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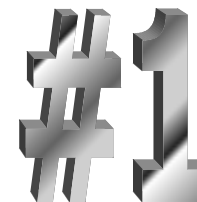
2003 Top 10 Heritage Perennials

annual report 2002-2003

From the Dean...

This 2002 – 2003 report for the Virginia Tech Libraries is a departure from our [usual format](#). This year I would like to take this opportunity to talk to you about ranking and academic libraries.

From flowers, to forms, to fishing spots we like to bring order to what we know. We make lists, comparisons, and rankings to organize the world around us. This urge to rank is a familiar exercise in academic circles. Each year we eagerly await the release of the *US News and World Report* survey ranking colleges and universities. Closer to home, at Virginia Tech we want to position the university as a “Top 30” research institution by the end of the decade.



Academic libraries are not left out of ranking activities. You may be familiar with the ARL [Association of Research Libraries] rankings, published each year in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. The most recent *Chronicle* table is based on 2001-2002 data from the ARL libraries. The VT Libraries rank 102nd out of 115 libraries on this ranking. You might wonder what this means.

ARL notes that a library’s rank for this index score is not a measure of goodness, but rather is derived from comparing the library with other member libraries on several *input* factors associated with describing the 35 founding members of ARL. In the last several years a number of ARL members have wanted to explore issues of assessment for libraries that would go beyond those linked to these more traditional input factors. This effort, dubbed the New Measures Initiative, has given rise to several projects for examining measures applicable to assessing an individual library and its core services.

LibQUAL+ is one of these projects. LibQUAL+ focuses on assessing libraries from the perspective of their users rather than from input measures. As the number of participants in LibQUAL+ grows it also allows the opportunity make comparisons with peers at the output, or service end. Using LibQUAL+ we would hope to learn that when compared to other research institutions we want to emulate, our library users perceive the VT services to be average or better.

Our report this year focuses on selected findings from the spring 2003 LibQUAL+ survey.

Eileen E. Hitchingham
Dean, University Libraries at Virginia Tech

The Chronicle Ranking and LibQUAL+

The table that appears in the *Chronicle* each year shows the relative position of each ARL library to other member libraries, based on an index score. The score is a *summary measure of relative size among the university members of the association*. It is calculated from a formula applied against five *input* measures associated with the 35 ARL University founding members. The measures include:

- number of volumes held
- number of volumes added (gross)
- number of current serials received (including duplicate titles)
- total operating expenditures
- number of professional and support staff

The five variables used in the index were determined by a factor analysis of 22 variables and represent the elements in which ARL university libraries *most resemble one another*. Intuitively we can see that each of these factors might be an important component in building the potential to have an excellent library. However, it does not necessarily follow that there is a linear relationship between having “more” of all of these factors and the ability to deliver excellent library services.

The index does not attempt to measure a library’s services, quality of collections, or success in meeting the needs of users. ARL notes that when comparing any individual library to ARL medians or other ARL members, evaluations should be made within the context of local goals and characteristics. While the annual index ranking appearing in the *Chronicle* is based on input factors, LibQUAL+ gets closer to addressing how well a library appears to be meeting user needs.

LibQUAL+ is a survey measuring the *perceptions* and *expectations* that library users attribute to service quality across four dimensions: Access to Information, Affect of Services, Library as Place, and Personal Control. Several inter-related questions are associated with each dimension. Four years old in 2003, LibQUAL+ has evolved from a conceptual model based on the SERVQUAL instrument used for many years in the private sector to measure service quality. Twelve institutions, including Virginia Tech, participated in the pilot program in 2000. This year the survey was completed by more than 130,000 users from 308 institutions in the U.S., Canada, the U.K, and the Netherlands.

In the survey library users are asked to make a judgment on three scales for each dimension question - the *desired* level of service they would like to receive, the *minimum* level of service they are willing to accept, and the actual level of service they *perceive* to have been provided.

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For comparative purposes scores on perception of services can be examined. In addition gaps - between perceived and desired scores or between minimum and perceived scores - can also be derived from responses. The survey also asks the respondent to indicate the frequency of use that she/he makes of library resources on the library premises, library resources provided online on the web, and the frequency of turning to Google, Yahoo, or other

web search engines for information access. Three general questions addressing overall satisfaction have also been part of recurring questions included in LibQUAL+. Finally, if they wished, users could include comments for the library once they have completed all the survey questions. In 2003 an extra sequence of questions regarding information literacy was included, but is not part of the continuing service dimension measurements.

The online LibQUAL+ survey for 2003 was announced to our graduate and undergraduate students in April, and there were several repeat calls for participation. The announcement went to a sample of e-mail addresses for graduate students and undergraduates. Whether these were the addresses currently preferred and used by the students - i.e. did they open and see the mailings - was not determined. . Earlier efforts (2000, 2001, and 2002) included faculty too, but we did not survey them this year. Faculty will be surveyed every two or three years for LibQUAL+, while surveying undergraduates and graduate students will be an annual occurrence. For users LibQUAL+ appears to be locally administered, but it is actually handled at a central ARL site. We received the LibQUAL+ results in early June.

There are a number of interactions we could examine. In this report we have chosen to focus on how our undergraduate and graduate students *perceive* the VT Libraries. We compare the responses of our students to those of undergraduate and graduate students at other ARL libraries participating in the 2003 LibQUAL+ survey and representing schools which ranked higher than VT on the most recent (2001) NSF Top 50 Research Institution list. In essence the question we are asking is: What is the perception of our students in regard to information access, staff interactions, the library as place, and our ability to meet their needs for personal control of their information environment, when compared to undergraduates and graduate students at other highly ranked research institutions.

