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Assessing and Improving Library Services at Georgia Southern University

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Abstract

Many academic libraries in America, including Georgia Southern University Zach S. Henderson Library are required to document and prove how its performance contributes to institutional goals and outcomes. Over the years, Henderson Library has been assessing its service performance, making improvements, and demonstrating its values. It has been applying various assessment tools and methods to evaluate its services and programs, and using the findings to make improvements. This case study article will describe how Henderson Library continuously assesses and improves its services.

Keywords: library assessment, library evaluation, continuous improvement, academic libraries, Georgia Southern University

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Introduction

Since the 1960s, the evaluation or assessment of library services has become an increasingly high priority activity for American academic libraries to perform (Kyrillidou & Cook, 2008; Lancaster, 1995; Oakleaf, 2010). The increasing emphasis upon assessment in academic libraries reflects the growth of the higher education outcomes assessment and accountability movement in America in recent years (Hufford, 2013). Because academic libraries are not immune to this movement, they are under pressure to document and prove how their performance contributes to the overall goals, in particular student learning outcomes and student success, of their parent institution (Hernon, Dugan, Schwartz, & Saunders, 2013).

Georgia Southern University has two libraries—Lane Library in Savannah and Zach S. Henderson Library in Statesboro. This article is a case study that describes how one of the libraries, Zach S. Henderson Library assesses and improves its services on an ongoing basis. While the Library has applied multiple assessment tools and methods to evaluate the performance of its services, this article will focus on selective assessment programs, and describe how the Library used the findings to improve its services.

Georgia Southern University Libraries

Georgia Southern University was founded in 1906 and is the largest and most comprehensive public university in the southern Georgia. It is a member of the University System of Georgia which consists of 27 higher education institutions. The University offers nearly 120 degree programs and is designated a Carnegie Doctoral-Research institution.

Early in January 2018, the University System of Georgia Board of Regents approved the consolidation of the Armstrong State University and Georgia Southern University (Coleman, 2017). The new Georgia Southern University has two libraries – each located in its Statesboro and Savannah campus to serve a combined enrollment of approximately 27,000 students.

Before the consolidation, the University enrolled over 20,400 students (Georgia Southern University, 2017). The Zach S. Henderson Library is the only library at Georgia Southern University's Statesboro campus. The Libraries' new mission is to support the University by providing access to information, collections, and services designed to meet the scholarly needs of the University and the public. The Libraries promote independent lifelong learning, employ a learner-centered service ethic, and ensure a comfortable and secure learning environment. Henderson Library is centrally located on a 900-acre campus in a four-story building renovated and expanded in 2008. The total square footage of the building is around 246,000. The Library provides more than 2,000 seats and 30 group study rooms to its users for study and research. The Library has over 410 computers for public use to access library resources, the Internet, and a variety of software applications.

The Library employs 57 staff members and is open 143 hours per week during regular semesters. Research Services, located in the Learning Commons on the second floor, offers in-person, telephone, and online assistance in utilizing library resources and services. Subject library liaisons are available to provide face-to-face library workshops to classes or groups,

library orientations and tours, one-on-one research consultations, assistance in ordering or locating materials, and customized hand-outs or research guides. The Library manages an open access digital collection, Digital Commons@Georgia Southern, to showcase the University's research and scholarly output.

Henderson Library currently houses a collection of over 721,000 volumes of printed books and bound periodicals. Many of these materials are kept in its automated retrieval storage facility. In addition to the extensive physical collections, the Library also provides access to a growing number of electronic resources which includes over 374,000 electronic books, 92,000 digital media, 94,000 electronic journals and related resources, and 330 databases that contain indexes, abstracts, full-text articles, and digital images. These electronic resources are easily accessible both on and off campus 24/7.

Through its Alma library services platform and website, Henderson Library extends its resources and services far beyond the walls of its building. The Library is a member of the Georgia's statewide library consortium, GeorgiA Library LEarning Online (GALILEO), which comprises of 27 higher education institutions across the state. Through GALILEO, legitimate users can borrow and access an additional three million book titles, thousands of academic journals, and hundreds of databases. The Library's interlibrary loan service also helps users obtain materials located outside Georgia and throughout the world.

Assessment Activities

Georgia Southern University is committed to building a culture of systematic self-reflection, evidence-based decision-making, and continuous improvement. In 2011, the University established the Office of Institutional Effectiveness (IE), which requires all academic and administrative departments, including the Library to prepare and submit their Institution Effectiveness Plan and Report annually to the IE Office in order to document their performance. The Library has been actively participating in the University's assessment initiative by aligning its assessment plan and action items to the University's assessment efforts, ensuring the Library is contributing to the University's mission, strategic directions, and student success.

