Library Service Assement 2006 Final Report
Based on LibQUAL+ Survey (March 2006)

What IS LibQUAL+?

Evaluation and assessment is an important part of providing the best library service possible. LibQUAL+ is a library evaluation tool created by the Association of Research Libraries (http://www.libqual.org/) which uses a web-based survey to gather responses on user expectations and satisfaction with library functions. Taken as a whole, these responses can be used to redesign library procedures or target areas where training, marketing, and instruction can be improved. LibQUAL+ has been used by hundreds of libraries to date (including many in HELIN, the University Library's library consortium).

The survey instrument uses a series of questions (27 in the case of URI) and a comment box to gather data. Each question requires the user to rate an aspect of service on three 9-point scales – the minimum acceptable, the perceived, and the desired levels of service. LibQUAL+ divides the results into three "Dimensions of Service" – broad areas of user interests. They are:

- *Affect of Service* – customer service
- *Information Control* – access to library materials
- *Library as Place* – the physical and social space of the library.

About the 2006 Survey at URI

The survey was run during March 2006. 1,123 responses were collected, with all three library locations (Kingston, Providence, and Narragansett) participating. Approximately 40% of the participants provided comments, which is in line with the national average.

Findings

The URI Library generally showed well in Library as Place and Affect of Service. Information Control was by far the weakest area, with considerable dissatisfaction shown by Graduate Students and Faculty. Specific questions about journal access (print and electronic) scored especially low. Users also expressed frustration with accessing the information without mediation – this suggests a need for different tools or more instruction. More study will be needed to determine what mix of solutions might be most effective.

The attached chart shows URI's results compared to the other college and university libraries that took the survey during Spring 2006. For all dimensions, URI Undergraduates closely matched the national means, with a slight edge in perceived overall scores, driven by a modestly greater perceived score in Library as Place. The URI undergraduates, in other words, rate their libraries' study and social spaces more highly than the national average. URI's scores begin to lag with the Graduate Students, dragged down by a somewhat greater than the average dissatisfaction with Information Control (more detailed analysis suggests a strong dissatisfaction specifically with access to journal literature) – strong enough to put the perceived Information Control rating below the minimum acceptable level. The situation is worse with the URI Faculty where, although the minimum acceptable and desired numbers are very close to the aggregate means, the perceived scores lag behind the aggregate means by .25 points or more. It is true that faculty are not happy with Information Control anywhere – the aggregate perceived mean for Faculty reactions to Information Control is the only place on the aggregate chart where the perceived is below the minimum. However, URI Faculty are substantially more unhappy with Information Control than their peers. This is not an artifact of the survey or general faculty malaise, but a mark of a substantial failure by the URI Library to provide the materials needed by its researchers. The low rating in general given by the faculty suggests substantial dissatisfaction with the Library and its services, driven in large part by the weakness of the serials collections. Assuming URI has an interest in encouraging and supporting the research efforts of its faculty and graduate students (and maintaining its status as a Carnegie RU/H institution), the serials problem is a critical issue that must be addressed.

Library Action Plan

On 21 July 2006, the Library faculty and staff met to discuss the survey and its findings. Based on this discussion, an action was developed with the following areas:

- Hire a Dean of Libraries
- Reevaluate Library Hours of Operation
- Optimize Use of Library Space
- Address Noise in Public Spaces
- Market the Library
- Promote LibQUAL+ Results
- Address Serials Issues

The Library believes that, if this plan is implemented, a repeat of the LibQUAL+ survey in 2009 will show improvement in the perceived scores for all users. Note that the plan is designed to focus on actions the Library faculty and staff can take within its current budgetary situation. The major weakness exposed by the survey, user dissatisfaction with the extent of the serials collection, cannot be adequately addressed without a substantial reevaluation of the University's support for the Library and its collections.