

Service quality in cataloging: The experience of the University of Kansas Libraries

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In 1999 the Cataloging Department of the University of Kansas Libraries decided to survey KU library staff to determine the perception of services that the Department provides. Finding nothing in the literature about the use of SERVQUAL in library technical services, Cataloging staff, working together in a team approach, decided on its primary services and created questions about those services to include in a questionnaire. The questionnaire addressed the areas of reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Working from the information gathered, the department has been addressing those issues for which the minimum level of user expectation did not at least meet the perceived level of service.

Background

In 1998 the Cataloging Department of the University of Kansas Libraries began to work on a SERVQUAL survey instrument. This process was a deliberate one, as it was sandwiched in among a number of other priorities. Marilu Goodyear, then the Associate Dean of Libraries, now the Vice Chancellor for Information Services at the University of Kansas, provided guidance for the effort. She had had experience with SERVQUAL while working at Texas A & M University. To provide technical assistance for this effort, she also arranged for the Office for Institutional Research and Planning (OIRP) at KU, the campus office that gathers statistics and prepares statistical studies, to work with the Department on preparing the survey instrument and analyzing the returns.

Since the death of the Head in 1997, the Cataloging Department has been working in a team environment without a person formally designated as Head. It is comprised of 27 staff, a combination of professional and paraprofessional librarians. Cataloging is the largest cataloging center on campus and provides services for the main humanities, social science, and science collections, the Art Library, the Music Library, and the Engineering Library.

The Cataloging Management Team (CatMaT), comprised of the heads of each of the subunits of the department plus the Assistant Dean, oversees the work of the department and directs the staff in the team effort. As part of the initial team building activities, the group identified its customers and the services it provides to them. Cataloging staff worked in functional groups, such as serials cataloging, authority control

staff, and copy cataloging, and each group identified the major services it provided. CatMaT then took these lists and put together a unified list for the department:

Cataloging Department's Most Important Services (in alphabetical order)

- Administer the Cataloging Department's internal processes (training, evaluating staff, keeping statistics, team-building, etc.)
- Contribute original bibliographic and authority records to the international library community according to national and international standards.
- Interpret cataloging records for library staff and users.
- Participate in the making of the "catalog" which provides access to collections owned by the Libraries and to resources not owned by the Libraries.
- Provide bibliographic access to electronic resources, which are either owned or not owned by the Libraries.
- Provide bibliographic records to the online catalog for older items not already represented in the online catalog through retrospective conversion cataloging projects.
- Provide bibliographic records to the online catalog for newly received items in all formats in the collections.
- Provide consistency within the catalog by maintaining authority control, solving problems, and correcting errors.
- Provide rush and priority processing for materials.
- Share cataloging expertise (rules, interpretations, software, documentation, etc.) with other campus cataloging agencies through consultation and training.
- Share the responsibility with other library units to provide and maintain holdings for monographs and serials.

PREPARATION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Associate Dean Goodyear introduced CatMaT and the Cataloging Department staff to SERVQUAL as part of the orientation to teambuilding. The department decided to cap these efforts by undertaking a SERVQUAL survey. This effort was very much one in which the whole department participated.

In looking through the literature search we were able to find SERVQUAL surveys in reader service settings but did not find any technical service surveys. Therefore, it was necessary to devise our own instrument. The Associate Dean suggested that we collapse the 10 SERVQUAL dimensions to 5—Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy, as the ones most relevant to our situation.

SERVICE QUALITY DIMENSIONS

5	10
Tangibles	Tangibles
Reliability	Reliability
Responsiveness	Responsiveness, Access, Communication, Understanding the Customer
Assurance	Competence, Credibility, Security
Empathy	Courtesy, Understanding the Customer

We subsequently decided to eliminate Tangibles (the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, and personnel) from the survey, since it is not an important dimension of cataloging service. Department staff participated in a number of brainstorming sessions. The goal was to formulate statements for each of the four SERVQUAL areas based on the top six of the department's essential services. These statements would then be turned into questions for the survey.

For example:

Interpret Cataloging Records for Library Staff and Users

Reliability (Ability to perform the promised service dependably)

1. Cataloging can explain the record in an understandable manner.
2. Cataloging can accurately interpret bib records.

Responsiveness (Willingness to help customers and to provide prompt service)

Includes: **Access** (Approachability and ease of contact); **Communication** (Keeping customers informed in language they can understand)

1. Cataloging staff answer questions without resorting to jargon.
2. Cataloging provides sufficient information about the types of information it changes in the online catalog.
3. Cataloging staff are always approachable.
4. Cataloging keeps staff informed about changes in personnel.
5. Cataloging staff are usually available to answer questions.
6. It is easy to know whom to contact with regard to a given problem.
7. When I call cataloging, I get an answer to my question.

