

La Trobe University Library

CLIENT NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Report: Phase 1

December 1997

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1. Executive summary

A project team was established by the Library in late 1996 to commence a survey of client needs and their evaluation of library services. It was agreed to use a two-phase approach:

- Phase 1. focus groups to identify the services of greatest interest and importance
- Phase 2. a questionnaire to gather statistical data on perceptions of library performance in those areas

The objectives of Phase 1 were to find:

- which services are, or would be, most important to clients
- which indicators clients use to evaluate library services

Fourteen focus groups with 121 participants were conducted across the campuses in May 1997. The groups comprised undergraduate students and combined groups of postgraduate students and staff. Wodonga Institute of TAFE staff and students were included in the focus groups at the Albury/Wodonga Campus.

The outcomes from Phase 1 of the Client Needs Assessment are:

- The Library obtained an impression of the range of services regarded as important by the client groups and the indicators and measures that clients use to evaluate library services.
- The Library has a framework to develop an in-depth survey which will invite clients to give their assessment of library services.
- The Library received comment on desirable new services and enhancements to existing services which can be integrated into its planning processes.
- Clients have been engaged in positive and potentially productive experiences with Library staff.
- Library staff have acquired a new skill, and have extended their personal interactions with clients.

Recommendations

1. A programme of information dissemination to and training for staff and students be undertaken at the campus level and the University Library level to ensure that the services offered by the Library are promoted
2. The Client Services Committee take responsibility for the development of a framework for the promotion of services at the University Library level
3. The findings from the focus group interactions be incorporated into the action plans at individual campus libraries where appropriate
4. The outcomes of the focus group sessions be disseminated within the Library and the University
5. A survey instrument be developed and implemented in 1998 to gather data on the perceptions of library performance of the services identified through focus groups (ie. Phase 2 of Client Needs Assessment)
6. A task force be appointed as soon as possible to undertake Phase 2 of Client Needs Assessment.

2. Introduction

The Library has always sought to be responsive to clients, using as communication channels both formally structured liaison committees and the contact of individual librarians with staff and students. However in an environment of rapidly evolving information technology, and an increasing array of options for developing library services, the Library's strategic planning recognised a need to be more systematic and proactive in identifying client needs and assessing service priorities. Planning began in early 1995 for the conduct of a "user survey". The Library Review Committee, which reported in September 1995, supported this direction of the Library, and recommended "that a survey of users' views at each campus be implemented as a matter of priority" and "that the survey be repeated at regular intervals".

In 1996 severe budget reductions for universities were announced. The Library reduced its staffing expenditure immediately by about sixteen positions. With fewer staff to provide services it became even more critical to ensure that resources were devoted to services most useful to, and valued by, clients.

The overall goal was to assess the library's performance, and in so doing to identify the services which clients valued, or would value, most. The instrument or process used to gather this information had to be able to be applied repeatedly, at different campuses and across different groups, in order to monitor change over time.

In late 1996 a project team was drawn together from Library staff at all campuses. Membership comprised:

Gay Butler	Librarian, Cataloguing Division Bundoora Campus Library
Eva Fisch	Librarian, Reference Division Bundoora Campus Library
Helen King	Associate Librarian, Bendigo Campus Library
Jan Maslen	Associate Librarian Technical Services
Barbara Paton (Convenor)	Deputy Librarian
Pat Pettit	Campus Librarian Albury/Wodonga Campus Library
Lynette Todd	Contact Librarian Bendigo Campus Library
Dianne Zakis	Campus Librarian Carlton Campus Library

The team surveyed the literature and examined some existing "user satisfaction" instruments. While a traditional survey method is the questionnaire, recent literature showed considerable interest in, and success with, use of focus groups in library use studies.^{1 2}

The team agreed that quantitative data, which could be obtained by a well designed survey and careful sampling, was required if the results were to underpin priority-setting by the

¹ Crocker, Katerina. "Focus groups" *AIMA newsletter*, 10(2), p.2-8

² Berger, Kenneth W. and Hones, Richard W. "What does the user *really* want? The Library User Survey Project at Duke University", *Journal of academic librarianship*, 20 (1994) p.306-309

Library. There was concern however that a survey could lose validity by inadvertently incorporating a Library-centred view. It was agreed to use a two-phase approach - the first to identify the services of greatest interest and importance, and second to gather statistical data on perceptions of Library performance in those services.

The agreed objectives for Phase 1, were to find:

- which services are, or would be, most important to clients
- which indicators clients use to evaluate library services

This is a report of that first phase.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

The research design for this project called for an initial phase which would identify the range of experiences and perspectives of patrons in relation to library services, in particular which services patrons identified as core functions and the criteria used by patrons to judge the performance of the library. A second phase would explore the levels of satisfaction with library services for particular user populations.

The methodology chosen for the initial phase of the research had to be flexible and exploratory. It had to be of assistance in the design of a survey instrument for phase two. It also needed to provide information about particular library constituencies and campuses. The focus group technique was explored through a literature survey and found to be the most suitable for this phase.

Focus group interviewing is a technique that collects information through group interaction on a topic, or topics, as decided by the investigators. Usually the group is run in a formal setting, contains six to ten strangers and the discussion is structured around questions posed by the moderator. The questions are designed to become increasingly specific throughout the session, finally reaching the pre-determined focus. Focus groups have emerged as a popular technique for gathering qualitative data in the applied research area over the past ten to fifteen years.³ They have been particularly useful in the following areas:

- needs assessment and strategic planning,
- development and evaluation of programs,
- insight into customer motivation and viewpoints,
- giving a voice to marginalised, less frequent users.

Focus groups are especially valuable in gathering information about the range of views, but do not provide support for statistical conclusions.

A very common way of combining qualitative and quantitative research is to use focus interviewing in the initial or first phase of the research and surveys in another phase. Focus groups serve in a preliminary way to provide data on how the respondents view the issues. They therefore provide invaluable help in drafting questionnaires, providing both the language and phraseology of the customer and a fuller range of ideas or options as identified by the users.

In this project three patron constituencies (undergraduates, postgraduates and university staff) were identified as the groups to be studied. First through third year undergraduates were recruited into the undergraduate focus groups. Since postgraduates and academic staff often have the dual roles of teaching and pursuing postgraduate qualifications, they use and view library services similarly. Therefore, honours, masters, graduate diploma and Ph.D students, and academic, TAFE and general staff were combined in the staff/postgraduate focus groups.

