

**Washburn University  
Mabee Library**

**Report of Library Service Assessment Consultancy**

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**Washburn University**

**Mabee Library**  
**Consultancy Report**  
**Service Assessment Focus Groups**  
**Spring, 2002**

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**ADMINISTRATIVE SUMMARY**

## **Introduction**

Mabee Library actively pursues a service assessment program, in concert with a growing number of academic libraries who endeavor to analyze user needs and identify solid rationale for improving library service programming. In designing a service assessment program, Mabee Library has incorporated professional best practices and appropriate Association of Research Library (ARL) guidelines. Consistent with these practices, pre-assessment focus groups were conducted prior to the conduct of the LibQUAL+(tm) (sm) assessment survey in 2001. Upon compilation of the results of that LibQUAL+(tm) survey, it became evident that some library user responses could easily be misinterpreted if analyzed only by Mabee Library staff, a situation common in assessment activities of this nature. To avoid such misinterpretation, a consultant was retained to conduct post-assessment focus groups and to provide clear recommendations for the use of the LibQUAL+(tm) results. The purpose of this enquiry was to amplify the understanding of the survey results and to develop a clear understanding of library user intentions with respect to several particular survey questions.

## **Methodology**

Four focus group sessions were scheduled; one group of Washburn University faculty and three groups of Washburn University students. Each group met for approximately ninety minutes on either March 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup>, 2002. The facilitator briefed each group on the assessment initiative, described the plan for the focus group session, and encouraged open, frank discussion. One part of the focus group addressed broad service-related issues in several categories as noted later in this report. Another part of each session endeavored to address and clarify responses to several specific questions that had appeared on the LibQUAL+(tm) survey.

The lines of inquiry during the focus sessions were directed into the following areas: Collections & Services; People; Technology; and Facilities. This structure allowed both faculty and student participants to discuss their feelings about library services in groupings that were germane to their daily experience.

After discussion in the groups about concerns related to specific LibQUAL+(tm) questions, participants were asked to offer narrative written responses to the questions “What is working”; “What needs improvement”, “What future opportunities do you see for the library to help you” Responses to these questions are represented in appendices to this report. Based on the aggregation of these comments, direct observations of the focus groups, and experiential data from similar library contexts, the consultant developed instrumental recommendations which are included with this report.

## **Related Data**

If so desired, LibQual data for specific responses reported within this focus group structure can readily be identified in the documents *Washburn LibQUAL+(tm) 2001 Undergraduate Priorities* and *Washburn LibQUAL+(tm) 2001 Faculty Priorities*.

## **About LibQUAL+(tm)**

In recognition of the need for evidence-based assessment of library services, the Association of Research Libraries (ARL), with funding from the U.S. Department of Education Fund for Post Secondary Education (FIPSE), developed LibQUAL+(tm) as a primary service assessment instrument for college and university libraries. LibQUAL+(tm) is being adopted by a growing number of libraries, and the aggregation of data from this mass implementation is being used by ARL in its continuing development of standards and best practices for library service.

# **GENERAL INFORMATION ON LIBRARY SERVICE ASSESSMENT AND FOCUS GROUPS**

### **Rationale for Assessment**

Given the reality of ongoing limitations in library budgets and staffing:

*“Providing on-target services and [information] products... is more likely to be a measure of effectiveness than is performing many unmeasured tasks with more people.”*

*(ARL New Measures Initiative. Organizational Capacity White Paper, April 21, 1999.*

*Available at: <http://www.arl.org/stats/program/capacity.pdf>. Accessed 4/5/00.)*

In this context, assessment is seen as an ongoing, cyclical process. The focus group exercise provides clarification and direction as this cycle progresses.

### **General Purposes of Focus Groups**

- Develop a non-judgmental line of communication with library users and potential users, facilitated by a trained, yet unbiased third party.
- Capture and analyze information from focus group participants and use this information to 1.) clarify the nature and intent of selected responses to the 2001 LibQual+ library service assessment instrument, and 2.) develop recommendations for short- and long-term responses to the LibQual+ indications.
- Focus group facilitators should develop *instrumental* recommendations, i.e., non-statistical recommendations that address broad categories of service- People (librarians and staff); Facilities; Services and collections; Technology.