Henderson Library constantly evaluates and assesses its service performance to improve service. Over the years, the Library has used different survey instruments and conducted various surveys to measure and evaluate its services. In recent years, the Library administered a series of assessments and solicited user feedback on services such as library work life, distance learning, music listening center, discovery service, library instruction, public service quality, web usability, and space utilization to determine how well it was actually providing library resources and services. The Library utilized a variety of assessment methods such as in-library use survey, in-class feedback, observation, interview, focus group, paper and online evaluation form, suggestion box (online and physical), as well as commercially available tools such as Google Analytics, LibAnalytics, LibQUAL, Qualtrics, SurveyMonkey, and OCLC Sustainable Collection Services for various assessment projects.

Library-wide Assessment

To obtain a more comprehensive picture of users' perceptions and expectations of library service quality, Henderson Library began to assess its performance by administering LibQUAL+ in 2003. Since then, the Library has conducted four additional rounds of LibQUAL+ surveys in 2006, 2010, 2013, and 2016. The Association of Research Libraries (ARL) offers this suite of services to assist libraries use to solicit, track, understand, and act upon users' opinions of service quality (ARL, n.d.).

LibQUAL+ consists of 22 core questions that measure users' perceptions of library service quality in three dimensions: Affect of Service (9 questions concerning the effectiveness and helpfulness of library staff), Information Control (8 questions concerning the ease with which information can be accessed, the access tools, and the availability of print and electronic resources), and Library as Place (5 questions concerning the facility and physical environment). For each question or item, respondents are asked to rank on a scale of 1-9 (with 9 being the most favorable) indicating their minimum service level, desired service level, and perceived service level performance. LibQUAL+ uses tables and charts to summarize the survey results.

In addition to understanding and comparing user perceptions of library services against their expectations, the Library also uses the survey findings to improve service quality and prioritize resources. Furthermore, the Library integrates the findings in the development of its annual IE Plans to measure its performance and tie the outcomes with specific library goals and university strategic themes.

The 2016 LibQUAL+ survey was administered in February 2016. The Library invited all faculty and students to participate in the survey and received a 10.6% response rate. However, only 5.7% or 1,221 responses were considered valid. Additionally, over 400 respondents submitted their written comments, which provide rich qualitative data that help to interpret and understand the survey results. Below are figures and tables that highlight the overall results of the 2016 survey.

Overall Performance

The general satisfaction score (Table 1) indicates that our respondents are generally satisfied with the services provided by the Library. Survey respondents rated the overall quality of the Henderson Library services at 7.64 on a scale of 1 to 9, which is higher than the scores from previous years. The Library received 7.59 in 2013, 7.55 in 2010, 6.94 in 2006, and 7.0 in 2003.

Table 1	
General Satisfaction Questions Summary	
<u>Satisfaction Question (all users)</u>	<u>Mean</u>
In general, I am satisfied with the way in which I am treated at the library	7.87

In general, I am satisfied with library support for my learning, research, and /or teaching needs	7.50
How would you rate the overall quality of the service provided by the library?	7.64

Table 1 General Satisfaction Questions Summary

Table 2 below summarizes the mean scores of the 22 core questions and the three scales (minimum, desired, and perceived) numerically. In general, the overall average scores show all respondent groups perceived library service levels to be adequate and met their expectations.

Table 2						
Mean Scores for Each Core Question						
<u>ID</u>	<u>Question Text</u>	<u>Minimum Mean</u>	<u>Desired Mean</u>	<u>Perceived Mean</u>	<u>Adequacy Mean</u>	<u>Superiority Mean</u>
AS-1	Employees who instill confidence in users	6.18	7.41	7.02	0.84	-0.39
AS-2	Giving users individual attention	5.79	7.04	6.77	0.98	-0.27
AS-3	Employees who are consistently courteous	7.03	7.85	7.75	0.72	-0.11
AS-4	Readiness to respond to users' questions	6.64	7.72	7.48	0.84	-0.24
AS-5	Employees who have the knowledge to answer user questions	6.63	7.86	7.51	0.88	-0.35
AS-6	Employees who deal with users in a caring fashion	6.58	7.85	7.51	0.93	-0.34
AS-7	Employees who understand the needs of their users	6.64	7.71	7.46	0.81	-0.25
AS-8	Willingness to help users	6.75	7.87	7.45	0.7	-0.42
AS-9	Dependability in handling users' service problems	6.67	7.64	7.22	0.55	-0.42
IC-1	Making electronic resources accessible from my home or office	6.31	7.62	6.87	0.56	-0.75

