



LibQUAL+™: A Methodological Suite

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LibQUAL+™ is a collaborative effort of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) and Texas A&M University. Responding to the need for greater accountability in measuring the delivery of library services to the research library community, ARL launched its New Measures initiative in 1999. One of the instruments in the New Measures toolkit, LibQUAL+™ undertakes to measure the delivery of library services to the diverse constituencies of research libraries.

LibQUAL+™ is based on the pioneering work of Berry, Parasuraman, and Zeithaml, whose work in the marketing sector produced SERVQUAL, the acknowledged assessment standard in the commercial sector. LibQUAL+™ has been tested in two iterations by participating libraries, most of them members of ARL. Both iterations were designed as large-scale web-based surveys developed to identify and measure the basic constructs defining service quality in a research library environment. The first iteration of LibQUAL+™ in the Spring of 2000 assessed the responses of more than 4,000 respondents across thirteen universities. The second iteration in the Spring of 2001 analyzed over 20,000 surveys from forty-three participating libraries, most of them ARL institutions. The ARL/Texas A&M University collaboration is supported in part by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE).

The following suite of articles assesses the findings of the second iteration. As is practice with any emergent theoretical construct, the findings of the initial survey were widely reported in the literature, including two articles published in the inaugural volume of *portal: Libraries and the Academy*. The present three articles mark the introductory report of analysis on the second, larger, iteration.

The first article, by the Texas A&M University research team of B. Thompson, Cook and R. L. Thompson, assesses the underlying reliability and validity of LibQUAL+™ as applied in the second iteration. It undertakes to answer the question of just how reliable were the scores from the 20,000+ respondents and presents the four dimensions that LibQUAL+™ identifies as contributing to the construct of Library Service Quality. For the first time, the twenty-five questions that will comprise the standard LibQUAL+™ instrument in future iterations are presented.

One of the qualities of LibQUAL+™ is that the information derived from the large-scale web-based survey is of sufficient granularity to be of immediate benefit to library administrators as they work to identify service areas of great importance to users, and to direct scarce resources to strengthen dimensions of services that respondents identify as needing repair. Of even greater utility, however, is the notion of “best practices” that underlies LibQUAL+™.

Because of the care given to the development of the LibQUAL+™ instrument, authors Cook, Heath, and Thompson argue in the second article that normative tables can be derived that permit library administrators to place local performance in the context of outcomes at other universities. This normative perspective, they suggest, can be obtained at the question, dimension, and overall service quality score levels. These service norms will place local results in the context of other research libraries and will enable managers to determine from among selected cohorts those service practices to be emulated.

The third article, by Heath, Cook, Kyrillidou, and Thompson focuses on the correlation of LibQUAL+™ scores with the ARL Index and other measures. As the authors and others have frequently observed, member institutions have lacked outcome measures of the delivery of library services to their research university constituents. The association’s best-known metric, the ARL Index, was designed as an input measure of institutional investments in their libraries in order to determine eligibility for admission to ARL. While never intended to measure a library’s services or success in meeting user needs, an institution’s standing on the Index reflects the level of sustained investment over time. For the first time, this article addresses the question of the extent to which LibQUAL+™ scores correlate with ARL Index scores at the 35 participating institutions belonging to ARL.

This suite of three articles places the emergence of LibQUAL+™ in methodological context. As one of the tools in the New Measures toolbox, managers will be able to take advantage of a large-scale web-based survey tool requiring only inconsequential effort at the local level. Not only do the local results have immediate meaning to managers, but the normative data places those results in a broader perspective, facilitating access to best practices. A third LibQUAL+™ iteration, involving as many as 200 participating colleges and universities, is scheduled for 2002. At the conclusion of that round, Texas A&M University will hand the instrument over fully to ARL for continuing administration.

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