Assurance (Knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence)

Includes: **Competence** (Possession of the required skills and knowledge to perform the service); **Credibility** (Trustworthiness, believability, honesty—people believe you to be competent, approachable, etc.); **Security** (Freedom from danger, risk, or doubt)

1. Cataloging staff answer my questions competently.
2. I am satisfied with the answers I receive.
3. I believe Cataloging should provide initial training for all campus cataloging agencies.
4. I believe that Cataloging should provide additional one-on-one tutoring for all campus cataloging agencies.

Empathy (Caring, individualized attention the department provides its customers)

Includes: **Courtesy** (politeness, respect, consideration); **Understanding the customer** (Making the effort to know the customers and their needs)

1. Cataloging staff members verify what I'm asking before answering my question.
2. A Cataloging web-based FAQ is important.

In addition to providing the basic work on formulating questions for the questionnaire, the sessions had the side benefit of focusing the attention of the department on its own identity. Most of the questions were identified as falling under the dimension Responsiveness, followed by Reliability, Assurance, and Empathy.

Essential Services	Tangibles	Reliability	Responsiveness	Assurance	Empathy*
Interpret cataloging records for library staff and users		X	X	X	X
Provide bibliographic access to electronic resources	X	X	X	X	X
Provide bibliographic records to the online catalog for older items not already represented in the online catalog through retrospective conversion cataloging projects		X	X	X	X
Provide bibliographic records to the online catalog for newly received items in all formats in the collections		X	X	X	X
Provide consistency within the catalog by maintaining authority control, solving problems and correcting errors		X	X	X	X
Share the responsibility with other library units to provide and maintain holdings for monographs and serials		X	X	X	X

*Empathy is checked because Listening (understanding the customer) applies to all services.

At this point in the process a staff member from the Office of Institutional Research and Planning joined the CatMaT group to clarify the service statements. OIRP staff then turned the department's questions into the survey instrument. The survey was tested on several staff members, including several within the Cataloging Department. OIRP then prepared the final version of the instrument.

The body of the survey was 9 pages long. Included below is the first page of the survey, to illustrate that it follows the usual SERVQUAL pattern of asking for the minimum and desired service levels of the user, as well as the user's perception of the level of service provided:

Watson Library Cataloging Department Customer Satisfaction Survey

(Part I)

We would like your impressions about Watson Library Cataloging Department's service performance relative to your expectations. Please think about the two different levels of expectations as defined below:

Minimum Service Level: **the minimum service performance you consider adequate**

Desired Service Level: **the level of service performance you desire**

Below are statements that ask you to evaluate Watson Cataloging Department with respect to **interpreting cataloging records for library staff**.

For each of the following statements, please indicate:

- (a) your *minimum* service level by circling one of the numbers in the first column;
- (b) your *desired* service level by circling one of the numbers in the second column; and
- (c) your *perception* of Watson Library Cataloging Department's service by circling one of the numbers in the third column.

... interpreting cataloging records for library staff

When it comes to ...	(a) My minimum service level is:	(b) My desired service level is:	(c) My perception of Watson's Cataloging Department service performance is:
Q1 ... explaining the bibliographic record in an understandable manner	Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 N - No Opinion	High Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 N - No Opinion	High Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 N - No Opinion
Q2 ... accurately interpreting information on bibliographic records	Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 N - No Opinion	High Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 N - No Opinion	High Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 N - No Opinion
Q3 ... answering questions without resorting to jargon	Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 N - No Opinion	High Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 N - No Opinion	High Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 N - No Opinion
Q4 ... providing sufficient information about the types of information the Cataloging Department changes in the online catalog	Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 N - No Opinion	High Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 N - No Opinion	High Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 N - No Opinion
Q5 ... being friendly and approachable to library staff	Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 N - No Opinion	High Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 N - No Opinion	High Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 N - No Opinion
Q6 ... keeping staff informed about changes in personnel	Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 N - No Opinion	High Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 N - No Opinion	High Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 N - No Opinion

On the 10th page the user was asked to weight the 5 SERVQUAL dimensions. Below is the result of the weighting provided by staff outside the Cataloging Department:

Distribution of Points Among Service Dimensions Other Library Staff

Service Dimensions	Overall Quality of Service	Count	Mean	Median	Std
Reliability	Cataloging's ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately	39	42.9	40	19.66
Responsiveness	Cataloging's willingness to help library staff members and to provide prompt service	39	21.4	20	9.25
Assurance	The knowledge and courtesy of Cataloging staff members and their ability to convey trust and confidence	39	21.6	20	14.53
Empathy	The caring, individualized attention Cataloging provides library staff members	39	14	15	8.16

On the 11th and 12th pages the customer was asked to supply some demographic information, including whether or not s/he worked in the Cataloging Department. Additionally, the customer was given space in which s/he could provide free-form comments about the most liked and disliked activities of the department.

