Undergraduate in Focus: Can Student Input Lead to New Directions in Planning Undergraduate Library Services?

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ABSTRACT

FOCUS GROUPS ARE AN EFFECTIVE WAY of soliciting student and faculty impressions of library directions, services, and collections. They can be used as part of library strategic planning or to reevaluate services in the face of budget cuts and downsizing. In this article, the authors provide a brief overview of focus groups; discuss the use of undergraduate focus groups on two campuses of the University of California library system; describe the methodologies used to conduct them and the conclusions drawn from the results of the interviews; outline actions taken as an outcome of the focus group discussions; and describe new directions the libraries were led to as a result of student input.

INTRODUCTION

Strategic planning in universities often involves many complex activities: consultant-led brainstorming sessions, retreats, meetings with staff participation at all levels, the use of bubble-up techniques, and even staff focus groups. Often faculty are included in at least some portion of the planning. What is less common, even rare, is the effort to gain information from students—the actual customers or stakeholders in what the university has to offer.

What are the reasons for this lack of input by the very consumers of the educational product we provide? There may be a risk in finding out this information—is this why libraries so rarely ask? The most skeptical

may think that users only want a quiet place to study which is open twenty-four hours a day, with reserve readings readily available, plentiful photocopiers that always work, and no-cost printers attached to the online catalogs. The more optimistic may think we need to provide even more classes on using information resources or more accurate and timely serials holding data.

Some may argue that this information is unnecessary because we as educators, professors, and librarians know what the customer needs. Library staff struggle to keep reference desks open for students. For their sake we write bibliographic guides and pathfinders and offer wonderful courses in using electronic information sources which we know they will need to pursue their academic programs, but we rarely know from students—our primary users—what they think of us or the services we provide for them.

Quite coincidentally, at two campuses of the University of California (Berkeley and Los Angeles), the libraries undertook focus group interviews of undergraduates (Berkeley also surveyed graduate students and faculty) in Spring 1993 as part of a strategic planning process, to determine students' perception of the library and to understand better what undergraduates wanted the library to provide. For better or worse, both campus libraries very much wanted input from our often-overlooked consumers in planning for the 1990s and for the twenty-first century.

HISTORY OF FOCUS GROUPS

What exactly is a focus group?

> a focus group can be defined as a carefully planned discussion de-
> signed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a per-
> missive, nonthreatening environment. It is conducted with approxi-
> mately seven to ten people by a skilled interviewer. The discussion
> is relaxed, comfortable, and often enjoyable for participants as they
> share their ideas and perceptions. Group members influence oth-
> ers by responding to ideas and comments in the discussion. (Krueger,
> 1988, p. 18)

Focus groups were originally used in the 1940s in the field of sociology (Hendershott & Wright, 1993, p. 154). They were soon picked up as a marketing tool in other fields and in the 1990s began being widely used as a tool of qualitative measurement in libraries (Baker, 1991; Widdows et al., 1991; Young, 1993).

Why use a focus group for this kind of information seeking? According to Krueger (1988, pp. 44-46), there are several positive reasons. First, focus groups bring people together in a social setting where their ideas can be shared by others. The setting is conducive to free and open discussion. Second, the moderator of such a group can pursue ideas that

arise in the course of discussion—follow-up that could not possibly occur through the use of printed surveys. Third, the results of focus groups are framed in lay terminology making them easily understood by others. Fourth, for public institutions particularly, their low cost is appealing. The fifth advantage is that the results can be obtained quickly—an important feature for both UCLA and Berkeley library staff. Finally, through the use of focus groups, researchers can obtain a rather large sampling of qualitative data. All of these features make focus groups an attractive instrument to learn about the perceptions of undergraduate library users.

FOCUS GROUPS AT THE TWO INSTITUTIONS

Beginning in July of 1992, the library initiated an extensive strategic planning process in order to look ahead for a period of three to five years and envision what the library should be like at the end of that time. Working groups were established in the areas of automation, bibliographic access, collections, research services, library culture, and development and external relations as part of the process. A working group on undergraduate services was originally envisioned by the new university librarian. The group's charge was to include a redefinition of basic services to undergraduates, a discussion of the relationship of undergraduate services to academic programs, of the traditional role of Berkeley's Moffitt Undergraduate Library as the core of the library's undergraduate services, and of the role of networked services in undergraduate library programs. The working group on undergraduate services was also to have been charged with soliciting input from undergraduates and from faculty and campus administrators whose special concerns included undergraduate education. Not all of the working groups were ultimately constituted by the university librarian as originally envisioned, and the undergraduate services working group was one such task force.

Over time, and as the strategic planning process unfolded, the university librarian determined that instead of limiting the solicitation of planning input from key campus groups to the issue of undergraduate services, this function should instead be broadened to encompass a variety of library-wide services, roles, and directions. She envisioned the vehicle for soliciting the needed library planning input from campus end-users to be a series of focus groups organized by the library and run by the campus Survey Research Center. A library focus group project coordinator was appointed.

