

Appendix F
Review of LibQUAL Survey Responses at the Ohio State University Libraries
in 2002, 2003, and 2005

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Introduction

This document reviews responses at the Ohio State University Libraries to the LibQUAL survey, developed by the Association of Research Libraries. Ohio State participated in LibQUAL during the years of 2002, 2003, and 2005, and has plans to continue participating each year into the foreseeable future.

The LibQUAL survey is distributed to a selection of email addresses as determined by the contact at each institution. It measures the perceptions of library users on a scale of 1-9 for a series of approximately 20 core questions, and allows each library to include 5 additional questions of its own design into the survey as well. There are also a few additional questions about overall satisfaction and information literacy. Users are asked to rate each concept in three ways: their minimally acceptable level of performance, the level of performance they perceive the library is providing, and their desired level of performance. So, for example, for the concept "Employees who instill confidence in users," the respondent could rank the minimally acceptable level of performance as 4, the perceived level of performance as 6, and the desired level of performance as 8. This answer would indicate that the user believes that the library employees are performing above the minimally acceptable level, but not as well as the user would like.

The core LibQUAL questions are gathered into larger groupings or dimensions and analyzed accordingly. Due to changes in the questionnaire over the years considered, some additional work was necessary to discern where questions in the older years were placed in the 2005 version. To the extent possible, these discrepancies were resolved in the summary results presented here. In 2002 and 2003, there were four dimensions: Access to Information, Affect of Service, Library as Place, and Personal Control. By the time the 2005 questionnaire was developed, analyses by the survey authors had determined that Access to Information and Personal Control were merging, so a new merged dimension of Information Control appeared on the 2005 survey along with Affect of Service and Library as Place.

Comparisons of data have been drawn between Ohio State and the annual summary of data for all participating ARL member libraries for 2002 and 2003. Since the calendar year of 2005 is not yet complete, no ARL summary data is available for member libraries at this time. Comparisons were also made between Ohio State and its defined peer institutions, but this did not prove to be extremely useful in many cases as different institutions and varying numbers of defined peers participated during the specific years of interest.

One last point of interest is that whenever the results are summarized across users groups for an institution, the library staff user group always is excluded. A closer look at individual institutional reports reveals the reason for this exclusion, and Ohio State is no exception. Library staff users when surveyed have such vastly different impressions and perceptions of the library than other users that including their results would skew the summary results in most unusual ways. There is a great lesson to be learned from this, namely just how important it is to ask users for their thoughts rather than rely solely on the thoughts and opinions of library staff.

Respondents

An important component of any successful survey is the response rate. While it is difficult in the LibQUAL survey to know exactly how many email addresses successfully received the survey due to inevitable maintenance issues of the email directory at any large institution, some meaningful comparisons could be drawn from Ohio State peer institutions in this case. This matter deserves attention early in the discussion of results precisely because for some reason the response rate for Ohio State in the 2005 LibQUAL survey fell far below that of its peers and even far below the OSU response rate in earlier years. Any conclusions drawn from this data must be considered with the knowledge that the 2005 survey results may not have yielded valid data due to a low response rate. **Figure 1** demonstrates the response rates of Ohio State and its peer institutions that were involved in LibQUAL during 2002, 2003, and 2005. As a reminder, LibQUAL data that reveals characteristics of specific institutions may not be used outside Ohio State. Names of institutions must be deleted from all data, but results may be shown under generic names such as “Institution A,” etc.

