CUL’s Impact on Seniors

This year the large-scale survey sent to all Cornell seniors by the Cornell Office of Institutional Research and Planning (IRP) included a 4-part question about the library’s impact on their student careers at Cornell:

“To what extent have Cornell library resources and services contributed to
...your ability to evaluate the quality of the information you find
...your ability to conduct research
...your efficiency
...your academic success”
(Rating scale: not at all; very little; some; quite a bit; very much)

RAU was very pleased that IRP was willing to include our library impact questions, because the return rate of their surveys is always very high. A full 50% of the senior class responded this year to the survey. Some of the highlights:

- 57% of the seniors said that the library contributed ‘quite a bit’ or ‘very much’ to their ability to conduct research, while only 15% said it contributed ‘very little’ or ‘not at all.’ Of the four areas, conducting research was the one most significantly impacted by the library.
- The second most impacted area was student efficiency (49.7% report a significant impact, while 19.6% say there is no or very little impact.)
- Academic success was a close third (48.7% significant impact vs. 18% no or little impact.)
- The area that was least impacted by the library’s resources and services was the student’s ability to evaluate the quality of information found (40.6% report a significant impact, while almost 25% reported very little or no impact.)
- Gender: across all areas, females consistently rated the library as having a greater impact to their college careers than did males, by 6 to 10 percentage points.
- College affiliation: Of all the undergraduate colleges, AAP and Human Ecology seniors credited the library with the greatest impact across all surveyed areas, while Engineering and Hotel seniors consistently assigned it the least. In fact, in a unique result, more Engineering respondents said the library had little or no impact on them in two areas (research efficiency and information evaluation) than those who said the library impacted them quite a bit or very much. See the bar graphs below for more details.
- Race and GPA seemed to make no significant difference in how these impact questions were answered.

Although this is more than we have ever known about our students’ view on library impact, these results leave some questions unanswered. For example, were students aware of the library’s role in their access to e-resources? Although the senior survey is administered at multiple universities, the library impact questions were asked only on the local section of the survey, and were new this year, so neither cross-institutional nor longitudinal
comparisons are available.

So what are possible takeaways from these results? First we should stop to quickly pat ourselves on the back for these positive results, as well as the fact that, as in the past, the library’s resources and services continue to rank the highest in satisfaction among campus support services (such as computing, food services, etc.) Then we need to look to the future. How can we maintain or improve the library’s contributions to students’ lives in the face of the changing information scene and budget cuts? How can we enhance our relevance to students’ lives? Students shared some suggestions at recent focus groups that RAU conducted for the unit library review teams: it is important that the promotion of library resources and services come from faculty, as well as librarians; library orientation should be required as part of freshmen orientation; and library workshops should be better tied to both curricular needs and students’ schedules.

Please contact us with your thoughts or further questions, researchandassessment@cornell.edu
To what extent have Cornell library resources and services contributed to your academic success?

- ILR
- HumEc
- Hotel
- Engineering
- Arts
- AAP
- ALS

Legend:
- Not at all
- Very little
- Some
- Quite a bit
- Very much