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Nontraditional Students' Library Satisfaction

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Introduction

To understand what a “nontraditional student” is, we should first define “traditional student.” A traditional college student is between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two, attends school full time, is single, and does not work full time. In contrast to this, a nontraditional student is over the age of twenty-two, usually attends school less than full time, often has a family, and may work full time. Cross defines the nontraditional student as “an adult who returns to school full or part time while maintaining responsibilities such as employment, family, and other responsibilities of adult life. These students also may be referred to as adult students, re-entry students, returning students and adult learners.” The major difference between the two student groups is the number of responsibilities outside of the classroom.

Literature Review

A majority of the literature on nontraditional students explains the differences between traditional and nontraditional students. The following information deals with the nontraditional student. In a study of nontraditional students' adjustment to college, Chartrand found “institutional commitment and the absence of psychological distress were important predictors of intentions to continue in college.” In an article on college satisfaction, Donahue and Wong state, “it is necessary to develop a greater understanding of their (nontraditional students) unique goals and needs in a educational system that was originally established to facilitate the growth, training, and education of young adults.” In a study of nontraditional students' perceptions of their library research skills, Leverence found they “did admit to having some anxiety and deficiencies in using the computerized academic library.” Hammond found similar results in a study of nontraditional students and the library. She noted, “differences were identified in areas relating to technology, perceived value of information literacy and library skills, the willingness to pay for services, and the use of the library as a study space.” The definitions and literature point out that there are distinct differences between traditional and nontraditional students.

Garcha and Gatten proposed that “formal library instruction designed for nontraditional students needs to account for an individual’s lack of academic routine, lack of full-time commitment to academic objectives, and lack of experience of interacting with library staff and library research tools.” Lintner states, “the homogenous campus of nineteen-to-twenty-four year-olds is slowly becoming a thing of the past. A new group of educational contenders has arrived, poised to influence, impact, and reconfigure the way we look at higher education.” College libraries must be prepared to serve the nontraditional student population along with the traditional students. Heery and Morgan suggest the following: “librarians interested in developing services to nontraditional students must be able to work with others and be committed to learning from others.” Wyman adds to this by stating, “getting involved with networks for the nontraditional student is valuable because they offer opportunities for reaching students through orientations, meetings, and informal gatherings not always publicized.”

Methods

Data for this study was gathered using a survey. The survey research took place on a public university located in the Southeast. One hundred and three surveys were passed out to students on campus in different locations. One location was the library itself. Surveys were passed out at different times and on different days to try to get a broad sample of students. The survey was designed to gauge students’ satisfaction levels of the library’s hours, reference assistance, and library resources. Five questions on the survey determined if the students would fall into the traditional or nontraditional student category. These questions dealt with academic course load, work hours, age, marital status, and children. Answering yes or meeting the determined criteria to any one of these questions placed them in the nontraditional student category. For the purpose of this study a student is deemed nontraditional if they work more than thirty hours per week, carry six semester hours or less, are married, have children, or are twenty-two or older.

There were also five open-ended questions on the survey that asked the students about the library. These questions were what they liked best and the least about the library, what they wanted to see added or removed from the library, and why they most often came to the library.

Results

Students were also asked to rate various aspects of library services on a scale.

The scale was:

1. Very satisfied
2. Satisfied
3. Dissatisfied
4. Very dissatisfied
5. Don’t know

Answers were tallied by counting numbers 1 and 2 as Satisfied and 3 and 4 as Dissatisfied; 5s were discarded. The following is a list of the services and the satisfaction rate for traditional vs. nontraditional students.

Traditional Student Responses

Question	Satisfied	Dissatisfied
Weekday Hours	44	2
Weekend hours	39	7
Noise level	37	12
Furnishings	37	7
Number of copiers	29	16
Quality of copiers	32	12
Cost of copies	30	14
Number of computers	30	18
Quality of computers	34	13
Number of books	35	9
Number of periodicals	29	10
Assistance from student workers	37	7
Assistance from librarians	39	6
Overall rating of library service	39	8

Nontraditional Responses

Question	Satisfied	Dissatisfied
Weekday Hours	26	4
Weekend hours	12	19
Noise level	20	12
Furnishings	25	4
Number of copiers	18	13
Quality of copiers	19	11
Cost of copies	25	11
Number of computers	17	13
Quality of computers	19	12
Number of books	20	10
Number of periodicals	20	10
Assistance from student workers	26	5
Assistance from librarians	27	4
Overall rating of library service	25	6

Responses to Open-Ended Questions

The following is a selection from responses by non-traditional students to the open-ended questions. Weekend hours, parking, and the location of the entrance to the library were cited as problems by a number of those responding. A number stated that the reason they most often came to the library was for a quiet place to study and to do their research.

Why do you most often visit the library?

- Research
- I can get help when I need it and I am able to concentrate and study
- Study and research
- Check my email, study

- Computer use
- Gives me a place to reflect on lectures
- To do assignments
- Look for books
- To use Blackboard and check email

What would you like to see changed in the library?

- Less noise, no food
- More programs
- More computers
- Weekend hours and accessibility
- Lights are dim on second floor
- Remodeling
- More access to better info & materials
- More hours on the weekend
- Strict rule enforcements
- Furniture
- Colors- the atmosphere on the main floor is dreary

What do you like best about the library?

- Very resourceful/ helpful
- Getting to know the staff
- We have a place to study when it's needed
- Copies printed from printers are free!
- Friendliness of the staff and students
- Set up of computers
- It is usually quite and a good place to study
- Allow students to print research articles
- Computers and student help

- The people who work there
- Comfortable
- The amount of research info

What do you like least about the library?

- Noise
- The copiers
- Not enough selection of books for research purposes
- The entrance into the library
- Not enough materials
- Weekend hours
- Need more recent books
- The card system for making copies
- Computers
- Entrance is not on main road, there needs to be two entrances instead of one, parking

What would you like to see added to the library?

- More computers
- More computers for research
- More books and periodicals
- Updated computers and printers
- More books
- Newer computers
- More copiers and more comfortable furniture
- Coffee shop/ magazines
- Allow students to check books out by themselves, reserve books online
- Lounge area with sofas
- Computers with Microsoft, the environment is good like the computer lab
- More up to date books

Discussion

The good news for the library is that both traditional and nontraditional students were satisfied with the overall service of the library. It is clear from the surveys, however, that the nontraditional students are not satisfied with the library's weekend hours. Only 38% of the nontraditional students said they were satisfied, compared to 84% of the traditional students. Since the nontraditional students most likely work or have other responsibilities during the week, the library's weekend hours are more important to them. Currently the library's weekend hours are 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Saturday and 1:00 to 11:00 p.m. on Sunday. The number of copiers and computers were also a problem for the nontraditional students. Since their time is more limited in the library they do not want to wait for equipment.

Recommendations

There are several ways in which college libraries can improve their service to nontraditional students.

- **Hours of Operation.** The library should be open late enough for nontraditional students who work during the day and provide adequate weekend hours.
- **Remote Access.** Students should be able to access most databases from home.
- **Remote Reference.** The library should be able to provide remote assistance to the student with their remote access. Libraries can accomplish this through telephone reference, Internet chat, and e-mail. It can be very beneficial to a nontraditional student to ask a question online or over the telephone as opposed to making a trip to the library.
- **Library Instruction and Tutorials.** The library should ensure that all students, not just freshmen, are getting orientations to the library. Nontraditional students will often need more library instruction if they have been away from school for any length of time.

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