Wodonga Institute of TAFE staff and students participated in focus groups at the Albury/Wodonga Campus. This is a joint use library where staff provide service to the Institute and the University. It was therefore appropriate and essential that both institutions be included in the survey. The survey team also needed to discover whether there was a difference in requirements or perceptions of library services.

³ Morgan, David L. (1996) "Focus Groups" Annual Review of Sociology 22:129-152

3.2 Selection and training of facilitators

The engagement of an external facilitator to conduct the focus groups was considered as this would have ensured consistency within the process. However it was decided that library staff working in pairs as moderator and scribe and using a pre-determined, structured questioning sequence could also achieve a satisfactory level of consistency. To reduce bias and to encourage anonymous participation the Project Team agreed that facilitators should avoid running focus groups on campuses where they had high profile roles. Seven staff were recruited from across the campus libraries to assist the Project Team in conducting the focus interviews. (See Appendix A). This achieved a sharing of the workload in addition to enabling facilitators and scribes to be allocated to campuses where they were little known. It also provided an opportunity for a number of staff to develop a skill which could have wider application in the Library. Arrangements were made with an experienced focus group moderator to run a half day training session for fourteen staff selected from the four campuses.

3.3 Pilot

A pilot focus group was run in the Library on 17 April 1997 by two members of the Project Team. The group consisted of ten undergraduates (Nursing, Biology, Geology, Politics, Legal Studies) from the Bundoora Campus. The arrangements and the conduct of the interviews, as well as the questions were revised as a consequence of the pilot. The changes included devising a preamble and wrap up to the session, recruiting of participants from tutorials as well as lectures, changing the physical layout of the room, and changing the order of the questions asked in the course of the session. Through training sessions and briefing meetings with facilitators/scribes, the questions (Appendix B) and procedures for each of the focus groups were standardised.

3.4 Conduct of the sessions with users

Focus groups were run at the Albury/Wodonga, Bendigo and Bundoora Campuses during the two weeks from 14 May to 29 May. In total fourteen focus groups (seven staff / post-graduate and seven undergraduate) were run with 121 participants. (See Appendix A). Each session lasted approximately one hour and was run by two library staff who had attended the training program, one acting as moderator and the other scribing the comments onto butchers' paper.

4. Data Analysis

The fourteen focus groups produced a large volume of raw data and the Project Team decided that an impressionistic picture would be aided by tabulating the data. Preliminary analysis was undertaken by a group of five of the researchers who were also moderators/scribes. The members of the groups checked the tabulated data against transcripts for accuracy. The audiotapes were also checked where any doubt as to meanings of points in the transcripts were raised.

Answers to the question “What services do you expect from the Library?” from each individual focus group were tabulated under ten service category headings. Because of the nature of discussion in a focus group some expected services were actually raised in response to other questions, and these were also incorporated in the table. A second version of the table was produced in which terminology describing services was standardised (to assist with detection of common themes) and data were integrated for groups covering the same client category and campus. (Appendix C, Table 1).

Particularly useful in the final analysis was the table derived from the answers to the question “Which services are the most important to you?”. This tabulation is by campus within client category. (Appendix C, Table 2a - undergraduate; Appendix C, Table 2b - staff/postgraduate) The tables convey a general sense of user priorities, although services are not ranked for importance. All groups were asked to rank their selection of the services most important to them, but as only some groups did this successfully, it was decided to list all services nominated as “most important”.

To capture the participants’ performance indicators for their respective libraries in a format which would allow an overview, the responses to the question “what would tell you whether or not the Library is working well for you?” were also tabulated. Again data related to performance indicators was drawn from discussion of other questions when appropriate. As for services, a second version of the table with standardised terminology and integrated data from similar groups was produced. (Appendix C, Table 3)

Note that the raw data, and intermediate tabulations, were preserved for future reference.

Although the tabulations assisted in a better understanding of the data, the Project Team decided that the most meaningful presentation of results would be in narrative form. In preparing these descriptions, team members referred to the tabulated data but also referred back to transcripts and/or tapes as necessary. The most useful primary categorisation was agreed to be by campus and client category, and a common format including a smaller number of service categories, was agreed. The results are presented in Section 5.

5. Results

In this section, the description of the data from the focus groups is arranged firstly by campus, and secondly by the constituencies of undergraduate students, and combined postgraduate students and staff.

Within each subconstituent group (e.g. Bendigo undergraduate students), the results are presented under the following headings:

- Services
 - Access
 - Information resources
 - Document delivery
 - Information services and information skills training
 - Other
- Most important services
- Performance indicators and measures

The Tables in Appendix C present the summary data in tabulated form.

Some groups were quite small and therefore caution is required when considering the responses.

5.1 Albury/Wodonga Campus

5.1.1. La Trobe University Undergraduate Students and Wodonga TAFE Students

The groups of La Trobe University undergraduate students and Wodonga Institute of TAFE students were quite small, with seven participants in the TAFE group, and four in the University group.

Services: Access

In relation to loans, the major concerns seem to centre around the need for material to circulate quickly and efficiently. TAFE students nominated the ability to borrow videos as a desired service not currently on offer, while in this category, the La Trobe undergraduates would like quick access to material in the Bundoora collections. There was also some dissatisfaction with the limit of six books at a time.

These groups considered it of some importance to have a unified catalogue, reflecting the holdings of all campuses of La Trobe.

Services: Information resources

For these two groups, concerns about the collections were a fairly high priority, and there was quite a significant degree of similarity in their areas of concern. Both were keen to see the collections reflect the core teaching areas, and also to include “*new, current materials*”. There was a regular re-iteration of the importance of building up strong collections to support the teaching programs.

It was also pointed out that lecturing staff should check that required readings are actually held in the library in sufficient numbers, before putting out their reading lists.

Services: Document delivery

The La Trobe undergraduate students expressed a desire to have access to Intercampus loans on the same basis as postgraduate students. At present, they are required to have their requests signed by a member of the lecturing staff.

The TAFE students perceived that there was a difference in the time taken to supply their requests, as compared with the La Trobe students.

