

## **SHOW ME THE DATA: Increasing client satisfaction**

Philip G Kent (1) and Michael Samarchi (2)

- 1. University Librarian, Victoria University and*
- 2. Client Relationship Manager, Insync Surveys Pty Ltd*

### **Abstract**

The paper demonstrates the benefits of a quality approach to managing client satisfaction at Victoria University (VU) Library. The Library has conducted a standard survey instrument for 7 consecutive years. The paper charts the results over this period, highlighting quantitative and qualitative data, strategies employed to increase response rates and satisfaction levels and the success of these activities. A literature review provides contemporary thought and practice as a backdrop. Noteworthy results are linked to specific projects and interventions in response to client feedback. The paper concludes that improvements in survey scores and comments may be directly linked to a positive service culture embedded in annual processes of the VU Library.

**Keywords:** quality management, quality assurance, client satisfaction, client surveys, customer feedback, benchmarking, surveys.

*Overall satisfaction is likely to have a significant impact on the future of academic libraries and their competitiveness.*

[Cullen (2001)]

## **1. Introduction**

One of my earliest memories of service quality concepts was a comment from a senior manager in the late 1980s. When speaking of an information technology organisation, he suggested that they needed to 'get customer focussed or get outsourced'!

Quality management principles were embraced relatively early by university libraries and Australia provided a ripe environment for early experimentation and embedding of the concepts into practice. Saunders (2008) argues that historically, library management decisions were based on data and intuition. Client needs were determined through casual conversations, rumour and 'the squeaky wheel'.

A long history of measurement and usage of statistics by library managers provided a logical foundation for embracing quality principles in the late 1980s and 1990s. The Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL) for example has recorded and shared common statistics collection since 1953 for benchmarking purposes (Byrne 1997). There is also evidence of formal and informal benchmarking exercises between Australian libraries (Robertson and Trahn 1997) which also created a readiness for comparisons of client satisfaction.

Against a historical background of national projects and initiatives, this paper examines the emergence of client satisfaction surveys as an important component of the quality management tools currently used in the Australian university sector. In particular it provides a case study on the usage of the sector-wide client satisfaction survey at Victoria University (VU) over 7 consecutive years. VU has successively improved its score in the survey, moving from the third to the top quartile in terms of overall customer satisfaction. The paper examines some of the areas of improvement and seeks to understand the drivers for success and continuous improvement.

## **2. Early Australian Developments**

In 2001, Pitman, Trahn and Wilson reported that almost half of the Australian university libraries had been involved in formal benchmarking exercises in previous years. Schmidt and Croud (2000) reported on benchmarking activities at the University of Queensland. Another project was conducted in 1995 between Queensland University of Technology and the University of New South Wales Library (Robertson and Trahn 1997). The value of the project lay in the sharing of performance data and in the structured process. One lesson learnt was the value of defining the scope to cover sub-processes (e.g. monographs) rather than a large undertaking (e.g. technical services). They concluded that:

*If libraries wish to benchmark in a rigorous and fruitful manner, the continued development of performance indicators by CAUL and similar bodies is necessary, together with implementation of the indicators by libraries and a willingness to share the results they obtain.*

Also in 1995, CAUL's 'longstanding commitment to measurement of academic library performance' led to the development of three performance indicators (Byrne 1997). They were:

- Library/Cientele Congruence (satisfaction) Indicator developed by Brian Cornish and Gary Gorman from the School of Information Studies at Charles Sturt University
- Document Delivery Quality Indicator developed by Jan Novak and Margaret Robertson from Queensland University of Technology (QUT) Library
- Proportion of Sought Material Obtained at Time of Visit developed by Colin Taylor and Jane Hiscock from the University of South Australia Library.

In 1996 a survey of CAUL members to determine usage of these indicators revealed that experience was limited although many indicated future plans.

It is interesting to note that the Victoria University of Technology Library (now Victoria University) had used both the Document Delivery and Materials Availability Indicators, demonstrating an early interest in performance management.

In the area of client satisfaction, the University of Melbourne Library was a pioneer in 1997 when a client service perception survey was piloted.

It was timely that in 1998 an opportunity arose to pursue best practice across the sector through a project funded by the Evaluations and Investigations Program (EIP) of the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA). A cross-sectoral team including Anne Wilson, Leanne Pitman, and Isabella Trahn, with input from Gaynor Austen and Margaret Sparks produced a best practice handbook and guidelines for Australian University libraries which were both published in 2000. The EIP recommendations included: formalising benchmarking arrangements, the establishment of a performance indicator database, sharing of best practice, the development of further indicators (e.g. research/reference services), regular updating of existing indicators, training in quality tools and techniques within library schools and the sector, and linkages with international efforts (Wilson et al 2000).

Trahn et al (2001) documents a concurrent project conducted in 1999 by four Australasian University libraries (University of NSW, University of Queensland, University of Melbourne and University of Auckland) under the banner of Universitas 21. Taking the instrument used earlier at the University of Melbourne, the 4 partners made a conscious decision to use two Likert scale responses (perceptions of service expectations and perceptions of

performance) instead of Parasuraman's three dimensions (minimum expectation, desired expectation and perception of library performance) (Trahn et al 2001).

Trahn et al (2001) observed that:

*This exercise was notable for the focus of managerial interest directly on the 40 plus items in the survey themselves and the gaps between the users' perceived service expectations and the perceived performance of the libraries for each item.*

This Australasian project predated the US Association of Research Libraries (ARL) pilot based on SERVQUAL concepts in 2000 (Trahn et al 2001).

Another important milestone occurred in 1999 when CAUL incorporated a Best Practice Section into its strategic plan. This led to the formation of the Best Practice Working Group (BPWG) in late 2001. The BPWG continues to champion and co-ordinate quality initiatives throughout CAUL today.

In 2000 CAUL agreed to update the client satisfaction indicator and sought to develop a standard survey instrument for the university sector to:

- Encourage the use of a common approach to measuring client perceptions of library performance
- Facilitate the potential for benchmarking and cross-organisational learning
- Encourage dialogue and debate about excellent library performance to drive continuous improvement (McGregor 2008).

