Chapter 2
Meeting User Needs

ABSTRACT

Determining how a library can meet user needs can be accomplished through different methods. Libraries can use focus groups, surveys, or other means of assessment. Liquid+® is a survey available to all academic libraries from the Association of Research Libraries. Most libraries who administer the Liquid+® survey can use the survey results to do additional internal surveys with users or to meet with small groups of users to improve their services.

INTRODUCTION

Libraries now compete with online and digital resources. In order to make sure they are meeting their user needs, they must work with their users to identify areas for improvement and to build on the services they do well. Assessment of library services through surveys and focus groups are two methods available; another assessment is to match library services with the overall strategic plan of the institution. The information obtained through focus groups and user surveys is a way to align the library’s strategic plan to meet user needs. Assessment of library services is an ongoing process and provides the library with the opportunity for continuous improvement of their services. Ease of remote access to library resources is one of the services that can and should be assessed on an ongoing basis.

BACKGROUND

Database vendors supply usage statistics to libraries, allowing them to determine not only the number of times the database is used but also the number of full-text results selected by users from their database search results. The combinations of statistics help libraries determine the amount of use for the database. As database subscription costs
increase, the usage statistics become important in determining which databases to discontinue versus which ones to keep in the collection. Usage statistics can also be used to determine need and as a way to promote a particular database or service. The statistics combined with user surveys can address gaps in the collection and the need for new services or resources. In the last five years, libraries and other organizations such as, for example, EDUCAUSE, have surveyed or examined how students study and find information. In other words, how they engage in the research process. Other studies have examined student use of federated search options, using LibQUAL+® to identify student and faculty satisfaction, how a catalog interface design can influence catalog use and library service perceptions, and how to improve library services to graduate students.

**MAIN FOCUS OF THE CHAPTER**

Assessing and meeting the needs of users are the topics of discussion in most academic libraries these days. User-centered and student-centered libraries are the goal of all library renovation projects. The question to answer is; how do libraries know if they are meeting the needs of their users? The only way to know for sure is to ask users directly. In 2007, Georgia Institute of Technology was one of three recipients for the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) annual Excellence in Academic Libraries award. Throughout the design and implementation process, Georgia Tech met with users from across campus to learn about their vision for the library. In the end, numerous focus group sessions and a partnership with Georgia Tech’s Office of Information Technology transformed the library into a space that people want to use and come back to day after day (http://www.lita.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/publications/crlnews/2007/mar/07awardwinners.cfm).

Robert Fox and Crit Stuart in a 2009 article in _EDUCAUSE Quarterly_ provide an in-depth look at the renovation and transformation of the Georgia Tech library through collaborations other departments on campus, students, and faculty (Fox and Stuart, 2009). The renovation of the Georgia Tech library resulted in the creation of an East and West Commons and each of the commons provides different services. The West Commons provides over 100 computer stations, a presentation practice studio and a multimedia center. The West Commons was designed in collaboration with the campus Office of Information Technology (OIT) but without input from students and faculty (Fox & Stuart, 2009). The East Commons was designed and created in collaboration with students and faculty.

The renovation and design of the East Commons at Georgia Tech library used focus groups of students and faculty to obtain information of their needs for the renovated space. A variety of methods was used to solicit ideas and generate discussion about the proposed renovations. Some of the methods used were inviting students and faculty to lunch, focus groups, and affinity focus groups with different populations of students, faculty, and staff, web-based surveys, student advisory council guidance, campus and outside experts to comment on their findings (Fox and Stuart, 2009). Using the different methods provided the library’s administration with a list of attributes they wanted in the East Commons. The attributes included for example, mobile chairs and tables, group productivity tools, easily adaptable space, and assistance when they needed it. The result was two collaborative computing areas with 40 workstations and several printers plus comfortable and movable furniture (Fox & Stuart, 2009).

While not every library will win the ACRL Excellence in Academic Libraries award, Georgia Tech has proven how any library can be transformed through collaborative efforts between the library and the user community. Georgia Tech in renovating their library used some of the methods.