

Assessment of Library Service Quality at University of The Bahamas Libraries: A Comparison of the 2008 and 2018 LibQual Surveys

[Shananda Hinsey](#)  0000-0003-4122-9218

Felicia Armbrister  0000-0002-5675-2493

University of The Bahamas

Abstract

The 21st-century learner has changed the way that libraries are being used. Academic libraries must demonstrate their value to university governing boards, therefore, libraries must understand current user perceptions to be prepared for the future. Continuous assessment of library collections, space, and services provides data needed to understand and demonstrate the impact of libraries in academia.

University of The Bahamas Libraries administered the web-based LibQUAL+® survey twice, first in 2008 and 10 years later in 2018, to assess users' perceptions and to measure service quality. The survey designed by the Association of Research Libraries and Texas A&M University has been used globally by libraries to gain insight from their user communities.

In the survey findings, library users highlighted a need for more computers, printers, and updated equipment, along with more current books and journals. The survey results also revealed that University Libraries had helpful staff who provided efficient service. Users perceived that the libraries' information literacy sessions helped them gain skills allowing them to become more efficient in their academic pursuits. With the opening of two new library buildings during this period, the onsite use of resources increased significantly for both the Harry C. Moore Library and UB North Campus Library. Overall, the general satisfaction level of users increased in 2018.

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Introduction

The academic library has always been an integral part of scholarly endeavors in the academy (Mallya & Payini, 2019). However, in the last three decades, technological advancements have allowed vast amounts of digitized information to be made available online which has given rise to the misguided idea that libraries are no longer central to scholarly work (Selga-Cristobal, 2018, p. 2).

Academic libraries have reported an increase in negative perceptions of the services they provide owing to the disconnect between what libraries do and how services are perceived by users (Kiilu & Otike, 2016). Libraries must then determine what students and faculty want and find ways to deliver innovative services tailored to their needs. In a rapidly changing technological environment, it means shaping or reshaping the narrative on what the library is doing,

how it can adapt to meet user needs, and also ensure that users are aware of what they can do to make the most of what the library has to offer (Mallya & Payini, 2019).

Surveying library users to gather information about their needs and expectations of library services provides library administrators with the data needed to assess and improve services. The Association of Research Libraries (2022) developed LibQual, a web-based survey, to measure library users' perceptions of levels of service quality. LibQUAL has proven helpful in providing means to understanding what users want and expect when they use Library services (Rehman, 2012, p. 2).

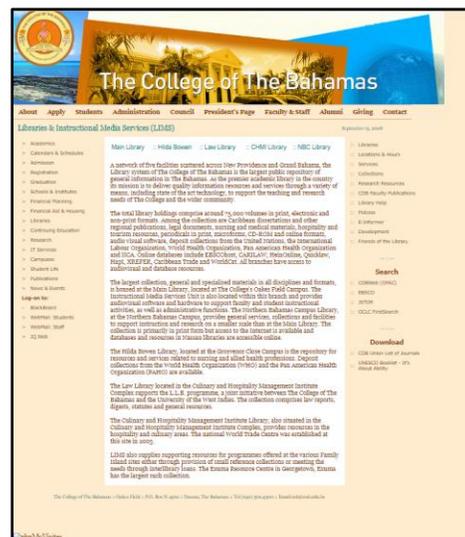
University of The Bahamas Libraries has participated in two cycles of LibQUAL™ (2008 and 2018) to assess the libraries' performance in terms of meeting the needs and perceived desires of library patrons. In the 10 years between the 2008 and 2018 surveys the University Libraries' system underwent significant changes: reducing the number of constituent branch libraries from five to three, in addition to a change in name from Libraries and Instructional Media Services (Figure 1) to University Libraries (Figure 2). Other major changes included:

- The institution reoriented and rebranded from the College of The Bahamas to University of The Bahamas in 2016, placing a greater emphasis on research and scholarship.
- Harry C. Moore Library & Information Centre opened on April 8, 2011, replacing the Oakes Field Campus Main Library located in the A Block (now known as the Keva Bethel Building). The three-floor, state-of-the-art library represented a significant improvement in the delivery of library services.
- The Law Library relocated from the Bahamas Hotel Training Centre building to the third floor of the Harry C. Moore

Library and Information Centre in 2011 and was renamed the Law Collection (Adams, 2014).

