
Building on Success: Increasing the Impact of an In-House User Satisfaction Survey

Emily Daly
Duke University, USA

Abstract

In 2013, Duke University Libraries' staff transitioned from using LibQUAL+® Lite to a user satisfaction survey designed, tested, and implemented entirely by library staff. Staff in numerous library departments were highly engaged in developing and piloting survey questions, analyzing and responding to findings, and participating in follow-up assessment, including focus groups and observational studies.

The collaboratively designed user needs assessment, which aimed to gather feedback about current and future library services, collections, and spaces, was deemed a success, but we knew there were aspects of the project we could improve when we ran the survey for a second time in the 2015–16 academic year. For instance, we wanted to reach more users, increase our response rate, and focus our efforts on gathering feedback about library services and resources from undergraduate and graduate students. In an effort to create a more valid survey instrument, we worked very closely with student advisory board members and pilot respondents to test the flow of our survey and the format and language of question and answer choices. Based on our low response rate from students in 2013, we adjusted the time of year that we distributed the second survey and offered an incentive to respondents. We also changed our recruitment strategy, basing our invitation to participate on behavioral decision-making research conducted at Duke University. Finally, we worked much more closely with Duke's institutional research staff during our second iteration and integrated many of their well established and refined survey guidelines into our protocol. These numerous changes in strategy enabled us to design a more robust and focused survey that reached many more students than our initial study did.

This short paper highlights lessons we learned in our 2013–14 survey project and changes we implemented in 2015–16 that enabled library staff to gather more substantive findings from a focused user population.

Background

Duke University Libraries has long been committed to learning more about the evolving needs of our researchers and then implementing innovative services, developing new collections and building new spaces in response to our users' demonstrated interests. Like many libraries, we have conducted multiple university-wide surveys in an attempt to learn more about our researchers' perceptions of the services, spaces and collections available for their use. We administered LibQUAL¹ in 2002, 2005, 2007 and LibQUAL Lite in 2011² and were prepared to conduct another university-wide user survey in 2013.

In late 2012, assessment and user experience (AUX) staff considered the possibility of administering a survey other than LibQUAL. While we appreciated the potential for benchmarking and comparing results across libraries that also use the LibQUAL framework, we found that we never actually made use of this feature. Perhaps more importantly, we heard from respondents and librarians alike that they found the survey to be too long (prompting our shift to LibQUAL Lite in 2011), the question format difficult to understand, and the results cumbersome to understand and analyze. We felt it was time to consider an alternative. After reviewing numerous in-house and consortial surveys from academic research libraries across the country, we opted to design our own survey, as we knew this would allow us to incorporate extensive branching and Duke-specific answer choices, including academic departments and pilot programs and services implemented at Duke University Libraries, in particular.

While AUX staff members were motivated by the customized options and answer choices of an in-house survey, we were even more excited that a locally-designed survey would allow us to involve staff at every stage of the survey design and implementation. Our goal was for our Duke-specific survey data to guide staff toward making service design changes and help set the direction of future

projects particular to our researchers' needs. By engaging staff in the survey project from start to finish, we hoped they would be more likely to use survey data to inform changes and improvements to library services they provide or oversee.

Survey design, take two

Our 2012–13 survey helped achieve the goal of learning more about users' experiences with the library and enabled us to make improvements based on what we learned, but we knew there were aspects we could improve. For instance, the survey response rate, especially among undergraduates, was fairly low. We were also concerned that survey questions and answer choices were unclear to respondents, thereby undermining the validity of survey findings. In the 2015–16 survey cycle, we endeavored to strengthen the validity of the survey instrument and reach a broader base of potential respondents. We were also able to focus our survey on a core group of users this time around: in 2013–14, we included faculty, undergraduate students, graduate students, staff, and the general public in our survey sample. Because we implemented the Ithaca S+R Local Faculty Survey in fall 2015, we did not target faculty respondents in recruitment for our January 2016 user survey. We opted this time to focus recruitment efforts on undergraduate and graduate students, and because we knew our respondents would be primarily students, we were able to focus our survey structure and questions on this population. Another change is that we shortened this year's survey considerably by reducing demographic questions—in fact, we bypassed this section entirely by recording a unique identifier for each survey respondent and then working with Duke's Institutional Research Service to collect aggregate participant data, including respondents' academic programs and majors/minors, year at Duke, sex, race, and international status.