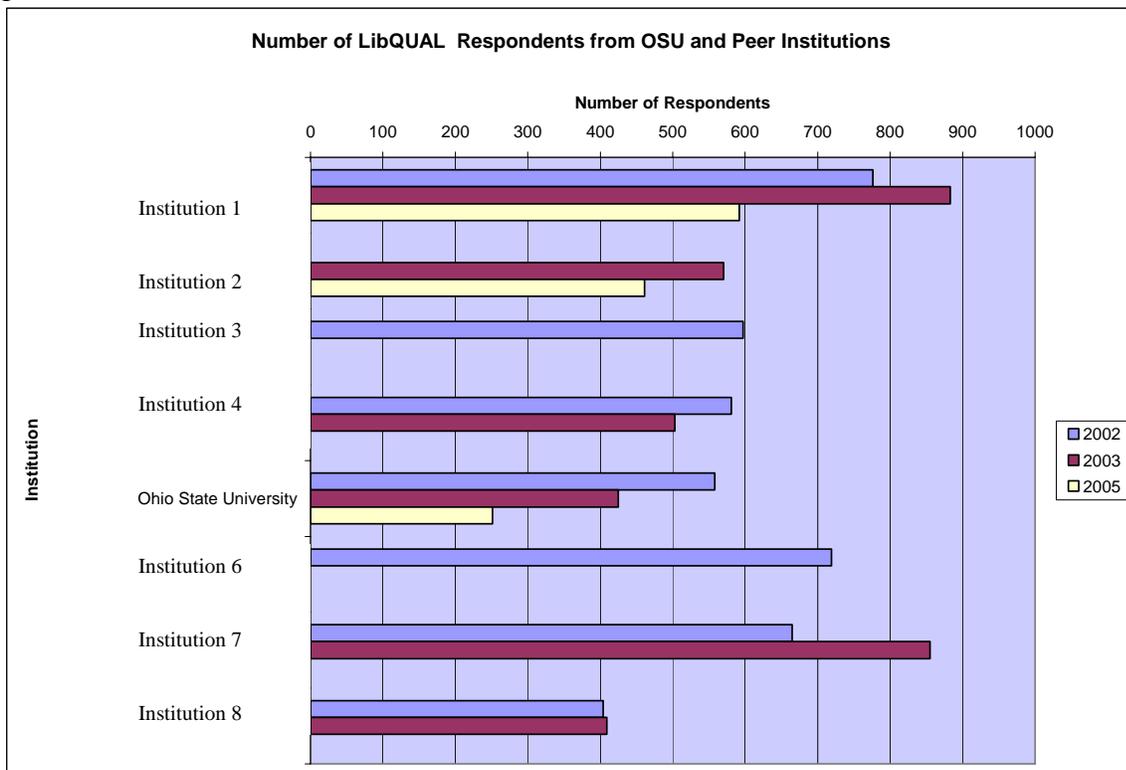


Figure 1

Overview of Minimally Acceptable, Perceived, and Desired Levels of Performance

As mentioned earlier, two dimensions in the 2002 and 2003 LibQUAL surveys (Access to Information and Personal Control) were merged into one in 2005 (Information Control). In order to understand exactly what these dimensions measure, it is important to know what types of questions are included in each dimension. The 2005 core questions are listed below by dimension. Those questions for which a group of OSUL respondents believed performance to be below minimum acceptable levels are highlighted in red.

Affect of Service

Employees who instill confidence in users

Giving users individual attention (Library Staff)

Employees who are consistently courteous (Library Staff)

Readiness to respond to users' questions

Employees who have the knowledge to answer user questions (Library Staff, University Staff)

Employees who deal with users in a caring fashion (Library Staff, University Staff)

Employees who understand the needs of their users

Willingness to help users (Library Staff)

Dependability in handling users' service problems (Library Staff)

Information Control

Making electronic resources accessible from my home or office (University Staff)

A library web site enabling me to locate information on my own (Faculty, University Staff)

The printed library materials I need for my work

The electronic information resources I need (University Staff)

Modern equipment that lets me easily access needed information (Graduate, Library Staff, University Staff)

Easy-to-use access tools that allow me to find things on my own (Overall, Undergraduate, Faculty, University Staff)

Making information easily accessible for independent use (Library Staff, University Staff)

Print and/or electronic journal collections I require for my work (Overall, Graduate, Faculty, University Staff)

Library as Place

Library space that inspires study and learning (Library Staff)

Quiet space for individual activities

A comfortable and inviting location (Library Staff)

A getaway for study, learning or research

Community space for group learning and group study

Figure 2 shows the results by dimension for Ohio State during the three years of LibQUAL participation to date. The two former dimensions that merged into the current Information Control, and Information Control in the most recent version, have always had the highest level of