IC-2	A library Web site enabling me to locate information on my own	6.54	7.74	7.13	0.59	-0.61
IC-3	The printed library materials I need for my work	6.62	7.78	7.38	0.76	-0.4
IC-4	The electronic information resources I need	6.22	7.62	7.09	0.87	-0.53
IC-5	Modern equipment that lets me easily access needed information	6.86	8.07	7.55	0.69	-0.53
IC-6	Easy-to-use access tools that allow me to find things on my own	6.42	7.85	7.1	0.68	-0.75
IC-7	Making information easily accessible for independent use	6.64	7.87	7.37	0.73	-0.5
IC-8	Print and/or electronic journal collections I require for my work	6.67	7.79	7.24	0.57	-0.54
LP-1	Library space that inspires study and learning	6.24	7.84	7.3	1.06	-0.54
LP-2	Quiet space for individual activities	6.56	7.87	7.46	0.9	-0.41
LP-3	A comfortable and inviting location	6.78	7.94	7.64	0.87	-0.3
LP-4	A getaway for study, learning, or research	6.66	8.06	7.51	0.85	-0.55
LP-5	Community space for group learning and group study	6.11	7.48	7.03	0.92	-0.46

Table 2 Mean Scores for Each Core Question

Ratings by Respondent Groups

However, when the 2016 survey results were furthered examined by respondent groups individually, they show a different picture of how each group perceives the services provided by the Library. The results show nine (9) items failed to meet the minimum expectation. These unmet needs were also expressed by the respondents in their written comments.

Of the 400 some written comments from the survey respondents, the largest percentage of these responses praised some aspects of the Library (24.5%). This shows students and faculty recognize the library staff who serve them and appreciate their work. The Library spaces and facilities received many positive comments, although the lack of parking space (6.5%) and group study rooms (12%) stand out as major concerns by the students.

The most critical area where the Library's perceived performance is lowest remains with its collection, including both printed and electronic resources. The negative ratings and remarks given by the faculty and graduate students to the quality and accessibility of library collections shows that they are not satisfied with the current level of support the Library provides. The Library is fully aware of the faculty's view of the library collection and has been making it a high priority despite a limited budget.

Improvement Measures and Follow-up Assessments

Because of the findings, the Library enacted multiple improvement measures last year to address the problems by implementing its annual IE Plan. The measures include improving library personnel training programs, enhancing the information literacy workshops, increasing study (individual and group) spaces, reducing noise, revising the Library website, adjusting the collection service policy, upgrading and purchasing more equipment and seats, increasing funding to add more titles and access tools, and improving communication with the faculty and students.

The above lists the major improvement measures the Library has either begun to implement or study. It is hoped that these efforts would increase the number of items meeting or surpass the minimum expectations in the next LibQUAL+ cycle. Below is a description of selective follow up improvement and assessment programs Henderson Library undertook last academic year.

Enhance Public Services

User satisfaction is an important performance indicator for libraries. Hernon, Dugan, & Matthews (2014) suggest that "Today many stakeholders, ... most likely view satisfaction as a reflection of library performance" (p. 104). Because user satisfaction is significantly affected by the quality of public services programs, Henderson Library has been giving more attention to evaluating user perceptions and how well library responsive to user needs.

As stated above, Affect of Service (AS) is one of three dimensions in LibQUAL+ that measures the courtesy, knowledge, reliability, and helpfulness of library staff. AS is the most important dimension in determining overall satisfaction with the library (Roy, Khare, Liu, Hawkes, & Swiatek-Kelley, 2012).

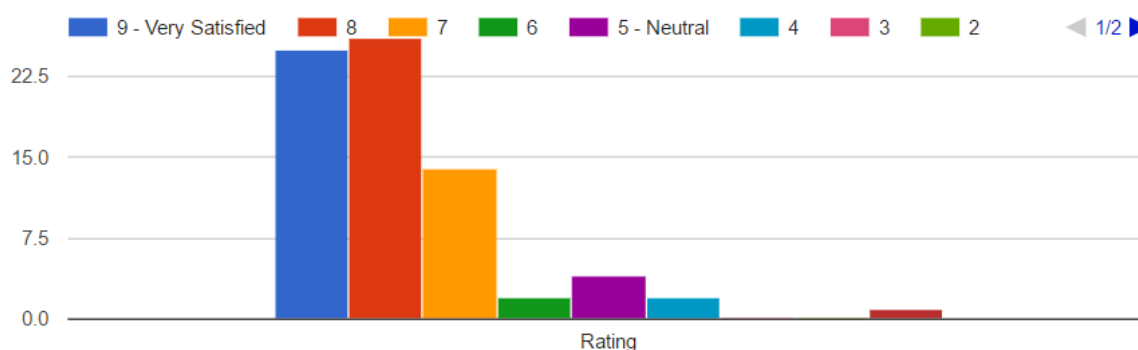
While the overall average scores show all respondent groups perceived library service levels to be adequate and meet their expectations, the Library also recognized that the rating of certain items in AS have slipped. In order to improve the service quality and maintain the level quality achieved in this dimension, the Library developed an action plan that includes offering additional customer service training opportunities to the staff, revising its services standards, and

