in the print or electronic journal collections required for school work. The committee discussed using on-campus focus groups targeting specific graduate programs, but eventually we turned our attention to a marginalized subset of graduate students, online distance graduate students.

This population is increasingly important, and yet challenging for us to reach. The University of Northern Colorado is offering more and more graduate level courses and entire graduate programs online, so the Committee chose to examine how the libraries can best serve the needs of this population.

Since the Committee's goal was to explore how to reach and serve this population, the Committee chose to use the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) method of assessment. Appreciative Inquiry focuses on what works well, inviting participants to identify any successes they have had so that we can build on that foundation of strength.

The Committee used Appreciative Inquiry methods to create a survey (Appendix I) administered via Blackboard to courses in the 500, 600 and 700 levels. Forty-four courses were identified in Banner as being both graduate level and online during the Spring 2008 term. Diana Suhr, in OBIA, created a survey meeting our specifications in Websurveyor and provided a URL at which the survey was located. The Committee created an invitation to participate, which included an informed consent statement, as a Blackboard announcement. We coordinated with Alma Azama in CETL to have that announcement display in the courses identified; we also contacted the faculty teaching those courses directly, asking them to encourage their students to participate. The survey was open for approximately one month. The survey reflects the goal of this qualitative method -- not intended to identify problems, but rather to seek input on a vision for the future, with an emphasis on serving graduate students in online courses.

Our five question survey invited narrative responses from participants, allowing us to mine the data for "stories" expressing respondents' core values and quotes that frame our strengths. Based upon these stories and quotes, we can build a vision for the future of University Libraries' services that will need to support more and more online graduate-level programs. Sixty-two participants were logged by Websurveyor, however four were not included in the data set because of duplication or because the surveys were not completed; the final data set is made up of 58 responses. The majority of respondents are from Colorado -- some in Greeley itself. This relative proximity of some of the respondents colors their University Libraries' experiences and the responses that they gave.

The Appreciative Inquiry process results in a statement of vision -- built from respondents' shared images for a preferred future. This vision is an expression of our distance graduate students expectations of how the Libraries' collections and services would ideally be for future distance graduate students. This is not a solution to one or more problems, but rather a definition of what our present students would like us to achieve. The vision, below, is stated in the future tense, to indicate and emphasize this "desired state" as imagined by the survey respondents.

Distance Graduate Students' Vision for the University Libraries

In support of the University of Northern Colorado's vision, University Libraries provides student-centered assistance with research and the development of lifelong learning skills. As President Kay Norton indicated in her vision statement, "Our commitment to excellence will not vary with the location of the student, method of delivery or level of program." So too, University Libraries will provide excellent services and resources for all students, whether on-campus or off-campus, undergraduate or graduate. To better meet this standard of excellence with distance graduate students, the following vision was gleaned from distance graduate students.

The Libraries will continue to expand online access to resources. This service is especially appreciated by the distance students so they can find needed materials at any hour from any location. This access will be easy to use. A distance graduate student stated, "I normally use the UNC online library resource, because it is convenient, fairly quick, and relatively simple to use."

Beyond access, the Libraries will provide an orientation to distance students about available resources and services. Instruction on how to use these resources will also be provided. Each student will be given contact information for a person or persons dedicated to answering their questions. Even in the distance learning environment, the personal touch is needed. The Libraries will also work with the teaching faculty involved with distance courses so that the professors can lead students to the right person or materials.

While online access is a boon to distance students, University Libraries will not have access to all needed online resources and the offline materials that are sometimes needed as well. Library personnel will continue to work closely with distance students to provide streamlined access to physical materials, including resources from the University Libraries as well as resources obtained through interlibrary loan. A distance graduate student stated, "ILL is my favorite program with the library; it makes me feel like I have the resources of a much larger library at my disposal."

Finally, the Libraries understands that it is difficult for distance students to feel connected to campus and to the Libraries while working on a degree from a distance. The Libraries makes a concerted effort to brand resources and reveal the people behind the online resources so distance students feel a connection to the Libraries while they use the resources we provide.

An Eye to the Future

As we prepared for this year's data collection we explored the in-person focus group option. While this was not the direction taken in 2007/08, we believe it should be considered an

appropriate activity for 2008/09. Targeted populations for focus group research could include on-campus graduate students or faculty.

Another aspect of our discussions over the past year has been the role of LibQual⁺ as a data collection tool and the possibility of administering this survey less frequently. The LibQual⁺ survey has been administered consistently over the past six years - in odd years (2003, 2005, 2007) with alternative methods used in intervening years to build on what has been learned in the previous year's LibQual⁺ survey data. Administering the LibQual⁺ survey frequently is costly in several of ways: fiscal costs, indirect costs, and survey fatigue.