Overall, we found that the structure of our 2012–13 survey worked well, so we preserved the flow: we first asked users which library they visit most frequently or if they choose *not* to visit a library (it was particularly important to liaison librarians in the sciences to hear from our users who do not visit a physical library; we followed up by asking *why* they opt not to visit physical libraries). We then focused our core questions around particular services, collections, and spaces we were most interested in learning about. We asked questions we felt would

help us gather information about users and, more importantly, prompt us to imagine and prioritize possibilities for services, collections, and spaces.

The next section gave respondents an opportunity to share what they viewed as most important to their teaching, research, and learning. We then asked that they indicate their level of satisfaction with the services, collections, and spaces provided by Duke Libraries. Again this year, respondents had an opportunity to tell us what services or resources they did not know were available through Duke Libraries (e.g., data visualization services, streaming audio, digital maps).

Finally, we invited our respondents to share which library services or technologies would most enhance their experience using Duke University Libraries. Options provided in the survey included specialized study spaces and furniture, expanded data and visualization services and support, and increased digital access to unique or rare materials, among others. Respondents were also invited to write in additional services or technologies they believe would enhance their library experience or list equipment they wish they could check out from the library. This particular question is a major reason we chose to invest time and resources to design our own survey: we wanted to hear from our community the programming and services they would like Duke Libraries to pursue in the future.

While our assessment analyst and consultant took the lead on building our home-grown survey in Qualtrics,³ a survey tool Duke licenses university-wide, she did so with input from numerous library staff, potential survey respondents, and university staff and faculty with expertise in survey design. Using our 2013 survey⁴ as a starting point for format and question terminology, AUX staff led numerous meetings to refine the structure and update the text used in 2013 to reflect the resources and services we were most interested in learning more about during this cycle and to ensure question and answer options made sense to our more focused group of student respondents. In addition to leading small group discussions about the format and structure of our survey and questions, we shared our survey with all library staff at library-wide meetings and through e-mail—we wanted no library staff member to feel excluded from the process or to be taken by surprise that we were leading this effort.

After weeks of discussion and work in Qualtrics, we had an instrument ready to test and then implement. Our final survey⁵ was short, taking users just four to six minutes to complete on average, but it was complex, featuring extensive branching and customized survey options for each of our library locations.

Recruiting respondents

Once we fully tested and vetted our survey with numerous students and library staff, we began to recruit respondents. Institutional Research provided a sample of 5,889 undergraduates and graduate students, and we directly e-mailed an invitation to take the survey to these students and followed up with reminders twice during the three-week survey window. Additionally, we posted links to the survey to the Duke Libraries homepage and promoted it through social media, student Listservs and subject librarians' departmental e-mails.

At the advice of a university expert in survey design, we opted not to provide incentives for survey respondents during the first implementation of our in-house survey. Because we were disappointed with our overall response rate in 2012–13, however, we decided to provide an incentive of a raffle for a \$75 Amazon gift card this time around. Additionally, we worked with the Duke Center for Advanced Hindsight, led by the prominent behavioral economist Dan Ariely, to develop a regret lottery.⁶ A regret lottery is based on the notion that respondents feel more pain or loss if they believe they were very close to avoiding loss. We developed a survey invitation invoking the idea that students' names could be picked from the raffle for an Amazon gift card—but they could only claim the prize if they actually completed the survey. Our message included the following language: "Your name has been entered in a drawing for a \$75 Amazon gift certificate... If you are the winner of the gift certificate but you have not completed the survey, you are not eligible to receive the \$75 Amazon gift certificate." On day one of survey distribution, we sent half of our potential respondents this regret lottery message; the other half received a more traditional survey recruitment email: "To thank you for your participation, you will be entered in a raffle to win a \$75 Amazon gift certificate."