The survey was sent to the 168 members of the library staff in June 1999. As an incentive to return the questionnaire, a ticket was attached to the questionnaire that could be used for a drawing for a \$25 gift certificate at the campus bookstore. Of the 168 surveys, 66 were returned for a return rate of 39%. In retrospect, it is easy to see that one possible reason for the disappointingly low rate is the length of the questionnaire. Also, since the questionnaire was sent out just before the implementation of the new integrated system, a number of staff were preoccupied with preparing for that event.

OIRP then analyzed the questionnaires that had been returned and prepared a summary of the results for the Libraries. It runs more than 180 pages. Because of the demographic information requested, OIRP analyzed the responses from the Cataloging Department staff separately from that of other staff members outside the Department. (Incidentally, this survey was the first SERVQUAL instrument that OIRP had created and analyzed.)

Results

On overall quality of service Cataloging rated itself from 4 to 9 on the scale, with the majority falling into categories 6 to 8; for other staff the range was wider with the majority rating service at level 7. Cataloging staff and the Libraries' staff as a whole believe that the Department is most successful in providing consistency within the catalog by maintaining authority control, solving problems, and correcting errors. Both groups agreed on the specific sub-areas where Cataloging is most successful in providing this service. They are under the area of Responsiveness and include:

- correcting errors in the cataloging within 3 weeks of being reported;
- spending an appropriate amount of time on the creation and maintenance of authority control;
- making sure that the headings in the online catalog are consistent;
- working toward bringing all the works of one author together under one heading.

Cataloging staff recognized room for improvement in the area of "providing bibliographic access to electronic resources." This result was expected. In August 1999 just after the surveys were returned, the KU Libraries moved from a locally developed bibliographic system to the Voyager system. The local system had not allowed for the display of URL information or the possibility of linking to

electronic resources. Consequently, we knew that this area was one in which all library staff sought an improvement. We also knew that the Voyager system did have these capabilities and that, therefore, we would almost immediately be able to address this area successfully.

Cataloging staff report the level of service as unacceptable in only 8 out of 64 specific sub-areas. The largest discrepancy between perceived level of service and minimum acceptable level is the area of making sure the library still owns all books represented in the online catalog, which is a dimension of Assurance. Generally, other library staff give higher ratings to desired level of service than members of the Cataloging Department, indicating a higher level of expectation. Other library staff report unacceptable levels of service across most areas of service. Generally, the discrepancies between minimum acceptable levels and perceived levels of performance are broader among the other library staff.

Follow up on the survey results has been moving slowly. First, there was a delay in receiving the results. Shortly after the survey was completed, the Libraries implemented a new integrated library system. Also, over the next year the department filled several copy-cataloging vacancies. Following up on the survey thus became a somewhat lower priority than training and concentrating on core tasks.

The Cataloging Management Team decided to look first at the areas of difference between the minimum expectation and the perceived level of service for other library staff. We identified those categories for which there was the greatest negative difference and have established an action plan to address the situation.