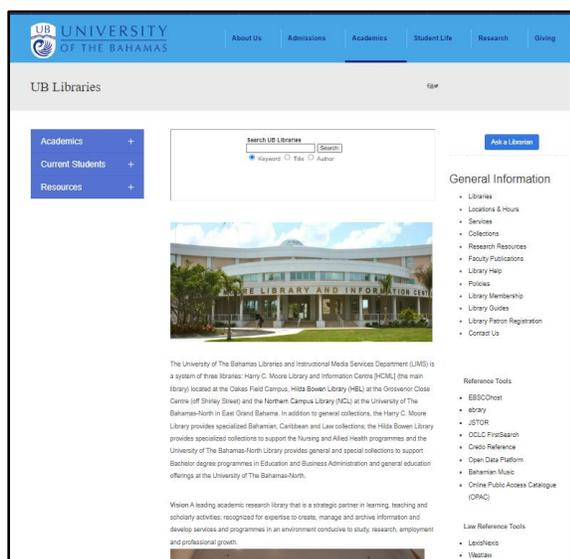
- The Culinary and Hospitality Management Institute Library, also located in the Bahamas Hotel Training Centre building, was merged with the Oakes Field Campus Library in 2011 (Walker & Ballance, 2014).
- UB North Campus Library moved to a new campus in East Grand Bahama in 2010 (unfortunately, the campus and its library were destroyed by Hurricane Dorian in September 2019).
- There has been continuous development of the library's online presence (compare the library webpages 2008 and 2018, Figures 1 and 2), the addition of more online databases and electronic resources as well as adding a single discovery search function ("Google-type" search) to access all UB University Libraries resources.

Figure 1 *LIMS Webpage, 2008*



Note: Screenshot of the LIMS Webpage from the Internet Archive Wayback Machine, September 15, 2008

Figure 2 University Libraries Webpage, 2018



Note: Screenshot of the UB Libraries webpage from the Internet Archive Wayback Machine, December 10, 2018.

One of the objectives of administering the LibQual survey in 2018 was to determine whether users' perceptions had changed over the course of 10 years as a result of the changes to the services offered, changes in information access, and most notably, the move of the libraries to new facilities at both the Oakes Field and the UB North campuses.

About University Libraries at University of The Bahamas

The University Libraries at UB is a system that currently includes two libraries in Nassau, on New Providence Island (Harry C. Moore Library and Information Centre and Hilda Bowen Library) and one in Freeport on the island of Grand Bahama (UB North Campus Library). Together the three libraries serve a population of approximately 4,400 full and part-time students and approximately 177 full-time and 237 part-time faculty (the UB North Campus serves 500 students and the Hilda Bowen Library serves over 500 nursing and allied health students; University of The Bahamas, 2019, pp. 4, 9).

The UL system holds approximately 90,000 volumes including various specialized collections, such as the Bahamian and West Indian collections, the Caribbean dissertations collection, and the United Nations depositary collection. The University also has access to over 100,000 academic journals, predominantly through online subscription databases.

The University of The Bahamas' mission and vision for continued growth and development in the areas of research, innovation, and service to the community provide the contextual structure of this report. It is useful to review the objective of Article 4 of the University of The Bahamas Act (2016) which states that the mission of University of The Bahamas "shall be to advance and expand access to higher education, promote academic freedom, drive national development and build character through teaching, learning, research, scholarship, and service." University Libraries mission statement: "to build and preserve collections in physical and virtual environments that nurture learning, support teaching and research through the discovery and use of information resources" (University Libraries Mission statement, 2023) supports the UB mission.

What is LibQUAL?

When seeking a method to investigate student needs, libraries looked to the popular measure of service quality from the business world, SERVQUAL, an instrument developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry in 1988. However, Herson and Altman's 2001 study showed that the needs of consumers in the business world and library users are not the same and neither are the products being consumed (Selga-Cristobal, 2018, p. 5).

Texas A&M University professors modified SERVQUAL to measure service quality in the non-profit sector, specifically to address

the unique needs of libraries “to solicit, track, understand, and act upon users’ opinions of service quality” (Selga-Cristobal, 2018, p. 5).

The Association of Research Libraries promoted LibQUAL in the early 2000s as a means of discovering how “users’ perception” of what library services should be different or coincide with their “expectations.” Kayongo and Helm (2010) share that their library had used this evaluation twice and found the results for customer service were useful.

How does LibQUAL help Libraries?

Selga-Cristobal suggests that as libraries plan for the future, they need to consider their competition, such as mega bookstores and the Internet, and “expand their thinking to put their users’ needs as first priority” (2018, p. 2).

Therefore, libraries must have a clear understanding of what their users see as needs and wants, and this is where administering the LibQUAL survey can help. Even if the library has the most extensive collections and tries to provide good service, “if the library is not aware of what its users think of the services it offers, all efforts to connect users with great resources will be in vain” (Selga-Cristobal, 2018, p. 3).

The result is a tool that measures three dimensions of user experience of library services, Affect of Service, Information Control, and Library as Place. The survey allows users to evaluate precisely how the library resources and contact with library staff met or failed their needs (Thompson, et al., 2008).

Kiriri notes that although LibQUAL was created to better measure library services, it should not be assumed that it universally applies to all libraries, especially those not in the West (Wang et al., 2022; Kiriri, 2019, p. 55). Researchers from Africa and Asia evaluated the adaptability of LibQUAL to

non-Western settings finding that with adjustments, LibQUAL was useful (Rehman et al., 2014, p. 86). The results of Kiriri’s (2019) study validated similar studies that endorsed modifying LibQual, as needed, to fit the unique circumstances of the society and cultures the libraries served, thus the survey has been used in The Bahamian context and produced meaningful results.