Rodski, the company that had worked with the Universitas 21 group on their survey, was selected from a field of commercial firms to develop the survey. This Australian initiative was a 'world first in industry specific benchmarking developed for an Australian audience' (McGregor 2008).

According to Saw and Clark (2004)

*...there was perceived value in adopting a common framework to encourage internally and externally directed dialogue on what constitutes excellent library performance by the primary clients to drive continuous improvement.*

Some of the advantages of the common approach were:

- Centralised administration and analysis
- Institution specific and aggregated data where required
- Customised for institutional needs
- Consortium pricing
- Flexibility in timing and frequency of survey
- Simple to use and interpret
- Benchmarking opportunities (McGregor 2008).

The survey developed by Rodski (now Insync Surveys) contains 40 statements covering the full range of services and facilities offered by libraries. The

statements are grouped into 6 categories: Communication, Service Quality, Service Delivery, Facilities and Equipment, Library Staff and Virtual Library. Results may be tracked on an individual question or category basis as well as a Weighted Performance Index and an Overall Satisfaction score. Verbatim comments are also collected and analysed for clients. Results may also be reported according to pre-determined categories (e.g. Students, Staff, International, Campus).

Since 2001 the survey has been in regular use by CAUL members. The standard questions have been refined over time to reflect the changing needs of the industry and there is scope to add extra local questions or to tailor questions to reflect local terminology. The survey instrument has been reviewed during 2008 by the BPWG with a view to implementing a revised instrument from 2009. With a rich and valuable sector time series of data covering 8 years, there was understandably some concern about making major changes to the survey. However this needed to be balanced with the changing nature of library services.

All participating Libraries agree with the benefits of benchmarking and allow their data to be used for benchmarking purposes. However there is agreement that comparative data at an institutional level will not be made available without prior agreement. However comparative reports have been commissioned by sub-sets of the university sector (e.g. Dual Sector libraries) who have an interest in benchmarking.

In 2004 the BPWG surveyed the top 5 top performing libraries in the main survey areas to identify good and best practices.<sup>1</sup> Examples from Bond University, Central Queensland University, Deakin University, University of Queensland, University of New England, University of Auckland, Flinders University, and Swinburne University provided examples and commentary on key service features. McGregor (2005) notes that interesting and useful information was obtained as a result of the survey. While several consequential improvements were introduced at University of Wollongong, 'there were no practices sufficiently significant to explain the disparity in performance ratings'.

### **3. Overseas Developments**

An important forerunner in the US was the Service Quality in Academic Libraries or SERVQUAL model developed by Herson and Altman in late 1980s. Building on concepts from Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, the SERVQUAL model was based on perceptions of quality by customers rather than objective quality from traditional performance management (Cullen 2001).

The work of Herson and Altman is well summarised by Cullen (2001). She highlights the difference between satisfaction related to a specific encounter and an overall service satisfaction based on multiple encounters or experiences. Importantly the true measure of satisfaction is the difference

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<sup>1</sup> CAUL Best Practice Working Group. Survey of Top Performing Libraries in Rodski Client Satisfaction Survey Results 28.5.04 <http://www.caul.edu.au/surveys/library-performance2004.doc>

between the level of services received and the level expected. Thus the concept of 'gap analysis' (Cullen 2001) or the 'zone of tolerance' (Saunders 2008) emerged.

According to Saunders (2008), SERVQUAL was trialled primarily in the USA during the 1990s and was subsequently developed into LibQUAL+ for the Association of Research Libraries (ARL).

*ARL wanted a survey instrument that would be standard across all academic libraries. The advantages are two-fold: 1) individual libraries can compare their results with results of peer institutions; and 2) libraries can use a proved and tested survey instrument, thereby foregoing all the expense and work of developing their own survey. (Saunders 2008)*

Key players in development of LibQUAL+ were Fred Heath and Colleen Cook from Texas A&M University, where the SERVQUAL protocol was developed by Professors Zeithami, Parasuraman and Berry (Thompson). Heath was serving on the ARL Board in 2000 when the survey was developed in late 2000. According to the company website, 214 libraries worldwide used the LibQUAL+ survey in 2008.

Meanwhile in the UK, Creaser (2006) reports that:

*UK academic libraries do not have a prescribed standard survey instrument or methodology, and do not report user survey data in their annual statistical returns to the Society of College, National and University Libraries (SCONUL)*

Meanwhile a December 2003 SCONUL survey found that 95% of members utilized user surveys with 63% conducting them on an annual basis. A standard template is available for SCONUL members (Creaser 2006).

In addition, a standard national student survey is administered across the UK. It includes a common question to monitor perceptions of library performance. Some UK universities look to their libraries to boost the overall university score for rating the student experience. This survey is increasingly being used by Australian universities and will provide an extra benchmarking dimension.

There is a strong tradition of co-operation between the Council of New Zealand University Librarians (CONZUL) and CAUL on performance management including common practices in gathering and reporting statistics and usage of the standard Insync survey.

#### **4. LIBQUAL+ vs Insync**

Following the SERVQUAL precedent, the LIBQUAL+ instrument requires the client to rate 30 statements concerning library services on scale of 1-9. Three ratings are recorded to identify: minimum acceptable standard, desired level that respondents would like and actual perceived level (Creaser 2006).

Saunders (2008) notes that some LIBQUAL+ patrons complain that it is too long (39 questions) and that all questions have to be answered before the survey will be accepted. There is a tension between 'the need for local information and the standardized information provided by the survey'.

Similarly Saw and Clark (2004) compare the differences between LibQUAL+ and Insync (formerly Rodski):

- Questions are significantly different
- Repetitive questions in LibQUAL+
- LibQUAL+ provides little or no benchmarking comparisons against other institutions – whereas Rodski provides comparisons in report
- LibQUAL+ questions 'fixed' whereas Rodski offers 5 questions in addition to 25 standard questions

Nevertheless certain libraries have preferences for either methodology (Murnane 2004) and some Australian libraries utilise both in alternate years. Comparative data over time is an incentive to continue to use the same tool. With regard to benchmarking opportunities, some universities prefer to use LIBQUAL+ because of its widespread use by like institutions (e.g. research libraries) world-wide.