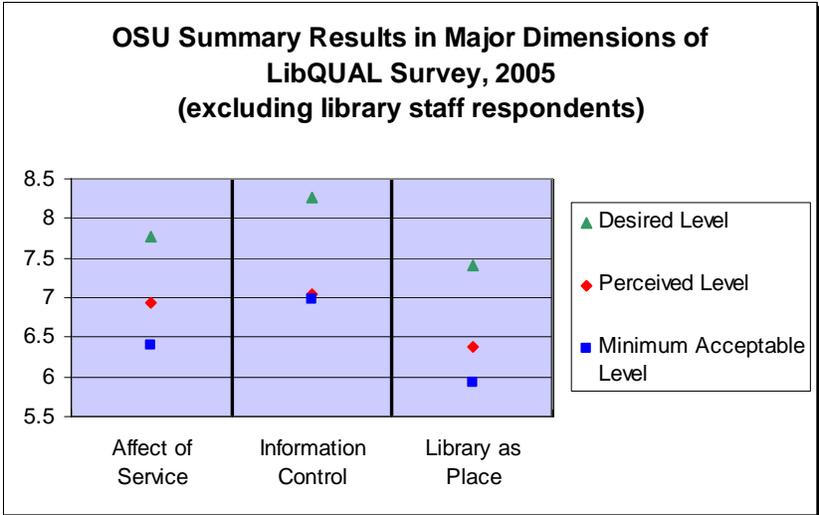
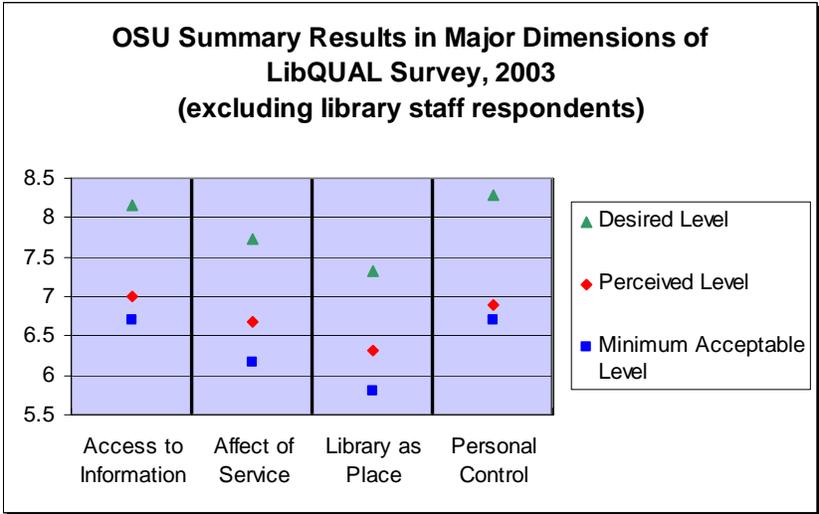
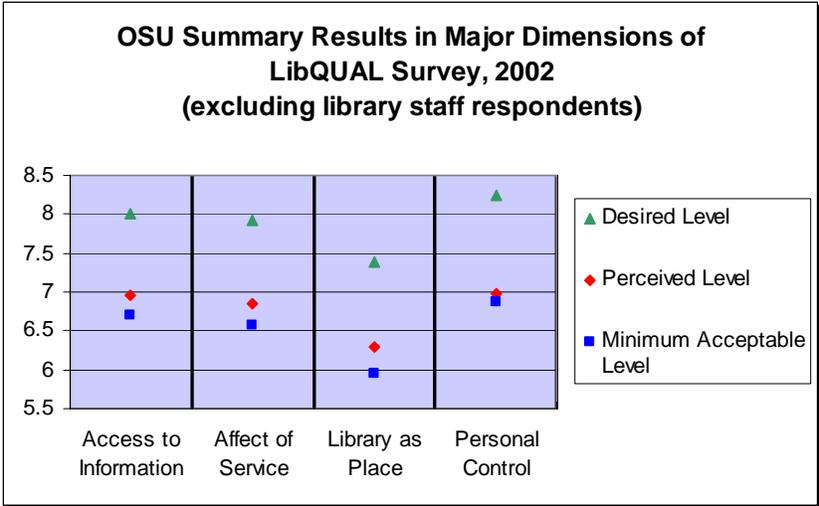


Figure 2

desired performance. This indicates that the Information Control dimension is at the moment more important to our OSU users than Affect of Service or Library as Place. In 2005, the Affect of Service perceived level of performance is the closest to the desired level of the three dimensions, and the perceived level of Information Control performance is extremely close to the minimal expectations of our users. The new style and format of the library’s web page presented in the summer of 2005 could be seen as a response to this issue. Another observation is that the importance of Library as Place and Affect of Service have remained fairly stable over time, and the desire for self-sufficiency and unmediated discovery continues to increase the importance of Information Control. However, it could be argued that if the “place” that is the library were transformed into a new concept with different arrays of features and services, users’ eyes would be opened to new possibilities and Library as Place would become more important to them.