- Fiscal costs include the fees associated with the survey itself, training for the individual charged with administering the survey, and costs of prizes. These costs totaled almost \$5,000 in 2007. In light of financial belt-tightening across campus, this sum may seem insignificant or critical, depending upon the quality of the data collected.
- Indirect costs for library personnel are another reason to consider a new model. Coordinating the survey takes many hours of time for all members of the Committee, and while the Committee members are dedicated to the assessment of library collections and services, we need to insure their time is spent on the most productive assessment activities.
- Our greatest concern about frequency of LibQual⁺ administration deals with participant survey fatigue. UNC students, staff and faculty are subject to multiple web-based surveys each year, and as students and faculty (in particular) complete more and more of these surveys, their dedication to accurate reporting, or even willingness to participate at all, wanes. This phenomenon is documented at colleges and universities, leading some academic libraries to administer the LibQual⁺ survey on a three-year cycle. According to a recent informal poll of the LibQual⁺ listserv, many academic libraries have transitioned to an every third year implementation of the survey, with alternate survey methods used in intervening years.

Given that we now have solid baseline data from LibQual⁺, and since many LibQual⁺ comments re-address the same issues, the Committee recommends that University Libraries administration consider approving a transition to a three-year cycle. LibQual⁺ could be administered in the first of the three years, followed by two years of alternative assessment methods such as focus groups or follow-up assessment activities based on the CIRP Survey of first year students.

Final Recommendations

The Committee offers recommendations drawn from the results of the Appreciative Inquiry findings. The Committee's initiative in exploring the needs of online learners, particularly those in graduate level programs, is a direct reflection of concern that the Libraries support the University's increasing investment in distance programs. According to the results of the Appreciative Inquiry survey of distance graduate students, the Libraries should

- Continue expansion of online access to materials through collections and e-reserves
- Support the development of an orientation for distance students, including emphasizing contact information for librarians serving distance programs
- Continue to streamline access to physical materials via interlibrary loan and targeted contact with faculty teaching in the online environment
- Explore options for branding and personalizing the distance learners' Libraries experience

The Libraries should strive to minimize survey fatigue and leverage data collected by campus colleagues, including the Office of University Assessment. This shift would demonstrate our willingness and ability to support and build on the work of the University as well as our understanding of the fiscally-sensitive climate of higher education in the state of Colorado.

Lastly, during the 2007/08 year, the University Libraries Assessment Committee experienced a change in personnel which reduced the size of the committee by 25%. This poses an organizational challenge for the coming year, as all but one of those remaining are scheduled to cycle off the Committee. While some members might be willing to serve an additional year or two, Administration should seek members for a staggered series of terms, thus correcting this year's anomalous challenge.

Summer 2008

Appendix I – the invitation/announcement and survey

**Blackboard announcement in 500, 600, & 700 level courses listed as
“Online” in URSA, Spring 2008.**

The University of Northern Colorado’s University Libraries routinely measure patron satisfaction with our services. Graduate online, or distance education, students have unique needs that might have been overlooked in our previous data collection. We hope that you will take a few minutes to let us know how well we are doing in meeting your needs.

If you are enrolled as a graduate student in an online course at University of Northern Colorado, we would like to hear from you even if you’ve never used UNC Libraries.

Please take a few minutes to complete the short survey.

The first question is this:

Are you enrolled as a graduate student in an online class at the University of Northern Colorado?

If no, thanks for taking the time to read this message. If yes, please click on the link below to complete the five-question survey.

We foresee no risks to participants beyond those that are normally encountered in computer use. The five questions are brief and responses should primarily involve one or two short paragraphs. It will take approximately 15 minutes to complete the survey. Participation is voluntary, and you may end the survey at any time. We request no information that could be used to identify participants; therefore your responses will be anonymous. Data, for research purposes, will only be used in the aggregate, further ensuring privacy. Clicking on the link below connects you to the survey, and indicates consent to participate.

Please feel free to contact the chair of the University Libraries Assessment Committee, annie.epperson@unco.edu with any questions or concerns about this research project. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact the Sponsored Programs and Academic Research Center, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado in Greeley CO 80639; 970-351-1907. Thank you for participating.

LINK

-----from here on in Websurveyor-----

Your home Zip code: _____

Program: _____

Level: Masters _____ Doctoral _____ Other _____ Please explain: (open ended text box, limited to 50 characters)

Age: Under 18 _____ 18 - 29 _____ 30-39 _____ 40-49 _____ 50 & above _____

1. When given a research assignment, where do you go to obtain the needed books, articles, or other resources and why?

(open ended text box, limited to 5000 characters)

2. If you use UNC Libraries, share a highlight of your use of the Libraries' resources or services. What made it a highlight? Who was involved? What did they do that made it a good experience? What did you do that made it a good experience?

(open ended text box, limited to 5000 characters)

3. Based on your experience so far, what do you value most about library resources or services? What do you define as core resources or services (resources and services that are essential for your success in your area of study)? Please be specific.

(open ended text box, limited to 5000 characters)

4. If you were "librarian-in-charge" and could have three wishes for UNC Libraries granted, what would you wish? How would UNC Libraries be different if your three wishes were implemented?

(open ended text box, limited to 5000 characters)

5. Many library resources are delivered electronically. What has been your experience in using these resources? What access or technical problems have you encountered?

(open ended text box, limited to 5000 characters)

Thank you for taking the time to let us know how well we are meeting your needs. Your responses will help us as we contribute to the planning process here in the Libraries, allowing us to better serve patrons in the future.

Thanks again!