Queen’s University Library LibQUAL 2013 Report – 2013-06-23

Queen’s University Library (QUL) has participated in the LibQUAL+® survey every three years since 2004. The survey was created by the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) as a standardized method of measuring the quality of library services. Faculty, students and staff are asked to provide their perceptions of library services. Again in 2013, QUL participated with 46 other Canadian academic libraries as a member of the LibQUAL Canada consortium. Of the 47 participating libraries, 25 (including QUL) are also members of the Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL).

The LibQUAL+ Lite® survey asks respondents to rank their minimum, desired and perceived level of service in three “dimensions”:
- Affect of Service (helpfulness and knowledge of Library employees)
- Information Control (adequacy of and ease of access to print and electronic collections)
- Library as Place (the Library’s physical facilities.)

The gaps between the minimum acceptable level and the desired and perceived levels of service inform the Library as to how well we are meeting users’ expectations and needs. Results from the LibQUAL+® are one of the sources of information we take into account in our assessment programs and annual strategic planning.

The LibQUAL+ Lite® survey consists of 22 standard questions plus 5 local questions (chosen by the LibQUAL Canada consortium), 3 general satisfaction questions and 5 information literacy outcomes questions. All respondents are asked to complete 3 of the standard questions and 1 of the general satisfaction questions while the remaining questions are randomly distributed so that each respondent completes only 8 questions in total.

Summary of Findings

- QUL’s overall scores improved over the 2010 survey results.
- There is a strong level of general satisfaction with the Library.
- The highest satisfaction is with Library as Place, but students desire more study space.
- There is a high level of satisfaction with the services provided by staff.
- Information Control is the most highly valued dimension and the area of lowest satisfaction, though scores have improved considerably since 2010.
- The areas most needing further exploration and improvement are electronic resources access and the Library’s web presence.

The Library received 614 valid survey responses, notably less than the 1,802 responses in 2010. It should be noted as well that graduate students were over-represented in the 2010 results, having constituted 48% of all respondents that year, versus 26% in 2013. See below for further information on response rate.
Overall Results

QUL’s overall general satisfaction results are very similar to those of 2010. All user groups gave higher scores for their satisfaction with the way in which they are treated at the Library. Faculty are more satisfied in 2013 with Library support for their learning, research and/or teaching needs and overall quality of the service provided by the Library, whereas graduate students and undergraduates are slightly less satisfied. The aggregate scores for all groups are almost identical for 2010 and 2013.

In 2013 there is an increase in QUL’s overall adequacy\(^1\) score compared to 2010, indicating some perceived improvements in Library services in specific areas. Of the 22 standard questions in the survey, QUL’s adequacy score increased in 15. Notable among those questions with higher adequacy scores overall in 2013 are all 5 questions dealing with Library as Place, 6 of the 8 questions in the Information Control dimension, and 4 of the 9 questions in the Affect of Service dimension.

In 2013 there is also an improvement in QUL’s overall superiority\(^2\) of service. Superiority scores improved overall for all 5 Library as Place questions, 6 Information Control questions and 5 Affect of Service questions.

Affect of Service

Respondents indicate a high level of satisfaction with the services provided by, and personal interactions with, QUL staff. While slightly lower than in 2010, QUL satisfaction continues to be higher than the CARL mean in this dimension.

Of the 3 dimensions in the survey, Affect of Service is valued slightly less than Information Control and more than Library as Place. Faculty are the users who most value this dimension, and they also indicate the highest perceived level of service. Undergraduates show some of their highest satisfaction in this dimension as well, such as in the question regarding staff willingness to help users.

Overall, 4 out of the 5 questions in this dimension show an increase in satisfaction since 2010, whereas 5 show a decrease. The reasons for these variations need to be explored; for example, in the question about dependability in handling users’ service problems, the scores dropped substantially for undergraduates and graduate students but rose for faculty.

Consistent with the CARL results, one of the lowest value (desired) scores in the survey is for the question regarding giving users individual attention. This and the results in Information Control indicate that users predominantly desire easy access to information on their own.

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\(^1\) Adequacy refers to respondents’ perceived level of service minus their minimum level of service. The larger the number, the more the Library is exceeding minimum levels of service.