Figure 3 indicates the summarized results of the 2002 and 2003 dimensions for all ARL institutions that participated in LibQUAL for those years. The satisfaction levels for Access to Information and Personal Control are much lower than for Affect of Service and Library as Place, much as the data from Ohio State show. Also, the increasing importance of Access to Information and Personal Control is apparent among ARL libraries just as at Ohio State.

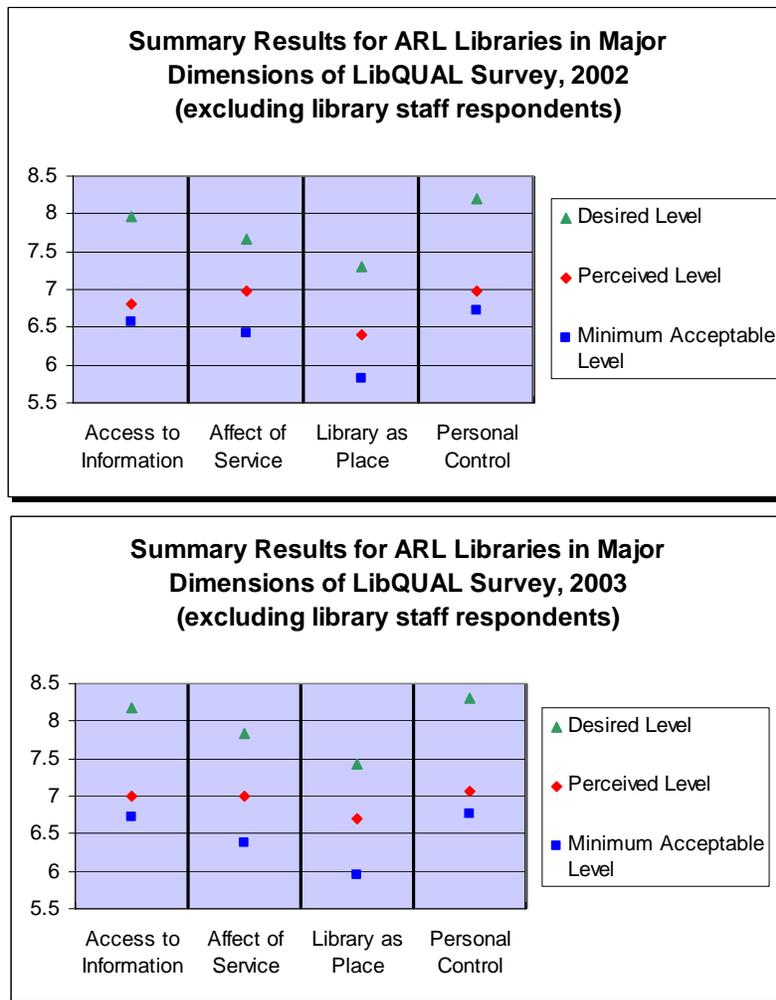


Figure 3

Average Satisfaction Levels

Another brief area of three questions on the LibQUAL survey addresses the issue of overall satisfaction levels in the areas of (1) Treatment, (2) Support for Learning, Teaching, and Research, and (3) Overall Quality of Service. **Figure 4** shows the general levels of satisfaction by Ohio State library users during the years of the LibQUAL Survey, and for 2002 and 2003, compares those levels with comparable data from the summary of all ARL library responses.

In the area of Treatment, the most noticeable trend over time is the steadily increasing satisfaction levels of the OSU undergraduate population. For Support for Learning, Teaching, and Research, the most exciting trend is the steady upward climb of the faculty satisfaction levels. For Overall Quality of Service, again the faculty satisfaction levels have improved steadily, although student impressions have varied from year to year. For students, it seems to be the case that they are more pleased with the treatment they receive from the library staff than the supportive learning and research environment the library provides.

With respect to ARL summary data, 2002 comparisons with OSU data are reasonable. In 2003, there was a general shift downward in satisfaction levels for most OSU respondents when compared to ARL summary data. It will be interesting to see the ARL 2005 summary data when this calendar year closes to see if 2003 was an anomaly, or if there is a trend that can be detected.