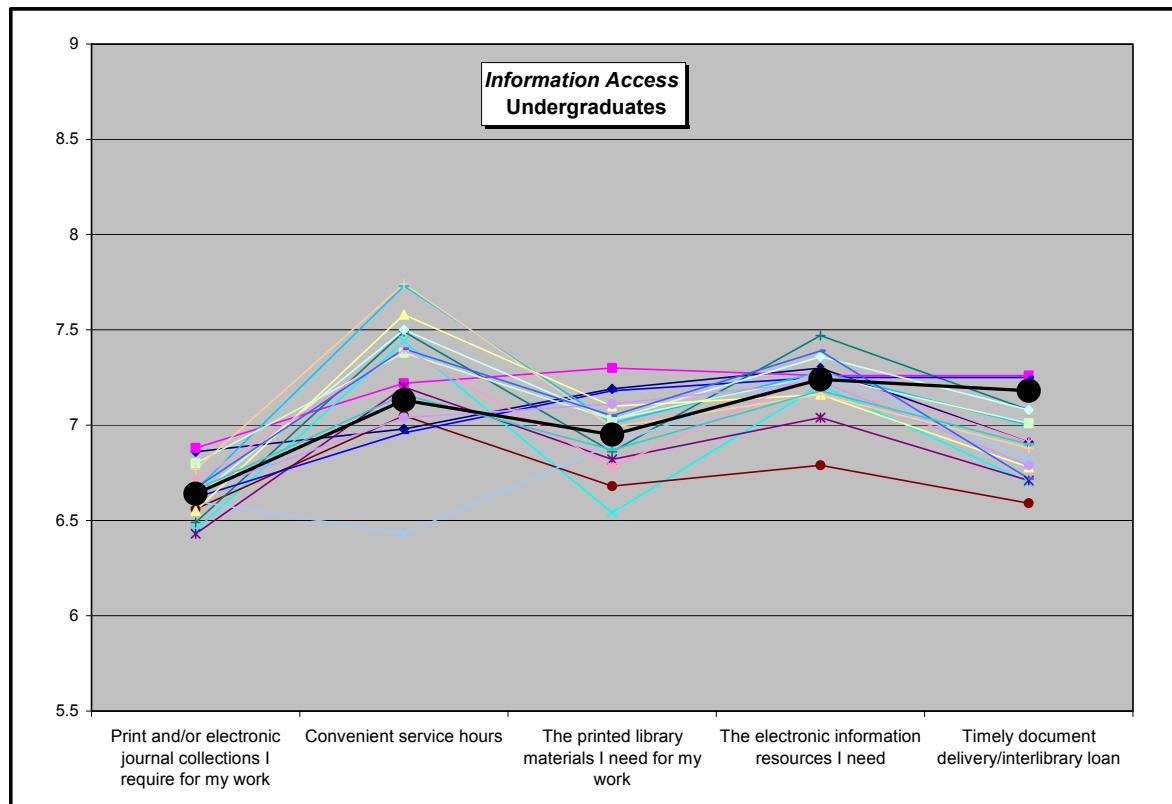
The schools associated with this review include Alabama, Arizona, UC Davis, UCLA, Columbia, Cornell, Florida, Georgia Tech, Kentucky, Louisiana State, Maryland, Minnesota, Ohio State, Pittsburgh, Texas A&M, U Texas -Austin, and the University of Washington. Participants in LibQUAL+ agree that for public reports that make comparisons with other participants there will not be an identification of data from other schools in a manner that associates specific values with a specific school. Instead, masked or aggregate data is to be used.

In the following charts **VT data is represented by the black lines with larger black circles**. Numerical points are not specifically noted, instead, the charts are used to give an overall visual impression of how VT responses are positioned in relation to the other schools examined here.

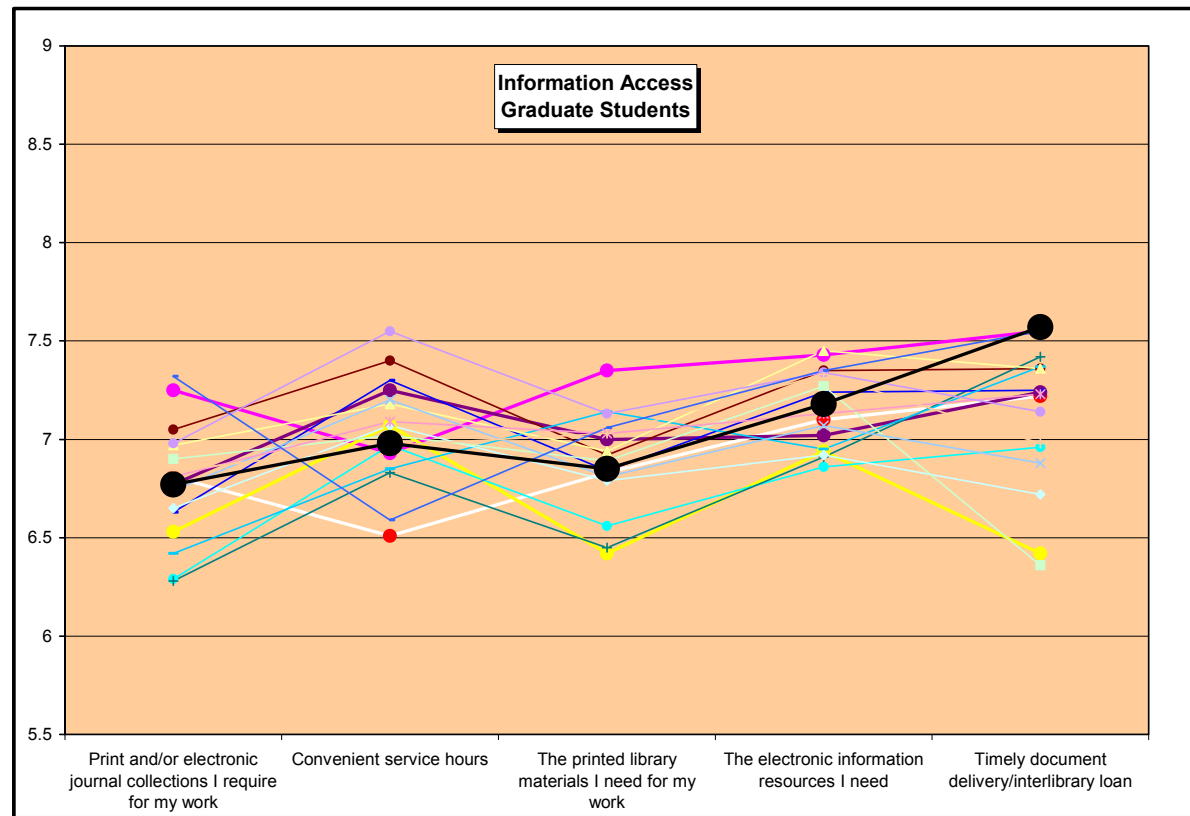
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Information Access

- In indicating their perception of library services for information access VT undergraduates score the library at mid-range for the first four items.
- VT undergraduates' perception of the library's ability to deliver service associated with document delivery/interlibrary loan is closer to the top of the range exhibited by all undergraduates. It's very possible that this is a testimony to the success of the ILLiad service developed at the VT Libraries in 1997 and since adopted by a number of other academic libraries.
- Journal resources – print or electronic – are perceived to be less accessible than other materials.