During approximately the same time frame, on the Los Angeles campus of the University of California (UCLA), a strategic planning process dubbed "Transforming UCLA" was taking place. The library was one of many units planning for the future. In this strategic planning process within the library, it was only the undergraduate or College Library staff that decided to survey its stakeholders.

The UCLA library staff set the goal of involving a broad range of students—all class years, all majors, all ages, and on-campus and commuter students. The staff wanted to include library users and nonusers; no library employees were permitted in the focus groups. To attract subjects, staff used a mass market approach. With funding from the Office of Instructional Development, the library purchased two quarter page advertisements in the campus paper, the *Daily Bruin*, announcing the focus groups; large posters advertising the focus groups were designed and posted in the eight campus residence halls as well as the undergraduate library and the University Research Library; and small posters were printed and posted in fraternity and sorority houses, in residence halls, on the student union campus bulletin boards, and in campus libraries.

Realizing that students might be somewhat reluctant to give up two hours of their limited free time, the library offered an incentive. Negotiation with the Associated Students of UCLA resulted in their generous provision of $10 Bruin Gold Cards (which can be used to acquire meals, clothes, or school and computer supplies) to each focus group participant. These cards were mentioned in the *Bruin* advertisement and on the various posters.

After a week of advertising, the library recruited enough students for five focus groups. The demographics of the groups were representative of the total campus population. Two students were first-year, seven were second-year, six were third-year, eight were fourth-year, and three were fifth-year. The students' majors broke down along the following lines: twelve humanities, nine social sciences, three sciences, and two undeclared. Seven students lived on campus and the rest lived either within walking or commuting distance. Thirteen students ranged in age from eighteen to twenty, eight between twenty-one and twenty-three, and five were over twenty-four years old.

College Library staff met with two professionals from the campus Center for Human Resources prior to conducting the groups to develop a list of questions and to answer questions they had about library jargon and pre-existing conditions in the library. Each group began with an introduction by the college librarian or designee stating the purpose, introducing the facilitator, thanking the students in advance for their time, and stressing the importance of this endeavor. The librarian then left the room so students could speak freely, expressing both positive and negative opinions without worry about offending the sponsor (Appendix A includes the UCLA Focus Group questions).

At Berkeley, a technical advisor at the campus Survey Research Center advised the library on how best to arrange for thirty to thirty-six of some 20,000 undergraduates to be recruited to participate in the focus groups. It was finally determined that the library would use its own patron database for selecting the students, and a random selection of names

was made. With the assistance of the Library Systems Office, the focus group project coordinator was able to order a list comprising every eighth name from each letter of the alphabet from the GLADIS (the Berkeley online catalog and circulation system) student patron database.

A small team of volunteers from the librarian's office support staff and public services staff was formed to make telephone contact calls. Two of the four staff assigned to calling were themselves undergraduate student library employees. Approximately ten to eleven hours of telephoning were required to subscribe the thirty-five undergraduate participants. Of the hundreds of undergraduates reached by phone, only one declined to participate because of lack of interest in the project. Virtually all of the undergraduates contacted expressed a high degree of enthusiasm for the project and were willing to participate. This came as a surprise to library staff since the focus groups were scheduled to take place less than two weeks before the start of final examinations.

Among the many undergraduates contacted but unable to participate, the most frequently cited reasons for nonparticipation were: (1) focus group discussion sessions conflicted with the student's class schedule, or (2) focus group sessions conflicted with the student's work schedule. One interesting phenomenon was the fact that the library's undergraduate student employees who telephoned potential participants were consistently more successful in persuading students—their peers—to participate than were the older career library employees who also made calls.

As incentives for the Berkeley students, the library offered refreshments, complimentary library copy cards in the amount of $10 which could be used to make copies on any of the library's photocopying machines, and library-produced notecards and mugs customarily provided to library donors.

Although the lists used to contact undergraduates were randomly generated, they turned out to include a broad range of undergraduates, ethnically diverse in composition, which in fact mirrors the Berkeley undergraduate population. The groups included five freshmen, ten sophomores, twelve juniors, and eight seniors. Four were humanities majors, six were social science majors, six were science or engineering majors, three were unspecified double-majors, and sixteen were undeclared majors.

At Berkeley, the Library's Focus Group project coordinator met with the design consultant from the Survey Research Center and five public service librarians, including the Acting Head of the Undergraduate Library, to identify topics worthy of exploration. The results of the group's discussion formed the basis of the Undergraduate Discussion Guide and Undergraduate Focus Group written survey prepared by the Survey Research Center's design consultant. The written survey was administered at the conclusion of each undergraduate focus group discussion.