## **5. VU Quality Processes**

VU was founded in 1916 as Footscray Technical School and established as Victoria University in 1990. Currently there are more than 45,000 enrolled students, including over 8,500 international and over 4,600 postgraduate students. VU has 11 campuses of varying sizes in the central business district and western suburbs of Melbourne. Some VU campuses have a mixture of higher, vocational and further education student cohorts and some are sector specific. A number of the smaller campuses focus on a few particular disciplines, while larger campuses offer a diverse subject range.

VU has a strong commitment to quality management including a Quality and Planning Policy and a Planning Framework. The 'Plan, Do, Review, Improve' cycle is utilised across the University to foster continuous improvement.

Within the Planning Framework, the University conducts Quality Improvement Reviews (QIR) late each year. The QIRs are a collegial process through which organisational units prepare a portfolio comprising an operational plan for the forthcoming year and a review of their performance against plans for the current year. This portfolio is discussed in a meeting with a panel of senior colleagues, chaired by either the Vice-Chancellor or an external appointee. Members of University Council are invited to attend as observers. Similar to the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) process, the QIR results in a formal report with Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations for action.

The annual library client satisfaction survey provides a very useful input to the QIR process. The 2007 report recorded that:

*The Library has continued to position itself as an exemplary provider of services evidenced through an increase in client satisfaction via the annual client satisfaction survey.*

In addition the following Commendation was also recorded:

*The Library by being able to meet the Vice-Chancellor's challenge from the 2006 QIR by maintaining its first time achievement of a top quartile rating for overall customer satisfaction, despite being in the lowest quartile for funding.*

The VU Quality intranet site includes a QIR Good Practice Database which celebrates 4 examples of Library better practice on areas such as self and unmediated services, collaborative and innovative projects.

The AUQA audit process also provides an opportunity to capitalise on the results of the annual client satisfaction survey. The VU report completed in 2006 recorded that:

*The University Library, which provides integrated services for higher education and TAFE, has participated in annual Rodski benchmarking surveys of Australian university libraries. Results from the 2005 Rodski survey show the University to be overall in the top 50% of institutions surveyed, with a significant improvement on scores for facilities and equipment in 2005 following the addition of 600 new computers in response to poor scores on this item in previous years (p48).*

Delivery of a responsive client service requires good upfront planning. The VU Library prepares an annual plan in the corporate format that demonstrates direct linkages between Library and University strategies. Library branch plans are developed to integrate with the overall Library plan and actions are assigned to Branch Managers for accountability. Every staff member develops an annual Staff Performance and Development Plan (SPDP) which is assessed at the end of each year.

The Library has a regular regime of quarterly reporting and produces statistics in accordance with CAUL and the Victorian Association of TAFE Librarians (VATL) templates. Benchmarking activities have been carried out on an irregular basis, primarily with other Dual Sector libraries. This has included commissioning of comparative reports on the client satisfaction survey outcomes.

Within the University schedule of peak committees, the Library reports regularly (1-2 monthly) to the Information and Knowledge Management Committee (IKMC) and the Quality Teaching and Learning Committee. These reports highlight new plans and initiatives as well as the annual client satisfaction survey results. Reporting on pilots and special projects is helpful in engendering support for additional funding bids.

Evidencing a reputation for good corporate citizenship and management practices, VU Library has also been successful in winning internal prizes such

as the annual Vice-Chancellor's citations for service to the University. These are also backed up internal Library staff awards for contributions to quality and service.

In earlier years, VU Library also conducted an annual Library staff satisfaction survey, also administered by Insync Surveys. However once the University implemented a biennial staff climate survey through another provider, the Library ceased to use the Insync process. The Library is also required to report on actions against messages from the staff climate survey as part of the annual QIR process.

Further details of the VU Library's quality journey are documented by Parker (2000) including the Dual Sector nature of the university.

## **6. VU Library Client Satisfaction Survey Results 2002-2008**

It is worth noting that VU Library conducted an annual Library Client Satisfaction survey as early as 1997. It was managed for the Library by staff from the School of Computer and Mathematical Sciences. The survey recorded a level of satisfaction with a long list of library services and facilities. There was also an overall satisfaction question similar to the current survey. In 1998, 1999 and 2000 the mean score on this question was consistently around 3.5 on a 5 point scale. A sampling methodology was used in the early form and the highest response rate between 1998 and 2001 was 808, which is considerably lower than present rates (e.g. 3663 in 2008). From 2002 onwards, VU Library used the Rodski survey instrument.

VU is unique in that the survey is completed annually around August. Most other Australian universities undertake the survey on a biennial basis. Arguments for this biennial timetable include cost and the time taken to plan and implement changes.

In order to complete this paper, Insync Surveys staff produced trend data for VU covering the 2002-2008 period. In some cases data was not available for the whole period due to changing questions (e.g. wireless). However 7 years of data is available in many cases and provides a rich source of trend information.

There are two high level scores that we look to in order to gauge the overall performance of VU in the survey:

- Weighted Performance Index (WPI) which applies a percentage weighting against scores in the 6 categories to arrive at a weighted total expressed as a percentage
- Overall Satisfaction drawn from a specific survey question to arrive at a score out of 7 which can also be translated into a percentage.