Significance of the LibQUAL Service Assessment

Library users have different information needs, expectations, and timelines to receive information. Therefore librarians must have an understanding of the user’s expectations as well as which service will meet their needs best. In librarianship, quality service is the availability and access to information resources, services delivered, and the skills and performance of library professionals and the facilities that satisfy users’ perceptions and expectations. Continuous quality assessment must be conducted to ensure that University Libraries provide quality services and resources to meet the needs of its users. The assessment helps to identify users’ expectations and perceptions as well as the gaps between what users want, need, and perceive library services to be. Comparing the 2008 and 2018 assessments provide insight into trends in user expectations and illustrate where the library has made improvements or areas where attention must be focused to improve services.

Methodology: The LibQUAL Instrument

The LibQUAL+™ survey instrument includes 22 core items categorized into three sections: Affect of Service, Information Control, and Library as Place.

- Affect of Service uses nine questions for users to score the way library staff handled requests and users in the process (Kiriri, 2019, p. 54). It measures the empathy with which the library delivers service to its users as well as staff

responsiveness, assurance, and reliability.

- Information Control determines “whether users are able to find the required information in the library in the format of their choosing, in an independent and autonomous way” (Association of Research Libraries, 2012, quoted in Kiriri 2019, p. 55). It uses eight questions to investigate the ease with which users can access resources, the availability of modern equipment, the usefulness of the library’s website and evaluate whether or not the resources they found were useful and adequate for their purposes (Rehman et al., 2014, p. 85).
- Library as Place evaluates the library environment and its facilities as an inspiring, comfortable space for study, learning, and research. This section consists of five questions that allow users to address what they like or dislike about the physical library environment and the ways it is set up, such as for individual study or group work, and as a space that is conducive to study and learning (Rehman et al., 2014, p. 85).

The survey also allowed University Libraries to include 11 additional questions: five under local items, five regarding information literacy, three about general satisfaction with library service, three on library usage trends, and demographic questions.

- Ease and timeliness in getting materials from other libraries (Interlibrary Loan/Document Delivery)
- Access to photocopying and printing facilities
- Library borrowing conditions fit for my work needs
- Library staff teaching me how to find information
- Opening hours during the fall, spring, and summer semesters

For the service dimension questions only, respondents were asked to rate each question according to their *Minimum*, *Desired*, and *Perceived* levels of service on a 9-point Likert scale of 1 (lowest) to 9 (highest).

- Minimum (MIN) - The number representing the minimum level of service found acceptable
- Desired (DES) - The number representing the level of service wanted/desired
- Perceived (PER) - The number representing the current level of service believed to be provided by the library

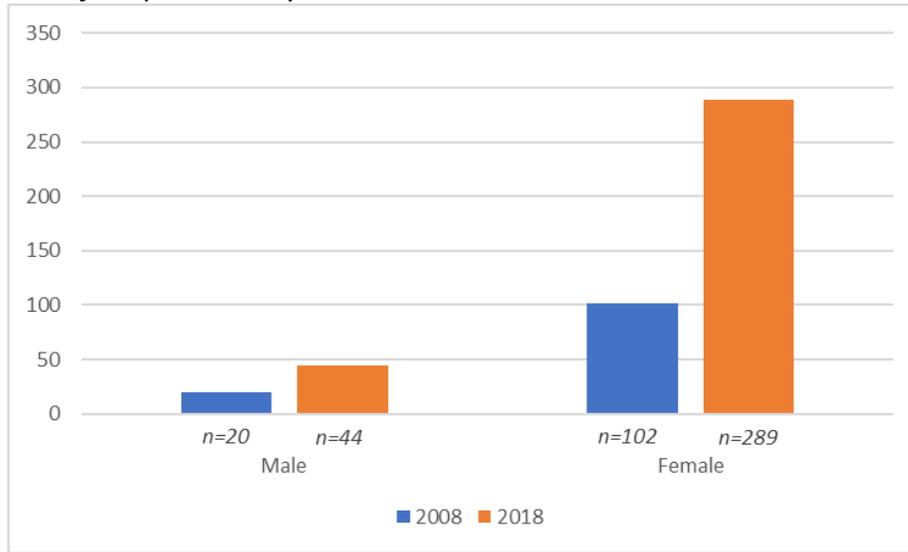
Ratings received for the *Minimum*, *Desired*, and *Perceived* levels of service allow the library to perform gap analysis which calculates the distance between desired service levels and minimally acceptable service levels.

Finally, the survey allowed users to provide open-ended comments about library services. The same general satisfaction and information literacy questions were included in both the 2008 and 2018 surveys.

Sampling

Surveys were distributed at all libraries in both 2008 and 2018. A convenience sampling method was used. In both instances the surveys were circulated electronically via e-mail blast and the University’s weekly online newsletter, and printed copies were available at all sites, however in 2018 no printed surveys were distributed at Hilda Bowen Library. Users from the University community (students, staff, and faculty) were invited to participate as desired. In 2008 122 surveys were completed whereas in 2018 333 valid surveys were collected (Figure 3 illustrates numbers of respondents by sex).