The sessions themselves were scheduled in the stately conference room of Berkeley's Bancroft Library and centrally located on campus. Each group began with self-introductions by the participants and the Survey Research Center's design consultant. Participants were reassured at the outset that the library wanted their frankest opinions and reactions, and that they should feel encouraged to speak freely. They were reminded of the purpose of the focus groups—to solicit student and faculty input to be used in library strategic planning and decision making—and of the length of the sessions.

Basic ground rules governing discussion were explained (e.g., participants were asked not to interrupt one another while speaking and reminded that the discussions were being taped). Participants were thanked in advance for their participation in this important and highly visible library project. The Library's Focus Group project coordinator attended all the sessions as an observer only and to serve as a resource in answering any questions on library services, policies, or collections which might be required in order for group discussion to continue productively. Her role was made clear to the participants at the outset, and her involvement in the discussions was minimal. The focus groups lasted two hours each, including time spent on introductions and on the completion of the written questionnaires which were distributed at the conclusion of the group discussions.

OUTCOMES: THE UCLA EXPERIENCE

The UCLA experience revealed that the two-hour sessions reinforced some of the library's self-perceptions and uncovered some new concerns. Six areas emerged as common ground in each group:

1. *The library's need to advertise its services.* Most students were unaware of the variety of services available in the library, such as a computing laboratory and telephone renewal. They suggested that the UCLA library develop a comprehensive guide to services (the library does, in fact, have such a guide. The fact that students were unaware of this is, in itself, revealing).
2. *The students' desire to have an automated reserve service.* Students complained that it took too much time to fill out cards for every reserve item they wanted to check out. They wanted reserve check-out to be automated as is the library's regular check-out. As reserve use had been increasing, so had user frustrations with the slow manual check-out process.
3. *Student appreciation of "quality" assistance.* The students felt that the librarians were friendly and helpful and available for their needs. Some wanted librarians available more hours. The library offers reference service sixty-two of the eighty-seven open hours per week. Generally, the staff as a whole received positive comments.

4. *Library education.* In general, students were not interested in work-
   shops on how to use the library. They felt they had neither the time
   nor the interest and preferred to have access to a librarian when
   they needed an answer to a specific question. The library compo-
   nent of English 3, the required basic composition class, received
   mixed reviews. The idea of a comprehensive guide was mentioned
   here also as a useful alternative.
5. *ORION and MELVYL®.* Three themes were evident regarding ORION
   and MELVYL, the online catalogs: (a) students thought these sys-
   tems had a lot more in them than they knew how to get; (b) they
   found them hard to use—"user hostile"—and were confused as to
   why each system had different commands; (c) they did not under-
   stand the differences between ORION and MELVYL and when to
   use one or the other.
6. *Checkout policies.* Almost all of the participants wanted longer loan
   periods—four weeks versus two—on core collection books.

OUTCOMES: THE BERKELEY EXPERIENCE

In the Berkeley focus groups, some different questions were asked
and different themes emerged. A topic that arose in the UCLA sessions—
the need for automated reserves—had been already addressed by the UC
Berkeley libraries and therefore was not an issue. Nine general areas
were probed with undergraduates at Berkeley using the focus group dis-
cussion guide. These are included in Appendix B.

A written questionnaire distributed to participants following the group
discussions asked participants to rank, on a scale of one to four, the im-
portance of various currently offered library services. Services listed in-
cluded everything from photocopying machines to library skills work-
shops, access to collections, to a variety of online and electronic data-
bases, and to interlibrary and reference services. Further, students were
queried as to which campus libraries they used most often, the currency
of the materials they consulted most frequently, and whether or not they
were employed by the university and if their job permitted them to utilize
services not normally available to undergraduates. Finally, they were in-
vited to make any additional comments they wished about the library.

At Berkeley, focus groups revealed the following:

1. *On library use, services, and facilities. "That's like a day's travel, exploring
   all the libraries on campus."* Many undergraduates reported using
   Moffitt (the undergraduate library) or Doe (the main research li-
   brary) libraries almost exclusively, particularly during their first two
   years at Berkeley. Some were unaware that branch libraries existed
   until they were juniors and required to do research in their chosen

major. Some found the then Moffitt Undergraduate Library too noisy to study in, others were not affected by the noise. Many wanted enclosed study rooms within the libraries where they could meet in groups to discuss class assignments or study for exams. Several described Doe Library as "beautiful" and "civil" yet intimidating to use.

2.   *On library instruction.* *"I don't think they really prepared you freshman year for the libraries." "I actually had a class that showed us how to use the library, mainly computers. It was Biology 1B, in which you were forced to write a research paper. What they did was show us how to use the different [online] catalogs in the class. We were required to do research. So I found that very useful." "Having classes where you're forced to use the library is a good idea. That's a great idea."*

   Many undergraduates admitted to trial-and-error methods of learning to use the libraries. Many did not know that the libraries offer tours and instructional programs. Those who attended library lectures integrated into other courses and related to specific class assignments rated them highly; library presentations unrelated to a particular assignment were at times described as "overwhelming." Some students felt they retained more when they learned by "stumbling around"; others requested reference handouts, library information packets, and regular rotating monthly tours of the various campus libraries to help them learn.