Summarized Responses to Selected  
LibQUAL+ (tm) Questions

Responses From Student Focus Group Participants

**STUDENT People Concerns Expressed in LibQUAL+ (tm)**

### **LibQUAL+ (tm) Question Number and Brief Text of Question**

- 3. Readiness to respond to users questions
- 5. Employees who understand the needs of the users
- 31. Employees who have the knowledge to answer user questions.
- 32. Willingness to help.
- 12. Improving library-use skills as a by product of seeking assistance from library staff.
- 21. Librarian providing assistance that addresses only the particular request rather than teaching me more than I need to know.
- 22. Tailoring a response to meet a particular request rather than teaching me more than I need to know
- 38. Library staff focusing on the here and now, not teaching research skills for the future.
- 47. Librarians providing help that both assists in finding the information needed now, but also improving skills useful in future information searches.

### **General Clarifications by consultant:**

*Do patrons know the difference between “library staff” and “librarians”?*

In a word, no. However, students almost universally expressed that whomever they initially contacted made referrals to an appropriate individual. It does not seem that name tags or other identifying mechanisms would be seen by students as a great benefit, but there may be indirect benefits to the librarians and staff if they are assured their occupational identity is clarified.

*How do students prefer to learn about the library?*

Scheduled library sessions as part of a specific course were far and away the most preferred instruction method. A distant second was the idea of drop-in sessions scheduled several times through the week. I am not convinced that the students truly grasped the randomness involved in attempting to mate their schedules with a “drop-in” session, regardless of time offered. I suggest that the Library investigate what seems to be a very low level of student awareness of instructional options. They may be receptive to other instruction modes if they become familiar with them through ongoing publicity.

### **User Comments-Selected:**

Please take the patron to the item-don't point us.

All library people are very willing to help, but we don't know who we should ask.

Librarians should ask us if we need help. (before patron requests help) (this was a very popular comment DY)

### **Consultant Comments**

The significant gap in #32 seemed to stem from the fact that students hesitate to ask for help when they need it. The expectation is that the librarian should approach the student, inquiring if help is desired. (This is a growing perception in academic libraries and it is beginning to appear in the literature DY). When librarians don't approach (not wanting to be intrusive), many students begin to feel less-than-optimum “willingness to help”.

## **STUDENT Services and Collections Concerns Expressed in LibQUAL+(tm)**

### **Question Number and Text of Question**

- 29. Convenient access- hours, etc.
- 36. Accuracy of records.
- 39. Complete journal runs
- 46. Resources added on request
- 55. Browsing open stacks

**General Concerns:**

The primary concern expressed by students in this category was awareness of services and collection resources. They seemed to have a sense that they were not accessing all that was available, but they do not know what to ask.

**Consultant Comments:**

#27. #29, et.al *Patron definition of "access services"*. Two frequent and significant issues here-"access" to secured areas such as the Koch Collection, and "access" to the Internet- seemed to be what pushed these questions into the "red".

#36-*Accuracy of records*. It was evident in all student groups that this concern centered largely around the payment of fees and fines, followed by often-lengthy waits before the library system recognized the obligation as having been cleared. This may result from a loading and/or backup cycle, but the concern was prevalent enough to warrant investigation so library staff could at least provide an accurate rationale to patron experiencing this. (DY)

Related concerns included other records-related issues.

39. *Complete journal runs*. Not a critical issue, but many students had no awareness of ILL services to augment print journal runs.

#46. *Resources added on request*. In nearly all cases, students referred to the perceived need to add additional copies of reserve materials to meet peak demand periods.

#55. *Browsing open stacks*. Students seemed conversant with this, and expressed no problems.

**STUDENT Facilities Concerns Expressed in LibQual+**

**Question number and text of questions related to this category:**

- 2. Meditative Place

- 40. Comfortable and inviting location
- 49. Safe/secure place.

**User Comments (Selected):**

**Strengths:**

- Many study tables are available.
- New Carpet !!!!
- Close access to material and computers when studying.