Figure 3 *Number of Respondents by Sex*



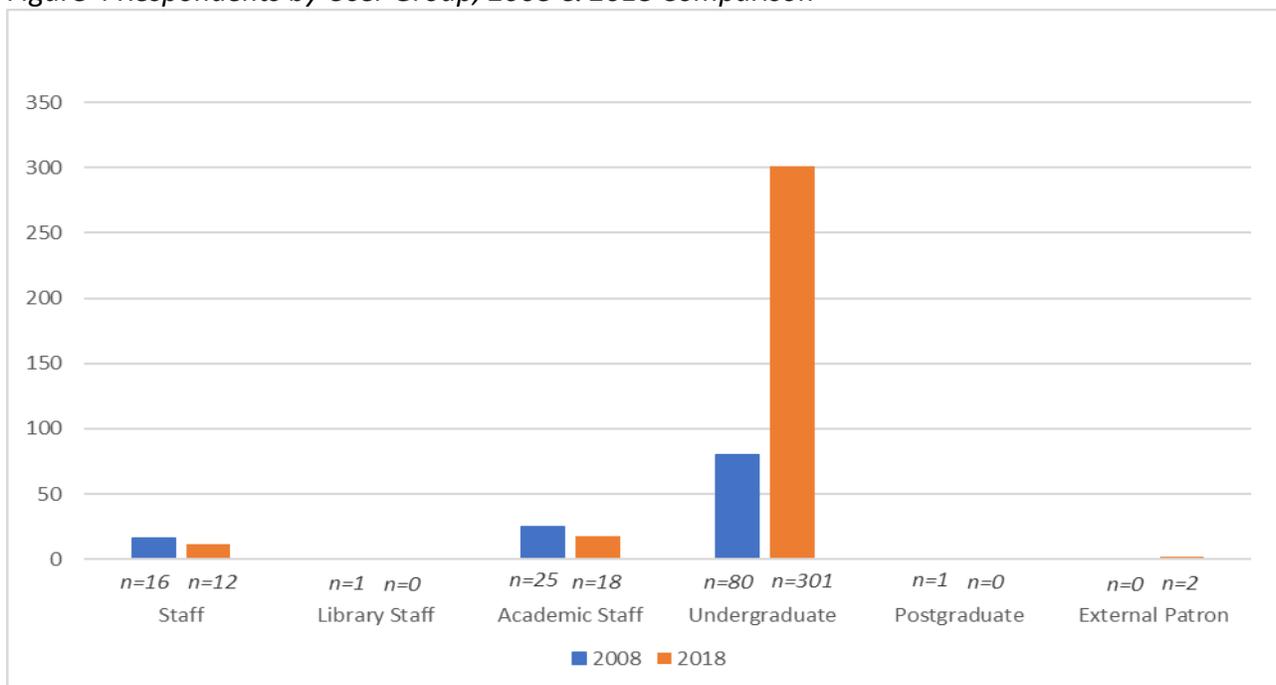
Results

Demographic Summary

The number of participants almost tripled in 2018 compared to 2008. However, there was

a decrease in the number of faculty participants and an increase in the number of staff participants in 2018 compared to 2008 (Figure 4).

Figure 4 *Respondents by User Group, 2008 & 2018 Comparison*



Note: There were no Postgraduate patrons surveyed in 2018 and no External Patrons surveyed in 2008.

Gap-Score Calculations

Perceived Minus Minimum ratings (P – M) = Service Adequacy

Subtracting the *Minimum* score from the *Perceived* score on any given question provides the service adequacy gap. Service adequacy is an indicator of the extent to which the library meets the minimum expectations of its users. A negative service adequacy gap score reveals that the users’ perceived level of service quality is below their minimum expectations.

Perceived Minus Desired ratings (P – D) = Service Superiority

Subtracting the *Desired* score from the *Perceived* score on any given question provides the service superiority gap. Service superiority is an indicator of the extent to which the library is exceeding the desired expectations of its users. A positive service superiority gap score reveals that your users’

perceived level of service quality is above their desired level of service quality.

We believe that the Service Superiority Gap scores provide the best indicator of how close we are to meeting or exceeding our users’ expectations of quality service. The statistical evidence to focus efforts to exceed users’ expectations is found in the LibQUAL superiority gap scores. The ratings of the desired scores are ranked along with the corresponding service superiority gap score, allowing the library to determine What Matters Most to each University Libraries user group (students, staff, and faculty). These rankings are reflected in Tables 1 and 2. Shaded areas in each chart indicate the greatest differences in service gaps. The Service Superiority Gap scores, along with the verbatim comments (Appendix) will be incorporated into broader strategic planning initiatives and the annual work plans.