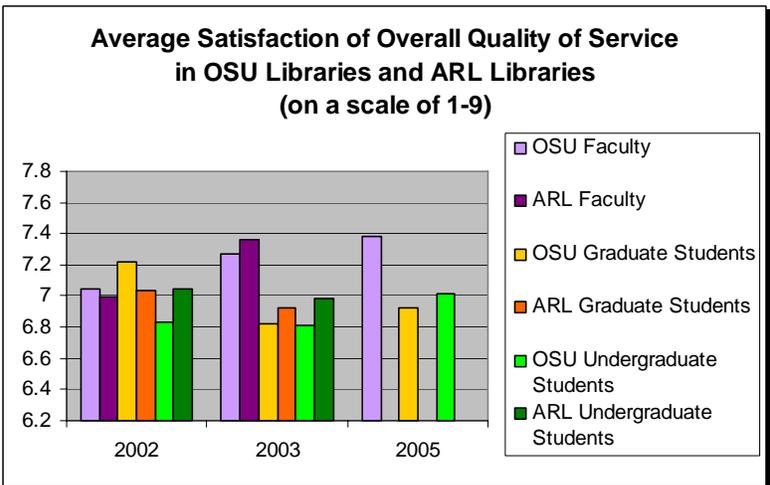
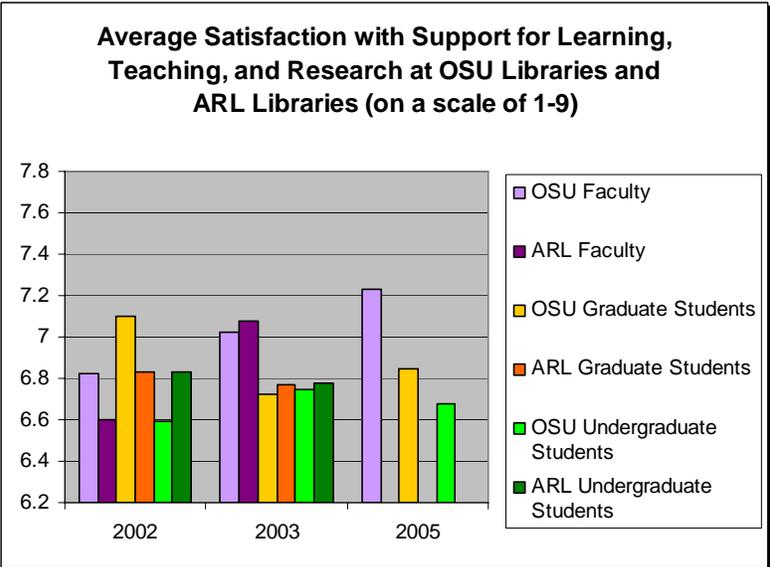
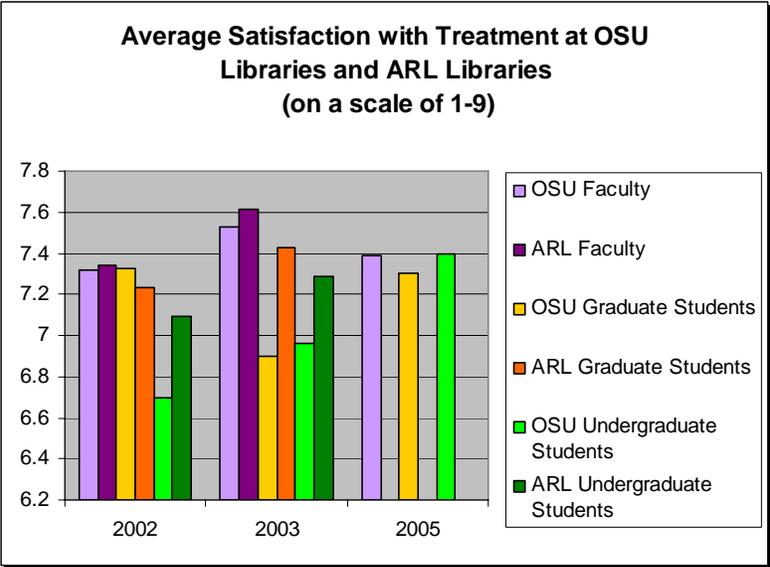