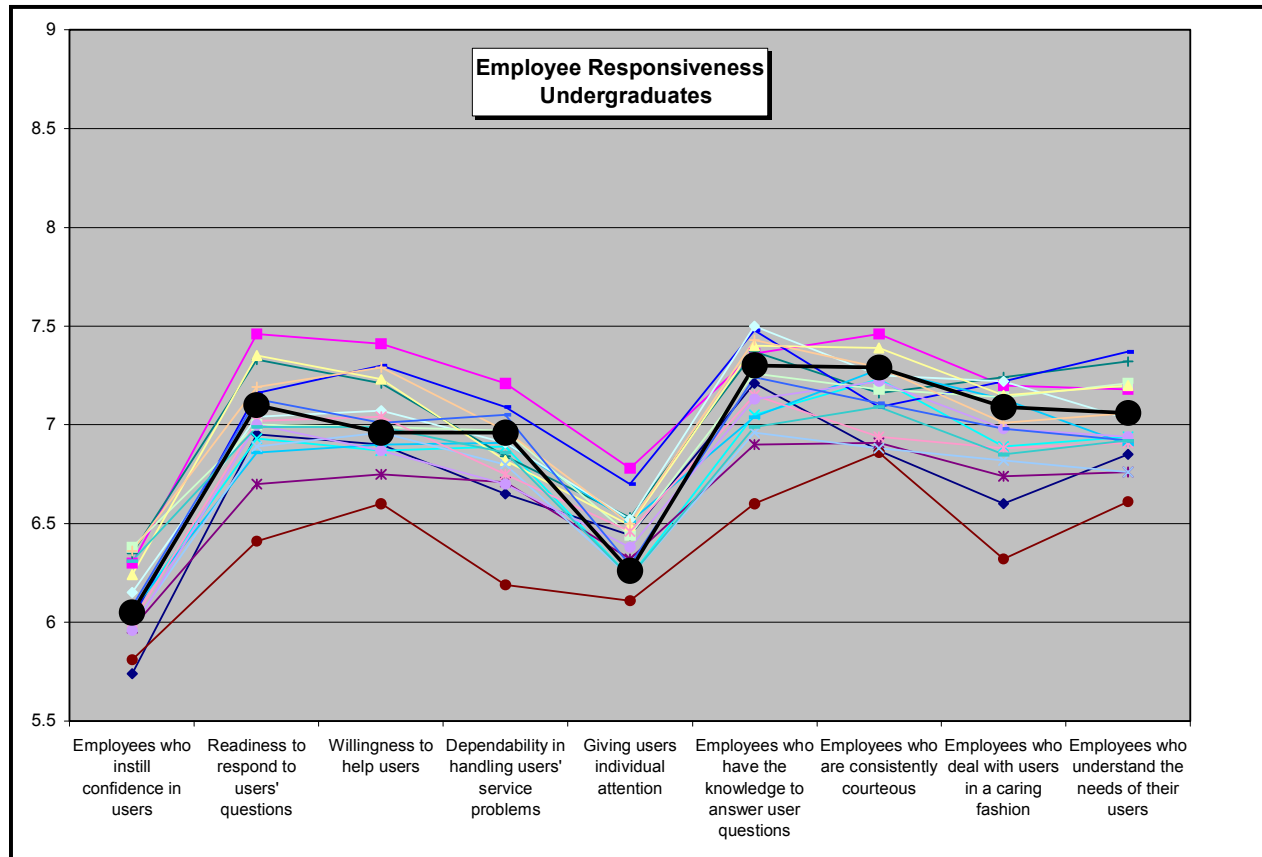
- On the first four items associated with the addressing the perception of access to information -journal accessibility, convenient hours, needed print materials, and needed electronic resources, the score given by VT graduate students is one which positions the library in the mid-range of the scores seen for all the libraries compared here.
- When considering convenience of hours, VT graduate students score the library somewhat lower than do VT undergraduates.
- Like our undergraduates, VT graduate students' perception of service in regard to document delivery/interlibrary loan services is noticeably higher than that expressed by most respondents at the other schools considered here.
- Like undergraduates, VT graduate students perceive less accessibility to journal resources than other materials.



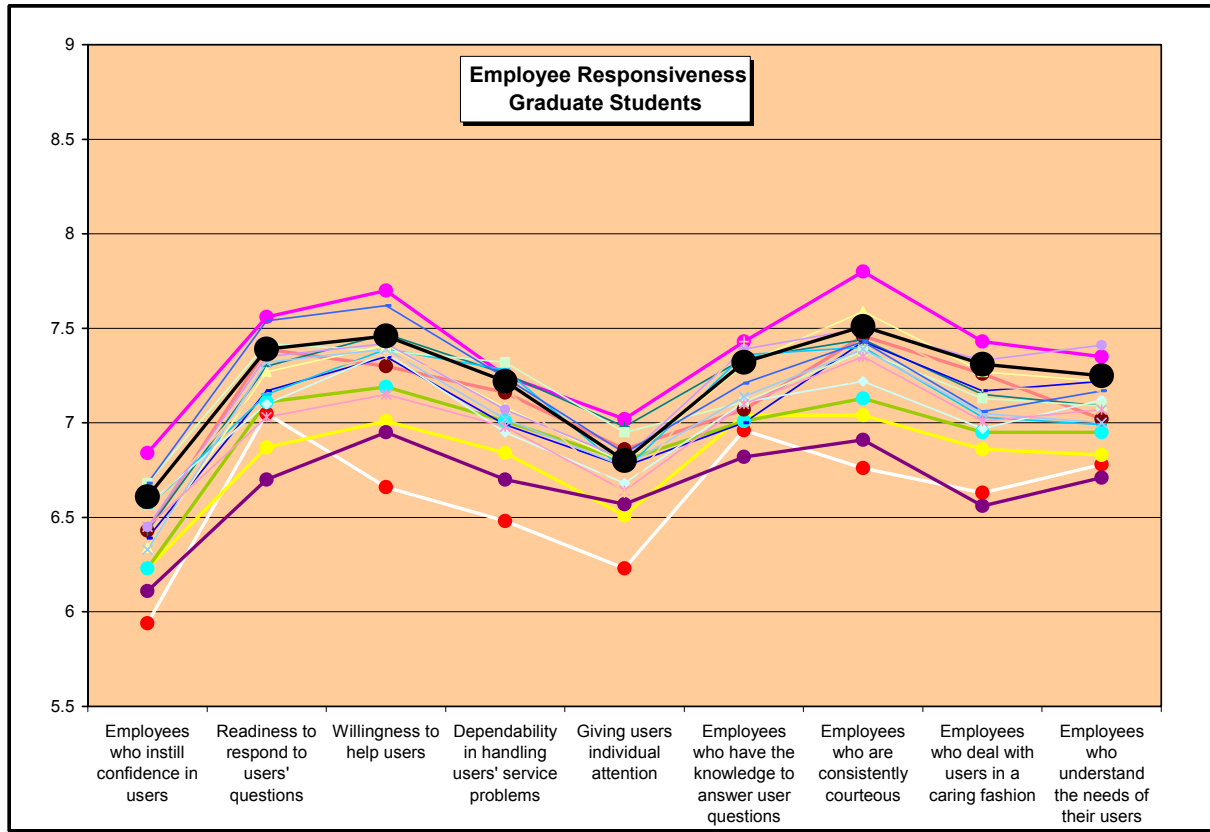
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Service from Staff