**Concerns/desires:**

- Depressing interior (#40)
- Need more group study rooms (#40)
- Safety in remote areas of building and in restrooms. (#49)
- An at-home atmosphere- table lamps, (#2)
- Electrical and phone connections for using laptops. (#40)

**Consultant Comments**

I was impressed by the consistency of praise and concern verbalized in all three student sessions. Also impressive was their overall sincerity as they expressed their concerns and suggestions. The students are obviously highly influenced by the "Barnes & Noble" model, and by the Topeka/Shawnee County Public Library renovation. I received strong signals that today's students see the "traditional" facility- large chairs, task lighting, artwork on walls, etc.- in fact as a "trendy" modern incarnation of what they feel a library should be- an intriguing twist. Further, students seek a place in which they can feel at home, but not a casual place- perhaps a living room for the campus. The food/drink issue did come up, but is was obviously a second-tier concern for the students. The issue of private study rooms was real, and oft-repeated, but it appeared that many were reacting to the remembered "loss" of two of the original four rooms. When queried, no students were able to imagine another campus location for such rooms. Several students foresaw moving of book stacks to form semi-private group study areas within the stacks.

**STUDENT Technology Concerns Expressed in LibQUAL+(tm)(tm)**

**Question Number and Text of Question**

- 14. Easy to use (technology) tools.
- 17. Making information easily accessible-authentication, user's hardware, library web site, etc.
- 28. Availability of library resources available from home or office-see # 17.
- 37. Commentary on library web site.
- 45. Modern equipment
- 52. Selection of online search tools to facilitate independent research.

**General concerns:**

Difference between library system and "IT" system.

Floppy drive access issues.

Authentication- awareness, functionality

**User Comments**

Give us free printing!

We need floppy drive capability.

ATLAS is GREAT!!

Library Web site is very helpful and links (to search tools, etc.) are extremely helpful.

**Consultant Comments**

The library web site and the catalog were extremely well-received. Remote access received high marks, with only minor authentication problems mentioned. Some comparisons were made gauging library technology against that of Law and Business at WU, but students seemed to have a clear grasp of the reasons for the difference. Not as clear, however, was the association of library hardware and services with campus IT hardware and service that they access in the Library. This was a significant awareness issue in all student groups and certainly impacted LibQUAL+(tm) responses in this area. Access to "floppy drives" was a critical issue for all groups.

Summarized Responses to Particular  
LibQUAL+(tm) Questions

Responses From  
Faculty Focus Group Participants

**FACULTY People Concerns Expressed in LibQUAL+(tm)**

**LibQUAL+(tm) Question Number and Brief Text of Question**

3. Readiness to respond to users questions

- 5. Employees who understand the needs of the users
- 31. Employees who have the knowledge to answer user questions.
  
- 12. Improving library-use skills as a by product of seeking assistance from library staff.
- 21. Librarian providing assistance that addresses only the particular request rather than teaching me more than I need to know.
- 22. Tailoring a response to meet a particular request rather than teaching me more than I need to know
- 38. Library staff focusing on the here and now, not teaching research skills for the future.
- 47. Librarians providing help that both assists in finding the information needed now, but also improving skills useful in future information searches.

**General Clarifications:**

In general, faculty seemed to know the difference between “library staff” and “librarians”, but it was evident that they were not “crystal clear” other than when dealing with personal acquaintances.

While faculty were prepared to endorse drop-in instruction, they expressed a strong preference for increasing working relationships with librarians to develop course requirements that encourage students to use the library and engage them in learning about library literacy issues.

**User Comments-Selected**

Librarians are accessible and willing to assist in all areas.  
Anytime program development is on the table, librarians should be part of the team.

**Consultant Comments**

It was truly a pleasure to facilitate this group. A perfect balance between candor about their preferences and concern about the library.

**FACULTY Services and Collections Concerns Expressed in LibQual+**

**Question Number and Text of Question**

- 13. Instruction in library use when requested
- 29. Convenient access- hours, etc.
- 36. Accuracy of records.

53 Providing services a promised.  
55. Browsing open stacks

**User Comments-Selected**

It would be very helpful to have more journals online.

“I wonder if there couldn’t be more interaction between the faculty & librarians, to plan together the role of the library in instruction.”

**Consultant Comments**

The partnering issue was very strong and, I believe, sincere. The education (librarian) model was admired, but was, by no means the only type of partnering that the faculty group saw in the future.

**FACULTY Facilities Concerns Expressed in LibQUAL+**

**Question Number and Text of Question**

#49. Safe/secure place.

**User Comments-Selected**

(Several sincere concerns were expressed about ADA-related building and furniture issues.) DY

Make the library a place we want to hang around.