providing closer supervisions to staff. The Library wants to ensure when users interact with library staff, their experience is always pleasant and positive.

In April 2017, the Library conducted a follow-up survey to obtain a snapshot of users' satisfaction with customer service points (mainly information and circulation desks) in the library. The respondents were randomly selected as they visited the library. It was a small scale survey and the instrument was brief. The survey contained five questions that collected data on where we do well and where we need to improve. The Library analyzed 74 valid responses our users submitted.

While the sample size of this survey is not as large as LibQUAL, the majority of the respondents consider the overall quality of our service to be high. More importantly, the mean score of the overall service quality has slightly improved over the mean score from the last LibQUAL survey.

How would you rate the overall quality of the service provided by the library?



The population size of our undergraduate students accounts for 87% of the total enrollment. Since they use the library building and services more often than other groups, their feedback about the facility and services receives more attention by the library administration. During the last academic year, the Library has made the following improvements to the building facility based on the feedback from LibQUAL and student groups.

Increase Access to Computers

In response to the comments in LibQUAL, the Library initiated an experimental request last August to set up eight computers with dual monitors on the 3rd floor of the building. As soon as the computers were set up, a brief survey was administered to find out how users feel about this new service. The result showed that 96% of the respondents liked the location of these computers and indicated that they wanted the library to add more computers to the rest of the 3rd floor since there is a lack of computers on this floor. The Library has 400 computers for public use but they are concentrated on the lower floors. 98% of users also found the dual monitors to

be helpful for their work. The findings of this survey helped the Library know our users' actual needs and guide the Library to further improve its services.

Promote Computer Ergonomics

The Library administrators meet with the representatives from the Student Government Association monthly during regular semesters to discuss student concerns and needs. Last November, the Library set up a computer on a standup workstation in the Learning Commons in response to a request made by the Student Government Association. The representatives suggested that standing computing is healthier than sitting for long periods (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2016; Stromberg, 2014). The Library accepted the suggestion and set up a standup workstation in the Learning Commons as a trial to promote healthy computing.

The Library placed paper survey forms at the workstation to gather user feedback about this new setup and used the data collected for developing further improvements. The Library also encouraged users to submit their feedback via its online suggestion box. This one-short survey gathered information over a two-week period and the written comments, including those submitted online, were favorable of the new workstation. As a result, the Library expanded the program by adding a second workstation in the Learning Commons last spring. Library staff are observing the usage of the workstations. If the usage is high, the Library will consider purchasing additional units that could be placed throughout the Learning Commons.

Improve Library Seating Furniture

In the 2016 LibQUAL survey, many undergraduate student respondents expressed their dismay over the inadequate access to individual and group study rooms. The Library serves a student population of 20,000 but only has 30 rooms for group study use. While the Library has been implementing various methods to maximize its group study spaces throughout the building, the demand for study rooms remains high, especially during examination periods.

Since it is not feasible to build more study rooms in the building, a recent attempt to address the group study spaces shortage problem was to create more comfortable seating for individual study. The current library room policy is first come first serve. It is hoped that the new seating, coupled with a revised room policy, would lure single individuals away from occupying a group study room, thus increasing the availability of study rooms for group use.

In March of 2017, the Library received a loan of two study chairs from a local furniture supplier to conduct a furniture testing in its top floor quiet study zone. Each chair provides an adjustable worktable to hold a laptop, side surface for writing, a privacy screen to reduce visual distractions, and power outlets underneath the seat for easy charging. The chairs also provide adaptive bolstering and lumbar support to make sitting more comfortable. Because the chairs were strategically placed by the tall windows on the top floor directly overlooking the lake, they were very popular among the students.