Table 1 *What Matters Most: 2008 and 2018 Compared*

	2008			2018		
	Desired Service Level	Perceived Service Level	Service Superiority Gap	Desired Service Level	Perceived Service Level	Service Superiority Gap
Space for group learning and group study	7.87	5.56	-2.31	7.66	5.60	-2.06
Library space that inspires study and learning	8.22	6.25	-1.97	7.78	5.77	-2.01
Quiet space for individual work	8.28	6.44	-1.84	7.87	6.12	-1.75
A haven for study, learning, or research	8.24	6.30	-1.94	8.01	6.46	-1.55
Making electronic resources accessible from my home or office	8.05	5.55	-2.50	7.80	6.31	-1.49
Modern equipment that lets me easily access needed information	8.21	6.02	-2.19	7.95	6.53	-1.42

The printed library materials I need for my work	8.17	6.41	-1.76	7.80	6.41	-1.39
Library staff who instill confidence in users	8.01	6.36	-1.65	7.67	6.32	-1.35
Print and/or electronic journal collections I require for my work	8.19	6.19	-2.00	7.85	6.56	-1.29
A comfortable and inviting location	8.09	6.38	-1.71	8.00	6.73	-1.27
Dependability in handling users' service problems	8.12	6.73	-1.39	7.73	6.52	-1.21
Easy-to-use access tools that allow me to find things on my own	8.16	6.47	-1.69	7.91	6.73	-1.18
A library website enabling me to locate information on my own	8.32	6.42	-1.90	7.72	6.55	-1.17
Giving users individual attention	7.97	6.50	-1.47	7.42	6.29	-1.13
Making information easily accessible for independent use	8.14	6.53	-1.61	7.93	6.81	-1.12
Library staff who are consistently courteous	8.36	7.03	-1.33	8.08	7.03	-1.05
Library staff who understand the needs of their users	8.14	6.66	-1.48	7.89	6.88	-1.01
Library staff who deal with users in a caring fashion	8.24	6.87	-1.37	7.96	6.95	-1.01
The electronic information resources I need	8.13	6.25	-1.88	7.78	6.80	-0.98
Readiness to respond to users' inquiries	8.22	6.92	-1.30	7.82	6.85	-0.97
Willingness to help users	8.17	6.99	-1.18	7.99	7.04	-0.95
Library staff who have the knowledge to answer user questions	8.17	7.21	-0.96	7.94	7.07	-0.87

Note: Values are based on a Likert scale of 1 (lowest) to 9 (highest)

Table 2 Local Questions: 2008 and 2018 Compared

Local Question Summary	2008			2018		
	Desired Service Level	Perceived Service Level	Service Superiority Gap	Desired Service Level	Perceived Service Level	Service Superiority Gap
Ready access to computers / Internet / software	8.15	5.40	-2.75	7.86	6.28	-1.58
Space that facilitates quiet study	8.22	6.36	-1.86	7.95	6.38	-1.57
Ease of use of electronic resources	8.15	6.22	-1.93	7.53	6.38	-1.15
Ability to navigate library Web pages easily	8.09	6.30	-1.79	7.84	6.84	-1.00
Library staff teaching me how to find information	8.20	7.09	-1.11	7.76	6.81	-0.95

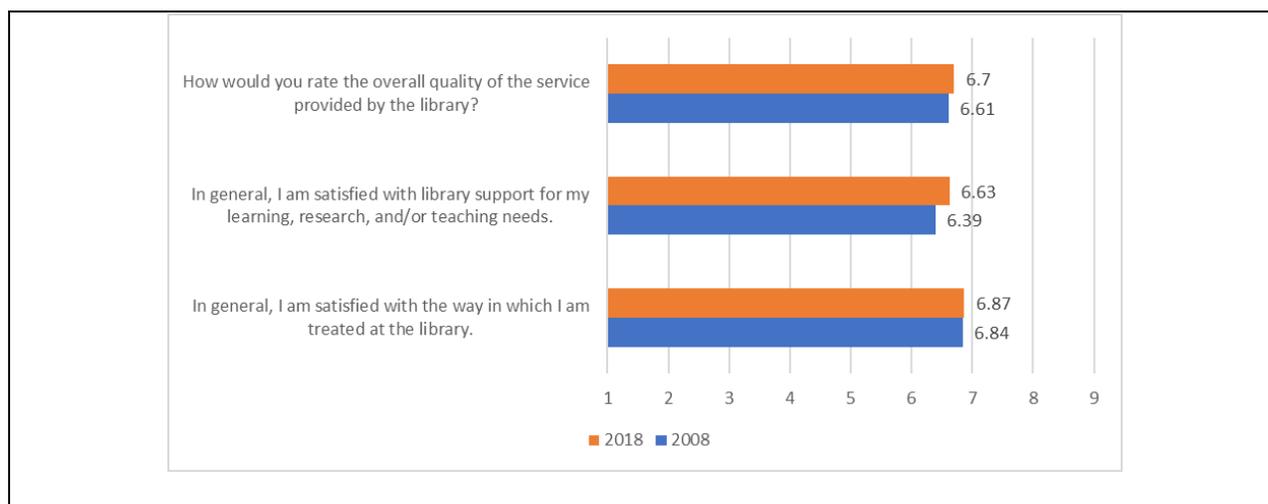
Note: Ranked by highest *Desired* ratings (descending order) for 2018 than 2008. Rating scale: 1 (lowest) – 9 (highest). Red = Areas targeted for improvement (largest gaps between *Desired* service expectations and *Perceived* performance). Green = Areas where the library is performing well and approaching service superiority.