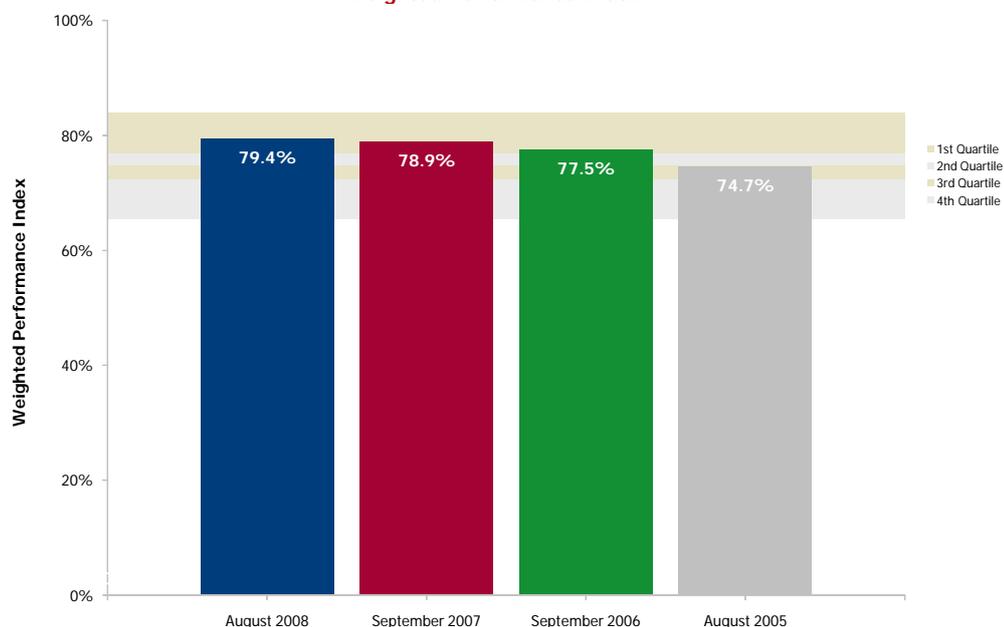
With regard to the WPI, VU's score in 2002 was 72% which ranked in the 4<sup>th</sup> or lowest quartile in the benchmark database. Due to changes in the survey over time, it is statistically difficult to portray 7 years of results. However the following table and chart demonstrates that from 2005 – 2008, VU's WPI rose

from 74.7% to 79.4% which now ranks in the top quartile. In 7 years VU has risen from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the top benchmark quartile.

Victoria University Library Client Survey Results, August 2008  
Weighted Performance Index

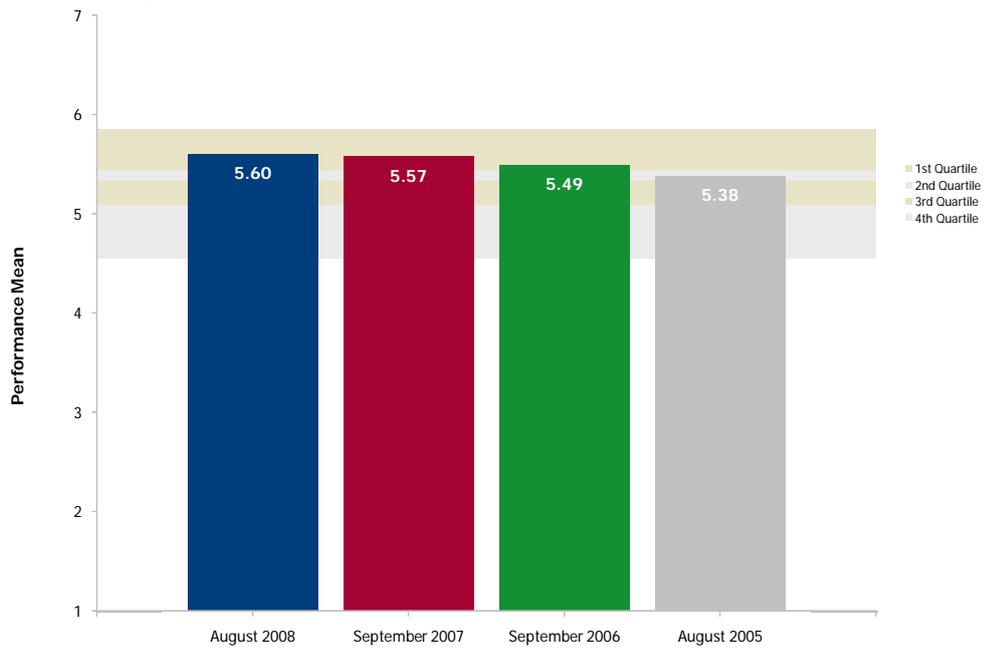
	Communication	Service Quality	Service Delivery	Facilities And Equipment	Library Staff	Virtual Library	Weighted Total
Weighting	15%	18%	20%	15%	20%	12%	100%
August 2008	77.2%	77.4%	81.0%	72.4%	88.5%	76.0%	79.4%
September 2007	76.9%	77.1%	79.8%	71.8%	87.9%	76.4%	78.9%
September 2006	75.6%	75.5%	78.7%	70.1%	86.3%	75.8%	77.5%
August 2005	73.0%	72.8%	74.6%	69.2%	82.7%	73.1%	74.7%
Highest Performer in Database	83.5%	86.0%	82.9%	78.0%	93.7%	79.7%	83.9%
Median	73.6%	71.6%	74.8%	68.7%	84.0%	72.2%	74.7%
Lowest Performer in Database	65.8%	57.5%	64.6%	53.4%	73.8%	62.1%	65.3%

Victoria University Library Client Survey Results, August 2008  
Weighted Performance Index



With regard to Overall Satisfaction, VU has made similar significant advances moving from a score of 4.7 (67.1%) in 2002 which ranked in the 4<sup>th</sup> or lowest quartile. In 2008 a score of 5.6 (80%) was obtained which maintained VU's place in the top quartile for the third consecutive year. Thus the goal of '80 in 08' was achieved. The following table highlights the improvement in scores over the past 4 years.