In the first 24 hours that our survey was open, we received 1,200 responses, nearly all from the survey links we e-mailed directly to students through

Qualtrics (four respondents completed the survey by accessing an open link on the Duke Libraries website during this same 24-hour period). Of the responses from the A/B testing, we had twice as many responses from students who received the regret lottery e-mail than from those who received the more traditional message, and within the first hour of sending the survey directly to students, we had 2.5 times more responses from those who received the regret lottery message. The response rate then normalized a bit over the first 24 hours. Because the regret lottery was so effective, we used the regret lottery text in our two reminder messages to all students who had not yet taken the survey. Our overall response rate from our initial sample was 43%, and we had an additional 945 responses to the survey through open URLs, resulting in a total of 3,467 respondents, significantly more than the 733 responses to our first in-house survey.

Analyzing and sharing results

Because our primary motivation for designing and implementing a survey entirely in-house was to involve our colleagues in reviewing and responding to findings, it was important that we share initial findings as soon after the close of the survey as possible. After sharing high-level findings with library staff, we formed a short-term team of six library staff who volunteered to review and tag over 1,200 free-response comments using a codebook with nearly 50 different topics.

While we were able to gather useful feedback through the survey and free-response comments, we planned from the start to follow our survey period with a series of focus groups to dig more deeply into survey responses. After spending time reviewing the survey data, we hosted six follow-up focus groups, targeting undergraduate and graduate students to learn more about our researchers' experiences with particular services, collections, and spaces they commented on in the survey. Just as we did when we designed the survey instrument, AUX staff solicited input from other library staff, this time to determine what we still needed to know from the initial survey.

By this point, we had survey data from nearly 6,000 respondents, including over 1,200 coded comments, as well as coded notes and themes from six focus group sessions. It was time to share this rich data with our colleagues, which we did through all-staff presentations and follow-up e-mails. Additionally, our assessment analyst and consultant spent

significant time using Tableau Public⁷ to develop three dashboards providing different ways to explore survey data and comments.⁸

Making survey data visible and usable in so many ways enabled staff from across the libraries to analyze the data on their own or ask AUX staff to help them delve more deeply into particular questions or slice the data by demographics particular to their areas. We encouraged units and departments to consider survey data and reflect on how library staff might respond to what we learned. We then invited all staff to participate in a workshop to explore the Tableau dashboards and prioritize an initial set of recommendations developed by AUX staff and department heads of units across the libraries. Forty-seven staff representing technical services, public services, IT, building services, and library administration registered to attend the session, working in small groups to explore areas of the data most relevant to their work or interests and consider ways they might respond to findings.

Responding to what we learned

After spending significant time exploring the survey data, comments, and focus group findings, AUX and other library staff developed recommendations to follow up on what we learned. We drafted potential improvements to library spaces, services, and resources. We also made note of services and resources that respondents expressed interest in but appeared to be unaware of—these are marketing opportunities for library staff. In fact, we have established a monthly e-newsletter in response to multiple survey comments requesting more coordinated communication from the library. We have used the newsletter to share information about underutilized services and improvements to our spaces and will continue to use this channel to inform users of changes we have made as a result of student survey responses and focus group findings.

We also outlined needs for further assessment, including developing targeted user surveys, semi-structured interviews, and observational studies to understand more fully our researchers' experience reserving group study rooms and using print and scanning services in the library. After discussing, vetting, and prioritizing the lists of recommendations for expenditures, service improvements, marketing opportunities, and assessment opportunities, AUX staff and library leadership charged task groups and

other library staff with acting on findings between now and our next biannual user survey.

Based on the success of our first two in-house survey cycles, we plan to conduct another broad-based university-wide user survey in early 2018, likely targeting both students and faculty. In the meantime, we will continue to make use of the significant amount of data gathered from our 2016 survey, encouraging staff to explore the survey dashboards as they consider new services or the needs of particular user groups. We will support staff as they lead follow-up observational studies, usability studies, and user interviews to develop a deeper understanding of the many ways our researchers engage Duke University Libraries' spaces, services, interfaces, and collections.

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Endnotes

1. "LibQUAL+," Association of Research Libraries Statistics and Assessment Program, accessed December 15, 2016, <https://www.libqual.org/home>.
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8. "2016 Student Survey."