3.   *On staff helpfulness.* *"Every time I've asked a librarian for help . . . they get all excited . . . they want to show you what they know. . . ." "I usually don't go to the student aide-type people. I just go to the older looking librarians and they're really nice. They seem like they have a lot of work to do."*

   While several undergraduates characterized student library employees as being "apathetic," in general their reaction to library staff was quite positive.

4.   *Trade-offs.* (hours versus books). Undergraduates were unanimous in wanting longer library hours; some worried about campus security at night. When faced with a similar hypothetical choice, although year-round hours were crucial to their use needs, graduate students opted instead for collections over extending library open hours.

5.   *On print and electronic resources.*

   Moderator: "Have any of you dealt with online catalog help screens?"
   Student 1: "I've begun to start doing that. I mean, I have a modem."
   Student 2: "Is that the online catalog help screen, the modem?"
   Student 3: "Yeah, it's that Internet deal, isn't that what it is?"

   "I love printed books and journals. I don't think I could ever handle reading all my books off computers. I mean, I'd go crazy."

In general, undergraduates revealed themselves to be inexperi-
enced in online systems. Most of the participants in these groups did
not own their own computers. When asked for preferences regard-
ing print or electronic sources, undergraduates resoundingly re-
sponded in favor of print materials. This was one of the biggest sur-
prises of the focus group results.
6.   *On reaching undergraduates.*

Undergraduates did not rely on the campus newspaper as a source
of information; rather, they paid most attention to information that
came to them in the U. S. mail. The undergraduates mentioned that
because they receive so little U. S. mail, anything that does arrive
addressed to them is read thoroughly and with enthusiasm. The be-
ginning of Fall semester was described as a particularly good time to
reach undergraduates, before the press of the academic semester was
upon them. Early in Fall semester is a time when undergraduates
frequently look for activities to fill their weekly schedules.

UCLA's WRITTEN SURVEY

UCLA followed its focus groups with a more ambitious written user
survey (see Appendix C). A questionnaire was prepared by college li-
brary staff in consultation with library administration and was designed
by the library's Graphic Arts Service. During the Spring 1993 quarter,
the survey was distributed and completed by 452 students in large lower
division lecture classes. Four professors graciously allowed the survey to
be administered in their biology, history, geography, and English lectures.
Two adjunct lecturers distributed the surveys to sixty students in two up-
per division library science classes. An additional 607 surveys were handed
out in the undergraduate library.

From the survey responses, library staff could profile their typical
users and discover how they related to the college library. College li-
brary users are typically between 18 and 21 years old, walk to campus,
work sixteen hours per week, and use the library once a week. Their
main reason for using the library is to study their own material, followed
closely by checking out class reserve material. On a good-satisfactory-
poor scale, they find service to be good; collection size, lending policies,
and study facilities to be satisfactory; and hours and staff to be good. Two-
thirds felt they knew something about libraries before coming to UCLA
(note: California ranks fiftieth of the fifty states on funding for school
libraries, so the perception of what students actually do know may be
optimistic).

When asked what was most useful to them when further assistance
was needed, they favored asking library staff over other means such as
tours or quarter-long courses. Slightly more than half felt that further

guidance in using libraries would be useful. When presented with a list of options for this guidance, such as tours, workshops, handouts, signs, and a self-help video, the undergraduates felt handouts would be most helpful followed closely by more signs. Workshops, a self-paced skills booklet, and tours were ranked lower as methods of learning more about using the library. When asked to provide guidance to library staff regarding areas that could be cut if needed due to shrinking budgets, the students felt that exhibits and travel guides could be stopped; they did not want to see reference service or reserves eliminated.

Focus Group Impact on Berkeley's Undergraduate Library Services

The library at Berkeley was on the verge of a transformation in some areas as the focus groups were taking place. One of the changes was the creation of the Teaching Library, a new service with a rather innovative structure. The Teaching Library is the central instructional service of the UC Berkeley Library. It consists of a team of full-time and part-time Program Coordinators, a half-time User Research Coordinator, the Library Graphics Service (responsible for signage and library publications), and the campus Media Resources Center.

The rationale for placing the Library Graphics Service under the teaching library was to provide an integrated signage system for the library as a whole, supplying patrons with the support necessary to navigate independently and easily the library's many (and some very complicated) buildings, and to locate the information, services, and materials that they need. For the Media Resources Center, the rationale for inclusion in the teaching library was the need to keep a close relationship with nonprint media, electronic resources, and the library's teaching function.

The half-time User Research coordinator turned out to be a critical position in the teaching library. Creating this post allowed the library the luxury of pursuing, in a more systematic and focused manner, the questions that had begun to be raised by the focus groups, and to use the results of various surveys conducted by the User Research Coordinator to explore faculty thinking on library literacy and library instruction. One question raised by the focus groups was how best to instruct students in the use of library resources and, in particular, electronic resources, given the fact that students were in general neither comfortable nor adroit in using them.