Figure 4

Areas in Which OSUL Did Not Meet Minimum User Expectations

Unfortunately, there are a few categories across the years in which OSU respondents felt that the OSU Libraries consistently did not meet their minimal expectations. Here, though, some thoughtful analysis is necessary. A scan through the list below indicates that OSU users are extremely unhappy with their access to online full text articles. This particular question on the survey appeared as one of the five local questions that OSU provided along with the core set of LibQUAL questions. The OSU local questions have remained the same all three years of LibQUAL participation. With the OSU membership in OhioLINK and the additional OSU resources, our library users have access to one of the largest full-text e-journal collections available in research libraries today. Why is it, then, that this area appears to fall the farthest from meeting our users' expectations? Is it merely that as we provide a greater the wealth of resources, the higher the user expectations are for an ever-more comprehensive collection of resources?

The Comments section of the LibQUAL surveys that allowed users to express anything on their minds contained several thoughts that were mentioned repeatedly over the years. One repeated theme was that of redundancy in the survey. The OSU local question, "Collections of online full-text articles sufficient to meet my needs," overlaps a great deal with the LibQUAL-supplied core questions of "The electronic information resources I need," and "Print and/or electronic journal collections I require for my work." Oddly enough, though, neither of these LibQUAL questions sparked the level of negative responses that the OSU local question did. Both of the LibQUAL core questions first appeared in the 2003 survey, so it was at that time that overlap and redundancy between local and core questions began to creep into the survey in this particular area. The 2003 responses to the LibQUAL core questions resulted in an actual performance rating of slightly above the minimal level of expectations, while responses to the OSU local question resulted in a constant actual performance rating just below the minimal level of expectations. In 2005, OSU responses to the "The electronic information resources I need" question showed some improvement in user satisfaction over the 2003 responses, while the "Print and/or electronic journal collections I require for my work" satisfaction levels fell even farther below minimum expectations than the OSU local question about e-journals only.

Library staff members are always excluded from summarized responses, as mentioned earlier, because their responses are so vastly different from those from other user groups. The other group of users that stands apart from faculty and students is the university staff. The OSU responses and the ARL summarized responses indicate that this group of individuals consistently seems to be disenfranchised and deeply unhappy. There is a great deal of indication that their lack of satisfaction stems from a lack of understanding and knowledge about how to locate online materials and a lack of support from the library staff when they encounter difficulties. As these university staff members are becoming more and more vital to the success of new trends and technologies that libraries are developing, it may be advisable for libraries to expand their outreach efforts to these constituents. For example, faculty secretaries who may be able to submit documents to repositories on behalf of faculty members need to feel that they can call on the library staff for training and support.

Areas in Which OSUL Consistently Did Not Meet Users' Minimum Expectations in 2002, 2003, and 2005

All Respondents (except Library Staff)

Collections of online full-text articles sufficient to meet my needs

Graduate Student Respondents

Collections of online full-text articles sufficient to meet my needs

Faculty Respondents

Collections of online full-text articles sufficient to meet my needs

Library Staff Respondents

Library space that inspires creativity and learning

University Staff Respondents

Making electronic resources accessible from my home or office

A library web site enabling me to locate information on my own

Modern equipment that lets me easily access information

Easy to use tools that allow me to find things on my own

Making information easily accessible for independent use

Ease of using library's online article indexes

Availability of online help when using my library's electronic resources

Collections of online full-text articles sufficient to meet my needs

One area of improvement over the years can be seen in the responses of graduate students after the library installed a proxy server that aided off-site access to electronic resources. Graduate students and university staff had expressed the most concern about this issue in 2002 and 2003, but the satisfaction levels of graduate students increased in 2005 after the installation of the proxy server. However, the satisfaction of university staff did not. Since presumably the majority of university staff members do not even have to use the proxy server for office access to library electronic resources, once again this situation points to the lack of training and information given to the group as a whole.

Area in Which OSU Did Not Meet Users' Minimum Expectations in 2002 and 2003, But Did Meet It in 2005

Graduate Student Respondents

Making electronic resources accessible from my home or office

User Comments

Analyzing the comments that respondents provided on the LibQUAL surveys proved to be an interesting exercise. A number of comments were broad-ranging and could not be associated neatly with a meaningful category. However, the majority of them for each year could be aggregated into the three major dimensions of the 2005 LibQUAL survey: Affect of Service, Information Control, and Library as Place.