General Satisfaction Questions: 2008 & 2018

Library users were asked three overall satisfaction questions regarding (1) quality of service, (2) how they are treated at the library,

and (3) their support for learning, research, and/or teaching needs. The user’s general satisfaction level increased in 2018, particularly in support of learning, research, and/or teaching needs (Figure 5).

Figure 5 Service Satisfaction Questions: 2008 and 2018 Compared



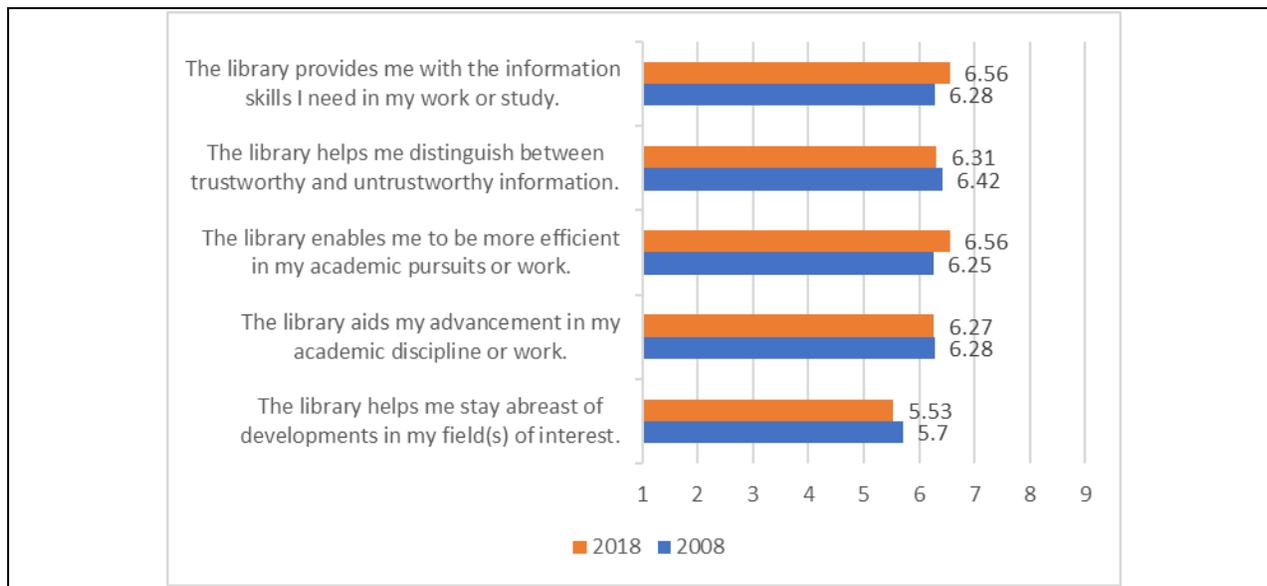
Note: Average scores where respondents rated their levels of general satisfaction on a scale from 1-9, with 9 being strongly agree.

Information Literacy: 2008 & 2018

Users rated their level of satisfaction with information literacy outcomes for the past two survey periods. Based on the information literacy statement in Figure 6 below, overall

information literacy scores have increased in the areas of information skills needed for work or study and enabling the user to be more efficient in academic pursuits or work.

Figure 6 *Information Literacy Outcomes: 2008 and 2018 Compared*



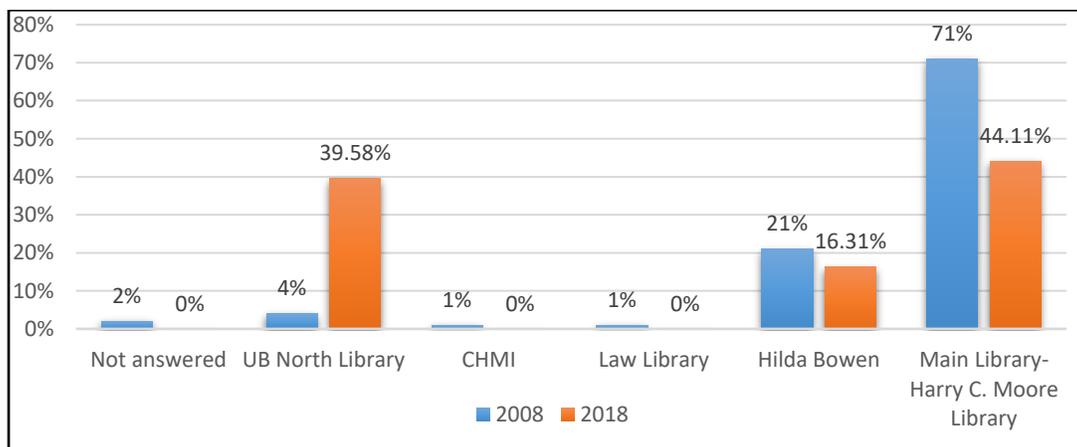
Note: Average scores where respondents rated their levels of general satisfaction on a scale from 1-9, with 9 being strongly agree.