In Spring 1994, the User Research Coordinator conducted a survey of graduating seniors in political science and sociology to determine their level of information literacy competency. Results showed that students rated themselves far more knowledgeable in library and research skills than they actually were. Many graduating seniors had serious difficulties

in distinguishing between a monographic and serial citation; in knowing how to search effectively for materials by subject; and in identifying the major research tools in their fields.

Armed with this knowledge, based on current empirical research, library staff contacted faculty to enlist their support in integrating biblio-graphic instruction into the curriculum. This is a critically important step: students at Berkeley had already revealed themselves in the library's focus group discussions to be amenable to a library course.

From lessons learned in the undergraduate focus groups, the library at Berkeley has taken several steps. In the focus groups, students dis-cussed their discomfort with electronic resources. In response to techno-anxiety, the teaching library designed a program of drop-in sessions, tai-lored to students' schedules and widely advertised. Sessions included information about the far-flung organization of the library's multiple branches and about planning research projects early so that needed ma-terials can be recalled from other users. These aspects of the library's organization have been emphasized in response to students' lack of knowl-edge about libraries beyond Moffitt and Doe Libraries as evidenced in the focus groups.

Beginning in Spring 1994, electronic mail accounts began to be widely distributed to undergraduates. Class communication via e-mail has be-come de rigueur, and students seem much more interested in learning to use the catalogs; to mail themselves citations, abstracts, and full-text ar-ticles; and to use Internet resources. Sessions in the use of the online catalogs, Gopher, and World Wide Web were designed and are now taught in a computer laboratory by Teaching Library staff, incorporating time for hands-on practice at the end of each presentation so that students can try out what they have learned in a learning-friendly environment with an instructor present.

Throughout this period, the library continued its program of faculty seminars, adding sessions covering the Internet and advanced MELVYL searching. There were so many applicants in Fall 1994 that sessions had to be added and some faculty turned away. If faculty are made aware of the complexity and value of such resources, they may be more likely to share this knowledge with their students and to be sympathetic with the need to integrate information-seeking skills in their classes.

Because those undergraduate focus group participants who had at-tended course-integrated library instruction sessions seemed to retain more, the Teaching Library has done an extensive amount of outreach to pursue the goal of increasing the number of course-integrated library instruction sessions with positive results. In Fall 1993, the Teaching Li-brary reached 1,597 students, faculty, and staff through its programs. In Fall 1994, the number of students reached had nearly doubled—to 2,771. A well-advertised program, which has the full support of the faculty, is critical to the library's teaching mission.

Another initiative underway at this time at Berkeley was the library's reorganization to make the physical and intellectual organization of services more rational. This task was occasioned by the construction of a four-story underground addition to Doe Library, the historic but hardly-conducive-to-the-twenty-first century building housing Berkeley's central research collections in the humanities and social sciences.

Because of upcoming seismic work, a "critical path" of necessary physical moves was developed by the Library Architect, Director of Doe and Moffitt Libraries' Services, and a Space Planning Committee. With faculty input, a Government Social Science Information Service was created to be located in close proximity to the General Reference (Humanities) Service. The new service consisted of the former Government Documents Department and social sciences reference. There are plans to relocate and bring together other portions of humanities and social sciences services to make using the library easier and more logical, thus addressing concerns raised by undergraduates in the 1993 focus group discussions.

The new underground expansion has doubled the amount of stack space on campus, and added 450 wired study spaces and eighteen enclosed study rooms suitable for groups of four to eight students. Seismic corners on the Moffitt Library building added ten enclosed rooms for sixteen to twenty-four students. Both buildings are now open until 2:00 A.M. While not adding more hours to current library hours, the underground addition has added another 450 study spaces. Equally important, eighteen group study rooms have also been added, which focus group members had indicated were highly desirable.

The library has aggressively addressed the issue of security in the new underground addition, with each floor as large as a football field. As a result of placing security guards in the building, the issues of a quiet study environment in the library and student safety—further concerns raised by undergraduates in the 1993 focus group discussions—have begun to be addressed in the physical reorganization of Doe and Moffitt Libraries brought about by the construction of the four-story underground addition.

FOCUS GROUP IMPACT ON UCLA'S UNDERGRADUATE LIBRARY SERVICES

At UCLA, the information gained from the focus groups and through the surveys has not yet been applied to "transforming UCLA." There are some very clear but, for some, troubling conclusions that can be reached from the data.

User education efforts at UCLA have been expanding dramatically at the expense of professional reference assistance. As mentioned previously, professional reference assistance is available sixty-two of the eighty-seven hours per week that the library is open. Bibliographic instruction sessions recently numbered 250 with close to 6,000 students being reached in 1992-1993.

