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LibQUAL+ Assessment Data for Service Improvement: A New York 3Rs LSTA Project

by: Kathy Miller, Rochester (N.Y.) Regional Library Council

The New York 3Rs Councils (NY3Rs) have been awarded a federal LSTA grant from IMLS and through the New York State Library, to coordinate a statewide project to conduct the Spring 2003 Association for Research Library (ARL) LibQUAL+ Assessment Survey in New York's academic and public research libraries. Over 70 academic libraries of all types -- public and private, community college to doctoral institutions -- and four public research public libraries are expected to participate.

Service quality has always been a value for libraries. LibQUAL+ provides a method to measure that value. LibQUAL+ is a program that seeks to define and measure library service quality across institutions and to create useful quality-assessment tools for local planning. LibQUAL+ measures library users' perceptions of service quality and identifies gaps between desired, perceived, and minimum expectations of service.

"LibQUAL+ is so important because it provides a cross-library means of assessing service quality," said David M. Harralson, Ph.D., Associate Dean and Director of the Library at Utica College of Syracuse University and a NY3Rs LibQUAL+ participant. "In this day that demands outcomes assessment, simple gate counts and numbers of interlibrary loans in or out will no longer be sufficient. LibQUAL+ provides outcomes based on library user perceptions that will be accepted by our funders and will be helpful to those of us who administer libraries. Being able to measure service quality within Utica College and across other institutions of higher education will be invaluable."

Individual libraries participating in LibQUAL+ can identify where their services need improvement, in the view of their users. They also can compare their service quality with that of peer institutions in an effort to develop benchmarks and understanding of best practices across institutions. By initiating action based on the information they receive from their library users and from other LibQUAL+ participants, libraries can provide services that are more closely aligned with user expectations. As library services are improved, the ultimate goal is to surpass user expectations in search of excellent library services.

The LibQUAL+ survey uses a web interface and protocol to ask library users about their library service expectations. Using a random sample of email addresses representative of their user population, the library sends a message to the sample encouraging recipients to complete the survey. Survey data are transmitted directly from the central (ARL) LibQUAL+ server to a database. The data are then analyzed and reports that provide

information on how users perceive the quality of their library services are generated for the individual libraries. The reports present information on the gaps between users' desired, perceived, and minimally acceptable levels of service.

The NY3Rs are state-funded regional library systems chartered by the New York State Board of Regents to support improved access to information for the people of New York. Through the connection of the nine regional Councils and in collaboration with the New York State Library, the New York State Archives and the New York State Education Department, the NY3Rs serve 18 million people, over 900 academic, hospital, law and business, and other special libraries, 23 public library systems with 750 public libraries, and 42 school library systems with 4,533 school libraries. Working with all types of libraries to ensure that all New Yorkers get the information that they need regardless of where they live, the NY3Rs provide electronic database access, interlibrary loan, delivery, database development, reciprocal access, professional development and training, and other services to help libraries meet the reference and information needs of their users. For additional information see their website: www.ny3rs.org.

For more information contact: [Kathleen M. Miller](#), Executive Director, Rochester Regional Library Council, 390 Packett's Landing, Fairport, NY 14450 (585-223-7570).

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