- All undergraduates in the study were a somewhat more critical audience than graduate students when it came to perception of service from staff. Overall, undergraduate perception of library service in regard to interaction with staff was scored lower than graduate scores for several of the affect of service issues.
- For VT undergraduates we were pleased to note that their service perception scores positioned the library at mid-range or higher for most issues when compared to the other participants.
- The one score that is noticeably lower – giving users individual attention – appears consistent with the knowledge that there are far fewer librarians at VT for each student than there are at other research institutions. At 639 students per librarian VT librarians work with more students per person than do librarians at any of the other ARL schools.



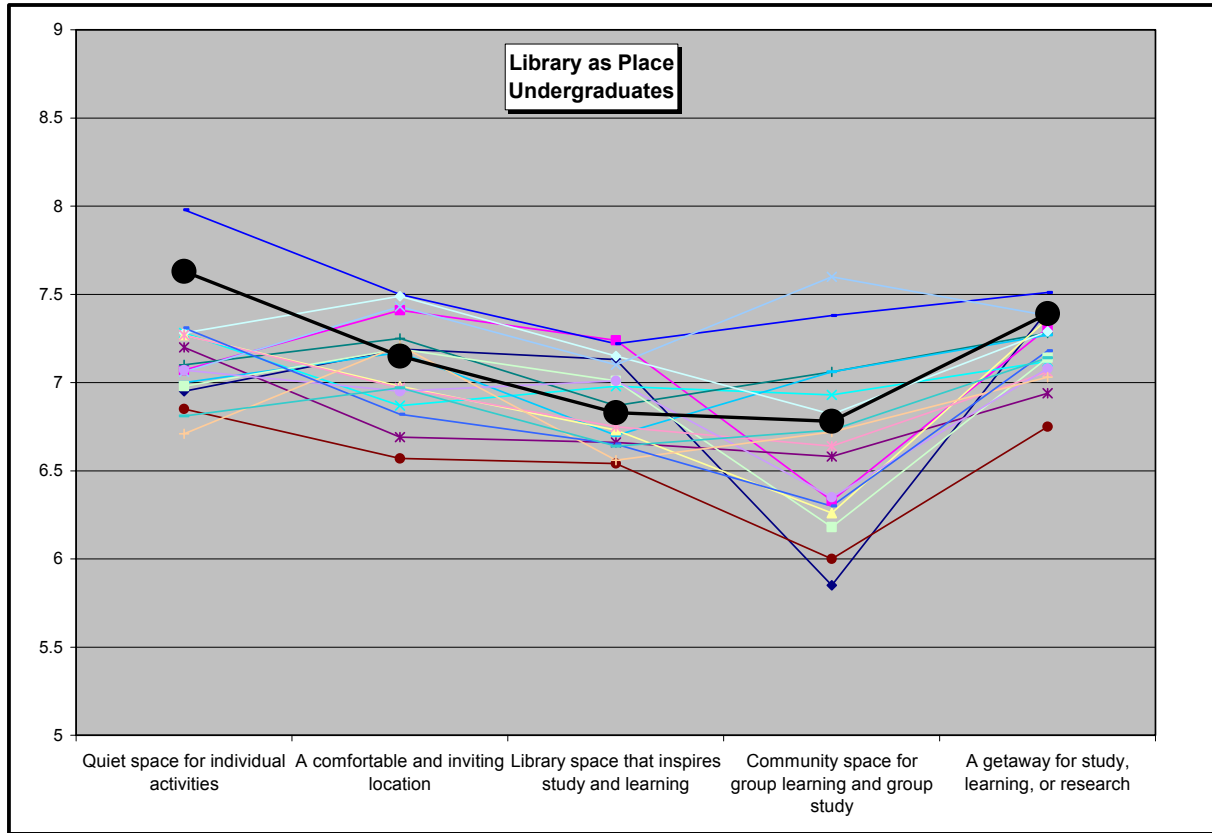
- VT graduate students generally have a higher perception of employee responsiveness than do the graduate students at most of the other sites. We can speculate that the outreach programs associated with having one or more College Librarians s identified for each VT College pays off in graduate students perceiving more effective interactions.