Services: Information services and information skills training

The TAFE students seem to put a particularly high priority on services from library staff. They were concerned that their help be available at all times and in all areas of the library. This assistance might be required in finding items on the shelves, in interpreting catalogue entries, or using reference materials. They were also keen to see “*user training in all library areas from microfilm to magazines*”. This concern was also reflected in a number of comments they made about the need for the library to promote the services it currently offers, and to provide information about anything new, such as new database subscriptions.

Services: Facilities

These groups did not concentrate on the physical setting of the library, other than to request additional study space with larger desks.

Most important services

When it came to identifying and actually ranking core services, the two groups appeared to have quite different requirements. Those few which were common to both groups are listed below:

- staff assistance to be available at all times
- collections need to be upgraded in some areas
- current materials required in both book and journal collections

A list of *all* the “most important” services mentioned by either TAFE or La Trobe undergraduate students is shown below:

TAFE

- books available at the time courses are being taught
- classes in how to use the library
- core resources to support teaching programs
- helpful library staff
- liaison between teaching and library staff
- short term loans for material in heavy demand
- up to date, current materials

La Trobe

- ability to e-mail Intercampus requests to library
- access to Interlibrary loans
- advertising of services and classes
- better collections in undergraduate degree areas
- bigger desks/more study space
- borrowing more than 6 books at once
- electronic delivery of Closed Reserve
- intercampus loans for undergraduates
- more classes in use of CD-ROM databases
- more up to date books, eg. 1993-97 material

- more journals
- one catalogue showing holdings at all campuses
- PCs available for wordprocessing
- photocopiers
- reference staff assistance
- subscriptions to journals covered by CD databases

Performance indicators and measures

Both groups were asked how they know whether or not the library is working well for them. The responses covered a range of issues, but are probably best summed up by the La Trobe student who said, “...when library staff are happy and students have no frustrations”.

Other responses were:

- when reference assistance is available, as this saves time
- when required item is on the shelf
- when the environment is inviting to study
- when required books can be found
- when there are no queues for service
- when using the library is a pleasurable experience
- when the opening hours meet student needs
- when users have access to PCs for wordprocessing

A comprehensive list of the performance indicators and measures can be found in Appendix C, Table 3.

Overall, throughout the responses there was a heavy emphasis on the part played by library staff in the delivery of library services, particularly by the TAFE students. The helpfulness and approachability of library staff was considered to be of prime importance in the way the students perceived the library operation as a whole.

5.1.2 La Trobe University Staff and Postgraduate students and Wodonga Institute of TAFE Staff

There were eight members in the group of La Trobe University staff and postgraduates: two postgraduates, one member of administrative staff and five academic staff. The Wodonga Institute of TAFE group had three teachers, one Head of Department, one Associate Director and one member of the Open Learning Centre.

Services: Access

Comments on the loans service concerned the physical attributes of the loans area, the service and policies. The La Trobe group suggested that staff and postgraduates should be able to borrow bound journals and it was suggested by TAFE staff that more AV materials should be available for student loan. They would like to see no queues and less congestion in the loans area. TAFE staff wanted to be able to return materials by the internal mail, especially when the new library is built. TAFE staff were also concerned about adequate services for their off-campus students.

Both groups stated that they wanted access to library resources from their offices and from home. (TAFE staff do not have access to the Library catalogue from their desks at present.) They would like to see the library use technology more effectively for ordering, reservations, renewals, closed reserve, etc. but it is important that the technology (hardware and software) works.

The catalogue should be up to date with an indication of whether a title is on order or in process. TAFE staff felt there should be improved subject access and that similar subjects should be located together. They felt that there were 'inconsistencies' in the cataloguing of materials. Staff also wanted more responsive/faster services; ordering, cataloguing, processing and reshelving were all mentioned.

TAFE staff raised the issue of opening hours. These have been based on University semesters and dates, but Wodonga Institute of TAFE has a more flexible mode of delivery and continues teaching during the University summer vacation.

Services: Information resources

The main concern about the collection was that it should have a broad range and depth which reflected the curriculum. Participants also wanted a wide selection of online databases and relevant CD-ROMs from which to choose. Resources in all formats should be current. La Trobe staff thought the Library should have a community archival focus.

Services: Document delivery

Interlending and document delivery, along with current journals, ranked very highly in the top five services for La Trobe. Both groups wanted quicker document delivery. La Trobe expected the interlibrary loan service to be available to undergraduates.

Services: Information services and information skills training

Library staff support, specifically reference services, was ranked midway in the list of the top five services for the La Trobe group. The TAFE group wanted to see reference librarians with a range of subject expertise. Both groups mentioned staffing levels during the sessions. The point was made that reference staff should be able to take time in assisting and answering questions. Despite the acknowledged restraints, the staff is generally seen as friendly and helpful.

The groups expected to see information skills classes run throughout the year.

Services: Facilities

A need was seen for more computers in the library, including word processing facilities. A better photocopying service, which included more copiers, a double sided copier and a staff copier, were seen as important.

Most important services

Both groups saw the provision of current resources as an important service. Otherwise the two lists were different.

La Trobe University

- catalogue that is good and up to date
- CD-ROMs and online databases on the desktop
- Closed Reserve
- current journals
- interlending
- library staff support to academics, specifically reference librarian expertise
- photocopying

Wodonga Institute of TAFE

- appropriate level of material available
- current resources
- environment - quiet and comfortable
- less delay in ordering and processing
- off-campus services
- opening hours/access
- size - physical
- staffing levels - rostering to ensure peak periods are catered for.

Both groups then tried to rank the five most important services from these lists but the results were not clear cut for either group.

La Trobe: most important services

1. Interlending, Current journals, Good catalogue
2. Current journals, Interlending
3. Library staff support
4. CD-ROMs and online databases available at the desk
5. Photocopying/Closed Reserve

Wodonga Institute of TAFE: most important services

1. Current resources, Less delay in ordering/processing, Adequate staffing
2. Opening hours
3. Level of materials
4. Off-Campus services
5. Size of Library and comfortable quiet environment

Performance indicators and measures

Both groups were asked what would tell them whether or not the Library was working well for them. This was well summed up by the TAFE group who said it was working well “*if the level of frustration is low.*”

Other measures were:

- when users are able to find materials because the collections are
 - ◊ current
 - ◊ comprehensive
 - ◊ in depth
 - ◊ placed logically
- when Library staff have
 - ◊ a range of backgrounds
 - ◊ time to deal with queries without interruption
- when users are able to find material in the catalogue by appropriate subject/title/author/keyword access
- when users are kept informed of the progress of their orders
- when users can communicate with all library staff members by email
- when users can use electronic means for ordering, closed reserve, reservations, renewals, borrowing etc.
- when users find all equipment in working order
- when the Library has an adequate purpose built space with access for the physically handicapped

A comprehensive list of performance indicators can be found in Appendix C, Table 3.