As soon as the chairs were setup, a 3-question survey form was posted on the desk of each chair for users to fill out. The results of the 7-week furniture test survey show that 178 users

who have sat on these chairs responded to this survey. While most of the users or testers spent between two to three hours sitting in each chair, many also spent four or more hours in these chairs. One student recorded as many as spending 14 hours on one day. 99.5% of the respondents felt the chairs were comfortable and 99% of them felt the new chairs are more comfortable than other library chairs. All respondents agreed that the design of the chair is good for single individual quiet study and suggested the Library purchase more of these chairs. The testers also provided ideas to improve the chairs. The Library will review its new budget and other funding sources when they are received and try to match the students' suggestions.

Upgrade Book Scanner

The Henderson Library has an old Minolta PS5000 model book scanner. This scanner, which has been used for nearly ten years, was placed in the Learning Commons for faculty, staff, and students to use free of charge. The scanner was connected to a PC and in order to scan a book or document, users needed to login using ones' credentials and wait for several minutes for Windows to start before scanning the first sheet. When scanning each sheet, one must lower the glass plate onto the document or book to flatten it before pressing the scan button. After the scanning has completed, one needed to lift up the glass plate, flip to the next sheet, then repeat the procedure above. Once the document was scanned, users can either save the product on a USB flash drive, print it, or email it. In the 2016 LibQUAL survey, respondents felt that this procedure was troublesome and time consuming. They expressed their wish to upgrade our hardware from scanners to printers.

In response to our users' expectations, the Library obtained a special fund from the University in 2017 to replace the old Minolta book scanner with new KIC Bookeye 4 book scanner. As soon as the new scanner was installed, the Library began to survey how users felt about the new machine and measure if the replacement decision was the right one. The Library placed a short questionnaire next to the scanner for users to fill out voluntarily. The questionnaire contained three core questions to find out if users were satisfied with the location, quality, and user-friendliness of the new scanners.

This six-month survey showed that 98% of the users were either very satisfied or satisfied in all three questions. No users felt dissatisfied with the new scanner or found it more difficult to use than the old scanner. Respondents' written comments generally showed that the new scanner's design is better, faster, and provides higher quality of image. They like the additional features of the new scanner and found it easier to use than the old one. More importantly, its operation takes a shorter amount of time because there is no glass plate and it is not connected to a PC which requires no login or logout and waiting time. All these improvements save them time. Since the new scanner was introduced, the Library found the usage has gone up, proving it a popular and cost-efficient investment.

The 2018 User Satisfaction Survey

Instead of relying on the results of the triannual LibQUAL survey, which would not be conducted until next year at the earliest, the Library conducted another follow-up user satisfaction survey this past spring to learn if the rating would increase after making the

improvements above throughout the year. To be consistent, this survey reapplied the same questionnaire and tools that were used last year. Surveyors randomly selected respondents as they visited the library at different times of day asking them to fill out a short survey using tablets. The only difference between last year and this year is that this year's survey also offered a paper survey for users to fill out. The survey was conducted in 30 days and collected 254 valid responses, including 12 paper survey forms.

Of the 254 valid responses collected, 97.6% of all respondents indicated that they were satisfied to very satisfied with the service they received. The overall satisfaction mean score improved from last year's 7.71 to this year's 8.30 on a 9 point scale. This represents an 8% increase from the year before and the rate of increase surpasses our expectation. While there is no clear evidence to establish a causal relationship between this year's user satisfaction survey and the improvements made throughout the year, the Library is pleased to see the significant increased rating.

The respondents also identified areas where the Library met their expectations or needed to make improvements. Below are the top three areas where the Library either met/exceeded their expectations or needs to improve. The top three areas that met/exceeded respondents' expectations are: Customer service at Checkout Desk (75% responses), Printing (75% responses), and Quiet Areas (62% responses). The top three areas respondents identified as in need of improvement are: Study Room Availability (46% responses), Noise (17% responses), and Difficulty finding materials with the Library (14% responses). While the overall user satisfaction score saw improvement, the top three concerns that the respondents identified in the 2018 survey remain the same as last year. Thus, the Library will continue to develop strategies and action plans to address these concerns.

Conclusion

The efforts above illustrate the continuous assessment and improvement cycle Henderson Library has adopted. Assessment is an ongoing process Henderson Library uses to learn what our users need. The more we learn about our users, the better we can plan services that meet their expectations. However, as Peter Brophy (2006) states, "it should always be remembered that measuring performance is an exercise in assessing the past. It is the use of that data to plan an improved future that is all important." (p.5). Thus, assessment is more than helping the Library gather information of our users. It is also important to use the findings to make well-informed resource allocation decisions, develop effective improvement measures, and build a library service program that effectively provides a better learning environment, contributes to the university's mission, and proves its value to the stakeholders.

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