

LA TROBE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

MATERIALS AVAILABILITY SURVEY 2003

Background

The University Library Strategic Plan identifies the evaluation of library services as one of the key focus areas for 2003. One of the initiatives for the year was to undertake the Materials Availability survey at the campus libraries. Materials Availability is one of a suite of three library performance indicators developed under the auspices of CAUL.

Materials availability is defined as the proportion of material sought by the user which is available in the library for use at the time it is sought. In short, if the user can find it, then it is available. Results from the survey provide information on availability and the reasons for non-availability. The overall purpose is to determine

- The extent to which the library provides the users with the items they are looking for
- The proportion of sought items not in the collection
- The adequacy of multiple copies at a campus and between campuses
- The appropriateness of loan periods
- The accuracy of shelving and users ability to find items on the shelves
- The ease of use of the catalogue to find items, to identify locations and to determine the loan status of items

The results of the recent Rodski survey identified that “the library collection including electronic resources is adequate for my needs” is the third most important factor for library users. This is also an area where the survey data provided evidence of a gap between expected and perceived library performance. Further information about the collection was also contained in many of the comments contained in the returned survey forms. Undertaking the Materials Availability survey will provide more detail in this area and support our efforts towards continuous improvement of services, resources and facilities.

The survey was last undertaken in 1995 and was conducted at six locations – Carlton, Abbotsford, Bendigo, Bendigo LRC, Bundoora and Albury-Wodonga campus libraries. It was conducted over a maximum two week period from 14 August and surveyed the availability of book, AV and print serial items.

Survey Modification

The CAUL survey instrument was modified very slightly. As in the 1995 survey, changes included

- Question 1 in the Albury-Wodonga survey form was modified to include the Wodonga TAFE users
- a question asking the user to identify the sort of material being sought – a book, a journal or an audiovisual item was added

There was early discussion about the suitability of the instrument in the increasingly electronic environment and whether additional modifications were required. Consultation with other university libraries who had administered the survey in recent years indicated they had undertaken few or no modifications and the La Trobe survey followed this path. It seemed unwise to tamper with a national performance measure too dramatically if the opportunity to evaluate the results against other libraries (that is, performance benchmark) was to be utilised.

Results

A total of 2,921 forms were handed out over the period 18 – 30 August, and 1,466 forms were returned, giving an overall response rate of 50%. Of these returned forms, 1,310 had data that

could be analysed giving a participation rate of 45%. Individual response and participation rates are provided in the campus library reports.

The data was entered into the Excel 5 spreadsheets provided in the CAUL package. The data entry for all campuses was undertaken at the Bendigo Campus Library.

The immediate availability of materials across the campus libraries ranged from 74% to 80% overall, for all client groups, with the average for the library as a whole as 76%. The range at the 95% confidence level varied from campus to campus and is detailed in the individual campus reports.

A comparison of results with the 1995 survey is given in Table 1. This shows an improvement in nearly all categories across the libraries.

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Table 1. Comparison of 2003 and 1995 Results

	Albury-Wodonga		Bendigo		Bundoora		All campuses	
	2003	1995	2003	1995	2003	1995	2003	1995
Materials immediately available	80%	66%	76%	62%	74%	68%	76%	67%
Not in collection	3%	5%	4%	11%	4%	7%	4%	7%
User error - catalogue search	0%	1%	0%	1%	2%	0%	1%	1%
At another location	5%	0%	2%	0%	0%	1%	2%	2%
User error - location check	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%
On loan	6%	11%	8%	11%	8%	11%	8%	9%
User error - item status check	0%	2%	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%	1%
Missing	1%	6%	5%	6%	6%	7%	5%	6%
User error - shelf search	2%	7%	4%	6%	3%	3%	3%	4%
Other	2%	1%	0%	2%	1%	1%	1%	2%
Confidence level	4.54%	5.11%	4.22%	4.60%	3.48%	3.38%	2.30%	1.89%
Materials availability range at 95% confidence level	76% to 85%	61% to 72%	71% to 80%	58% to 67%	70% to 77%	65% to 72%	74% to 78%	65% to 69%

NB The 1995 “All campuses” result includes data from the Abbotsford, Carlton and Bendigo Learning Resource Centre libraries