While the focus groups were split on the issue of desire for classroom instruction, the written surveys clearly showed that many undergraduates do not list workshops and sessions in library use high in their list of priorities. Reference desk hours have been declining, yet in the written surveys the students rank reference help almost as high as reserve readings and photocopying in terms of desired services at the undergraduate library. One interpretation posed by the UCLA author of this article is that professional resources should be redirected to providing more reference service hours and teaching fewer bibliographic instruction sessions.

Undergraduates often have time management problems.   At a university such as UCLA, where the average undergraduate works sixteen hours per week (according to survey results); and must take a minimum of four courses per quarter to maintain full-time status (part-time undergraduates are not permitted at UCLA); not to mention social, family, and community service activities, it is easy to see that library assignments may be put off until the last minute. Since the UCLA students show little interest in, nor do they claim to benefit from, advanced instruction in library use, staff needs to provide assistance to them when needed. This is what characterizes "one-on-one" reference service, and it may be required at 8:00 A.M. on Tuesday, 10:00 P.M. on Thursday, 8:00 P.M. on Sunday.

The students also wanted longer library hours. They did not make as much use of the library's core book and journal collections as they did of the reserve collection. This is a common phenomenon at large universities which have combinations of central research, separate undergraduate, and branch subject libraries. A reallocation of resources could be made to cut materials acquisitions in the college library, which are 75 percent duplicated in other campus libraries, to fund longer service hours. In this case, it would be very feasible to transfer one-quarter of the college library materials budget to the staff line and provide longer library hours and, again, more reference assistance. These are but two of many possible changes that could be initiated at UCLA as part of utilizing stakeholder input in strategic planning.

COUNTER-INTUITIVE RESULTS

Focus groups often yield information that is counter-intuitive to the prevailing view of the environment. Three factors relating to the students' experiences surprised the library staff at Berkeley: (1) students were largely unaware of the branch libraries until rather late in their academic careers; (2) students were much more inexperienced in using the library's online systems than staff imagined them to be, and most in the groups did not own their own computers; and (3) students, whom staff imagined were completely enthralled with online resources, spoke eloquently about preferring books and printed sources over computer resources. No such surprises arose at UCLA.

CONCLUSION

Both institutions found focus groups to be an effective mechanism for accumulating organized feedback from a group that often has no chance to voice its opinion. A number of issues require further scrutiny.

First, the methodology by which focus group participants were selected differed importantly. At Berkeley, a sample of students was telephoned from randomly generated student lists. At UCLA, self-selecting students responded to advertisements placed all over campus. Did the students' motivation for participating in the focus groups differ markedly at each campus and thus skew results? While the mix of lower division students to upper division students participating in the focus groups was roughly similar (35 percent to 65 percent at UCLA; 42 percent to 58 percent at Berkeley), the majors of the students at the campuses were dissimilar. The breakdown at UCLA was 46 percent humanities, 35 percent social sciences, 12 percent sciences, and 7 percent undeclared majors. Berkeley's mix, on the other hand, was 11 percent humanities, 17 percent social sciences, 17 percent sciences, 9 percent unspecified double majors, and a whopping 46 percent undeclared majors. Second, a comparison of the responses to the UCLA focus group and the Berkeley group reveals quite a difference regarding desire for library instruction. Does the fact that a librarian was in the room at Berkeley and not at UCLA have a bearing on these differences?

A third issue is the interpretation of the gathered data. Conclusions reached from the data can be disparately interpreted by different individuals, and a variety of paths can be taken as a result. One drawback of focus groups is that they do not involve large numbers of the population being surveyed. Is it advisable to make changes in operations based on input from such a small percentage of the user population?

At Berkeley, some directions taken as a consequence of the focus groups, acknowledging the risk taken of basing new services on input from relatively few users, were to:

- simplify use of services and collections;
- concentrate on group instruction;
- place a higher priority on making users self-sufficient; and
- teach students to exploit effectively the panoply of print and electronic databases available on campus and through the Internet because of the techno-anxiety uncovered in the focus group sessions.

One mechanism for doing this was through a series of well advertised and attended drop-in and course-integrated instructional sessions. Other initiatives included:

- emphasizing the breadth and depth of the collections in orientations to the library;
- expanding the space of late night study hall and exploring a twenty-four hour study hall; and
- increasing library security.

The risk has paid off in more sophisticated library users and in many more users being reached through instruction than had been previously reached.

Scrutinizing results from the focus groups and surveys done at UCLA led the previous head of the college library to postulate that a strategic planning goal might be to:

- cut down or drop instructional sessions;
- reduce collection size; and
- increase reference desk hours from resulting savings.

