

Evidence-Based Management

FLORIDA ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

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The FAU Challenge: Meeting Assessment Requirements Effectively and Affordably

To secure accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), Florida Atlantic University (FAU) follows an assessment cycle of assess, analyze, make improvements, and reassess, which requires the FAU Libraries to submit an assessment plan showing self-studies for each academic year.

In partial fulfillment of this requirement, FAU Libraries implemented a survey instrument to measure customer satisfaction in 2004 and 2007. “The survey instrument we used was expensive and difficult to implement and our response rate was poor,” says William Miller, Dean of University Libraries. “We needed something that was better, easier, and cheaper. We needed a more effective way to gauge public opinion and make changes based on what we learned.”

The LibSat Solution: Flexible Administration, Data Easy to Access, Continuous Improvement

In the fall of 2009, FAU implemented the LibSat module (part of LibPAS, an evidence-based management solution) offered by Counting Opinions. The survey, one of the self-studies included in the FAU Libraries Assessment Plan, was made available to students and faculty August through December 2009 and during the same time period in 2010. FAU selected fall semester because it is the busiest time of year.

Miller recognizes that LibSat is designed to be available continuously but has chosen to make it available just for several months each year to prevent “survey fatigue” on the part of students and faculty. Surveying at the same time each year provides comparative data and, according to Darlene Parrish, University Librarian, and Malka Schyndel, Associate University Librarian, this will also give SACS the three years worth of required comparative data for 2009, 2010, and 2011 for the reaccreditation review.

During the fall survey periods the FAU Libraries used a variety of tools to boost response rate, including in-library signs and fliers. The main campus library website used the pre-built, ready-to-use LibSat corner widget to draw attention to the survey during the months it is available. Other campus libraries

provided a link to the survey and displayed the Counting Opinions logo on their websites. One of the branch libraries also used Facebook. FAU used both the short and long versions of the survey and found that approximately 25% of respondents chose to complete the long version.

LibSat provides easy access to data and useful results to make improvements more readily. In addition to the quantitative results, FAU uses the verbatim comments to identify major themes and develop positive and negative summary reports to address specific areas.

Parrish and Schyndel say library staff were surprised at the number of comments they received. “People are taking time to write lengthy comments which we then categorize to analyze trends and make recommendations for improvement,” Parrish and Schyndel say.

To demonstrate responsiveness, the library maintains a webpage www.library.fau.edu/assessment/Improvements.htm highlighting improvements made based on LibSat.

These include:

- Purchasing additional laptops for students to check out
- Improving the seating in the main campus library lobby
- Redesigning the FAU Libraries website home page to facilitate searching
- Extending library hours at the Jupiter campus library
- Increasing security on the Davie campus library

In addition, based on survey comments some changes were made to the physical space including the addition of signs to indicate “quiet areas.” “We knew noise was a problem but LibSat highlighted the extent to which our patrons are dissatisfied,” Miller says. “This is a hard issue for us to tackle because we have too many people for our physical space and, frankly, we have a noisy culture. But we have set up quiet areas and our users can see we are being responsive.”

Miller, Parrish and Schyndel point to the following benefits of using LibSat to measure customer satisfaction at FAU:

- **Support for accreditation.** The SACS accreditation cycle will look at three years of customer satisfaction data, including patron satisfaction with library instruction. “We have to show our accrediting agencies that we are

analyzing, evaluating, and making changes. LibSat offers an effective, affordable tool for this type of analysis,” says Miller.

- **Hard data to support need for change.** Miller says LibSat provided leverage in dealing with printing complaints at the libraries. Armed with LibSat data they were able to get the department responsible for managing campus-wide printing to address the complaints by putting in new card readers.
- **Highlight positive aspects of library service.** The verbatim comments are not just focused on the negative, says Miller. “LibSat identifies positive areas, too—the things our users appreciate, like the expertise and skill of the staff.”
- **Customized surveys for specific areas of service.** FAU uses another LibPAS module, InformsUs, to develop customized surveys for more in-depth information. For example, individual campus libraries surveyed their patrons on topics such as library hours, Text-a-Librarian, computer lab and a nursing tutorial. “LibSat and InformsUs make it easy for us to customize and pre-test surveys as our needs arise,” Parrish and Schyndel say.
- **Track trends over time.** FAU plans to do the LibSat survey every year during the fall semester. This will allow them to assess improvements continuously. Each campus library can easily access results from LibSat and InformsUs to monitor results regularly.
- **Free access to ACRLMetrics.** ACRL has contracted with Counting Opinions to provide an online service with unprecedented access to the annual ACRL Academic Library Trends & Statistics Survey data as well as the biennial National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Academic Library Survey data in one convenient location. FAU, as a LibPAS subscriber, can (in real-time) benchmark results with other institutions using either the ACRL or NCES databases or a combination of ACRL and NCES data elements. This functionality is included as part of the annual LibPAS subscription fee.

About Florida Atlantic University

Florida Atlantic University, established in 1961, officially opened its doors in 1964 as the fifth public university in Florida. Today, the University serves more than 28,000 undergraduate and graduate students on seven campuses and sites. The University offers 170 undergraduate and graduate degrees with a faculty of more than 1,000. FAU is ranked as a High Research Activity institution by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

FAU Libraries operate on six campuses. The libraries house approximately 2.5 million items along with unique special collections in book arts, American Revolutionary War and Civil War documents, print and recorded music, rare book and manuscripts, and archival materials. The libraries also provide access to more than 200,000 full-text electronic books and subscribe to 20,000 full-text electronic journals, plus access to several hundred proprietary databases. FAU Libraries serve a diverse community with multifaceted creative programming, encouraging public engagement and forming cultural alliances as well as maintaining formal relationships with the Center for Research Libraries, the State University Libraries (through the Florida Center for Library Automation) and area libraries in the Southeast Florida Library Information Network.

About Counting Opinions

Facing constant competitive challenges, libraries and library organizations need better tools to understand and manage customer needs and to compete more effectively for scarce resources. In business since 2004, Counting Opinions provides libraries and library organizations with a cost-effective, evidence-based management solutions' platform for the comprehensive management of their performance and customer satisfaction data. Solutions for custom surveys, open-ended customer feedback, trends, benchmarking, outcomes and peer comparisons are also available. For more information, www.countingopinions.com/academic

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