The major concern of both groups concerned the material available in the Library, whether in print, audiovisual or electronic format. It must be current, relevant and adequate in breadth and depth to support the curriculum.

5.2 Bendigo Campus

5.2.1 Undergraduate Students

Nine participants attended each of the two undergraduate focus groups conducted at Bendigo.

Services: Access

More than half of the first focus group rated access as the top service priority. An increase in opening hours had helped but access could also be improved by increasing the number of items in Short Loan and increasing the number of copies of books purchased. In contrast some of the second focus group wanted to see the Short Loan Collection decreased with its contents able to leave the library. Some of students also wanted an increase in the number of items available for general loan and the length of their loan periods.

Students wanted remote access to CD-ROMs and the catalogue. Some were not happy with present internal booking arrangements for CD-ROMs while most are unhappy with their lack of holdings statements.

Speed of access is also important and students requested speedier catalogues with better AV searching facilities, *“a skilled library user showed me how to do it but I don't think that I could go back and do it myself”*. Students suggested a printed list of AV holdings would be one solution to the present problem and that, *“it would be good to have a booking-system for AV”*.

Books and journals not being on the shelf was the greatest impediment to access for students and they expressed frustration at frequently running into “dead ends”. They suggested solutions like binding more journals and fining for overdue books. The quality of signs and labelling of spines and shelves were also raised.

Finally Bendigo students would like access to the entire La Trobe collection by a fully integrated library catalogue.

Services: Information resources

Bendigo undergraduates want *“better resources”*. They define “better” as more and newer books with a greater Australian component. Students want to see more local/regional information with subscriptions regularly reviewed and supplemented by electronic alternatives. More than half of the second focus group regarded this as the most important library service of all.

Students outlined how these resources should address curriculum requirements and demonstrate high degrees of relevancy. According to the first focus group this is particularly important in the Nursing, Business and Computing areas, *“in the student handbook we're dissuaded from using books that are really old and yet when I go upstairs for books on marketing I find books from the 1970s. They're just not relevant anymore”*. Both groups were very clear about the necessity of weeding out old books and replacing them with new editions when available unless they serve a useful historic purpose.

The concept of “*strong resource support for specific courses*” was also discussed by the second group. They identified courses like Public Health, Social Work, Outdoor Education and Environmental Studies, “*Outdoor Ed. is a unique course with a good enrolment level but has no collection to support it*”. While Public Health students said, “*it’s really hard to get the books that you want because there’s not enough of them*”. The requirement for improved historical maps/atlasses was also identified.

Students suggested that collection gaps might be remedied by a bus to Bundoora three times a week or alternatively “*resources could be temporarily relocated between campuses to meet course needs*”. One remedy already in operation is the use of lecturers’ private collections, “*lecturers have better resources in their offices than the library has*”.

Finally students want lecturers to be more aware of the limitations outlined above and want to see knowledge of the Collection itself reflected in their reading-lists. There should be greater empathy from lecturers regarding the “time taken to acquire material externally, and the difficulties in relying on this process”.

Services: Document delivery

Access to other campus collections was rated as an extremely important service but time delays for this service are too long , “*five to seven days instead of three to four*”. Some students find it quicker to collect items in person and would like to be able to place “holds” on items held in the Bundoora collection. They expressed frustration at having to begin their research so far in advance of deadlines.

The second focus group would like more access to documents outside La Trobe on a pay-for-service basis, “*It would be wonderful to get the journal that you wanted despite the cost*”, while the first group wanted free interlibrary loans for undergraduates. The present process of having lecturers authorise loans was considered cumbersome.

Services: Information services and information skills training:

Students said that staff were friendly and helpful. They commented favourably on the Returning-to-Study program, “*It was very good. I hope they continue to run it in the future*”. They also commented , “*at stressed times staff can be very short and this means that you don’t get the information that you need to help you with your research*”. Requests for more mandatory classes and greater advertising of the classes already running were made.

Services: Facilities

Students would like more and better maintained photocopiers, “*I had to fix one myself once*”. sixteen of the eighteen participants ranked this service as important and half of these gave it a high ranking. More card dispensers are necessary and cards should be uniform across all campuses. Long photocopy queues indicate that the library is not working well and students say they sometimes, “*leave in despair*”.

Library temperatures prompted comments like, “*I find it too uncomfortable to stay in there too long to study....I don’t hang around*” and “*I think about the library when deciding what I’m going to wear each day because I get too hot*”. Several participants believed that the library being “less stuffy” was an essential service.

Cross-platform PCs for word processing was ranked as an essential service (not most important) by the majority of the second focus group. They would also like the library printers to serve remote wordprocessing sites and to operate on copytex cards.

Both focus groups would like attention paid to group study areas and quiet zones. Thirteen of the eighteen participants ranked group discussion rooms as an essential service, *“a lot of my work requires you to talk a lot and you can’t do that in the library”*. Both groups mentioned the requirement of several rooms with some wanting a *“mature-age”* room. Both groups wanted, *“better control of noisy areas”*, and these areas to be better located.

Other suggestions included an automatic stapler, *“we have to go downstairs to use a stapler. The ones in the library never work”* and child care facilities.

Most important services

The list below shows services mentioned by Bendigo students as “most important”.