At Berkeley, the results of the focus groups and other library surveys have been useful in discussing students' perceptions and knowledge of the library with faculty and in outreach and publicity about library collections and services to faculty and graduate student instructors. Being able to cite or quote how students perceive a research problem, or how they access databases—or their inability to do so—can provide a compelling argument for integrating research skills into the curriculum. Partially as a result of the focus group surveys, an information literacy survey of graduating seniors in political science and sociology was undertaken in Spring 1994. Those results, which showed dramatically the students' lack of ability to do effective library research, were shared with faculty. Faculty were troubled by this information and have been more receptive to integrating information-seeking skills into their coursework. In Spring 1995, the research skills of an additional slice of Berkeley seniors, those in history, history of art, and philosophy were measured. These results closely paralleled those of the social sciences students.

As a result of the UCLA surveys, the former UCLA College Librarian, now at Denver University, is currently conducting surveys at Denver University; University of Colorado, Boulder; and Colorado State University. These surveys partially replicate the UCLA survey. Results should be available in Summer 1995 and will be used for strategic planning purposes in these institutions. A comparison of the results at the three institutions will also be made.

It is difficult to draw any conclusions about the current level of computing awareness at UCLA and UC Berkeley based on the 1993 surveys. First, the computing environment within the libraries, campuses, and national scene is clearly a moving target. Second, the academic environment has changed so that e-mail and newsgroups, as examples, are now regularly used by students and faculty in and out of the classroom. Reserve collections are beginning to be made available electronically. However, use of these resources does not necessarily translate into mastery of search, filtering, and evaluative techniques required for effective information seeking.

At both institutions, focus group interviews with undergraduate students proved to be a particularly useful tool to elicit information to lead planners in new strategic directions. While library staff often collect useful anecdotal information from students in a variety of informal settings, it is more effective when they can collect evidence from planned focus group surveys that define themes of the undergraduate experience. Library staff can benefit from knowing what the issues are and in seeking solutions to enhance undergraduate academic programs at our institutions.

APPENDIX A
Focus Group Questions Asked at UCLA

A. For what purposes do you use the Library?
B. When do you use the UCLA Library?
C. How often do you use the UCLA Library?
D. Which library services currently being provided are critical for your educational and research needs?
E. Which services are being provided effectively by the Library?
F. Which services need improvement? In what way?
G. How do you feel about the following services:
    1. Hours
    2. Reserves
    3. Past exams
    4. Core collection
    5. Reference assistance
       a) What reference materials do you use?
       b) The quality of the assistance from the reference librarians
    6. Term paper assistance
    7. Teaching library use
    8. Computing lab
    9. Study space
    10. Group study rooms
    11. Lounge area
    12. Current periodicals
    13. Current newspapers
    14. ORION (UCLA online catalog., i.e., user friendly)
       a) Do you have a PC/MAC & modem?
       b) Are you aware of the free Orion accounts?
    15. MELVYL (The MELVYL system is a centralized information system that can be reached from terminals in libraries at all nine campuses of the University of California. The system can also be reached by any terminal or microcomputer with dial-up access to UC computers connected to the MELVYL system. Network access to the system is available to all users on the Internet. The MELVYL system includes a library catalog database, a periodicals database, article citation databases, and other files.)
    16. Check-out policies
    17. Phone renewal
H. Would you attend library-sponsored workshops that the Library would offer on such topics as researching a term paper or advanced ORION/MELVYL searching?
I. What other topics for workshops would interest you, if any?
J. What additional services would you like the library to provide?

Appendix B

Focus Group Discussion Guide Used at Berkeley

1. Last use of campus library
   How recently? Which one? Purpose—study, research, other?
   How used (in person, remote access, other)? Why that library?
   How does it compare with typical pattern?
   If more than a month ago, any special reason why the Library was not
        used more recently?
2. If you ever used Moffitt (the undergraduate library): Which services in Moffitt
   are most important to you? Reserves, place to hang out with friends, Media
   Resources Center, term paper advisory service, short-term loans?
3. How you got acquainted with the Library and facilities?
   Any special orientation or instruction? (If so: how it happened/learned about)
   Need to know more? What? What has kept you from learning this? Steps
   taken when trouble finding what is needed or wanted?
4. Experience in using the library
   Best and worst aspects?
   Need for more books v. longer or different hours?
   Pros and cons of studying at home vs. at a campus library?
   Need for additional services? (Any other basic library services—not available
   now—that you would be willing to pay for, for added convenience?
   Specific improvements and additional services needed (more computers, type-
   writers, better lighting, photocopiers, etc.)
   Most useful parts of the collections regularly needed (If cuts necessary, set
   priorities)
   If cutbacks were necessary, which changes would hurt the least?
   Feelings about automation, computer literacy?
   Preferences for printed materials vs. CD-ROMs and other databases?
   Preferred methods of assistance? Staff? Online catalog help screens? Hand-
   outs? Other?
   How would you rate helpfulness of staff?
   Ever need to borrow materials from other libraries? How long are you willing
   to wait for such materials?
   How term "research" is used? How do you go about it (what do you use/what
   do you do)?
5. Use of other libraries? If any, which (UC, Stanford, other)? Why? How got
   acquainted with them?
6. Access to library
   Computer, modem at home or elsewhere? Dormitory or campus drop-in com-
   puter facility? What experience with computers? In person visits?
   Are the hours adequate (when is the student most likely to visit the library)?
7. How library should try to reach students?
   Where do you look for information (campus newspaper, dormitory mail, U.S.
   mail)?
   Best time in the semester to reach out?
8. Other use of library (in addition to books/materials)?
   Place to study, meet people, other?
9. If money were no object, most important way(s) for library to improve? If
   finances did not permit, which improvements would you most likely be will-
   ing to pay for?

