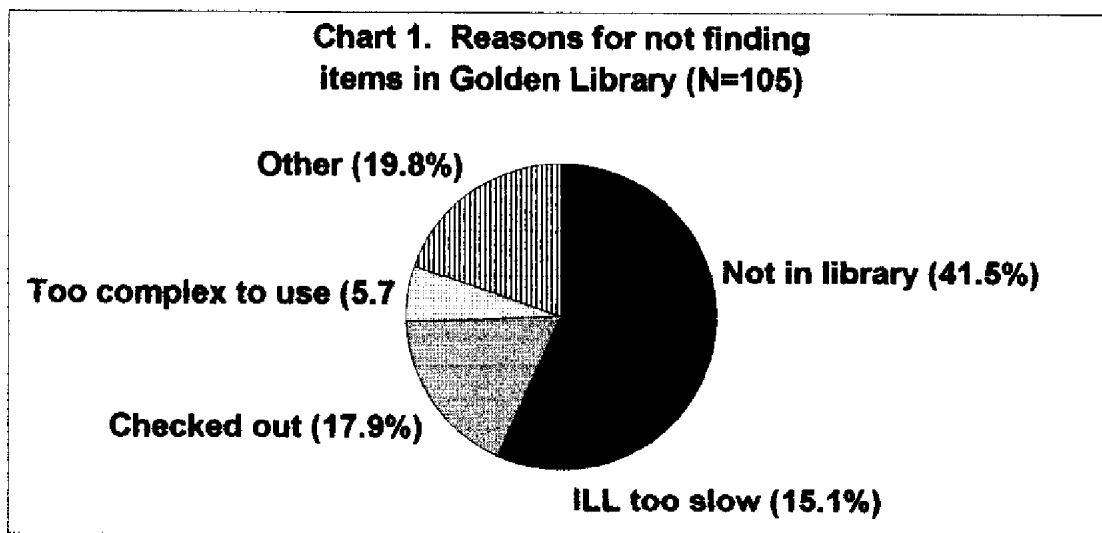


## IMPROVING THE RESEARCH SUCCESS RATE IN THE GOLDEN LIBRARY

The ENMU Golden Library staff treats our students as "customers." We want our patrons to feel that they have been completely successful in finding the library resources they need. When one of these customers comes looking and does not find what he or she needs, we would like to know about the problems they encountered, and what can be done to avoid them in the future. Even so, we know we can't anticipate and avoid every problem, so we are trying to design recovery processes that will tell us about the problems we didn't prevent and allow us to fix them to the best of our ability.

Each year the Golden Library surveys a sample of our patrons. We ask the first 500 people who come to the Library to give us their impressions. The survey form has several parts. The first part asks what happened during the current visit to the Library. The answers provide an annual snapshot that can be compared with prior years to spot changes in user perceptions. The first survey was conducted in 1968 and that data provided us a base year from the time before library automation. The surveys were discontinued until 1992, but were conducted annually each year thereafter. Unfortunately, records were not kept of the analyses done in previous years so this analysis is based on 1998 only.

In 1998, our patrons returned 245 usable forms. Not all of the respondents came to the Library looking for materials. There were 144 replies to the question "If you came to find information or specific library material, please rate your success." In answering that question, 60 respondents (24.5% of the total sample of 245 and 41.6% of the 144 who were looking for information) indicated that they had found everything they were looking for. However, 105 people answered the question "If you didn't find everything you were looking for, what was the reason?" Chart 1 breaks out the reasons given by these 105 for not finding all of the materials needed. The "others" on this chart include "There was no one around to help me" (3 answers), "A librarian was unable to help me" (2), "I ran out of time", and more.



Based on past experience we expect about 30% of the materials requested on interlibrary loan (ILL) to be available in the Golden Library at the time of the request. Obviously, what some of the students think are "lack of material" problems are really "access" problems. Of the 105 who did not find everything they needed, 55 listed the items they did not find. A reference librarian took the list and searched for the items about two weeks after the survey was completed. We concluded that a professional librarian could have found acceptable material for 61.8% of the items on the list. Chart 2 summarizes what the librarians found.

