

“No Two Directions Are Ever the Same”¹: Transforming Reference Services

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Abstract

Since 2002, reference services at the University of Kansas (KU) Libraries have been influenced by the progression of assessment activities designed both to build a culture of assessment and to gather information about user behavior and expectations on our campus. Assessment activities include the campus-wide administration of LibQUAL+ (completed in 2000, 2003 & 2006), in addition to purely local instruments and surveys designed to gauge user response to service changes. Over the last six years the evolution of reference services have both paralleled and been informed by the development of incipient assessment efforts at KU, aimed at gathering relevant information about users in several areas, including reference services within the Libraries.

For many years, KU Libraries offered traditional and separate reference services at the two largest libraries on campus – Watson and Anschutz libraries. However, KU Libraries sought to redefine its reference services in 2002 to take advantage of changing user behaviors and technologically-enhanced access to informational and scholarly resources and to better utilize library faculty time. Some of these changes included all or some of the following initiatives: merged reference departments, design and implementation of a “peer and tier” model that relied on student workers as front line service attendants supported by librarians in reserve; paraprofessional staff (i.e., not librarians) presence at the desks; cross-training staff members of other departments to provide reference services; combined circulation and reference service points; and vigorous approaches to training of all desk personnel. At the same time, initiatives in chat and other virtual reference services were inaugurated to provide users significantly greater latitude in contacting the libraries for reference and research assistance.

With the hiring of a new Dean of Libraries in 2006 and an assessment of the changes introduced over the previous four years, reference services has once more transformed its approach to public service. Recent changes have been informed by debate about service-related issues such as ensuring the continued relevancy of reference in an era of increasing self-service; remaining user-centered and focused on community needs; adding value to services provided; and seeking ways to deploy technological tools that can be personalized to meet immediate user needs.

LibQUAL+ 2006

KU Libraries: We Listened to You!

Thanks to the more than 1,100 KU faculty, staff and students who completed the 2006 LibQUAL+ survey, KU Libraries has made significant changes over the past few months to better meet your research and service needs.

You requested:

- Access to the electronic resources from your home or office
- Print and/or electronic journal collections you require for your work
- A Libraries Web site that enables you to locate information on your own more quickly and easily
- Librarians and staff members who have the knowledge to answer your questions
- Dependability in handling your service problems

We delivered:

- More access to print and electronic materials, including 30,000 journals and many other primary resources
- The new Information Gateway, a primary tool for searching the Libraries' proprietary online resources including databases, journals and images
- A newly redesigned Web site
- Access to electronic records for hundreds of thousands of previously inaccessible items
- An ongoing commitment to enhancing service quality through comprehensive training and continuous evaluation

Service Desks User Survey - Fall 2007

Chart 1: User Status Return Rate

The largest number of surveys were returned by undergraduate students, followed by graduate students.

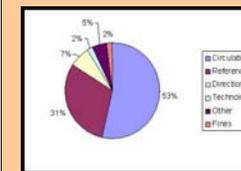
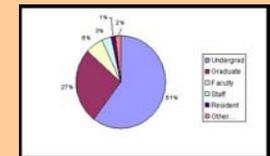


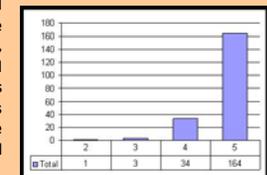
Chart 2: Primary Reasons for Interacting with Service Desks

The primary reasons indicated for interacting with the service desk were largely related to circulation and reference. However directional, technology, and fines related reason were also indicated.

Chart 3: Overall Ratings of Satisfaction Received

1-Completely Dissatisfied to 5- Completely Satisfied

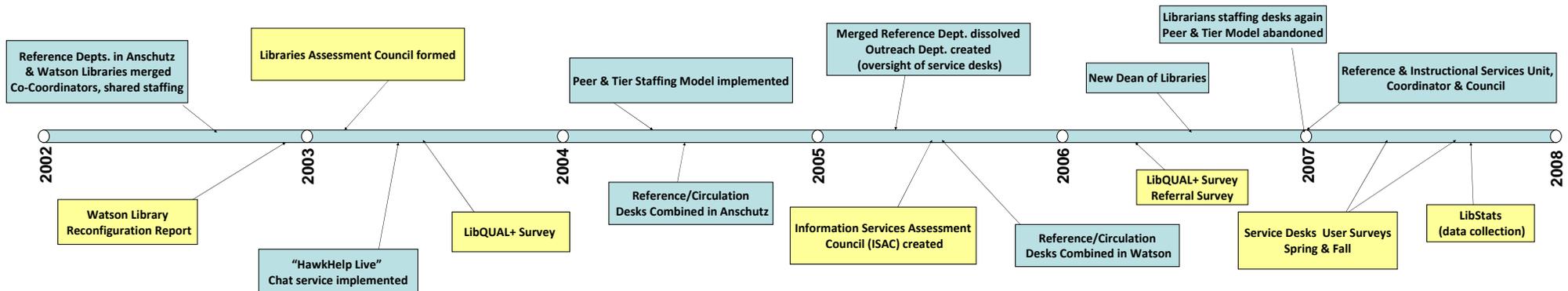
Users overwhelming (98%) reported that they received the information or help needed at the service desks. In addition, a majority of users rated their interactions with service desk staff as positive. On a Likert scale of one (poor) to five (excellent), 97% of users rated interactions with staff a four or five in the categories of approachability, friendliness, willingness to help, knowledgeable, and timely in their response. Generally, users felt more confident with library resources and facilities after speaking with a service desk staff member. Finally, users reported satisfaction with the service they received.



Faculty members reported the highest percentage (92%) of “complete satisfaction” with service.

How Assessment Will Inform Our Future

1. Administration of on-going user surveys and focus groups to enhance reference services
2. Analysis of LibStats data in order to develop a comprehensive training program
3. Administration of the LibQUAL+ instrument in 2009
4. Plan for the assessment of the future *KU Learning Commons* (an integration of student-centric services and re-purposed space within the libraries to enhance student learning)



¹ Don Williams, Jr., American novelist and poet, b. 1968