- adequate number of resources in all subject areas
- up-to-date resources
- journal subscriptions relevant to curriculum
- availability of electronic journals
- local/regional information
- Australian books and journals
- adequate copies of prescribed/recommended texts
- short loan option
- holdings available on electronic indexes
- photocopiers
- intercampus loans
- items easily locatable on the shelves
- discussion rooms
- quiet study areas that are patrolled
- classes on library services
- quick and easy to use catalogues
- ventilation that permits comfortable study
- adequate printing and computing facilities

Performance indicators and measures

Specific performance measures for Bendigo undergraduates were:

- relevance of collection to all subjects taught
- currency of collection
- adequacy of collection to meet research requirements
- easily locatable books/journals
- flexibility of loan periods
- loans system ensures books are returned on time
- availability of holdings-statements on CD-ROMs
- availability of training in all library services
- quality of training keeps users abreast of latest technology
- helpful and knowledgeable staff
- adequate opening hours
- number of photocopiers
- limited queuing for photocopiers
- advertising of library services
- working-order of all equipment and technology
- utilisation of short loan option by lecturers
- availability of group study areas

- availability of quiet patrolled areas
- short loan items are promptly processed
- turnaround time for intercampus loans

A complete list of services and indicators is provided in the Appendix C.

5.2.2 Staff and Postgraduate Students

In total, ten staff, including one general staff member and nine postgraduates were interviewed from two focus groups.

Services: Access

The participants identified timeliness and efficiency in obtaining the information, and the availability of access to the locally housed resources as important in how they judge the service. They evaluate this by asking the question ‘*do I walk out with what I want?*’ and ‘*can I find the information I need quickly?*’. Participants measure access by availability of items on the shelves at point of need, citing examples of inconvenient journal binding times, mishelved items, damaged or lost items and replacement strategies, and journal cancellation without consultation, as sometimes preventing this access. One participant suggested that academic staff should have more generous borrowing privileges. Access to photocopiers at time of need was also very important. External access to the library catalogue ensures researchers can check the local availability of wanted resources both in terms of whether it is held by the campus library and whether it is on loan or not before coming to the library and this is seen as an important time saving device. Participants would also like to have access to CD-ROM databases from their home computers

Services: Information resources

The focus groups identified comprehensive searching of sources, either print or electronic, which locate information of a particular discipline, as very important for their research. This facility overcomes to some extent the limitations of small and inadequate on-site collections of both books and journals. Access to electronic resources as well as print is also on their list of most important services. Electronic resources include index and abstract databases and full text databases. Availability of electronic full text journal material is seen as particularly important because it eliminates time delays in receiving the item after publication and through the inter-library and inter-campus document delivery services, and also expands the range of resources, particularly journals, available at regional campus sites (although many participants would prefer to have printed format if given a choice). Being able to search these services from the desk top and from home is also important.

Locally held print resources are still vital and participants commented on the value of browsing the journal literature in their fields. One participant suggested it might be useful for the University Library to rationalise its journal collection across all campuses so titles weren’t duplicated and a greater range of titles was made accessible, perhaps each campus focussing on particular areas. This would need to be backed up by a good inter-campus loans service.

It is critical that the local collection is current and has been systematically developed through partnerships between librarians and academic staff. Limited access to publishers’ catalogues and time limitations makes it difficult for academic staff to maintain adequate and comprehensive collection development even in their own areas of expertise. Participants suggested that the library could forward publishers’ catalogues to them to assist in the process. Participants evaluate this aspect of the library on their perception of the quality and appropriate comprehensiveness of the collection as developed by competent librarians, in

liaison with academics. An online ordering facility, both for book purchases and document delivery requests would be valued. There is some frustration in not being able to order wanted journal titles and one participant suggested adjusting the library budget to allow for this at the expense of book orders.

The participants require access to be available to the technology which is necessary to locate electronic information and have the technology configured to be able to download the complete information (including accompanying graphs). The technology must be working, not in use at the time of need, and education and training should be available for its easy use. One participant suggested that accessing the library catalogue from the library home page should be made simpler.

Services: Document delivery

In the absence of locally held resources, the interlending and document delivery service is seen as very important. Timeliness is an important factor and one participant suggested exploring the scanning of and electronic delivery to the desktop, of material requested through the service. Photocopying and circulation of journal contents pages would also be a desirable service. The participants, particularly part-time staff and students, appreciated feedback on the status of requests from document delivery staff.

Services: Information services and information skills training

The focus groups also identified competent, enthusiastic and knowledgeable professional help from library staff as an important library service. This includes help provided from the information desk service point to access the technology and find resources, and the training programs and library tours that are developed by library staff. The library staff have an important education role. Providing sessions which keep staff and students up to date with new technology and new electronic resources available is also highly valued. One participant suggested the library should run seminars on how to control information overload. Having confidence in the capability of library staff is one means of rating the service as well as the availability of follow-up assistance by the library staff member initially consulted to ensure needs are fully addressed. The assistance seen as vital also extends to the production and dissemination of information and guides to library services, particularly guides to the services which can be accessed from staff and student office areas such as the library catalogue, CD-ROM services and other electronic databases, and other campus libraries. Many participants wanted to be made more aware of the services that the library offers.

Services: Facilities

The photocopying service is also very important. The quality of this service is measured by the availability of good machines in working order, the timeliness of access and how long the queue time is, and time saving devices such as an express copier or the possibility of short term loans for journals to allow photocopying in departments. A technician on site was also suggested. Some participants would appreciate the availability of someone to do the photocopying for them, even if there was a charge. One participant wanted the library to provide a powered area for laptop use.

Most important services

Neither group ranked the services as they found it difficult to rate their needs for teaching and their needs for research on the same scale. The groups identified the following as important for their needs.

- availability of comprehensive indexing tools
- competent, enthusiastic and knowledgeable professional help

- current and systematically developed collections developed as a partnership between library and academic staff
- electronic information services, particularly full text
- external access to electronic resources - from beyond the library walls
- guides to information services
- information skills training
- inter-library loans and document delivery services
- locally held print resources
- photocopying facilities

Performance indicators and measures

When the groups were asked how they know whether or not the library is working well for them, the most common response was - whether their information needs were satisfied or not.

Specific performance measures/indicators were:

- currency of the collection
- availability of the required information resources at time of need
- accessibility of the required information resources at time of need
- timeliness in the delivery of required information resources
- the good working order and ease of use of technology and facilities
- confidence in the ability, competency and knowledge of library staff
- availability of assistance, particularly training sessions and guides to services, from the library
- availability of feedback and follow-up from library staff on problems, requests, queries

A complete list of services and indicators is provided in Appendix C.

5.3 Bundoora Campus

5.3.1 Undergraduate Students

At the Bundoora campus three undergraduate focus groups, of sizes ten, seven and five students (twenty-two students in all) were carried out.