**Victoria University Library Client Survey Results, August 2008**  
**Please give your general assessment of how satisfied you are with the Library**

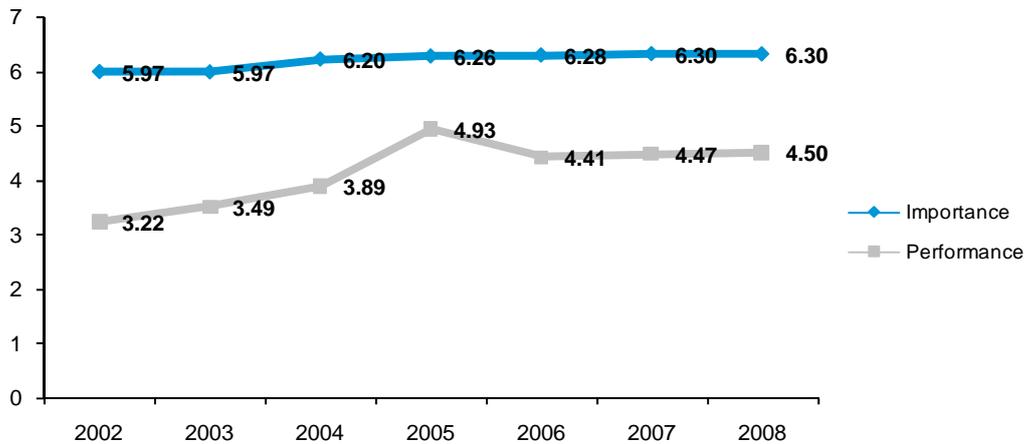


In addition to the quartile information, VU was eager to determine where we ranked in the CAUL group. Insync Surveys have determined that in terms of Overall Satisfaction, VU has risen from an overall ranking of 26<sup>th</sup> within CAUL in 2005/6 to an overall ranking of 10<sup>th</sup> in 2007/8. In the Service Delivery category, VU currently ranks 3<sup>rd</sup> within CAUL.

One strength of the Insync Surveys methodology is the ability to chart perceived Performance against Importance.

One of the most contentious questions in the survey relates to the adequacy of the number of computers and computer printers. Colleagues have suggested that it does not matter how many computers we provide, students will not consider this to be enough! The following chart easily demonstrates the consistently high Importance vs Performance trend line over the past 7 years.

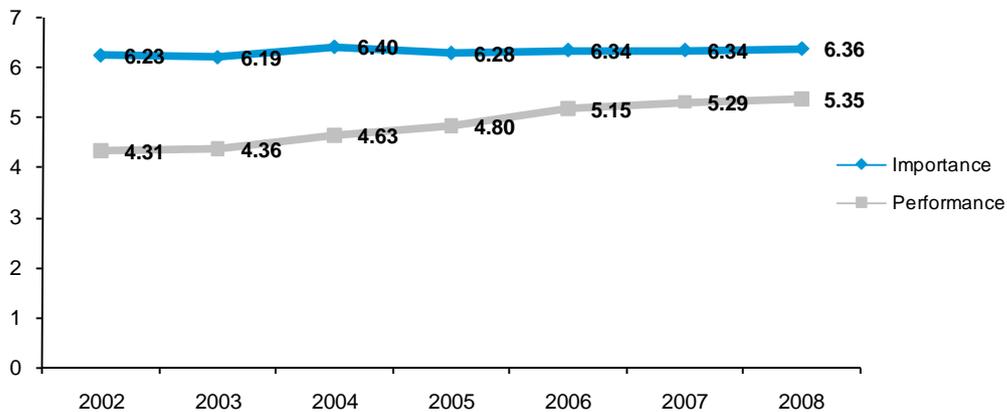
The number of computers and computer printers is adequate



In contrast, while gains have been made and the gap narrowed, there is still a gap of 1.8. Insync Surveys recommend that customers should be concerned if the gap is 2 or above. The biggest gain in the Performance line was in 2005 with a gap decrease of 1.04 on a 7 point score.

Another major area of interest in libraries is collection adequacy. The following trend line demonstrates how the gap between importance and performance has narrowed, most likely as a result of increased access to electronic collections.