Library Usage

Figure 7 illustrates the use of each constituent library by users who completed the survey. In 2011 two smaller library collections were amalgamated into the newly-built Harry C.

Moore Library and in 2010 the UB North Campus Library moved from downtown Freeport to the new UB North campus located in East Grand Bahama.

Figure 7 *Number of Respondents by Branch: 2008 and 2018 Compared*



In 2018 nearly 40% of the questionnaires were filled out at the UB North campus location compared to 4% in 2008, while at the Oakes Field Campus’s Harry C. Moore

Library there was a drop of nearly 30% in the number of questionnaires completed when comparing 2018 to 2008.

Figure 8 *Library Resources Usage Frequency by Total: 2008 & 2018 Comparison*

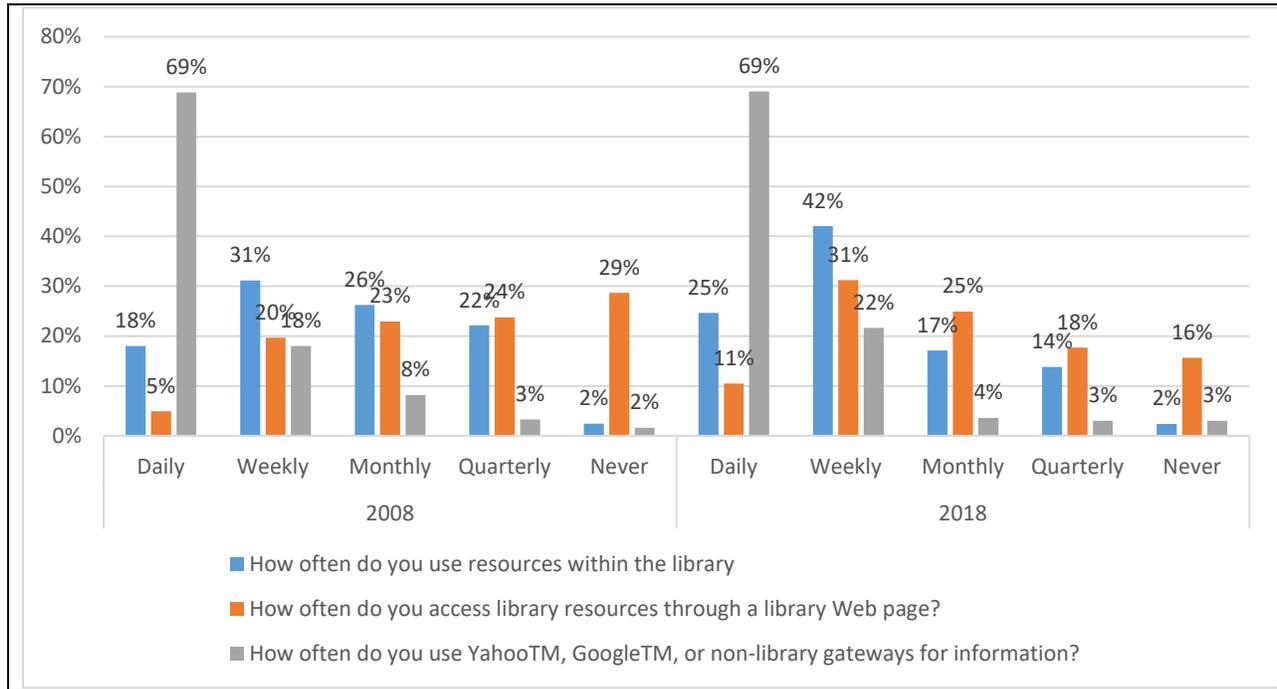


Figure 8 illustrates the use of resources either within the library, via the library webpage, or through non-library information gateways such as Yahoo and Google. It also displays the frequency with which respondents report using resources (Daily, Weekly, etc.).

Compared to 2008, UL overall ratings increased in 2018. Daily and weekly use of resources within the library increased in 2018. Daily, weekly and monthly use of the library’s website increased in 2018, while quarterly and never decreased. Daily and quarterly use of non-library gateways remained high in both years, weekly use increased in 2018 and monthly usage decreased.

In answer to the question: “How often do you use resources within the library” a

comparison of 2008 and 2018 showed an increase in daily and weekly usage indicating more frequent in-person use of the library. Answers to the question about the use of the library web page to access the library online resources show a similar increase in daily and weekly usage in the 10-year gap, and, perhaps most significantly, those who never accessed the webpage fell by almost half. This indicates that the library webpage is needed to gain access to resources. User access to all subscription-based resources is authenticated via the library website using OCLC EZproxy service. In 2008 there was no automatic authentication and both on- and off-campus access to paid online resources was relatively novel to the COB community. The rate of internet usage in Bahamian homes was 32% in 2008 compared to 83% in 2018

(<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NE.T.USER.ZS?locations=BS>).