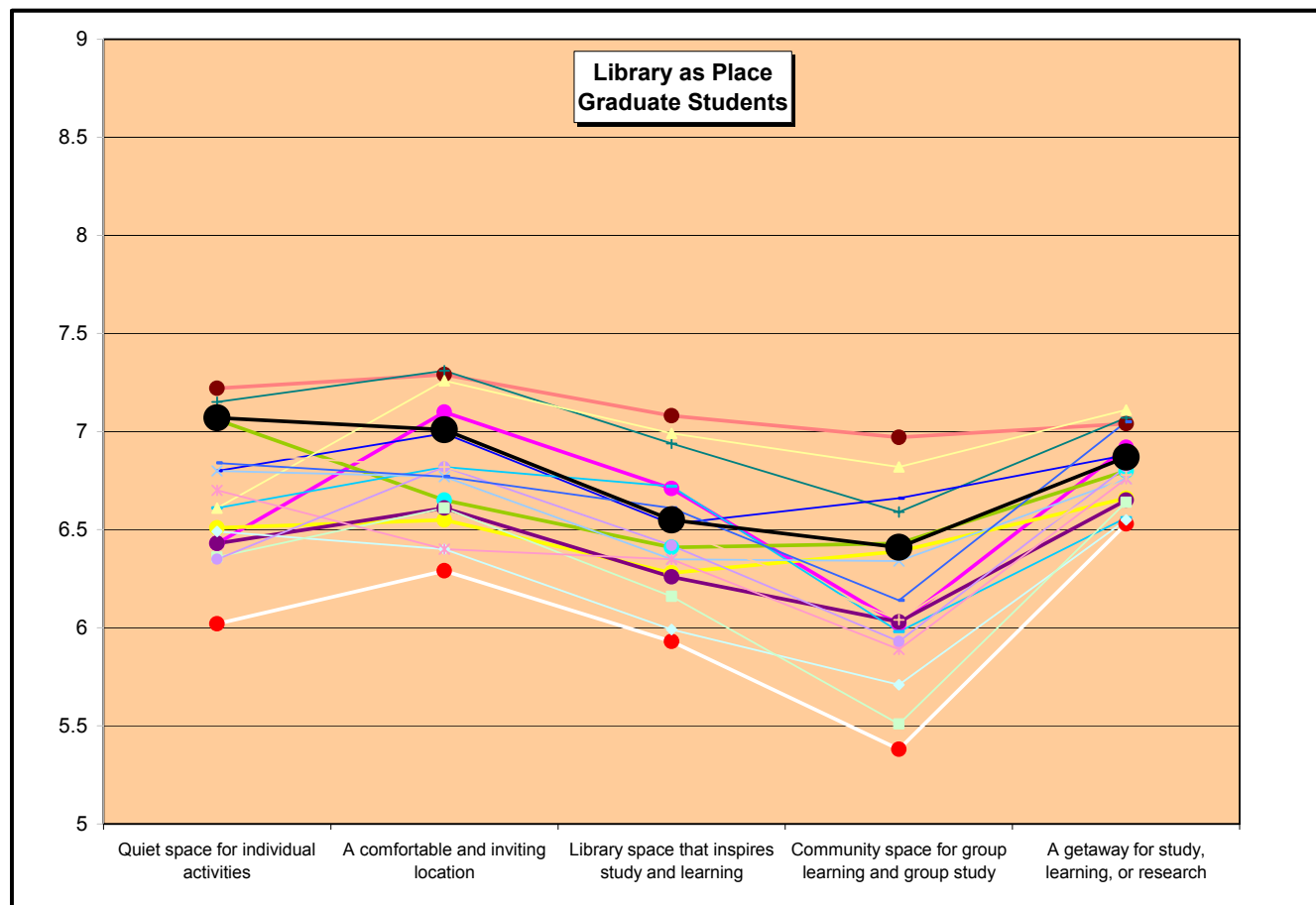
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Library as Place

- On the five questions addressing the dimensional aspects of the library as a physical place, the perception of VT undergraduates positions the libraries at mid-range or higher on spatial issues when compared to other participants.
- The area where VT undergraduates score the VT Libraries somewhat lower than on other issues is their perception that we are able to provide community spaces for group learning and study. Most of the other libraries in the study also perform less well here. VT and they offer buildings from the 50's or earlier – a time when the need for students to carry our group projects or work together was emphasized much less. The higher scoring libraries for this issue are either new or have undergone extensive renovations.



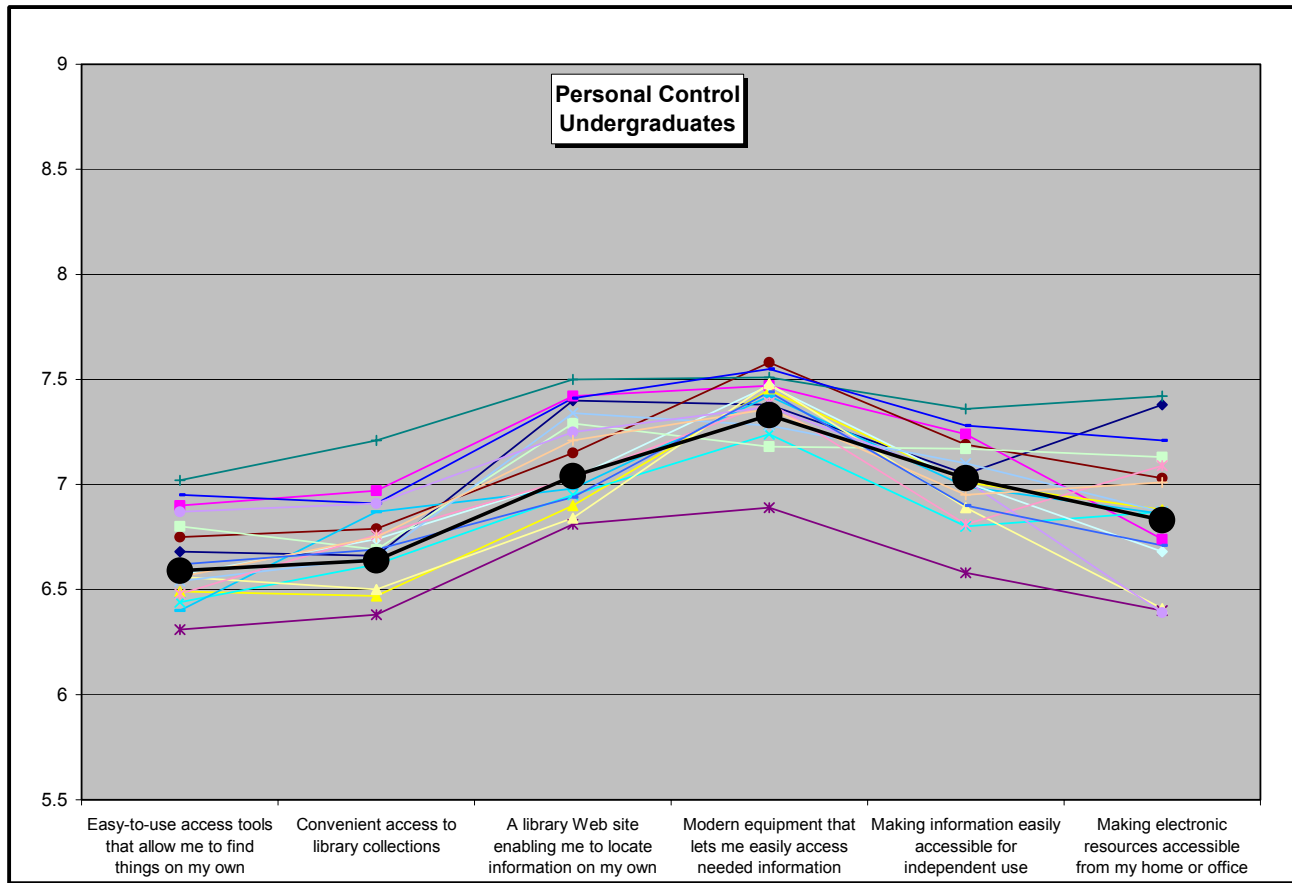
- In general graduate students appear to be somewhat more likely to have lower perceptions of their libraries as a physical space than undergraduates.
- Like undergraduates, the issue of delivering a community space for group learning and group study receives the lowest scoring. The library review team recommended that the library renovate to include more collaborative spaces, which would address this concern of our graduate and undergraduate students.
- Again, libraries which have built new spaces, or renovated to meet 21st century needs scored higher on the perception of the ability to deliver community learning spaces for graduate students.