Figure 5 provides summary charts of the categories of comments and defines them as positive or negative. The portion of comments in the Information Control dimension grew from 23% to 50% of the number of analyzed comments from 2002 to 2005. This finding is in parallel with the increased importance of Information Control to users previously noted. Comments regarding the Affect of Service have declined in percentage, as have comments regarding Library as Place. One unknown factor is the impact and publicity of the main library renovation plans in 2005. Perhaps users ceased to comment on the matter because they were aware of efforts to make improvements.

Other general observations from the Comments sections can be made. It is striking to note that the positive Affect of Service comments were largely directed toward branch libraries and branch librarians. Negative Affect of Service comments largely centered on the main library and its staff, with quite a few comments about ineffective, untrained, and uncaring student employees there. Sometimes particular policies, such as the new \$10 per day fine for overdue recalled items, were mentioned as examples of negative service encounters. The total number of negative comments about library technology and access to electronic resources via the web in the Information Control dimension increased in percentage with each passing year, although there was a slow trend to complain more about technological issues (such as lack of modern equipment and number of printers) and less about e-resource access difficulties over time.

Further analysis of the Comments could be performed with respect to the communities of users that expressed different or common feelings, but in 2005 the low response rate to the survey resulted in only 68 comments that could be assigned to the three major dimensions of the survey. With such a large community of users at Ohio State, this is not a large enough sample from which to draw safely any sort of specific and meaningful conclusions.

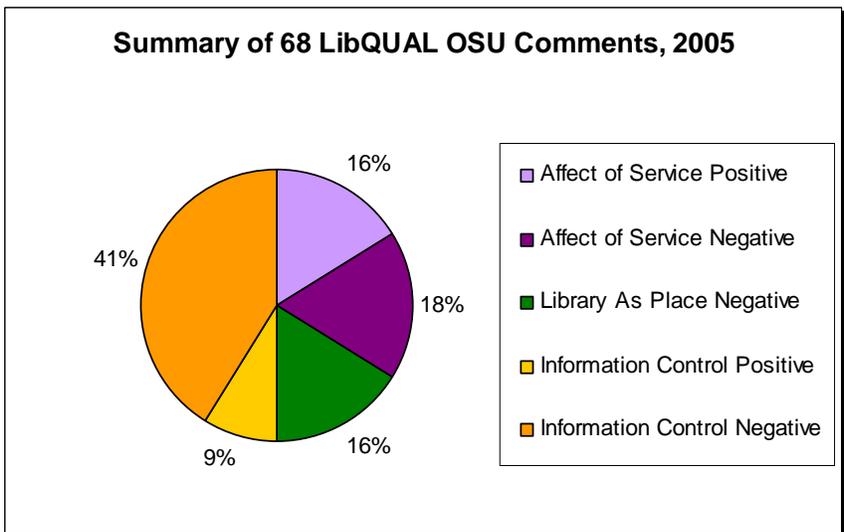
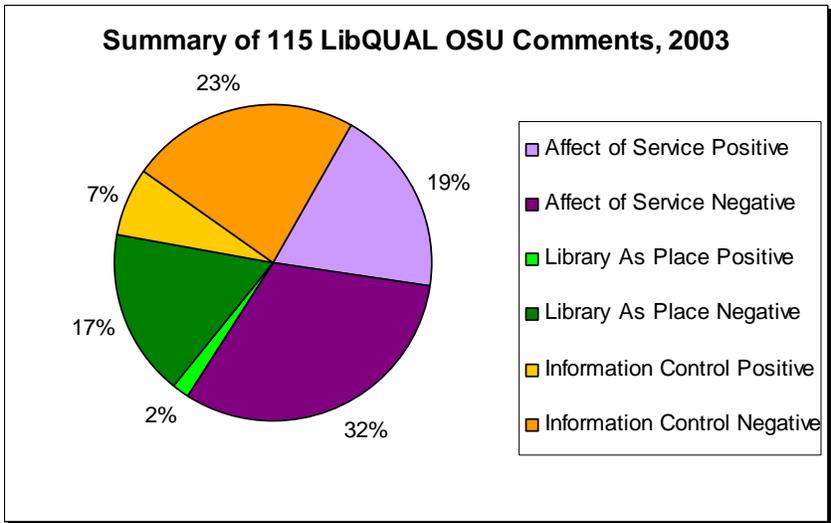
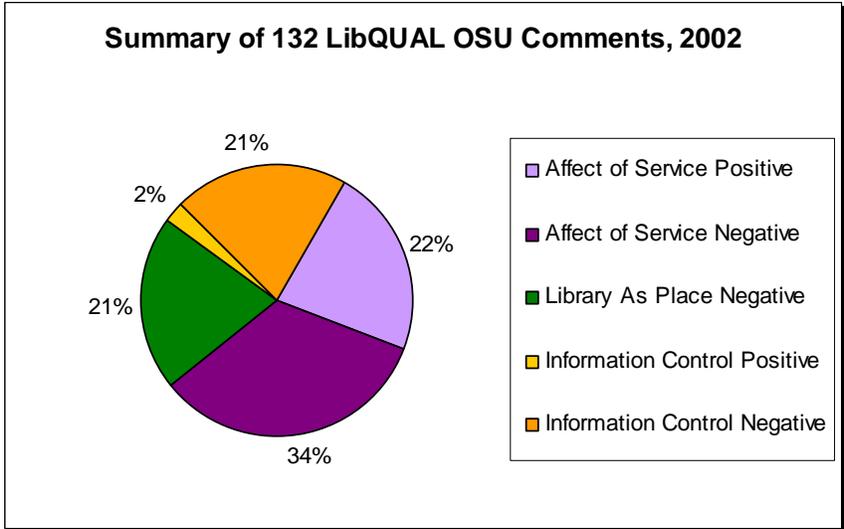