Examination of all the data reveals some clear student preoccupations. Ease and speed of access to relevant material is a priority. Bundoora undergraduates are also clearly very concerned with a range of physical Library facilities and with the specific support that the Library's collections offer their coursework. They also seek support from Library staff in a range of reader education classes and in prompt, informed and friendly help with their queries.

Services: Access

With regard to access, use of Closed Reserve is a priority for Bundoora undergraduates. Students would like to see more flexibility in Closed Reserve loan conditions as well as greater ease of borrowing, renewal and return of materials generally. Students demand quicker movement of materials from lecturer to Closed Reserve and sufficient numbers of copies of high demand course resources to meet their needs. The computer catalogue should be user-friendly. Another access issue of major importance to undergraduates is the speed and accuracy of reshelving of monographs and journals.

Services: Information resources

Concerns with the Library's collections relate both to access to these and to the relevance and sufficiency of available material. Students expect core resources in the latest editions. The Library should hold all recommended texts for courses taught at La Trobe. Multiple copies should be available, commensurate with enrolments. Journals in fields studied should be readily available and/or individual journal articles supplied as required. Other Library resources nominated include multimedia, newspapers and audio-visual/video items. Past examination papers are mentioned.

Bundoora undergraduates use the range of electronic services the Library offers including CD-ROM and online databases, Internet access and access to other university catalogues and CoolCat. More electronic information is requested.

Services: Document delivery

Another requested service is availability of interlibrary loans to groups of undergraduates with special requirements, eg. final year Law.

Services: Information services and information skills training

All three groups use or request more reader education sessions. Library skills generally are sought as well as skills in use of CD-ROM databases and the Internet. Classes by subject area and flexible class times to accommodate part-time students are wanted. Friendly, approachable and competent staff who are readily available to deal with queries are also a priority.

Services: Facilities

Amongst existing Library facilities, overwhelmingly the availability of ready access to photocopiers is a priority. Students state clearly their need for adequate seating and study space in the Library. Group discussion rooms are required as well as carrels and silent study areas. Physical comfort considerations such as warmth and nearby drink fountains are mentioned. A cloakroom is requested.

Services: Other

Students require appropriate signage in the Borchardt Library and repeatedly ask for clear directions for use of equipment. User friendly guides about specific subject areas and data bases are wanted as well as effective publicity about the reader education classes offered by the Library.

Most Important services

In all there were over seventy three services and suggestions for new or improved services mentioned by these undergraduates. These are enumerated in Appendix C, Table 1. Students were then requested to list the services considered most important and to rank the latter but the results to this question were not clear.

A list of all the services mentioned by Bundoora undergraduates as “most important” is shown below.

- clear directions
- cloakroom
- closed reserve facilities (including more flexible borrowing and borrowing for more than three hours) or, net pages or open reserve
- computer catalogue
- current information
- easier returns (inside library / elsewhere on campus)
- electronic information / database retrieval services
- group discussion rooms
- journals
- lockable study carrels
- materials in single physical location (eg materials on one subject (eg. law) in one place, ie. books, journals all together; library together in one place, not separate subject libraries;)
- photocopying facilities
- reader education classes; in library skills, CD-ROM usage and Internet
- security bus and announcement
- shelving, in proper place, of items shown in catalogue to be in the library
- silent study areas
- staff, at service points and roving, who are expert (in subject areas and technology), friendly, proactive and available to help identify and locate resources

Performance Measures

Students were asked what aspects of service indicated to them that the Library was working well. A complete list appears in Appendix C, Table 3.

The criteria that emerge reflect the student preoccupation with aspects of services that might not work well and the overwhelming theme is speed of transactions.

- queues
- speed of service at service points
- speed of reshelving both books and journals
- working order and number of equipment items (photocopiers/PC's)
- adequacy of opening hours.
- adequacy of the Library's collections
- friendliness and knowledge of staff
- level of communication and cooperation between lecturers and Library re course material.
- appropriateness of level of reader education classes

- effectiveness of Library signage
- effectiveness of instructions for equipment (instruction sheets, on-line help etc)

Broadly speaking, their feelings of frustration when trying to use the Library are for students indicators of failure on the part of the Library. When the patron feels “*satisfied and attended to*” the Library is seen to be successful.

5.3.2 Staff and Postgraduate students

This summary is based on three focus groups of eleven, thirteen and ten participants respectively. The majority of individuals in the groups were academic staff, with postgraduates and general staff under represented in the sample.

Services: Access

The pressures on academic staff have increased in recent times. Fewer technical and clerical staff to assist, more competition for grant monies, more administration and reporting duties, and larger class sizes across several campuses are just some of the challenges to teaching staff in the University. Staff are looking at how to achieve their goals faster, smarter, across campuses, and some are looking to technology to help them.

This attitude is reflected in many of the comments about services provided by the Library. “*research from my desk in advance of coming to the library*”; “*remote access to catalogue for preparing bibliographies and searching prior to placing orders*”; “*electronic system for ordering new books*”; “*remote access to extend what I can use from home or office*”; “*MATHSCINET [an electronic index] has changed the way we research in Mathematics and we are very happy!*”; “*use email to nominate books for closed reserve*”; “*need to be able to cut and paste library/CD-ROM databases into windows applications*”; “*I do not use library databases with aging technology but subscribe to databases to be able to use from my desktop*”.

Services: Information resources

The Library's collection figured prominently as an area of discussion and comment during the focus interviews. While the academics expressed their appreciation of the extent, depth of coverage and diversity of the monograph collection their main concerns centred on the serials collection and their increasing reliance on interlibrary loan and document delivery for their access to journal articles. A theme throughout the interviews was the expectation that collections should be reviewed and new journal titles should be ordered: “*Review serials collection*”; “*Expand, update and renew collection, especially journals*”; “*Cooperative purchases and/or rationalisation with other universities*”. Many specific areas where the collection needs to be developed were mentioned.

Services: Document delivery

Staff and postgraduates looked to rapid ILDDS to fill collection gaps: “*slow delivery of ILDDS holds up research*”; “*use ILL extensively but am not happy waiting three to four weeks*”; “*ILDDS compensates collection weaknesses*”.

