User Needs Assessment to Support Collection Management Decisions

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ALA Annual, Orlando, Florida, June 2004
Needs Assessment Using Large Scale Surveys at the University of Washington Libraries

Steve Hiller, UW Libraries
For ALA Annual Meeting
Why Do User Needs Assessment?

- Decisions based on data not assumptions -“assumicide”

  Fundamental to User-Centered Library

- Users determine quality, importance and success
- Evaluation and assessment focus on user outcomes
- Align collections and resources with user needs
- Identify differences/similarities in needs and use by academic areas/groups
- Support fair and equitable distribution of funds

Ensure libraries are responsive to their communities
Use Multiple Approaches for Assessment

• User Needs Assessment and Behavior
  – Surveys for satisfaction, importance, use patterns, priorities
  – Focus groups/interviews identify issues from user perspective
  – Usability and observation for the how’s and why’s

• Measuring Usage
  – Print
  – Electronic

• Calculating Costs
  – Actual costs
  – Cost per use

• Collections Assessment
User Needs Assessment: What We Want to Know

- Who are our customers (and potential customers)?
- What are their teaching, learning and research interests?
- What are their needs for library services and resources?
- How aware are they of library services and resources?
- How do they currently use library/information resources?
- How would they prefer to do so?
- How do they differ from each other in library use/needs?
- How does the library add value to their work?
University of Washington Libraries Assessment Methods Used

  – All faculty
  – Samples of undergraduate and graduate students
  – 2004 survey Web-based (with paper option for faculty)
• In-library use surveys every 3 years beginning 1993
• Focus groups (annually since 1998)
• Observation (guided and non-obtrusive)
• Usability
• Information about assessment program available at: http://www.lib.washington.edu/assessment/
UW Triennial Library Use Survey
Number of Respondents and Response Rate 1992-2004

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Large number of respondents allows for analysis within groups.
UW Triennial Survey: Core Questions

- **Importance**
  - Sources for work
  - Information resource types
  - Priorities for the library

- **Satisfaction**
  - Hours
  - Specific services
  - Resource types/collections
  - Overall

- **Use Patterns**
  - Frequency by access method used (in-person, remote)
  - Frequency of in-person library visits by type of use
  - Frequency of remote use by type of use and location
  - Libraries used on a regular basis

(% of each group who use library at least weekly)

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Print/Online Priority by Academic Area Faculty 1998, 2001, 2004 (% in each group identifying as priority)
Importance of Resource Types
Faculty 1998, 2001, 2004
Scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high)

Books
Current Journals
Bib Databases
Faculty Importance/Satisfaction with Resource Types by Broad Academic Area 2004

- **Health Sciences**
- **Humanities/Social Sciences**
- **Sciences**

**Importance**

3.2 3.3 3.4 3.5 3.6 3.7 3.8 3.9 4 4.1 4.2 4.3 4.4 4.5 4.6 4.7 4.8

**Satisfaction**

3.2 3.3 3.4 3.5 3.6 3.7 3.8 3.9 4 4.1 4.2 4.3 4.4 4.5 4.6 4.7 4.8
2004 Overall Collections Satisfaction
By Group in Selected Colleges

Faculty
Grad
Undergrad

Humanities Social Sci Business Science Engineering Public Health

Graph showing satisfaction scores for different groups in various colleges.
Overall Collections Satisfaction by Group

2002/03 Focus Groups: Findings

- The information environment is too complex
- General search engines (e.g. Google) are preferred over library licensed/provided interfaces
- Undergrads have difficulty determining which library sources to use
- Faculty “dumbing down” library research assignments
- Ubiquity of library research – any place, any time has changed research patterns
- Availability online is more efficient way to research
- The personal connection with a librarian is important
**Guided Observation** (March 2003)

**Bibliographic Database Searching**

- Faculty and graduate students search very differently than we think they should
- Common observations included:
  - Prefer to use single keyword search box
  - Little use of Boolean commands
  - Limits or format changes rarely employed
  - Commands need to be on first page or lost
  - Visible links to full-text critical
- Important features for librarians are not necessarily important to faculty and students
What We’ve Learned from User Needs Assessment about the UW Community

• Libraries remain the most important source of information used for teaching, learning and research
• Satisfaction with the libraries is exceptionally high
• Library needs/use patterns vary by and within academic areas and groups
• Remote access is preferred method and has changed the way faculty and students work and use libraries
• Faculty and students use libraries differently than librarians think (or prefer them too)
• Library/information environment is perceived as too complex; users find simpler ways (Google) to get info
How We’ve Used Assessment Data to Support Collection Management

• Move to electronic only access for science journals
• Provide access to additional titles online
• Acquire online backfiles selectively based on user need
• Move older serial runs to storage in selected areas
• Increase book budgets in some subject areas (e.g. Math)
• Review value of bibliographic databases in selected areas
• Better understand differences within groups as well as between groups
• Develop better resource discovery tools and ways to access and retrieve online information remotely
2004 Grad Student Priorities & % in Doctoral Programs by Selected Colleges

Maintain quality of print collections

Online Journal

Online Journal backfiles

Doctoral

A&S Hum
A&S Soc
Business
Education
A&S Sci
Engin
Public Hlth

10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%
80%
90%