Figure 5

Recommendations for the Future

Since Ohio State plans to administer the LibQUAL survey each year into the foreseeable future, there are several issues to consider in order to obtain more meaningful data from the respondents. The most obvious one is to find ways to increase the response rate. Without any knowledge of how the targeted email addresses were determined or how many emails were distributed to potential respondents, I cannot make any concrete suggestions about how to improve the response rate. However, the process clearly should be re-examined. One technique that many libraries have used to pique interest in the survey is a raffle of a significant prize, such as an iPod, for survey respondents.

The LibQUAL core questions have evolved over the years, and while consistency in annual survey questionnaires can be a positive feature, the LibQUAL core changes have resulted in some redundancy with the consistent OSU local questions. Other local questions are a bit dated or have outlived their meaningful contribution to the survey. An important task for 2006 would be to examine the 2006 LibQUAL questionnaire, make certain there is no redundancy between the core and local questions, and make certain that the local questions are relevant to the issues of most interest to the OSU Libraries. There is an opportunity to update the local questions each year.

Finally, as with any survey of users, it is important to report results to the respondents and the wider OSU community in order to strengthen relationships between the Libraries and their users. Respondents to surveys need assurance that they have made a meaningful contribution and have been heard. When possible, direct associations between survey responses and OSUL attempts toward improvement should be stated publicly.

Final Commentary

As the survey authors emphasize, LibQUAL is but one tool in the larger toolkit of assessment strategies that libraries can employ today. It provides a library with insight into the perceptions of its community of users, and it is essential for libraries to confront actual user impressions and perceptions. It is never wise to assume we know what our users are thinking because we are sure that our services are good. For example, OSUL staff may feel confident in the truth that they are providing their users with one of the best e-journal collections available at a research library today. If the users are not aware of that though, or due to their limited scope of experience do not believe that to be true, then clearly promotion and marketing are needed in order to improve user perceptions of the library. The library staff should not ignore the user perceptions just because they know the truth and reality of the matter to be otherwise.

Since I am new to the OSU Libraries community, I was not able to link LibQUAL survey results to efforts for improvement over the past several years. Undoubtedly others will have personal knowledge of those efforts and will be able to make meaningful contributions in that area. Far more analysis could be performed with the LibQUAL data. I attempted to highlight the most striking factors I encountered while reviewing the data over a two week period, but if there is a need for more detailed work, that certainly could be done. I also focused on the areas in which

user communities felt that the Ohio State University Libraries failed to meet their minimum expectations of performance. The analytical process could shift to focus on narrowing the gap between the levels of perceived performance and the levels of desired performance. There is much to be gained by using this tool repeatedly in the future.