The library collection is adequate for my needs

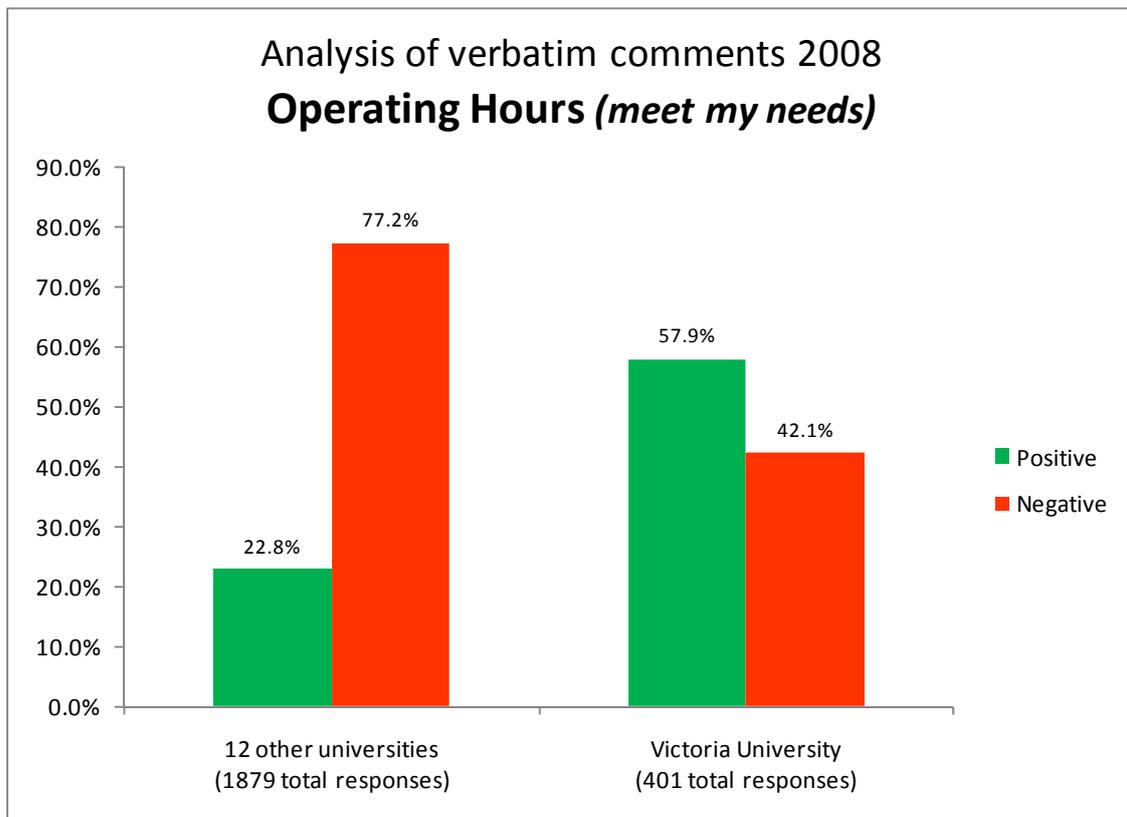


In 2008 as the results for the current survey was being processed, the two authors were drawn to 2 standout improvements compared with the previous year:

- Operating Hours,
- Wireless Access

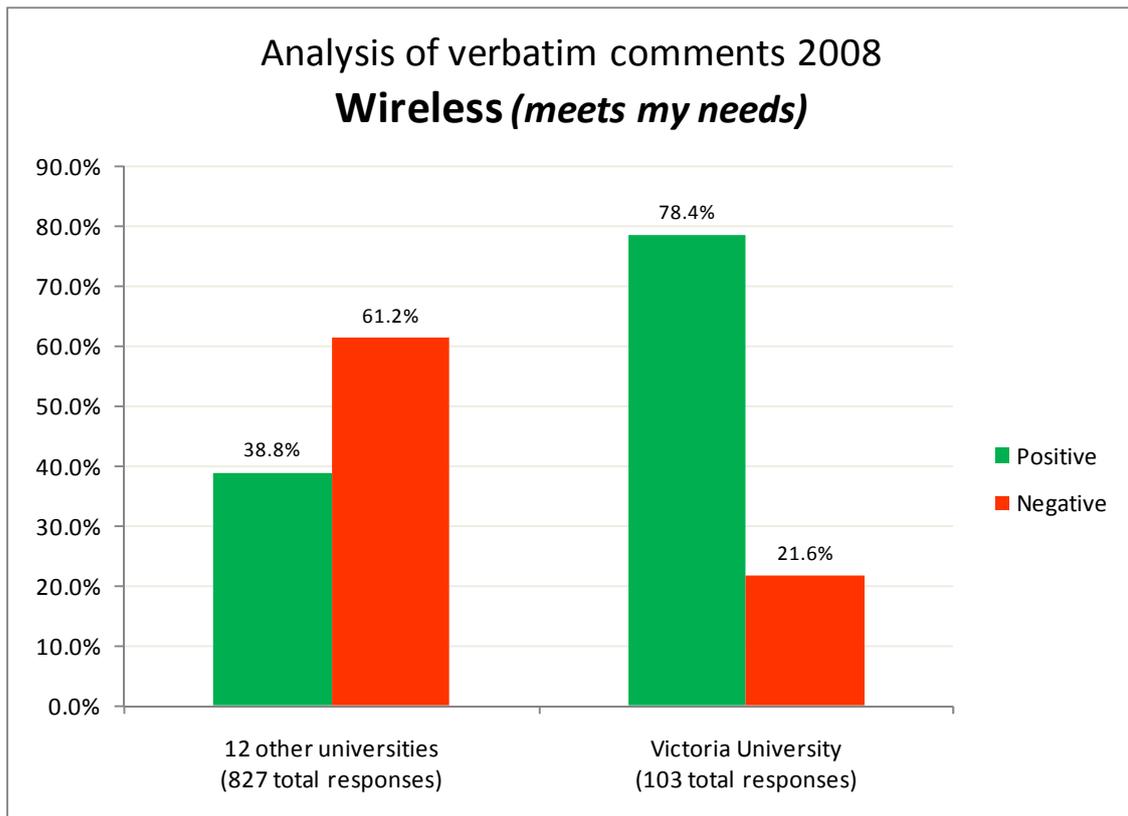
In the case of the Operating Hours question, the data pointed to a significant improvement in reducing the gap between Performance and Importance. In one year the gap has decreased from 0.88 to 0.66. In 2008 Insync Surveys implemented an additional service to analyse verbatim comments and to assist

libraries through clustering similar comments into positive and negative categories. The following tables show a correlation between the quantitative and the qualitative results.



With regard to Operating Hours the number of positive comments outweighed the negative comments. This is distinctively different from the mean results of 12 other universities who collected and analysed verbatim feedback in this manner in 2008. VU was the only Library with a greater emphasis on positive rather than negative responses.

Wireless Access was another standout improvement in the 2008 survey. The score in 2008 was 5.40 compared with a score of 5.16 in 2007. Again the analysis of verbatim comments supports the quantitative data. The table below demonstrates that VU received significantly more positive comments on wireless access compared with the mean totals for 12 other universities. Only one other university shared a greater emphasis on positive comments.



## 7. Interpretation of Results

Recent successes at VU in the Client Satisfaction Survey can be directly attributed to initiatives or interventions that were integral to the Library and University strategic and operation plans and project portfolio.

Increased satisfaction on the provision of computers was directly related to the Higher Education Infrastructure Program (HEIP) funded Information Commons initiative in 2005. This major project initiated by the University Librarian resulted in 600 additional computers being installed across the Library. A standard suite of desktop productivity software was installed on all computers and appropriate furniture provided to enhance the Information Commons environment.

Despite this major milestone, the Library has continued to pursue further opportunities to increase the number of computers in response to client feedback. The Learning Commons initiative has also led to further computers becoming available at the three campuses where building projects have been completed. At the end of 2007, the Library Management Group placed a priority on the installation of further PCs, laptops for loan and additional power points for charging laptops in response to survey feedback. Funding was also secured through small IT grants to install PC booking software to maximise the availability of PC stock. The extension of library opening hours has also maximised access to and utilisation of computers. The Library has successfully bid for extra resources in recent university budget bids to fund associated internet charges and to move end-of-life PCs onto sustainable leasing arrangements.

