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Major changes lead to customer satisfaction at Wollongong Uni

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Abstract

Sustaining Satisfaction, a Quality and Service Excellence program (QSE), conceived in 1994, revitalised the University of Wollongong Library's approach to the design and delivery of client service. Results of extensive ongoing market research reveal what our clients want and expect from their Library, namely friendly, knowledgeable and responsive staff, and seamless access to information resources. This has driven major change throughout all levels of the organisation, with dramatic and most importantly, sustained service improvements for clients.

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CUSTOMER SERVICE

Major changes lead to customer satisfaction at Wollongong Uni

Sustaining Satisfaction, a Quality and Service Excellence program (QSE), conceived in 1994, revitalised the University of Wollongong Library's approach to the design and delivery of client service. Results of extensive ongoing market research reveal what our clients want and expect from their Library, namely friendly, knowledgeable and responsive staff, and seamless access to information resources. This has driven major change throughout all levels of the organisation, with dramatic and most importantly, sustained service improvements for clients.

What can be achieved when clients are at the core of a quality and service excellence (QSE) strategy? A 22% increase in overall client satisfaction and a 35% increase in satisfaction with the availability of information resources are just some of the results. By focusing on an understanding of what clients value now and into the future we have received excellent outcomes in survey activities. Consistently high rankings were achieved in the most recent client survey (2005), including rankings in the top five performers across 6 of 7 assessment categories, as benchmarked against other Australian academic libraries.

How is a commitment to great service initiated and sustained? At our Library everyone has a responsibility for excellent client service. Staff from all areas now work across the various service points, affirming the importance of a client-focused approach. Even the University Librarian does a regular Information Desk shift! Increased emphasis and support for training has provided staff with the skills they need to support clients. Client service skills are now core training for all staff and regular update sessions keep knowledge current and confidence high.

Further initiatives have focused firmly on meeting clients' needs. Having a staff member come to them, rather than visiting a fixed help desk, holds great appeal for clients working in a predominantly electronic realm. Since 2000, Rovers wearing 'Here to Help' branded t-shirts have moved throughout the Library, offering technical and basic research help to clients at their point of need. Clients can seek in-depth research assistance via email at any time or via a live online chat service during core hours. Of course face-to-face services remain a key to our success, with experienced librarians available from 9.00am until closing on weekdays and during all weekend and holiday operating hours.



Laptops are available for loan, enabling greater flexibility for individual and group study. Leisure reading collections provide respite from gruelling study and research loads. Coffee vouchers are offered for those times we don't get it right or a client is unnecessarily inconvenienced. Transparent online feedback systems enable the tracking of client compliments, comments and complaints, as well as communicating the Library's response to the feedback. A longstanding Client Service Charter demonstrates our commitment to maintaining and exceeding service standards.

Excellence in client service requires constant attention. Regular training updates and refresher sessions are provided for staff. A major client satisfaction survey is conducted biennially and provides results that can be benchmarked across our peers. A mystery shopper style of service evaluation has enabled the assessment of the 'total client experience' – exploring the various nuances of service delivery that influence overall satisfaction. We regularly turn to and achieve accreditation in exemplars in client service, including quality standards such as the Australian Business Excellence Framework, Investors in People and the International Customer Service Standard, to challenge our views and client service practices. It is an approach that our clients clearly and measurably value.

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