Respondents did not find what they needed in these subject areas	Number of items not found	Number we found	Difference
Ecology/Biology/Medicine	10	3	7
Dance/Music/Plays	3	1	2
Chemistry	2	0	2
Psychology	2	0	2
Physical Education/Recreation	2	1	1
Astrophysics	1	0	1
Archeology/Anthropology	7	6	1
children's books/reading tools	2	1	1
job placement	1	0	1
Art History/Art	2	1	1
activities for children	1	0	1
law	1	0	1
Government documents	2	2	0
Women's studies	1	1	0
pleasure reading	3	3	0
ERIC/education	2	2	0
Business Management	2	2	0
Math	1	1	0
journals	9	9	0
new books	1	1	0
	55	34	21
		61.8%	

There are many problems with classifying responses based on terse answers and checklists. Patrons may have had unstated qualifications or format expectations that the librarian did not know about. However, there are some internal clues to validity of this analysis. Biology and chemistry provide examples. In both of these areas, the conscious decision was made nearly ten years ago to emphasize journal literature over the book form. As a result, there is very little current biology or chemistry material which summarizes these topics in book form. Psychology prefers the book form, so students that require journal articles do not fare well in the Golden Library. When a number of students list the same problem, it can be taken that they are identifying a weakness in the collection. On this

list, Life Sciences, Chemistry, Psychology, and perhaps Theatre collections need strengthening. In the other cases, we believe that all of the available items were not found. An attempt was made to classify the reasons why the patron did not find each item, although the librarian did. Based on circumstantial evidence, we believe that we have identified 5 reasons that the searches were less than successful.

**1. Looking for a subject with a term not listed in the computer.** When a customer enters a term for a subject search, the computer will only search a list of "approved terms." If the term is not exactly as listed on the subject list, the computer responds with "no holdings." Subject fields in databases are controlled vocabulary. The specific term must be on the approved list for that database -- such as the *Library of Congress Subject Headings* (LCSH) in the Golden Library's public catalog, the official thesaurus for the Educational Resources Information Clearinghouse (ERIC), etc. The library keeps

Example: A subject search for "Navajo" does not return any holdings. A search under "Indians of North America -- Navajo" brings up a hit list of 127 items. A keyword search for Navajo and Indian brings up 406 items on the hit list.

Solution: (1) Use a thesaurus or list of subject headings to find an approved term, or (2) perform a keyword search. The natural language keyword search will find any entry which contains the word or words that are entered. If you don't know the official subject, use the keyword to find an item that will work. Check the subject headings listed at the bottom of the entry you found. Search for this subject heading.

**2. Searching in the wrong place.** Computers have greatly simplified the search process, but the sheer number of databases has increased tremendously since 1986. It is now a problem to identify the correct database that will have the information needed. Some students believe that anything they want will be available on the World Wide Web, but are disappointed when they don't find everything.

Example: The WWW is not a single, organized database, so information about companies, universities, and those who want others to know about them will have a great deal of information. Other topics will have little or no usable information. Some of our students will look for business information in the *General Periodicals Index* on Infotrac (rather than the *Business Periodicals Index*) because the database is easy to use and no one may be using that terminal.

Solution: (1) Ask someone with experience to point out the appropriate database(s). Golden Library schedules professional librarians at the reference desk at all times for just this reason.

**3. Looking at the wrong level.** Some subject searches are too specific or too general. Our newer customers have not yet developed the concept of "scope" of materials. Their expectations are not being met because they are looking for the wrong thing.

Example: One patron wanted a book written about Michelangelo's statue "David". The library has a number of books on Michelangelo that contain information about the statue, but they can not be identified using the subject David. Similarly, the student who wanted information about Quantrill's raiders should have included the more general term Civil War in their search.

Solution: When the customer does not have enough background to understand the context of the subject he or she is seeking, a crash course may be needed. We recommend that they develop background for their search topic in an encyclopedia, specialized dictionary, or other general source to develop the vocabulary to use in their search. Again, a librarian can be helpful in developing search strategies.