The standout results in Library Opening Hours is also attributed to a project over 2007 and 2008 detailed in a separate case study in this paper.

The improved score on Wireless Access is also attributable to a University-wide project funded through Information Technology Services (ITS) in 2008 to upgrade the coverage and quality of wireless access at VU. While this was not a Library project, the Library worked with ITS to maximise the outcomes of the project. As the Library is the major provider of self access computing, independent and collaborative learning spaces on campus, the Library did receive priority treatment in the wireless project.

Improved results in library collection questions are also attributable to recent projects to acquire e-books and other new resources. Existing collections are working harder through the BONUS+ collaborative online borrowing scheme and weeding programs ensure that the book stock is fresh. This counters complaints about irrelevant and dated working collections.

While there are standout results at certain times attributable to interventions, improvements in overall scores relate to the culture of the Library and a deeply embedded commitment to quality management by the Library staff at large.

## **8. Library Hours Review Case Study**

An ongoing area of client feedback through the annual survey and other feedback mechanisms has been Library Opening Hours. The longitudinal data from the annual survey indicated a reasonable level of satisfaction (5 out of possible 7) with library opening hours but with a persistent and growing level of importance. Through the initiative of Frances O'Neil, Manager, Library Services a project plan was developed in 2007 under the title of: 'Access for a New Paradigm: Library Hours Review'.

The review process was preceded by intensive data and research analysis on student populations, home addresses, campus breakdowns, proximity to other libraries and public transport and library usage as evidenced by gate counts. Competitor analysis was also undertaken to determine access at other Melbourne university libraries.

The project consultation strategy involved emails to student and staff lists, web-based surveys and briefings, and in particular a number of face-to-face student focus groups. These student feedback sessions teased out the issues contributing to the gap between library opening hours performance and importance. The sessions garnered qualitative rather than quantitative responses indicating trends and experiences. The sessions were valuable to the review in gaining student input in the context of the overall research data.

In addition to the student focus groups there was also direct consultation with campus communities including the VU Student Association, the Student Experience Committee as well as direct interactions with students and staff.

In response to the project findings, options were developed to redistribute or expand existing hours such as weekend opening and later closing on week nights. The current mix of staff, skills and level of staff required during opening hours was also examined as well as financial modelling of the proposed options. Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) issues associated with security and physical location of library campuses and working alone considerations were also vital to planning the outcomes.

The Final Report for the project was submitted in September 2007 and a pilot of extended opening was conducted in the latter part of the 2007. This was funded through savings made within the existing library budget. The plan included the incorporation of student library assistants into the staffing mix and 'study hall' conditions with limited services outside previous opening hours. While this was consistent with university trends towards student employment and work experience, this significant change required considerable attention to detail in implementation and training.

In principle support was obtained from the Information and Knowledge Management Committee and the Quality Teaching and Learning Committee. The Budget bid for additional resources was approved in late 2007 and the new arrangements were implemented with the start of the 2008 academic year. This was planned as a full scale pilot, involving a mid-year review and final report in November 2008. Planning for service improvements in 2009 are subject to the finalisation of the 2009 Budget. Feedback through the annual client survey and other informal mechanisms attested to the responsiveness of the project to client needs and in improving the student experience at VU.

## **9. Quality Culture at VU**

*The Library with a culture of quality assurance and a continuous cycle of renewal is in a better position to demonstrate its value in the teaching, learning and research outcomes of the university...*

While the subject of Jordan's (2007) quote above is the University of Queensland Library, it could equally apply to VU Library.

Schmidt and Croud (2000) also detail earlier work at Queensland which involved all staff in a variety of quality management initiatives and benchmarking activities. Regular communication on these themes through library publications and regular information sessions was also important.

The focussed position of a Projects Coordinator ensured that Library Quality Management Program at the University of Queensland achieved successful outcomes. However Schmidt and Croud (2000) suggest that the most successful feature of the implementation was the '7Up' group of middle managers for:

*...promoting and propelling the priority area quality initiatives throughout the library and involving other staff members in initiatives. Through this group quality initiatives reached all sections of the Library.*

Articles by McGregor and Jantti (2003-2007) articulate the planned and detailed processes required to develop a culture of quality, service and excellence through commitment and assessment.

*It became a norm for staff to measure, question and aspire to best practice.*  
(McGregor 2003)

VU Library embraced quality management many years ago. A focus on the customer has been a core value for Library staff and quality improvement has been encouraged throughout. VU Library has a reputation for innovation and 'doing more with less'. The university has a strong ethos of student and learner centred approaches. It is not surprising therefore that the Library relaxed food and drink rules, provided a more sociable environment within libraries and put the student at the centre of revised library rules and borrowing conditions.

VU Library staff take the annual Client Satisfaction Survey very seriously and contribute in many ways such as 'talking up' survey participation through regular announcements on public address systems, poring over verbatim comments and developing action plans to redress client complaints. An important factor at VU is the team approach as also described at Wollongong.

*As measurement, evaluation and problem-solving was increasingly integrated into the work teams, change management and improvement initiatives became the responsibility of the teams, not just the Library Executive.* (Jantti and McGregor 2007)

Over the past few years a representative from Insync Surveys and its predecessors has spoken at an annual meeting of library staff. The interest of staff in the results and in seeking to understand what the data and comments are saying is exemplary. It is timely that the survey outcomes are presented at the same time as the annual review and library staff awards. According to McGregor (2004):

*Celebrating success should ideally be included as an additional step in the change management process and not be associated solely with external recognition.*

Staff members seriously seek opportunities for continuous improvement over time and appreciate it as a regular process embedded in the Library's annual timetable and plans.