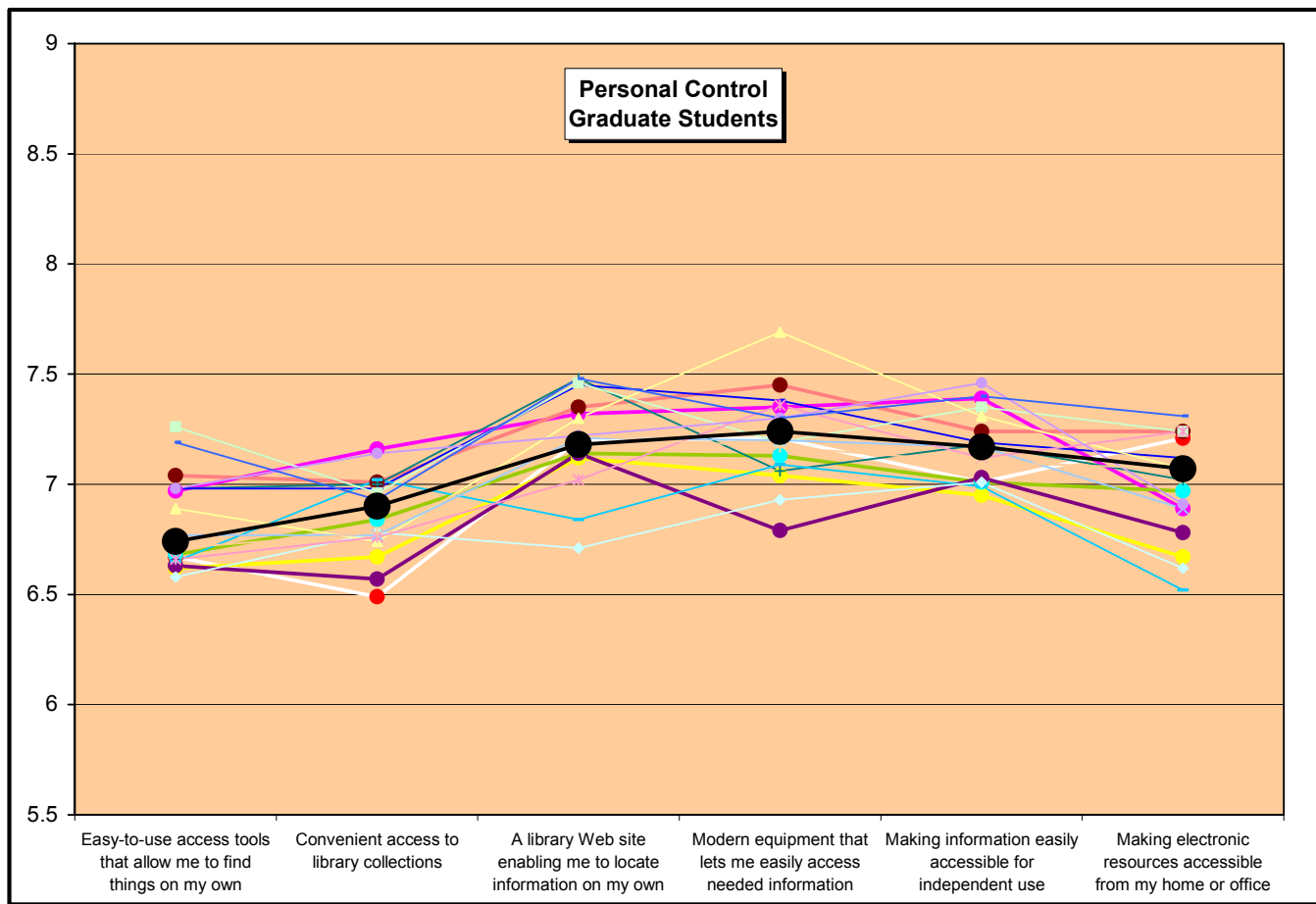
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Personal Control

- VT undergraduates indicate somewhat lower perceptions of the library's ability to provide services that allow them to feel in control of their information environment than do many of the other undergraduates in the survey. Specifically VT undergraduate perception scores are lower than mid-range for questions related to tools that allow them to find things on their own, convenient access to collections, a web that enables them to locate information independently, and the library's ability to make resources accessible from their home or office. An older library system may be one of the contributing factors to this perception. We are also concerned that we have not yet been able to develop entirely satisfactory means to communicate widely and effectively with undergraduates in a way that works for them, or to include them in ways helpful to us as we develop communication products and web targeted to them.