Services: Information services and information skills training

Due to rapid changes in the electronic environment it is not surprising to find that another aspect of service highlighted was liaison and communication between the Library and academic departments; *“want feedback about orders or cancellations”*; *“need some way of alerting users to what is available in the Library”*; *“information about services offered by the Library and reader education involvement in courses taught by the Library”*; *“librarians to feed/promote information to academic areas - keeping academics up to date”*.

An extension of keeping academics up to date is the training role of the Library staff. This role came up in every focus group, with some participants focussing on the technical expertise and others on the subject expertise or personal skills of the librarians: *“specific Internet resource person on staff”*; *“specialist staff, multilingual staff, expertise in discographic research”*; *“responsive to customer demand”*; *“librarians specialists in subject areas”*.

Some felt that Library was not staffed with adequate numbers at service points.

Services: Facilities

Given the emphasis on desk top access it is probably not surprising that the Library as a place featured in only one out of three focus interviews with this constituency: *“good student study environment - warm, safe area”*.

Most important services

In all there were over seventy five services and suggestions for new or improved services mentioned by staff and postgraduates. These are enumerated in Appendix C, Table 1.

One of the main aims of the project was to assess important core services for each group. When participants were asked to list the most important services, between ten and twelve services were enumerated in each group. However, participants found it quite difficult to rank the top services or to agree on the ranking of the top five services, protesting that this exercise was superfluous or too hard.

Therefore, the “most important” services **common** across all three focus groups are listed below:

- collections/collection access
- closed reserve
- desktop access to library databases
- expert/specialist staff
- ordering facilities
- reader education and training
- shelving

A list of **all** the “most important” services mentioned by staff/postgraduates is shown below:

- collections (subscriptions to new journal titles and full text journal access)
- Closed Reserve systems
- computer catalogue
- central area for students as resource and for study
- desktop access to Library databases (from home and office)
- ease of access
- expert/specialist staff (in subject areas, in technology and by format)
- information and database retrieval services

- library communication to academic areas (current awareness and subject specific)
- library and new book displays
- loans - of journals
- ordering (online ordering, feedback about orders, ability to see items in orders pipeline)
- reader education and training for students and staff
- separate health sciences collection
- shelving of items

Performance indicators and measures

Similar criteria emerged in all three groups:

- able to use the collection - can find the items
- speed of transactions - short waiting time in queues
- staff help, are highly skilled, and responsive to customer demand
- student feedback is positive
- technology is up to date with remote access to library services

The importance of the Library within the University's teaching and research profile was emphasised during one of the focus groups when the comment was made that "*losing student enrolments to other institutions*" was one measure of how well, or poorly, the Library was working. Postgraduates and staff also made the point that "*the Library is an extension of academic courses*".

Many other criteria for "working well" were mentioned during the focus groups and a complete list appears in Appendix C, Table 3.

5.4 Common Themes

A number of common themes and notable differences emerged from the focus group sessions. The data was examined to discover whether there was agreement on issues across the two constituent groups, Staff/Postgraduates and Undergraduates. Common elements were also identified across all the campuses.

5.4.1 Common Themes for Staff/Postgraduate Groups

Services: Access

The staff and postgraduates were all interested in having more access to electronic databases from their offices and homes.

Services: Information resources

Although there were many comments about information resources, there were no recognisable themes across the staff/postgraduate groups. However there were agreed performance measures that the collections should be relevant to the curriculum and up-to-date.

Services: Document delivery

Document delivery was seen as important by all groups and prompt service was given as a measure of library service.

Services: Information services and information skills training

Information skills training was mentioned as a necessary service.

Services: Facilities

The need for an adequate photocopying service was reiterated on each campus.

Performance indicators and measures

- availability of remote access
- quality of the photocopying service
- queues
- timeliness of document delivery
- friendliness and knowledge of reference staff
- accuracy of shelving order
- availability of information skills training
- relevance of collection to the curriculum
- currency of the collection

5.4.2 Common Themes for Undergraduate Groups

Services: Access

The undergraduate groups said access to the Internet was important and that the catalogue must be user friendly.

Services: Information resources

The Library should provide core resources for courses and ensure that the materials were new and current.

Services: Document delivery

All undergraduate groups wanted extension of the document delivery system, but different needs were expressed at each Campus.

- At Albury/Wodonga intercampus loans for undergraduates were seen as important
- At Bendigo it was suggested that interlibrary loans should be available to undergraduates willing to pay (the system that existed previously)
- At Bundoora interlibrary loans for final year law students were proposed.

Services: Information services and skills training

Information skills training was seen as important on every campus, particularly for building skills in using electronic resources.

Services: Facilities

A smoothly running photocopying service is seen universally as a necessity while the undergraduates at Bendigo and Bundoora specifically mentioned a need for group discussion rooms.

Performance indicators and measures

- availability of remote access to electronic resources
- quality of the photocopying service
- availability of information skills training
- friendliness and knowledge of reference staff
- relevance of collections to the curriculum
- reliance on other collections (other libraries, lecturers etc.)

5.4.3 Common themes across the campuses

The data has been taken from the consolidated tables prepared from the focus groups transcripts, listing services and performance indicators. Topics included were mentioned at least once by any of the focus groups at a particular campus.

Services: Access

Remote access to electronic resources, including the Internet, from home or office is considered a highly desirable service. These comments came from both staff and students.

The computer catalogue is an important facility and it must be user friendly. At each campus the need for better ways of searching the catalogue was mentioned, but the type of access requested differed.

The availability of telephone renewals was a service seen as particularly useful by participants at all campuses.

Services: Information resources

There was general agreement that there is a need for new, current materials and that the Library should hold the core resources to support the curriculum.

Services: Document delivery

Interlibrary loans and document delivery rated very highly and the two regional campuses made mention of the importance of intercampus loans.

Services: Information services and skills training

There was general agreement on the important place of information skills classes and there was evidence that more could be offered.

All campuses saw the importance of liaison with library staff in disseminating information about library services.

Services: Facilities

Photocopying services were discussed in all groups and improvements suggested. These varied from library to library.

The provision of quiet study areas was seen as desirable at each campus.

Performance indicators and measures

The overall indicators were that the library was working well when the client left the library satisfied and when the library could supply most of the resources that he/she needed.