\(^2\) Superiority refers to respondents’ perceived level of service minus their desired level of service. The smaller the number of gap, the more closely the Library meets the desired level of service.
Information Control

The overall scores in the Information Control dimension improved in 2013 with better scores in 6 of the 8 questions in the dimension. There is, however, still room for improvement, and it should be noted that this is the only dimension where the QUL overall score is lower than the CARL mean. There is an overall improvement in respondents’ evaluation of the adequacy of e-resources, print collections, journal collections, both electronic and print, and the availability of computer and other equipment. Several categories within this dimension receive the highest scores for desired level of service in the entire survey, indicating the importance of this dimension to our users.

In both the QUL and CARL results, scores show that expectations for the Library web site are very high, second only to expectations for making electronic resources accessible from home or office. Expectations for the web site at QUL are slightly higher than the CARL mean, and satisfaction is lower. The adequacy score at QUL for this question is the lowest of all of QUL scores. In looking at this question for each user category at QUL, however, we see that satisfaction amongst undergraduates and graduates is much higher than amongst faculty. An additional local question asked about ability to navigate Library web pages easily. It shows a higher adequacy score than for the standard question, perhaps because different users may have answered each question, but it also indicates lower satisfaction amongst faculty. Clearly this is an area that needs further exploration and improvement.

Graduate students identify a large gap between their desired and perceived access to needed print and/or electronic journal collections. In other words, the journal collection does not meet their needs as well as they would like. This may be indicative of the very specialized nature of the research conducted by graduate students and a desire for more esoteric titles that cannot be supported by our acquisitions budget, or it may indicate difficulty in finding materials that QUL does in fact provide. Faculty do not identify as significant a concern in regards to journal collections, but their adequacy score for this question is amongst their lowest. Graduate students also identify a gap in their perception of e-resources being accessible in their office or home. Faculty and undergraduates, while not ranking this question as low as graduate students, nonetheless do not give this service a particularly good score.

The results around the collections-related questions suggest that there is a need for Library staff to better ensure that users are well-informed about the resources available to them, have easy access to them, and are aware of their ability to suggest acquisitions, both print and electronic. Librarians work closely with their departments to integrate resources within course and research environments and to ensure that collections reflect the needs of faculty and students. There will be cases, however, where desired materials cannot be acquired, given the cost of materials increases and the lack of increases in the acquisitions budget.

Both graduate students and faculty identify dissatisfaction regarding having easy-to-use tools that allow them to find information on their own. Undergraduate students do not share this view, which poses some interesting questions regarding how the three groups access information and how they perceive ease of use. As with the web site question noted above, this is an area for further exploration.
The Information Control dimension scores indicate that the Library needs to continue to place a high priority on collection development and assessment, and ensure we are making users aware of the collections, services and tools available to them. We also need to learn more about the user experience of different groups of users in accessing the Library’s electronic collections, in order to improve our access tools and web presence.

**Library as Place**

QUL scores very highly overall in the Library as Place dimension. As these scores might predict, many respondents included comments that are complimentary about our Library spaces. Frequent concerns expressed include inadequate seating in Stauffer Library, especially during exams, as well as difficulty in finding quiet study spaces. Undergraduate students give some of their highest desired level of service scores in this dimension, with their second highest desired score in the whole survey on the question regarding the Library providing quiet study space (their highest desired score relates to the Library website). Faculty, on the other hand, give their lowest desired level of service scores in Library as Place, likely an indication of their reliance upon electronic resources, but their high perceived scores showed an appreciation for Library spaces. Graduate students’ expectations are similar to those of undergraduates, and it should be noted that they are less satisfied than undergraduates with regard to quiet space for individual activities.

These results make it clear that many of our students would prefer to have more access to quiet study space, and overall increased study areas in all of our facilities. These results echo comments from the 2010 survey, and mirror and confirm feedback received through the information gathering phase of the LAMP process. The Library and Archives Master Plan, which will be complete in the summer of 2013, will provide plans to address a number of issues raised by LibQUAL+® respondents regarding the physical spaces in the Library.

**Local Questions**

The LibQUAL Canada consortium of libraries chose five “local questions” from a list of possibilities provided by LibQUAL+®. Those questions dealt with the navigability of the web site, adequate hours of service, effectiveness of interlibrary borrowing, Library staff ensuring users are aware of resources and services, and Library staff teaching users how to access, evaluate and use information.

