

## **LIBQUAL+**

### **Charting Library Service Quality...**

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#### **WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF LIBQUAL+?**

- + establishment of a library service quality assessment program at ARL;
- + development of web-based tools for assessing library service quality;
- + development of mechanisms and protocols for evaluating libraries; and
- + identification of best practices in providing library service.

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#### **WHAT IS LIBQUAL+?**

LibQUAL+ is a research and development project undertaken to define and measure library service quality across institutions and to create useful quality-assessment tools for local planning. Service quality has always been a value for libraries; LibQUAL+ provides a measure of that value. LibQUAL+ currently tests a tool for measuring library users' perceptions of service quality and identifies gaps between desired, perceived, and minimum expectations of service. The project will continue as an R&D endeavor based at the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) in collaboration with the Texas A&M University Libraries through 2003, by which time LibQUAL+ will evolve into an ongoing service quality assessment program at ARL.

#### **WHY WAS LIBQUAL+ BEGUN?**

There is increasing pressure for libraries to move towards outcome-based assessment, instead of relying merely on input, output, or resource metrics. This pressure comes from funding authorities as well as users themselves. Outcome measures may show how well an organization serves its users; they demonstrate an institution's efficiency and effectiveness. LibQUAL+ is one of several outcome-based assessment efforts begun under the ARL New Measures Initiative <<http://www.arl.org/stats/newmeas/newmeas.html>>.

#### **HOW WILL LIBQUAL+ BENEFIT LIBRARY USERS?**

Individual libraries participating in LibQUAL+ can identify where their services need improvement in the eyes of their users. They also can compare their service quality with that of peer institutions in an effort to develop benchmarks and understanding of best practices across institutions; for this reason, several library consortia and other peer groups have chosen to participate in LibQUAL+. By using LibQUAL+ and initiating action based on the information they receive from library users and from other LibQUAL+ participants, libraries can be more responsive to user needs and provide services that are better aligned to user expectations. As library services are improved, the ultimate goal is to surpass user expectations in search of excellent library services that better help users to reach their learning and research objectives and to effectively manage information resources.

#### **WHAT IS THE BASIS FOR THE LIBQUAL+ SURVEY INSTRUMENT?**

The LibQUAL+ survey instrument is adapted from an instrument called SERVQUAL, which is grounded in the "Gap Theory of Service Quality" and was developed by the marketing research team of A. Parasuraman, V.A. Zeithaml, and L.L. Berry. The Texas A&M University Libraries and other libraries have been using modified SERVQUAL instruments for several years. These applications showed the need for a newly adapted SERVQUAL protocol that serves the needs of libraries; thus LibQUAL+ was born. The original SERVQUAL instrument was regrounded based on a series of interviews with library users. The regrounded instrument, called LibQUAL+, is being refined with each iteration of the survey.

### **HOW IS LIBQUAL+ CONDUCTED?**

New technology and the use of the Internet make it possible for libraries to survey their users with minimal local effort—LibQUAL+ uses a scalable web interface and protocol for reaching library users and asking them about their library service expectations. Each participating library gathers a random sample of email addresses representative of their user population and sends a message to the sample encouraging recipients to complete the survey on the Web. Survey data are transmitted directly from the central LibQUAL+ server to a database. The data are then analyzed and reports that provide information on how users perceive the quality of their library services are generated for the individual libraries. The reports present information on the gaps between users' desired, perceived, and minimum expectations of service.

### **HOW IS LIBQUAL+ BEING PAID FOR?**

LibQUAL+ is presently funded through a variety of means: external funding through September 2003 from the U.S. Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE), contributed funding from ARL and Texas A&M University, and modest fees from participating libraries to underwrite production of deliverables. Participating libraries also contribute staff and organizational resources for preparation and administration of the survey instrument.

### **Participate in LibQUAL+ <[www.libqual.org](http://www.libqual.org)>**

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