Chart of all negative differences between minimum and perception

Section	Difference between minimum and perception	Action Plan
Section I <i>(interpreting cataloging records for library staff)</i>		
Q3-answering questions without resorting to jargon	-0.2	Work with Cataloging staff on answering questions without jargon.
Q4-providing sufficient information about the types of information the Dept. changes in the online catalog	-0.4	Prepare document to share with staff.
Q8-making sure that every library staff member receives an answer to his or her question	-0.2	Work with Cataloging staff on service issues.
Section II <i>(providing bibliographic access to electronic resources)</i>		
Q6-providing accurate URLs	-1.0	Voyager allows for display of URLs and linking to the electronic source; URLs for paid sources are being checked; Errors in URLs for other resources depend on staff notification.
Q7-soliciting adequate input from staff about what is needed by way of call numbers, URL displays, holdings displays, text of notes, etc.	-0.1	Electronic Information Council established first standards; ongoing standards being addressed by CERA.
Section III <i>(retrospective conversion cataloging projects to provide bibliographic records for the online catalog for older items not already represented)</i>		
Q4-working to overcome the problem of similar materials not having the same classification number or being split between two call numbers	-0.3	Correct situations that are reported; reiterate policy about when changes will be made.
Q11-making sure that the library still owns all books represented in the online catalog	-0.8	Need inventory of collections by Circulation staff to identify problems for Cataloging to correct.
Q12-making sure all the call numbers on the books match the call numbers on the bibliographic record	-0.2	Retrospectively, need inventory of collections by Circulation staff to identify problems; prospectively, new system allows copying of call number, thereby reducing the chance of transcription errors.
Section IV <i>(representing the bibliographic records of newly received items in all formats in the collections)</i>		
Q1-preventing new books and other materials from getting lost during cataloging	-0.9	Move security stripping to earlier stage of processing; provide locked cabinet for AV materials.
Q2-providing adequate bibliographic access to the individual titles within monographic series	-0.4	In process; solicit input from staff on what additional series to analyze; reiterate policy on when series will be analyzed.
Q4-promptly processing serial receipts	-1.0	No backlog of new serial titles and title changes in Serials Cataloging; responsibility for check in of current serials in Retrieval Services.
Q5-working to represent everything the library owns in the online catalog	-1.3	In process.
Q6-provide online access for newly received items within 2 weeks	-0.7	This currency reached for 1/2 of incoming material; need to review some policies to meet this currency for remaining materials.
Q7-adding brieflisted records in a way that is adequate for users' needs	-0.8	Information in some fields in brieflisted records has been augmented; Voyager keyword searching capability has increased access to brieflisted records.

Chart of all negative differences between minimum and perception *continued*

Section	Difference between minimum and perception	Action Plan
Section IV <i>continued</i>		
Q8-making it possible to retrieve in process materials quickly	-0.1	Reviewed process in the Voyager environment; construct an online form for user requests.
Q9-making sure that the hold and notify routines meet the users' needs	-0.4	Reviewed process in the Voyager environment; do not put notify material into Hold.
Q10-soliciting staff input for corrections of online catalog records	-0.2	Send out message to staff reminding them to send in corrections; upgrade catalog comment capability.
Q11-working to overcome the problem of similar materials not having the same classification number or being split between two call numbers	-0.7	Correct situations that are reported. Reiterate policy about when changes will be made.
Q12-minimizing the number of items placed in Hold	-0.7	Complete training of new cataloging staff and assign work with the goal of reducing the amount of material sent to Hold.
Q14-freely and willingly sharing information with colleagues outside the dept.	-0.7	Send out department updates regularly.
Section V <i>(providing consistency within the catalog by maintaining authority control, solving problems and correcting errors)</i>		
Q1-providing sufficient references to help staff and patrons find materials	-0.4	Remind staff to notify Authority Section if a reference is needed; remind staff of newly available keyword searching as an added help.
Section VI <i>(sharing the responsibility with other library units to provide and maintain holdings for monographs and serials)</i>		
Q1-correcting errors in holdings records within 3 weeks of being reported	-0.9	Being done with monographs; serials holdings part of Retrieval Services responsibilities.
Q2-making sure that holdings notes are understandable	-0.4	Reviewed what notes are added and how Voyager displays them.
Q4-providing adequate documentation on holdings policies and procedures	-1.0	With move to new system, Retrieval Services now responsible for serial holdings documentation; monographs policy added to Cataloging website.
Q5-working toward making KU's holdings accessible on OCLC	-1.3	Done for key ILL titles.
Q6-making sure that every volume or issue of a serial on the holdings record exists in the library	-0.7	Need inventory of collections by Circulation staff to identify problems for Cataloging to correct.
Q7-freely and willingly sharing information with colleagues outside the dept.	-0.8	Send out department updates regularly.

The free-form responses at the end provided interesting reading and some insights into the attitudes of the staff. These statements flesh out the survey results. It was reassuring to see the general recognition by library staff of the quality of the work produced by Cataloging.

The survey results offer a wealth of data for analysis. We have only just begun to do so. In some cases the results of the survey support anecdotal evidence and individual perceptions about how the rest of the library perceives the department's services. The implementation of the new integrated library system improved some departmental services and at the same time has caused the degradation of other services and introduced some new problems. It would be useful to redo the survey, since the departmental context has changed greatly.

Note

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