2006 LibQUAL+ Survey at WIU

LibQUAL+ survey was carried out at WIU during October 9-29, 2006. The respondents are as follows: 717 undergraduate students, 204 graduate students, 204 faculty members, and 137 staff members, for a total of 1,262 library users. The survey consists of 22 questions covering three areas: Affect of Service, Information Control and Library as Place. These questions are on LibQUAL+ surveys for all participant libraries to yield comparative data across institutions. The survey also included 5 local questions chosen by WIU.

   In the summary results for the core questions, the means for the perceived level or quality of resources and services are above the minimal acceptable values and below the desired values. Essentially, this means that we are doing better than the minimal level but not as well as the best. There is room for improvement in all areas. Noteworthy is that on a 1-to-9 scale, only four perceived means are below 7. These four areas are:

> Employees who instill confidence in users (6.66)
> Giving users individual attention (6.80)
> Library space that inspires study and learning (6.99)
> Community space for group learning and group study (6.88)

For the local questions, two of five received means below 7.00. But again, all of them are above the minimum and less than the desired. These two are:

> Access to [computer] equipment that is not readily available in my department (6.22)
> Space for students to study and work in groups (6.91)

For the full report, please go to http://www.wiu.edu/library/libqual/

When broken down by user groups, there are differences. A preliminary inspection of charts and tables in the full report shows that among undergraduate students, "Giving users individual attention" received a lower perceived mean. In the local questions, not having computer equipment such as scanners stood out. For graduate students, in addition to the two areas identified for undergraduate students, having adequate electronic resources received a perceived mean lower than the minimal acceptable level. This aspect was also true for availability of computer equipment in the local question. For faculty, the picture is very different. The perceived mean for service areas were uniformly high. The mean for group study areas is actually higher than the desired level. In 6 of the 8 questions concerning information control or resources, the perceived means are lower than the expected minimal level. These cover navigational, availability and access issues. In regard to staff, the low areas are courteous personnel, readiness to answer questions, inadequacy of print materials and spaces that are inviting. Electronic access from home or office, however, was deemed at a more than desired level.

The comments gave more specific concerns and confirmed the lower perceived means cited in the previous paragraph. In particular, the following two summarize the more than five hundred comments received:

> "I think the library has a lot of great resources. The one thing I would strongly suggest is providing more space for group work, and also more computers for school work. It will also help to have the library open for later hours."
>   --traditional female student at Curriculum Library

> "The library services provided by Western are very good, as long as the individual is willing to solicit help. Information can be difficult to come by, but that is associated with attempting to find it, not a function of the services offered by Western."
> --older male undergraduate at Quad Cities.

One concern raised by the comments, however, is the interrelationship among the issues. For example, comments about difficulty in accessing electronic information may be a function of inappropriate technology, navigation of the Web pages, or the lack of databases in certain topical areas. Some comments call for better interfaces, newer and faster equipment, or additional databases. Another area mentioned most often by graduate students is Interlibrary Loan services. While the services can be improved, users' concerns are about turn-around time and the ability to check on status of request. While the former is externally controlled, the latter is a technological issue. But the respondents regard these as service issues. Highly related to services are the personnel involved. Friendliness or knowledge base of personnel are mentioned in relationship to access, directional and navigational difficulties.

Space and environmental comments also came through the comments. From the comments, available space, especially for group study areas, is a big problem in the evenings. This is associated with the space problem. The more crowded the library, the higher the level of noise. Related to this is a call for a coffee bar or lounge area, especially among the students, and more open hours, both for the library and for service hours. Again, dependent of personal needs, some say that the library is an inviting place while others say that the furniture and carpeting are dated and the atmosphere is gloomy. There were also comments on physical accessibility and ADA compliance.

As with the physical environment, resources also brought out comments either on superior availability or the lack of resources in specific disciplines. In several comments, compliments on available resources are related to getting excellent help from the library staff. Comments about the lack of resources such as popular DVDs or scholarly titles are related to collection development policies and practices. Lack of electronic resources, again may refer to access and navigational concerns. As one student said, help is there for the asking. Availability and access to information are often not for the lack of service but procedural issues.

Focus groups were then conducted in late February 2007 where participation is limited to self-selected groups. Those who took part were encouraged to articulate their own perceptions and definitions of library events. Participants in the focus groups gave very positive marks to the quality of service. But faculty and graduate students expressed a need for expanded service hours, especially between sessions. The nature of services would be on accessing and using resources. While electronic services and databases are important, there is a need for recent books in disciplines. While many articles target current individual issues, books will tie these individual strands together for undergraduate students who do not yet have the knowledge base to do that on their own. Many participants also expressed a need for better instructional and directional help. There seems to be a "disconnect" between choices provided on Web pages or search engines and those needed by different disciplines.

The need for directional cues also extend to the physical facilities. Several participants said that the building is not an inviting place. To make it a "lively" place means updating the furniture, adding color, and providing better signage, especially at the entrance and in the stacks areas. Perhaps a different physical layout of the stacks would help. There was also an expressed need for individual study areas, perhaps shared with a few other individuals. Concurrent with the physical make-over, the library needs to market and promote its resources and services. While the

level of technology is already better than many parts of campus, using more technology such as iPods for self-guided tours may be another way of engaging students.

The focus group participants articulated many of the same issues identified through the written comments. They went further in clarifying many of the points and suggested possible steps to better understand and start solving some of these problems.