A precedent for this culture was established in the early 2000's when an Integrated Management System (IMS) was developed by the then VU Quality Manager. The system was embedded in the University as part of the Australia Quality Training Framework (AQTF), primarily for the TAFE sector. Relevant Library managers, campus librarians and supervisors were required to attend training/information sessions to ensure that they understood the processes and their roles. As part of the IMS the Library was audited from a service delivery perspective. Internal and external audits were conducted against the relevant

standards detailed in the IMS manual. Some of the areas in which the Library was audited included: acquisitions/provision of resources, document control, monitoring of processes, and customer feedback procedures. The Library was required to undertake corrective action if compliance issues were identified. As part of this process, the Library achieved ISO 9001 certification. While the certification is no longer maintained, the concepts are still anchored in Library practice particularly in technical service areas.

Involvement of library staff in scenario and strategic planning exercises as well as regular briefings on new VU strategies has assisted in fostering the service culture as well as ongoing training on contemporary customer issues such as handling difficult people.

Feedback loops are vital to ensure that clients see the results of the survey and action plans to redress problems. At VU the survey results are disseminated widely through the Library web-site, online newsletter, emails and reporting at university committees (e.g. Quality Teaching and Learning Committee). Plans are publicised to ensure that clients see that their feedback is valued and acted upon.

## **10. Conclusion**

Through a focus on quality, VU Library has improved client satisfaction over the 7 year period that the current Client Satisfaction Survey has been administered. Collaborative work within the sector and with the vendor has achieved positive results in refining the survey instrument and sharing expertise and learning.

Cultural change and putting the student 'at the centre' has resulted in greater support for VU's mission. Higher scores in survey data and comments enhance the reputation of the Library as an honest and trusted service provider in the University. While some standout results may be attributed to specific projects, survey success and ongoing improvement requires a positive client-centred culture and processes embedded deep in the DNA of the organisation.

Additional resources have followed as a result of detailed client analysis such as the Library Opening Hours initiative at VU. Regular briefings of key stakeholders, presentation of client feedback and the development of well argued and researched plans has assisted in building the case for additional resources. Despite recent successes at VU Library, future challenges abound.

For example Cullen (2001) quotes a challenge by Altman and Herson as to whether the library would commit to cease spending staff and dollar resources on activities that customers do not care about. Would we willingly reallocate resources to other services that customers prefer?

Times of economic restraint mean that additional resources may not always be available to fix problems such as access to sufficient numbers of computers. One strategy would be to look more closely at the areas where we might be considered to 'over deliver' and to reallocate resources to more 'needy' areas. This would need to be carefully managed in regard to the service ethos.

Similarly Saunders (2008) warns of the danger of focusing attention on the 'sins of the past vs possibilities of the future'. This concept has been picked up in recent plans to revise the survey to include positive recommendations for future action in addition to what might be perceived as backward looking complaints.

An important factor in VU's continued success over time has been the annual approach. The survey fits well into VU's annual timetable and the regularity ensures that it is 'front of mind' with both clients and library staff. It is recommended that VU continue with the annual survey. Movement to a biennial timetable similar to the majority of other universities is not advisable.

One of the distinctive characteristics of VU's experience relates to the multi-campus environment. The majority of participants in the survey come from the largest campuses. However some of the highest performing campuses are small and have a greater intimacy with the client base. It would be easy to lift the overall scores by focussing on programs at these large campuses to lift scores!

2009 will pose some new challenges for VU. It is anticipated that there will be some changes to update the standard survey instrument. This does provide some opportunities to recalibrate our survey and to consider 2009 as a new base line.

There will be substantial building works during 2009-2010 at the major campus which always receives the largest number of survey responses. The Library has put this challenge in a positive light – a specific strategy in the 2009+ Library plan is to maximise access and minimise disruption during the building project.

The vast majority of survey responses come from students. Another challenge moving forward at VU will be to reconsider our feedback mechanisms with academic and teaching staff. Different instruments and tools may be more appropriate particularly as many facilities such as computers and seating are increasingly used by students, whereas academics increasingly use the Library's virtual services.

McGregor (2004) notes that strategies at Wollongong included an early intention to apply for quality awards. Historically VU has applied for internal rather than external awards in areas of quality and service. VU Library may consider a planned approach to winning external awards but this will involve a structured approach to project planning and require a conceptual methodology such as the Australian Business Excellence Framework. There are added benefits beyond the kudos of awards as noted by McGregor (2004);

*Meeting the standards required by the Award process is by no means the end of the journey. Comprehensive feedback both verbally and in writing from the evaluators provided insights to reflect upon and material for future improvement strategies. External evaluation by independent auditors meant that feedback was not connected with any internal politics or preconceptions.*

Another learning from the University of Wollongong is the option to expand the quality repertoire to include the 'mystery shopper' concept detailed in a number of papers by McGregor and Jannti.

While VU has invested resources in training and developing a quality culture, there may also be opportunities to refresh training for staff and to ensure that newer staff members have the opportunity to receive formal training in the area. With the revision of the survey and the time that has elapsed since the survey was introduced, it would be timely to have a heightened focus on quality concepts and tools.

As VU has now reached the Top 10 in overall customer satisfaction within CAUL, there are also opportunities to learn further from other high performing libraries and to benchmark with them. Given the time that has elapsed since the 2004 survey of top performers, there is also an opportunity for the CAUL BPWG to revisit work in this area.

Survey incentive prizes are another issue to consider. At VU we have continued to revise the prizes offered each year in order to be up-to-date with student preferences. While prizes can improve response rates and raise the profile of the Library and feedback processes, it can trivialize the survey or result in quick responses that are not thoughtful. If checks are not in place, duplicate responses may be submitted. In the Australian experience, where the use of prizes has varied between universities, experience has shown that prizes don't necessarily colour client responses or honesty.

There is increasing competition from other areas in the university (e.g. Student Services) to gain the attention of clients. Students and staff increasingly complain about survey fatigue. Should there be greater integration of feedback across the university? While there is some overlap and potential for a common approach, it would be unfortunate if a valuable feedback opportunity was lost for the sake of reducing the number of surveys.

The Australian university library sector and VU Library has much to be proud about through our quality journeys.

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