The use of non-library sites to access information showed no significant difference over the 10 years. The use of non-library sites is still a popular way for users to access information, thus presenting an opportunity for librarians to educate users about value of using the library website to access subscription databases and other authoritative websites and digital resources.

Discussion

The top 10 things that mattered most to University of The Bahamas users based on the results from the *Desired* ratings show that our users are particularly interested in the Affect of Service and the Library as a Place. Local question results show the top service desired is “A space for quiet study” in both years that the survey was conducted. Additionally, University Libraries performed well in meeting the respondents’ expectations with the provision of competent staff delivering instruction on how to find information. Areas targeted for improvement are centered around providing comfortable spaces for individual and group study, learning, and research – components related to Library as a Place.

Despite the construction of two new library buildings, and opening of an Internet Café

and providing computers on every floor of the Harry C. Moore Library, and making computers available at all branch libraries, the recurring theme from the comments is a demand for more computers, printers, and other updated equipment such as scanners and wireless printing. Further investigation revealed that the needs were not predominantly related to research, but for computers to complete assignments and for printing facilities. The comments also highlighted the noise levels and need for current books and journals at Harry C. Moore Library, and the need for more space at both UB North Library and the Hilda Bowen Library. However, it is noted that at each branch there is an acknowledgment of staff behaviour. Users perceived the Hilda Bowen Library to have helpful staff, HCML efficient service, and UB North Campus Library caring and knowledgeable staff. In sum, comparing the two surveys reveals a consistency that what library staff were good at in 2008 is the same in 2018.

The general satisfaction level increased in 2018, particularly in support of learning, research, and teaching needs, however, areas targeted improvement and highlighted comments will be investigated further and included in the University of The Bahamas Libraries strategic plan for continuous improvement.

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Appendix

Comments Harry C. Moore Library & Information Center, 2008 and 2018

2008		2018	
Outdated resources	7	Service is good/efficient	14
Staff does a super job	4	Need current books/journals	11
Good service	4	Too noisy	10
Staff unpleasant and unhelpful	4	Staff is helpful	8
More staff needed	2	Longer opening hours on weekends/before exams	7
More computers	2	Need longer hours to access computers	6
Staff attitude needs improving	2	Need more computers	5
Pleasant staff attitude	2	Too many printer/computer issues	3
Library hours extension.	2	Access to/Need more study rooms	3
Well-organized and well kept	1	Staff needs to be more cooperative/respectful	2
Library computers are slow	1	Need more library workshops	2
Friendly staff	1	Good Resources	1
Noisy	1	Printing fees too high	1
More group study rooms	1	Too cold/uncomfortable	1
Service is fairly acceptable	1	Need scanning functionality with ability to save drive/email	1
Overall satisfaction	1	Print credit should apply to copying & scanning	1
Ways to increase usage	1	Limited access for disabilities	1
Too cold	1	Need trained student workers	1
Not an inviting environment	1	Need to address mold issue	1
More resources needed	1	Need more staff	1
Upgraded library facilities	1	Should always have copy cards	1
Sections for tutoring needed	1		
Librarians are attentive and helpful	1		
Staff needs more training	1		
EBSCOhost needs upgrading	1		
Quality organization	1		
More hands-on approach from staff	1		

Comments UB-North Library, 2008 & 2018

2008		2018	
Availability of resources and assistance	1	Needs reliable computers/more computers	16
Noisy	1	Needs more space	15
Disappointed with the A/V room	1	Needs reliable printers/more printers/color printer	15
Staff helpful	1	Helpful Staff	11
Limited resources	1	Access to reliable resources and updated equipment	5
		Longer opening hours/open on weekends	3
		Good work/love the library	2
		Lower printing cost	2
		Needs a reliable research facility	1
		Needs helpful staff	1
		Staff rushes patrons before closing	1
		Needs a quiet study area	1
		Needs faster Internet	1
		Needs online access off-campus	1
		Other printing options other than copy cards	1
		Monitoring computer usage	1
		Mediocre service	1

Comments Hilda Bowen Library, 2018

Staff is very helpful	8	Caring/knowledgeable staff	9
Staff are great	5	Need more computers/another computer lab	9
More space is needed for study	3	Very good/exceptional service	4
Staff should be more helpful	2	Needs more printers/upgrade/wireless printers	4
Safe and peaceful environment	2	Needs more desks and chairs/space for group study/assignments	3
Services offered are extremely well	2	Longer opening hours/including weekends	2
Library noisy sometimes	2	Limited resources	2
Offer more DVD health tapes	1	Good resources	1
Library equipment needs fixing	1	Lacks space	1
More resources and funding are needed	1	Need more structured seminars on library and information use for faculty and students	1
More client-centered and student-friendly	1	Needs study rooms	1
The best library	1	Needs better Internet service	1
Opens on time and very accommodating	1	Updated equipment	1
Library is the best COB has	1	Staff not helpful	1
Outdated resources	1	Janitors should clean when students are not present	1
		Create another computer lab	1
		Access to more online journals	1

Comments Law Library, 2008

Staff helpful	1		
Limited resources	1		