APPENDIX C

UCLA Undergraduate Written Survey Questionnaire Results on Library Use

1. Class/Yr
   - 286   Freshman
   - 323   Sophomore
   - 271   Junior
   - 224   Senior
2. Age
   - 20   Under 18
   - 802   18-21
   - 220   22-25
   - 60   26-30
   - 45   31 +
3. Ethnic Background
   - 60   African-American
   - 411   Asian-American
   - 288   Caucasian
   - 215   Hispanic/Latino
   - 58   Native American
   - 85   Other
4. What is your major field of study?
   - 156   Humanities
   - 580   Social Sciences
   - 325   Sciences
5. Do you live in the dorms?
   - 435   Yes
6. If not, do you live within walking distance of UCLA?
   - 601   Yes
7. Do you work while attending UCLA?
   - 583   Yes
8. Do you have a personal computer?
   - 619   Yes
   - e-mail?
   - 250   Yes
   - ORION account?
   - 157   Yes
9. How often do you use College Library?
   - 41   Never used
   - 40   Once a year
   - 80   Once a quarter
   - 60   Once a month
   - 186   Twice a month
   - 408   Once a week
   - 130   Twice a week
   - 140   More often
10. When do you use College Library?
    - 40   First half of quarter
    - 121   Second half of quarter
    - 864   At finals
    - 79   Between quarters
    - 658   Throughout quarter
    - 80   NA

11. Why do you use College Library?

511	To consult library materials
528	To borrow library material
579	To make photocopies
682	To study own material
206	To use computers to type papers
316	For information and assistance from library staff
617	To check out reserve items

12. Libraries/services used(one check) those used regularly (two checks)

Towell	Used	Used regularly
Book collection	486	390
Reference service	509	353
Audio listening	191	66
Humanities computing	96	86
Study space	346	412
Current periodicals	249	106

URL	Used	Used regularly
Circulation desk	389	168
Reference service	254	146
Periodicals room	383	173
Graduate reserve service	33	5
Catalog information service	82	35
Public affairs service	116	25
Special collections	102	3
East Asian Library	36	29
Microform reading service	172	18

Other campus libraries and services	Used	Used regularly
Arts	120	48
Biomed	386	192
Chemistry	199	72
Engineering/Math	135	51
Geology/Geophysics	90	31
Management	196	52
Instructional media lab (Powell)	235	216
Language lab (Powell)	200	90
Law	109	30
Map	59	1
Music	195	38
Physics	79	21

13. How would you rate our service?

	Good	Satisfactory	Poor
Service	521	518	19
Lending policies	479	515	34
Book collections	467	481	35
Study facilities	393	520	120

Staff	Instructive	Helpful	Too busy
	203	687	97

Hours	**Convenient**	**Inconvenient**
	874	166

14. Where do you do most of your studying?

	In the Library	**Where you live**	**Other**
	283	785	48

15. Last quarter, how many books and other materials do you estimate you borrowed from College Library?

	Assigned reading	**For pleasure**	**For research**
	1,489	871	312

16. Does College Library generally have the books/materials you want to read?

	For study	**For pleasure**
	767	456

17. Rate your knowledge about how to use a library before coming to UCLA.

	Nothing	**Some**	**A lot**
	132	709	218

18. What is helpful in assisting you to use libraries?

195	College Library Guide
158	College Library tours
615	College Library staff
318	Library handouts
69	High school courses
121	GSLIS 110
290	UCLA Lib component/Eng 3
153	Public library
88	Other college/high school lib staff
423	ORION/MELVYL demos
433	Fellow students

19. Do you feel that further guidance in how to use the library and its sources would help you?

565	Yes

If yes, which of the following would be useful?

154	Library tours
252	Term paper clinics
155	Self-help videos
173	Library workshops
317	Handouts/pamphlets
166	For-credit orientation courses
315	More instructional/directional signs
238	Self paced library skills booklet
184	Individual appointments w/librarians

20. Which services could be eliminated if needed because of budget cuts?

168	Audio listening
135	Library use instruction
12	Reference service
72	Past exams
491	Travel guides
64	Computing labs
68	Microforms
36	Periodicals
574	Exhibits
48	Weekend tours

357	Conference rooms
48	Study space
13	Reserve materials
191	New book shelf
36	Night hours

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