Build a new library from the ground up. Incorporate a new plan of services.

**Consultant Comments**

Faculty facilities concerns were similar to the students' in that they desired a warm, inviting, place. The faculty were really more concerned with values expressed in question #2 (meditative place) and #6 (center for intellectual stimulation) i.e., a congregative club for faculty.

An alternate faculty view was that the existing building could be renovated. Private faculty carrels were a minor issue. A campaign to raise awareness of hours of operation was suggested.

**FACULTY Technology Concerns Expressed in LibQUAL+****Question Number and Text of Question**

14. Easy to use (technology) tools.

17. Making information easily accessible-authentication, user's hardware, library web site, etc.

28. Availability of library resources available from home or office-see # 17.

37. Commentary on library web site.
45. Modern equipment
52. Selection of online search tools to facilitate independent research.

**User Comment-Selected**

Update both faculty and students regularly on technology changes

**Consultant Comments**

Faculty technology concerns focused on three areas: the provision of appropriate technology for visually-challenged individuals, including remote users, the expansion of full-text journal capability (see collections summary) and the development of an aggressive technology awareness campaign for users.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

## **SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS**

**These summary recommendation should be considered in context with the short and long term recommendations and with the participant comment information included elsewhere in this report.**

- Celebrate successes, especially in personal service support.
- Enhance communication with users.
- Use assessment and strategic planning information when allocating existing and new financial and staff resources.
- Provide a traditional, yet comfortable, library living/learning environment.
- Establish and maintain both short and long term goals based on planning and assessment activities.
- Consider identifying benchmarks for library service quality. Link these benchmarks to the library strategic plan.
- Branding, or direct identification of library services as they are being delivered, can be an effective means of both educating users about library services and communicating to them the positive results that develop from service assessment initiatives.
- Examine the roles of both Mabee Library and Washburn /University ITS-administered technology and analyze the efficacy of this arrangement in contributing to the support of Mabee Library service programming.

Develop and implement an assessment program that is ongoing, yet flexible. While LibQUAL+(tm) continues to be the premier choice for current and projected assessment needs, rapidly-changing circumstances in modern libraries suggest that Mabee Library should recognize the need for flexibility in the longer term. In ongoing service assessment, inflexible programs can begin to yield reduced patron response and diminishing data returns.8/10/02

## **SHORT TERM RECOMMENDATIONS**

### ***General-***

Responsiveness to users is critical to the success of any assessment plan. It is recommended that Mabee Library seriously consider an ongoing program of communicating library assessment issues to patrons, whether or not they actively participate in a formal assessment related activity. Specific examples are discussed in the following recommendations.

***People-***

Excellent responses were received by this third party consultant from all library constituencies. It is recommended that librarians and staff thank themselves for excellent personal service to patrons, and consider actions that will ensure that library service continues to be perceived at this level as the future arrives. Further commentary on this area of service is offered under longer-term recommendations.

***Facilities-***

- Shorter, bigger, signs on stacks would easily provide a visible response to a very common patron concern.
- Updating of wall treatments was a concern expressed in all focus groups. Communication about the completion of the wall painting capital improvement project (although previously funded) would be an excellent means of highlighting responsiveness to patron concerns..

***Services & Collections-***

- Provide to patrons clarification of the particular roles of different library staff members.
- Provide to staff members clarification and training in how to interact with patrons in a fashion that serves the patron clarifying the role of the staff person. The attempt to be “all things to all persons” often results in lowering, not raising the level of service.

***Technology-***

- Users are very pleased with much of the existing library technology, but a strong demand for floppy disk storage capability when using ITS hardware in the library. Existing file-access/storage options were almost universally condemned by patrons. Develop a means of increasing patron access to this type of storage.
- Formal library instruction efforts are well-received, but an ongoing program of general information about library online resources is strongly recommended. Note other communications-related comments elsewhere in this document.

***Communications-***

Publicity of the E-Book project could be continued and amplified. Success may not be evident in the time span previously allocated to this project.

**LONGER TERM RECOMMENDATIONS**

***People-***

- Conduct programming that will help staff and professional librarians become more clear about their own and others role in the library organization.

Delivery of service at an “above excellent” level is seldom appreciated by patrons in proportion to the staff resources required to support service at such a level.