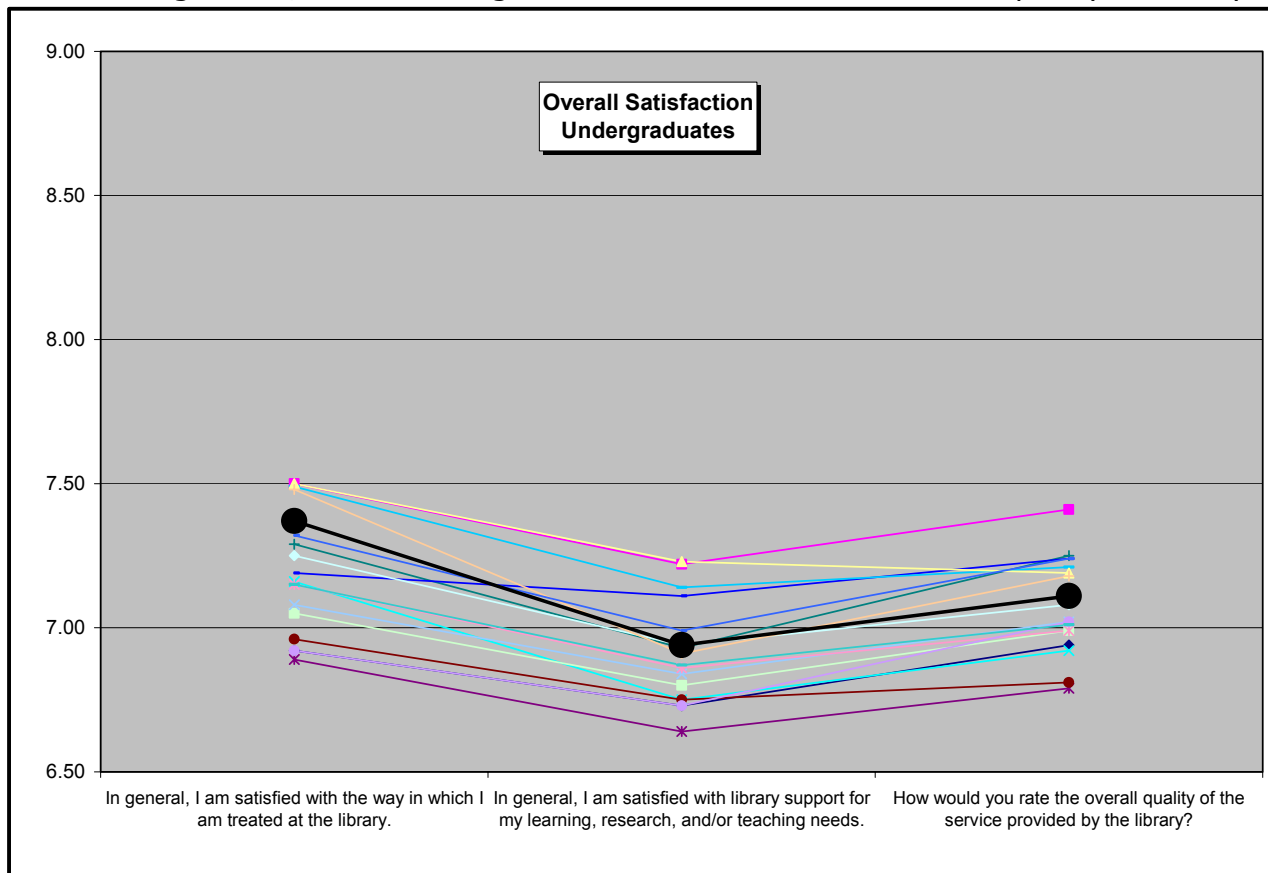
- VT graduate students gave slightly higher scores than did our undergraduates on each of the items included in the section about perception of personal control in working with information and resources. Higher scores may result from academic maturity – graduate students know the ropes – and again, the closer contacts with the College Librarians.
- We would have anticipated higher scores for both undergraduates and graduate students on the question about making electronic resources accessible from home or office. Most of the resources are accessible from remote sites, but the process has been somewhat complex, and it appears that we need to find a better way to communicate how to do this to all our students.



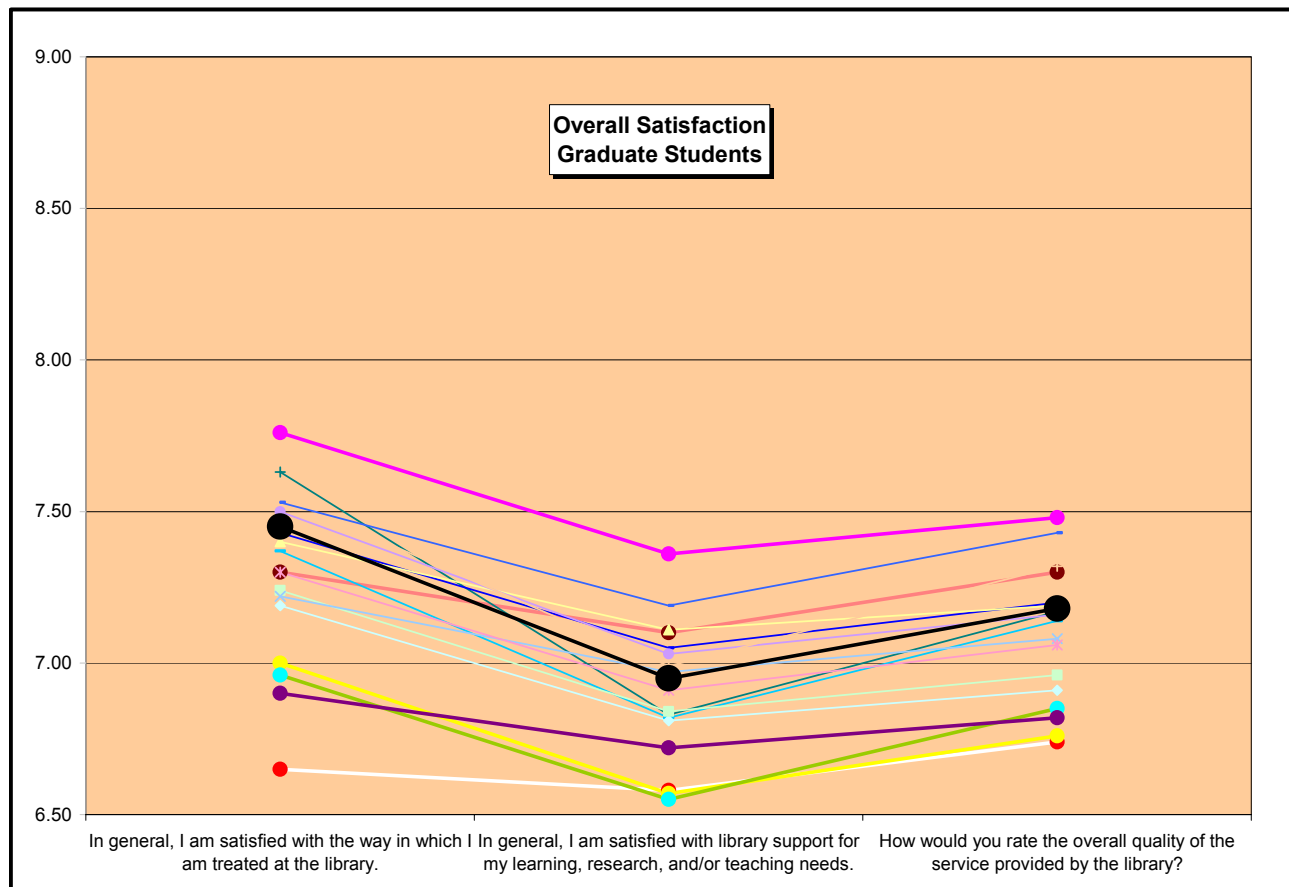
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General Satisfaction

- At the end of the survey respondents are asked to give an overall assessment of how they are treated, whether the library meets their information needs, and the quality of library service - independent of the minimum, perceived and maximum aspects of the individual service dimension questions. Again, undergraduates at all of the schools score the question on satisfaction with the way they are treated at the library with a lower value than graduate students.
- The range for this question may be lower, but VT undergraduates score the VT library close to the top of the range for satisfaction with the way they are treated.
- VT undergraduates score the library at a value that is mid-range for the questions regarding the ability of the library to meet learning needs, and mid-range for overall satisfaction with the quality of library service.