Other common indicators/measures were:

- availability of remote access to electronic resources
- quality of the photocopying service
- adequacy of space and seating
- queues
- timeliness of document delivery
- friendliness, knowledge and adequacy of reference staff
- collections relevant to the curriculum

6. Discussion

The aims of this first phase of the Client Needs Assessment project were to identify the services which are, or would be, of most value to clients and to identify the indicators clients use to evaluate library services.

While the focus group approach cannot provide, statistical outcomes it was used to tap into a wide range of clients' opinions and to give a broad brush picture of their view of the services which the University Library should provide.

A structured questioning approach is implicit in focus group technique. Although a sequence of questions was put to participants, it was found that the responses to one question sometimes matched a different question in the sequence. Participants also tended to attach quality indicators to services e.g. an important service was "*helpful staff*" not just "staff". Thus data about service indicators was drawn from across the responses. Furthermore, there seemed to be a pre-conceived perception by the groups that what was being sought was an assessment of the Library's performance. The nature of a focus group does not permit the explicit statement to participants of the purpose of the focus group. So although not the goal this phase, many comments were received about performance. It is also implicit in the focus group approach that the statements made by participants are accepted without comment or response from the facilitator. This meant that it was not possible to clarify a participant's perceived misunderstanding or misinformation about library services during the focus group session, although often there was an opportunity afterwards.

During the data analysis and interpretation, it became apparent that participants in the focus groups designated as particularly important those services which in their view were not working well at the time. There was a tendency to disregard services which they use a great

deal and presumably would regard as important (e.g. loans), but which were not problematic. This needs to be considered when interpreting the data. More importantly it will be necessary to consider the wider range of services identified by participants for inclusion in the Phase 2 survey of clients rather than limiting the survey to the nominated "important services".

There was also an inadvertent emphasis on future services which while providing useful information for Library planning, in some ways distracted participants from the identification of important existing services. It was acknowledged from the outset that participants might have difficulty in ranking the services in importance, or even in nominating their top five or ten services. This difficulty did emerge with very few groups able (or in some cases willing) to prioritise their most important services in spite of the structure imposed by the questions.

Participants highlighted a number of new services or indicated desirable enhancements to existing services. The University Library has already embarked on a number of projects that will meet some of the needs expressed by the focus groups. The new library computer system that will be in place by the end of 1998 will enhance electronic access to collections and information, in particular providing a single catalogue for all campuses. The Library will systematically extend the number of databases available, thereby increasing access to electronic resources. Forms for Interlending and Document Delivery Service requests and purchase recommendations are being made available electronically. Building plans underway at all campuses will improve physical conditions. However, some services were requested that the Library has previously considered to be outside its role or capacity to provide, e.g. distribution of photocopies of contents pages of journals, interlibrary loans for undergraduate students, PCs for wordprocessing. The inclusion of these services in the Phase 2 survey of clients will require consideration within the Library.

The way in which some of the services were mentioned made it clear that some students and staff were not aware of services already in existence. This has implications for the effectiveness of the Library's promotional activities.

Some thirteen library staff were involved in conducting the focus groups. A supplementary goal of the project was to provide a developmental experience for those staff involved, and to provide training in a skill which could be utilised in other circumstances. It was anticipated that focus groups would be an appropriate way to seek comment from groups of library staff and/or clients about issues from time to time. While those staff involved would not profess to be expert in conducting focus groups, the outcome from this project has been sufficiently positive to provide encouragement to the Library to consider adopting this approach where suitable. In some circumstances of particular sensitivity, it would be most desirable to engage an external facilitator.

Both the library staff and the clients involved in the process have expressed positive comments about the experience. The clients were pleased that their comments were sought and were appreciative of the face-to-face contact with library staff that was integral to the process. The library staff found the experience informative, particularly as they interacted with clients at a campus other than their home campus.

As a result of Phase 1:

- The Library obtained an impression of the services regarded as important by the client groups and the indicators and measures that clients use to evaluate library services.

- The Library has a framework to develop an in-depth survey which will invite clients to give their assessment of library services.
- The Library received comment on desirable new services and enhancements to existing services which can be integrated into its planning processes.
- Clients have been engaged in positive and potentially productive experiences with Library staff.
- Library staff have acquired a new skill, and have extended their personal interactions with clients.

Phase 2 of the Client Needs Assessment project will entail the development of an instrument to survey a representative sample of the client constituencies regarding the services they regard as important and their evaluation of those services.

A project team will need to be appointed to undertake Phase 2 in 1998. The Phase 1 project team has assembled a body of knowledge and experience which could contribute significantly to Phase 2. Some continuity in membership between the project teams is desirable, as is the infusion of new members who may bring other relevant skills to the project.

7. Recommendations

The Project Team recommends that

1. a programme of information dissemination to and training for staff and students be undertaken at the campus level and the University Library level to ensure that the services offered by the Library are promoted
2. the Client Services Committee take responsibility for the development of a framework for the promotion of services at the University Library level
3. the findings from the focus group interactions be incorporated into the action plans at individual campus libraries where appropriate
4. the outcomes of the focus group sessions be disseminated within the Library and the University
5. a survey instrument be developed and implemented in 1998 to gather data on the perceptions of library performance of the services identified through focus groups (ie. Phase 2 of Client Needs Assessment)
6. a task force be appointed as soon as possible to undertake Phase 2 of Client Needs Assessment

APPENDIX A

Focus Groups and Participants

Campus	Date	Group	Total No. Participants	No. Postgraduates
Bendigo	14.5.97	PG/Staff	9	3
	15.5.97	PG/Staff	9	5
	20.5.97	UG	9	
	21.5.97	UG	9	
Albury/ Wodonga	15.5.97	PG / Staff	8	2
	16.5.97	UG	4	
	15.5.97	TAFE Staff	10	
	16.5.97	TAFE Students	7	
Bundoora	22.5.97	PG / Staff	11	2
	23.5.97	PG / Staff	13	2
	26.5.97	UG	10	
	27.5.97	UG	7	
	27.5.97	PG / Staff	10	2
	29.5.97	UG	5	

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APPENDIX B

Questions to Focus Groups

1. What words come to mind when you think of the library?
2. Why do you usually go to the library?
What use do you make of the library without physically coming to this building?
3. What services do you expect from this library? (...they don't have to be services available now.)
4. Which services are the most important to you?
5. Rank the top 5 services.
6. What would tell you whether or not the library is working well for you?