Hours of opening are mentioned several times in the comments, particularly with regard to wishing for longer hours in Douglas Library. Undergraduates, and to a lesser extent graduate students, have a significant gap between their desired score for opening hours and their perceived score. This question was also used in the 2010 survey and the undergraduate score at that time was much better. The drop in satisfaction in 2013 may have been a result of the Library shortening the hours of Douglas Library in the Fall 2012 term. Even before the survey was administered, it was recognized that those hours needed to be restored, which they were in Winter 2013. The desire for longer opening hours was also expressed by students, both undergraduate and graduate, during the LAMP information gathering phase.
As noted above, the web site’s navigability scores better on the local question than in the standard question, though the scores still do not indicate strong satisfaction. Again, faculty give a poorer assessment of the web site than students in this question, as they do in the standard one.

All other scores on local questions indicate a high level of satisfaction. Graduate students particularly rank the Library highly on making them aware of resources and services, evidence that the Library is succeeding in its outreach to graduate students. Faculty rate the Library highly for teaching how to access, evaluate and use information, suggesting that working with librarians is highly valued. Faculty also rank interlibrary borrowing very highly.

**Information Literacy Outcomes Questions**

The survey included 5 questions related to the Library’s information literacy program outcomes. They dealt with whether the Library helps respondents keep up-to-date in their field, advance their academic work, be more efficient, distinguish between trustworthy and untrustworthy information and develop information skills. QUL’s overall mean scores are down somewhat in 2013, though there are slight improvements in faculty scores. All 3 groups of respondents rank the Library most highly for helping with advancement in their field(s) of interest and enabling them to be more efficient. Undergraduates also give high scores for the Library’s role in their information skills development and learning about trustworthy information.

**Survey Response Rate**

The 2013 survey ran from February 6 through March 3 with a total sample of 7,662. This was a random sample of 5,201 students (both undergraduate and graduate) and 2,461 faculty and staff (including all full-time and some adjunct faculty). By comparison, in 2010 a larger sample of 10,133 people was contacted, including all graduate students, all full-time faculty and 4,995 undergraduate students.

In 2013 there were 614 valid responses of 647 completed surveys for a response rate of 8.44%. Comments were provided by 258 respondents, providing us with additional information beyond the statistical results of the survey. This response rate is lower than that of 2010, which was 18%.

Reasons for the reduction in response rate in 2013 can be speculated. Surveying all graduate students in 2010, versus a random sample in 2013, resulted in a drop of graduate student participation in 2013. Graduate students were in fact over-represented in the 2010 results, having constituted 48% of all respondents that year, versus 26% in 2013. Additionally, students and faculty may be experiencing survey fatigue given the large number of surveys directed to them in any given year both by the University and external organizations. Undergraduate students may prefer to be contacted by methods other than email but, that said, the response rate for undergraduates was actually up in 2013. Faculty and staff response rates were also up in 2013.

Slightly over half of the 1,212 people who started the survey in 2013 went on to complete the survey versus 71% in 2010 when Lite was introduced. One could speculate that respondents who are not regular Library users might start the survey, feel they can’t contribute meaningfully, and drop out. Some comments would support this theory. Other respondents may find the survey daunting. Again, there were
some comments to that effect. Investigating the reasons for completion versus non-completion of the survey would be instructive for future iterations of LibQUAL+®.

**Percent of Respondents by Population Groups**

- Undergraduate Students: 43% (up from 38% in 2010)
- Graduates Students: 26% (down from 48% in 2010 – see above)
- Faculty: 21% (up from 13% in 2010)
- Staff: 10% (up from 1% in 2010; a larger number of staff were surveyed in 2013)

**Percent of Respondents by Broad Discipline[^3]**

- Business: 6%
- Education: 6%
- Engineering/Computer Science: 13%
- Health Sciences: 8%
- Humanities: 8%
- Law: 2%
- Other: 10%
- Performing & Fine Arts: 6%
- Science/Math: 18%
- Social Sciences/Psychology: 23%

[^3]: Broad disciplines are defined by LibQUAL+®