- Identify targeted areas of service, and determine the service level to be maintained for each area.
- Seek to identify resources that can be allocated away from “above excellent “ services to bolster targeted programs.

#### ***Facilities-***

By and large, the facility-related service assessment concerns rise from the perceptions and expectations of library users that are significantly different from those of even a decade ago. While online access is increasingly popular and effective, present-day student work habits are best served by a library facility that is both traditional in structure and modern in operations.

The design of the Mabee Library facility is such that accommodating the needs of modern users would not likely be accomplished by modifying the existing building.

#### ***Services & Collections-***

- Increased access to online journal literature is recommended. Whether or not this is done, publicity about the collections resources needs to be enhanced.
- Librarians need to develop an organizational culture of reaching out to and connecting with teaching and research faculty, not only for instruction, but to become involved in those aspects of course development that may impact library programming.

#### **User Communications**

Users truly appreciate hearing about their library. Continue to communicate the successes that have been achieved against service assessment objectives.

Also, regularly communicate the fact that the library continues to care and listen to constituent concerns. These activities can be effectively managed either on a project basis or by a standing library communications team.

## **Appendix A**

### **Compiled Written Comments from Student Focus Groups**

**March 2002 LibQual+ Focus Groups  
Participant Comments  
Students**

This appendix contains unedited, verbatim transcriptions of all written comments provided to the facilitator by focus group participants.

***“What is Working?”***

*-People:*

Great help at the library with the reference and circulation desk. (sic)  
Reference desk people are very helpful- Never had any trouble with respect to getting help!  
Good service, helpful librarians.  
Everything works great. The people are helpful and always ready to lend a hand.  
The staff really goes out of its way to help us patrons get the materials or direction we need.  
The librarians are very helpful and very approachable.  
The librarians are really nice.  
Well informed librarians.  
The assistance from the librarians and book checkout.  
The librarians are very helpful.  
The help is most of the time helpful.  
The staff does a very nice job. Very helpful and full of knowledge.  
The workers are great!!  
Helpful staff.

*-Facilities*

The art on the walls!!  
Plenty study space.  
Reference desk  
The atmosphere lends to learning. (sic)  
It is quiet  
The way the chairs and desk are set up are comfortable.

*-Services & Collections*

The library is small and comfortable and provides easy access to information.  
The interior of the library is very comfortable. It would be neat to have a new interior that looks clean and fresh, but that might take away from the comfort of it right now.  
The training given by library staff regarding how to do research for papers, and how to use data bases is tailored to specific disciplines. In art history [the librarian] works with the professors to address a specific topic and does step-by-step instruction.  
ILL is really helpful for the people who want to find the material form other libraries.  
Interlibrary loan  
If you need to do research it is helpful, I can find more than enough info.  
Infotrac, Lexus/Nexus, etc. is great! The articles are easy to find.

## **Student Focus Group Participant Comments (continued)**

*“What is Working?”*

*-Technology*

Online Resources  
Washburn internet.  
The Alta system (sic) is great.  
The online services such as the online journals, library catalogs, etc.  
I like being able to research journal databases from my home PC.  
Internet access is very helpful.

***“What needs improvement?”***

*-People*

Staff & Librarians-uniformity, meaning shirts, name tags, (note-to identify all and separate reference people from others).

*-Facilities*

More attractive physical environment.

Main floor needs bathrooms.

The temperature is not comfortable.

More study space.

More study rooms.

There needs to be more regulation of how the group study rooms function and maybe even more publicity that they are existent (sic). These rooms are really good for the people who need to discuss issues that others don't want to hear.

Physical: walls (drapes, nice art displays).

The room temperature, there's either too hot or too cold.

Needs the restroom on the main floor.

Needs more group study rooms

The Koch Room (note-should remain unlocked)

Study rooms.

Temperature-it is always cold.

I think the library needs to be remodeled to accommodate the students to feel comfortable & safe in the library.

Facility need remodeling-modernized or at least more appealing somehow (new furniture).

More study room.

It needs a new look inside.

Design-more space to relax & read. More group study areas.

*-Services & Collections*

Leave the *People* magazine on the browsing shelf, not at the circulation desk!

Easier system of shelves. (note- it was evident from the discussion that this refers to both the LC classification scheme and the visibility of the shelf signs.)