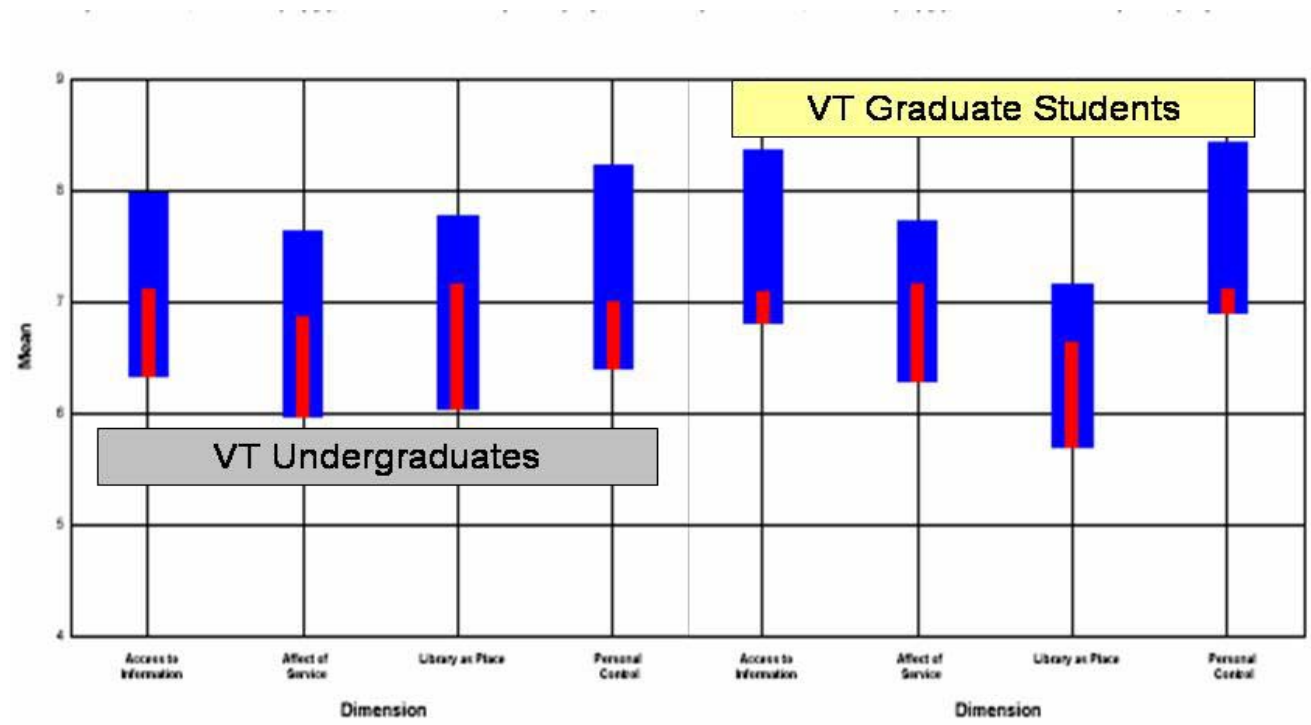


- More graduate students scored the question on general satisfaction with the way they are treated somewhat higher than did the undergraduates, and VT graduate students position the library higher than mid-range on this issue.
- On the question of overall satisfaction with library support for learning, teaching, and research, VT graduate students give a mid-range score to the library.
- VT graduate students rank the library a bit higher than mid-range on the question regarding a rating for the overall quality of service provided by the library.



Summary LibQUAL+ Considerations

- On each of the LibQUAL+ dimensions - information access, service responsiveness, the library as place, and personal control – VT students perceive their library to be delivering services of a quality comparable to or sometimes better than the mid-range score for other institutions positioned higher than VT on the 2001 NSF ranking of research institutions.
- For students, the perception of the VT library or other libraries' performance in delivering specific services is not directly associated with the overall index- based ranking that appears in the *Chronicle*. All but one of the other libraries considered here ranked higher than VT on the Chronicle listing, and several ranked considerably higher, yet VT scores for services ranked at mid-range or better when compared to these libraries.
- On a 9 point scale the perception scores for VT are OK but not great, as they seldom ranged above 7. For the VT participants chart here, which shows a blue bar as the distance between the minimum score acceptable for a



library service and the score of the desired level of service, and a red bar for the distance between the minimum expectation and the perception of the service, there is a gap [distance between top of the red bar to top of the blue bar) in perception and expectations for each of the dimensions addressed in the study. Graduate students in particular indicate the greatest gap between expectations and what is desired on two dimensions, information access and personal control.

- If we focus on issues that showed gaps of 1 or greater, between what the students perceived as our level of service delivery and what they desired we can see that for students, the issues they might most like to see addressed include those noted in the table here.

Issues with a gap equal to or greater than 1 between the score for perceived level of service, and the score for desired level of service, LibQUAL+ 2003		
	Graduate students	Undergraduate Students
Print and/or electronic journal collections I require for my work	X	X
Easy-to-use access tools that allow me to find things on my own	X	X
Making electronic resources accessible from my home or office	X	X
A library Web site enabling me to locate information on my own	X	X
The printed library materials I need for my work	X	X
The electronic information resources I need	X	
Convenient access to library collections	X	X
Making information easily accessible for independent use	X	X
Convenient service hours	X	
Employees who instill confidence in users		X

- Several hundred of the student respondents chose to include comments. Many were congratulatory or thankful, but in one area – copier functioning and quality – we saw a significant increase in negative comments. In response to this concern we have centralized most of the machines on the fourth floor, the site of most copying, moved the library cashier/service desk to that site so that someone can assist when there is a problem, and worked with the machine vendor to improve maintenance support.
- Faculty were not included in the survey this year. Comparing their perceptions of library services to those of colleagues at other schools will be of interest to us, as will the determination of gaps for them between services as perceived and services as desired, in a future LibQUAL+.

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PUBLICATIONS, PRESENTATIONS, AND OTHER SCHOLARLY ACTIVITIES

Ariew

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Aschmann

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Auer

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