Design thinking and LibQUAL+: The landscape of changing user needs and expectations of faculty and undergraduate students in ARL libraries — Trends 2003–2014

LibQUAL+ is a metric that captures key dimensions of library service quality: Affect of Service, Library as Place, and Information Control. From a design perspective, one wonders why on earth libraries did not articulate and measure those dimensions over the last 30 or so years. There are probably many answers to this question, but one of the key elements is the time it took during the last century to implement cross-disciplinary innovative approaches. In the social sciences for example, it took a little time to shift from the era of paradigm wars (quantitative versus qualitative) to the golden age of 'mixed-methods' design.

As information is becoming more accessible, diffusion of ideas and innovative thinking are also proliferating. In recent years we see the emergence of participatory design that brings together thought leaders from architecture, business, design, environmental studies, anthropology, engineering, information technology, and many other areas. In this context, LibQUAL+'s primary role may be to monitor our user base and ensure that we continue to meet their needs and expectations, while we launch and design new buildings, new methods of teaching, new ways of understanding the world, and new ways of deploying our resources. In that sense LibQUAL+ may be part of the established toolkit, and we may need to extend our interpretations to the innovation toolkit.

Results

Based on many thousands of responses, we can articulate with some confidence that user needs and expectations for undergraduate students and faculty are changing, sometimes in very different ways.

Giving users individual attention

- **Undergraduates are not very interested in receiving individual attention**

  Among all respondents, a decline in Desired score and a slight increase in Perceived score contributed to a widening positive adequacy gap and a declining negative superiority gap.
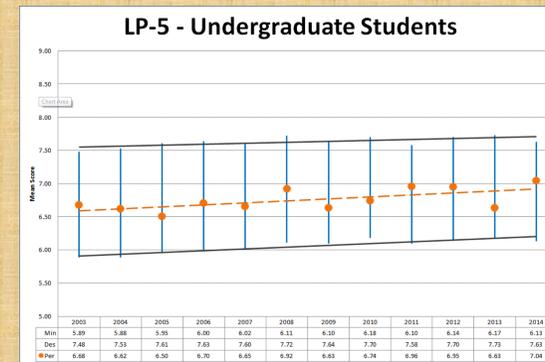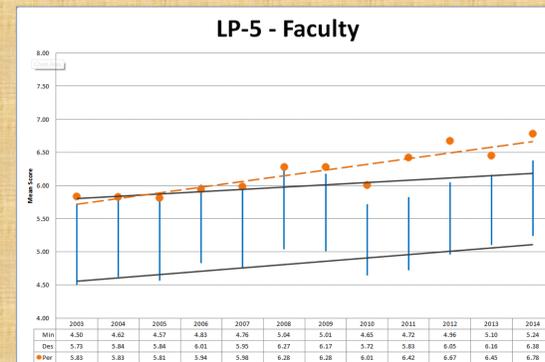
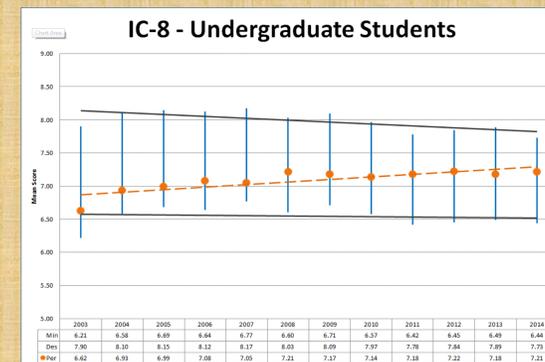## Affect of Service
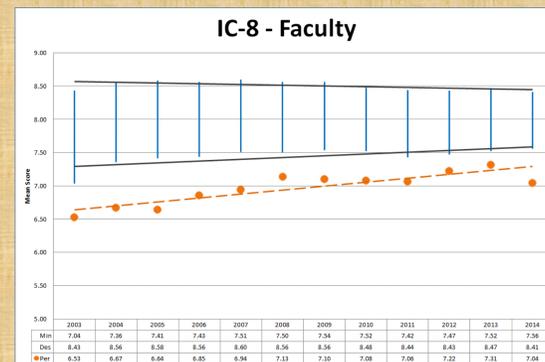
Giving users individual attention

AS-2 - Faculty

AS-2 - Undergraduate Students
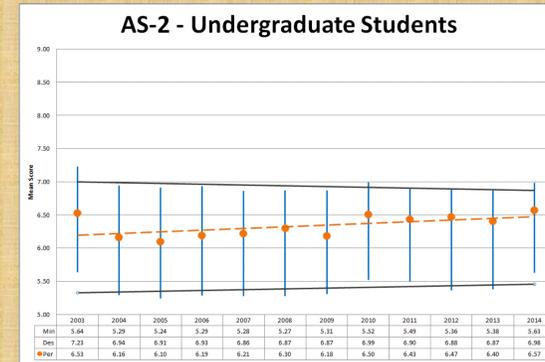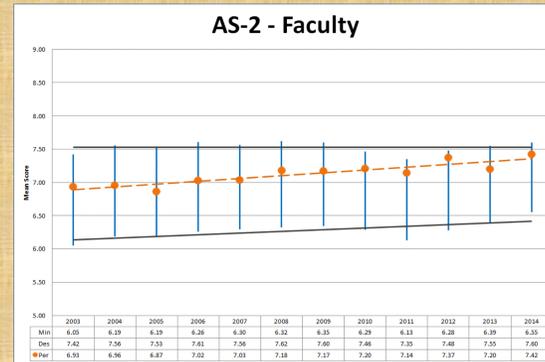
Library as Place

Community space for group learning and group study

LP-5 - Faculty

LP-5 - Undergraduate Students

Information Control

Print and/or electronic journal collections I require for my work

IC-8 - Faculty

IC-8 - Undergraduate Students

Community space for group learning and group study

- **Marked difference in expectations**

  Undergraduates, along with library staff, have significantly higher Desired and Minimum scores than other groups, while faculty rate this item lower than any other.

Print and/or electronic journal collections I require for my work

- **Highest average Desired rating of any subgroup (faculty)**

  Undergraduate students display a positive adequacy gap for all years; faculty have a significant negative adequacy gap, because even though their Perceived response is trending upward, their Minimum is also rising sharply.

Conclusion

We conclude that we have plenty of data to understand major differences between key constituent groups. As we change our services, our spaces, and our organizational structures we look forward to continuing to track our users' sentiments towards our ability to provide high-quality services.

Future Research

We hope to be able to explore further how design work and LibQUAL+ data can enhance the quality of library and information services. We are closely monitoring how signifiers like 'library' and 'information services' shift the signified notions we love(d).

References

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