Books from one author should be placed on the same shelf.

Need a mailbox in the turnabout outside the library.

More books

I think we need to bring back the “browsing” (new book) section.

Access to art resources.

Art Gallery resources.

More photo books

**Student Focus Group Participant Comments (continued)**

***“What needs improvement?”***

*-Services & Collections (continued)*

We need more biological journals!!!!

Expand it's research materials (update materials).

Change at the front desk for people who don't have printing cards.

Open at 7:00 AM

Put tables outside in the Summer around the library.

*-Technology*

I personally think that we need to get more computers in our library. I also believe we need to have the

computers run faster online.  
New PC's.  
PC's don't have disc drive!  
Better Netscape system. Should be faster.  
More computers  
Computer.  
Computer & internet needs upgraded/faster.  
Need more standardized computers (note-i.e., with floppy drives)  
Internet access on the computer terminals.  
Computer system is awful!!  
20 cents for computer printout is too much!  
The computer system needs improvement.  
At least allow for the use of disk otherwise it is a hassel (sic).  
Free print from internet.  
Microfiche readers-difficult to use & often not functional. Solution: make the information available online.  
More computers on 2d floor or other floors.  
More of a campus-wide issue but the library could begin the change .

***“What future opportunities do you see for the library to help you?”***

*-People*

Circulation desk has cute girls, I really appreciate that !!  
Some kind of indicator to show if the person is a “reference librarian” or a “circulation” person.  
Want the help of a librarian all the time.

*-Facilities*

More study rooms  
Making the library a student friendly place. A place where students want to come and do research and study.

*-Services & Collections*

I heard they used to keep the times best sellers at the front lobby area. I think they should bring that back into Mabee.  
Stuff for my speech class on people in general  
Easier to locate books and journals in the library.  
Maybe make it easier to find things (books).  
Extra copies of books for specific research classes so everyone can have a choice of books recommended by professor. (note- refers to supplemental readings, not course texts.)

**Student Focus Group Participant Comments (continued)**

***“What future opportunities do you see for the library to help you?” (continued)***

*-Technology*

Media  
New computers  
More electronic equipment  
More computers that are much faster.  
More computer/web-based access.  
To be ready for the future we need to have a lot more computers w/faster internet access.  
I was not aware of Atlas.

*-General*

I don't really know what to expect in the future, but I'll be glad to see something new.

None at this time.

If they could improve the things that listed that's will be great. (sic)

I am interested in a private unlocked art book research room. Due to the controversial nature of some of this material. I feel it may be more comfortable to view it in this type of environment. I would like to see further involvement with student art exhibitions from 2-d works to full installation pieces.

Get away from the hard copy & move to electronic media.

Idea: To increase the number of students who come into the library, have a beginning of the year kick off that is full of energy. You also might want to have little incentives throughout the year for people who use the library.

When conducting library surveys, give everyone (completing the survey) a free pop or something like that. I'm sure that response rate would be much higher.

## **Appendix B**

### **Compiled Written Comments from Faculty Focus**

#### **March 2002 LibQual+ Focus Groups Participant Comments Faculty**

This appendix contains verbatim transcriptions of all written comments provided to the facilitator by focus group participants.

#### ***“What is Working?”***

##### **-People**

The library staff have been wonderful and I see them as part of our educational team!  
Librarians are accessible to faculty/students and are willing to assist them in all areas.

##### **-Facilities**

-Services & Collections

I think the online resources are invaluable- for both my research and my students.

-Technology

***“What needs improvement?”***

-People

Based on the discussion, I wonder if there couldn't be more interaction between faculty and librarians, to plan together the role of the library in instruction.

-Facilities

-Services & Collections

It would be very helpful to have more journals online.

Make the library atmosphere one faculty/students want to go to . We have a tendency to get what we need and leave immediately- make it a place we want to hang around.

-Technology

(none)

***“What future opportunities do you see for the library to help you?”***

-People

-Facilities

-Services & Collections

-Technology

Update students and faculty on technology and resources.

I would be interested in exploring more how the library serves the needs of distance students.

Keep vision of future in mind- Think outside the box-If you built a library from the ground up today-what features would you want? Which elements would you leave in the past?

Anytime program development is on the table: curriculum, specific courses, librarians should be part of the team.