A Better Reference Evaluation Survey
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SUMMARY
This survey obtains student opinions about subject-specific support, including specialized research assistance they may have received from multiple encounters with a librarian.

A brief online survey distributed by email at the end of the semester in which they ask their librarian for help provides students with the opportunity to:
- Evaluate their librarian's service and expertise after a project's completion rather than shortly after the interaction.
- Emphasize what was most helpful from their encounters.
- Assess and reflect upon their overall research process and perform a final stage in constructivist learning when answering. “What advice or information related to your research assignment do you wish someone had given you sooner?”

In addition to giving customer feedback, the survey results help the librarian to:
- Set priorities for which skills and strategies to emphasize in future transactions.
- Describe the skills, tips, and topics typically covered.
- Quantify the major formats where reference services are provided.
- Collect tangible advice to use for future students engaged in similar research assignments.

Coupled with library instruction evaluation surveys, this instrument provides a more rounded and customized view of students' needs throughout their research process.

The REFERENCE/INSTRUCTION CONNECTION
Increasingly, academic reference and instruction librarians develop relationships with students who begin in instruction sessions and extend through the duration of research projects.

Library instruction increases reference traffic (Saunders, 2003), and it likely increases student demand for follow-up consultations with librarians who know their courses, assignments, and particular research needs.

In addition, librarians learn how to improve their instruction after follow-up reference interviews with the students they have taught.

SELF ASSESSMENT IN LEARNING & TEACHING
Carol Kuhlthau's model of the Information Search Process (2007) includes 7 stages, including a final assessment stage where students reflect on their whole research process and consider:
- What they have learned.
- What problems they had along the way.
- What will do in the future.

This survey provides an opportunity for students to assess themselves and their experience formally in questions 3 and 6.

Because the survey is NOT anonymous, the librarian can:
- Quote the tangible advice in workshops for future students with the same assignment.
- Compare what the student remembered with what the librarian covered.

HOW IS THIS SURVEY DIFFERENT?
1. Connects reference to library instruction.
2. Is NOT anonymous.
3. Obtains patron feedback at the end of a research project.

The SURVEY INSTRUMENT
A brief online survey is sent to student emails via the Library’s Survey Monkey account at the end of the semester.

2. Which statements best describe the nature of your research consultation?
- Customer Satisfaction + Helps librarian manage time during future interviews.
- Customer Satisfaction + Self Assessment
- Customer Satisfaction + Helps librarian manage time during future interviews.
- Customer Satisfaction + Self Assessment + Helps librarian manage time during future interviews.

3. Which statements describe what you learned?
- Customer Satisfaction + Self Assessment + Helps librarian manage time during future interviews.
- Customer Satisfaction + Self Assessment
- Customer Satisfaction + Helps librarian manage time during future interviews.
- Customer Satisfaction + Self Assessment + Helps librarian manage time during future interviews.

4. By which methods did you communicate?
- Measures reference formats + Prioritizes where to provide future service.
- Measures reference formats + Prioritizes where to provide future service.

5. Which aspects of library research did you discuss?
- Students remember what was important + effective.
- Students remember what was important + effective.

6. What advice or information related to your research assignment do you wish someone had given you sooner?
- Advice for future students + Self Assessment.
- Advice for future students + Self Assessment.

7. What was helpful?
- Quality Feedback
- Quality Feedback

REFERENCES

Special thanks to Paul Jackson (Leonard Library) for the images in this poster.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
- How do you evaluate reference service at your library?
- How do you evaluate specialized research assistance?
- When do you solicit feedback for your services?
- Does library instruction increase reference traffic at your institution?

REFERENCE EVALUATION
Most reference service evaluation focuses on patron impressions of reference service shortly after their encounters. Much of the recent assessment instruments and discussions have focused on measuring the value and effectiveness of virtual reference service and describing the complexity of reference questions (McLaughlin, 2011). In most cases they suppose a semi-anonymous exchange between a service provider and patron.

The California State University system uses a modified Warner model (2001) for classifying reference statistics by focusing on the level of skill and the strategies used. This is helpful in considering library staffing, but it does not measure the relationship between library instruction and research assistance.