**4. Misinterpreting the results of their search.** Over 40% of the items listed in the Golden Library public access catalog (PAC) have never been assigned a barcode. (Government documents, microfiche items, and a few others do not receive barcodes when added to the collection.) Unfortunately, when one of these items is accessed the computer does not give a location of the item. Instead, the computer responds with

"THE LIBRARY HAS NO HOLDINGS OF THIS TITLE. SEE YOUR LIBRARIAN FOR ASSISTANCE"

The statement is misleading. The library has every item we list. In this case, either the Library either has ordered the item and it has not been received and processed or it lacks a barcode. The message was written by a national library software company and can not be changed. Signs placed near the PAC to explain the problem are not understood, and they can't even be seen by those who dial in. As a result, many of our customers do not understand that the library owns the item and a librarian can tell them where it is located. Sometimes patrons do not write down the entry (GENERAL, WL Open, WLClosed, MedServ, etc.) which shows the place where the item is located. Yet another 1998 respondent transposed the digits in the call number of the book and was unable to find the non-existent call number on the shelves.

Examples: Most items from government documents, all microfiche in the Evans collection, and others do not have a item record that is created when a barcode is attached to them. Rare books and science fiction are located in the Special Collections area, A-V is located in the Media Services department of the library and should not be confused with items in the General Collection on the second floor of the library.

Solution: The Library staff is studying the feasibility of supplying dummy barcodes for documents. Until the library is able to change the message when there are no item records attached, we must keep trying to inform our customers of the nature of the problem. We own or have ordered all items listed in the PAC. Also, we must encourage all customers to copy the location of the item as well as the call number.

5. **Giving up too soon.** Library automation has made it easier to search a database, but the number of automated databases has grown exponentially to complicate the development of a search strategy. The sheer number of these computerized databases can be confusing. Very few of the automated databases include information from the period before they started. Others are deliberately limited to a few years to keep the size manageable. The old bookform indexes continue to be valuable research tools for items that were created prior to the beginning of computer databases. There was a time when there was one "right" way to conduct research, but there are many right ways now. Too many of our students try a research strategy that makes sense to them, but if it does not produce what they need, they should keep trying other strategies and other databases until they succeed. A library search today calls for advanced problem solving skills.

Examples: To learn about a business merger that occurred more than ten years ago, it may necessary to consult the paper version of the *Wall Street Journal Index* or the *New York Times Index*. Useful paper indexes include the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* (which began before 1900), the *Business Periodicals Index*, the *Education Index* and many others located on the second floor.

Solution: Knowledge of the contents of specific databases is gained through experience. Although faculty may make assignments designed to give students this type of experience, it is no longer possible for everyone to learn about all of the available databases. Our survey compared the record of those who consulted a librarian with those did not. Only 18% of those who did not consult found everything they were looking for, while 37% of those who consulted a reference librarian found everything they were looking for. Obviously, reference librarians can not answer all questions asked of them, but can improve the odds of finding what is needed.

**Summary and Conclusions.** The Golden Library uses annual surveys to monitor research and the impact of automation. Survey results show that our patrons have problems despite our best efforts to simplify and improve the library. It appears reasonable to expect a majority of those who do not find "everything they need" to report this result to faculty members. A study by Fortune magazine and the Forum Corporation found that "Satisfied customers will tell an average of five other people," while "The average dissatisfied customer, however, will tell nine other people about a negative experience...." If 24.5% of our students were unable to find what they need in the Golden Library, the faculty must be bombarded with negative comments about the Library. It does not matter that the Library staff may not be able to prevent the problems, or even that in many cases they are unnecessary.

Classic marketing techniques require that a recovery system be installed to support and assist patrons who are not initially successful. The Golden Library took the first step in this recovery system by assigning a professionally trained librarian cover the reference desk at all times the library is open, but this is not enough. There is still a significant number of students who leave the library thinking that the library does not have what they need.

We need another recovery mechanism that goes beyond the Library. The following proposals are offered as an approach to this second line of recovery.

(1) That all faculty be shown (through this study and any other available means) that "problems of lack of materials in the library" are frequently "problems of not finding what is available."

(2) That the library offer to provide a form to students who have contacted the reference librarian and the reference librarian was unable to find suitable materials. This form would certify to the items or subjects that were not found, and suggest that the faculty might wish to recommend items for purchase to strengthen an identified area of collection weakness.

(3) That the faculty refuse to accept any excuse for not submitting assignments, etc. unless accompanied by a printed form signed by a reference librarian.

Any other suggestions for training and/or recovery programs to enhance the success of our patrons in their research would be greatly appreciated.