The Ask-a-Librarian Service Assessment survey was conducted during the 2014 Academic Year. 27 responses were received from unique students, faculty, staff, and community users. This survey was conducted to rate user experience with the Ask-a-Librarian service. The purpose of this assessment is to evaluate the satisfaction of patrons using the ask a librarian email service that Melvin J. Zahnow Library uses when chat is unavailable and make improvements based on patron responses. This report aims to illuminate patron responses to the service as well as improve assessment methods for the service.
Executive Summary
In response to a growing need for online research support, Zahnow Library has implemented several online services to assist patrons. This assessment looks at data collected about the email service that is available to patrons when chat is unavailable due to hours or librarian availability. This service is only visible when all librarians have marked their chat as “away” or all librarians are signed out of chat.

97% of respondents were either Extremely Satisfied, Very Satisfied, or Satisfied with the email service. One respondent replied that “this is a wonderful service and truly appreciated”.

Positive Remarks
- Service was convenient
- Service had fast response times
- Service was easy to use
- Patron’s question was answered effectively
- Patrons said they would use this service again in the future

Recommendations for Improvement
- Include a time frame for responses in away message in chat boxes
- Advertise librarian hours on webpage near chat boxes
- Let patrons know when a librarian has started to answer their question
Background
In the 2014 Academic Year, Zahnow Library answered 2,161 chats from undergraduate students, graduate students, staff, faculty, and community members. It took librarians on average 25.1 seconds to respond to chats as they came in. On average, chats lasted 8.74 minutes. During this time period, Zahnow Library had 7 librarians answering chat on a regular basis. The majority of patrons using chat came from the Chat Help LibGuide, followed by the databases guide. This survey went out to patrons that wanted to use chat when it was unavailable and instead of sending a chat to the librarian they were prompted to send an email response.

Methodology
When chat is unavailable, patrons are prompted to send an email to a librarian with their question. Members of the Research Team at Zahnow Library emailed the survey to patrons who used the Ask a Librarian service when the chat service was turned off. Scott Mellendorf, Head of Research Services, emailed the respondents to participate in the survey. There was no compensation involved as an incentive for people to participate. Librarians sent the link to the survey to 202 patrons that utilized the Ask a Librarian service. 27 participants responded for a 13% return rate.
Data Analysis and Summary

Demographics
The majority of users that responded to the Ask a Librarian survey were females falling in the 18-24 year range. This age range is typical with traditional undergraduate students. The second highest age range was from 40-49 year olds. Majority of respondents said that they held faculty status at SVSU, followed by undergraduate and graduate students. This data indicates that chat is used by the SVSU community almost exclusively and that it is used at a wide range by all members of the SVSU community: faculty, undergraduate students, and graduate students.

The higher female response rate could correlate that the student population at SVSU has more females than males. There is also an even distribution of age ranges of Ask a Librarian users.

It is also unknown if faculty members use the service more often than undergraduate and graduate students, or if they are more likely to complete a return survey. It is important to note that the responders to this survey do not necessarily make up the entire population of users.
Why this Service?

Survey respondents were asked “Why did you choose the Ask-a-Librarian service, versus contacting the library by phone or visiting the library?” Most of the respondents answered that the convenience of this service is what drew them to use it over coming in person or reaching out via phone. Some responded that they needed an answer to their question and believed this would be the best way to get their answer. Some respondents also noted that they have fast response times when using this service, which was a factor in why they chose to use it.

Why did you choose the Ask-a-Librarian service, versus contacting the library by phone or visiting the library?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Convenience</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needed answer to question</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast Response Time</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used at other Library</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy to Use</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wanted to Try</td>
<td>1</td>
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Half of the respondents said that convenience drew them to this service. This demonstrates that people still have questions that require librarian intervention, but they want to use librarian services at their point of need.

**Experience**

68% of respondents said that they were extremely satisfied with their Ask-a-Librarian service. 97% of respondents reported that they were either Extremely Satisfied, Very Satisfied or Satisfied with the service.

The respondent who was not satisfied with the service tried to use it three times and received no responses from a librarian. Another student responded that they were satisfied with the service even though they did not receive a response in the time they needed for their assignment. This student specifically stated how apologetic the librarian was in not getting back to the student in time.
An overwhelming majority of respondents said that they would use the service again. The only person who said no was the student who unsuccessfully tried to contact a librarian three times. This student stated that they cannot wait even 20 minutes when doing research and need answers right away.
Concerning question No. 6, briefly state why you would or would not use this service again.
Most respondents praised how timely of a response they received from a librarian and this directly affected whether they would use the service again. In addition to how timely the responses were, they also helped the patrons which was another factor in why they would use this service again. Patrons also mentioned how convenient the service is, which factored into if they would use the service again in the future. The respondents did not elaborate on what they found convenient about the service.

Only one respondent, who was mentioned earlier, was not satisfied with the response time to their question. 67% of patrons were extremely satisfied with response times. Some respondents weren’t responding directly to the question, but to Interlibrary Loan times. One respondent did mention that they needed more help via chat service on the weekends.
Do you have any comments concerning response time?

I appreciate the quick response! Unfortunately I am known to procrastinate and my time seems to precious, it is nice that I can still get help even when I am running late.

Thank you, this is a wonderful service and truly appreciated.

It took a long time to get the book.

When doing research I don't want to wait a whole day or even 20 minutes for a response because I want to continue moving forward with the paper am that just puts me at a stand still

It has always been immediate

One response I got was very quick; the other took a few hours and I no longer needed the answer to my question once I got it. I was not upset with this since it was only my second time using the service but I hope librarians can find a way to be more prompt with their responses in the future when questions are submitted during library hours.

No

No, it was fine.

Excellent response time

It was great

very quick

Again he went above and beyond and worked with me through e-mail way past what I believe anyone’s hours should have been.

No

during the fall & winter semesters I was always able to chat directly with a librarian - even on the weekend. This seemed limited in the Spring/summer semesters. Since the weekends are when I have time to sit down and do research that is when I tend to need some help.

no

Most of the comments about response time were positive or the respondent did not leave feedback. There were a couple of mixed and negative comments as well.
Respondents mostly valued a fast response time, convenience, answered questions and librarian availability when evaluating this service.

Most respondents had used this service more than once before. It is unclear from the data and patron responses if they’ve used chat service more than once or if they’ve used the Ask-a-Librarian service.
more than once. Several responses seemed as if patrons were evaluating research services or chat services as a whole instead of the Ask-a-Librarian service that this survey was intended to assess.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have you used the Ask-a-Librarian service more than once?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Yes: 74%</td>
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<td>No: 26%</td>
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Do you have any comments or suggestions regarding this service?

Keep up the good work!
I hope it is continued.
Thank you! Much appreciated.
As stated previously, I hope that questions asked during library hours can be responded to more quickly in the future. Perhaps give more than one librarian access to the questions at the time if this does not already happen
No.
Keep up the great job!
Keep up the great work
They are great!
no
this is a last resort- prefer the "chat" line better because I can get an answer to my question quicker.
Overall, I have the library services very helpful- and appreciate the online options for help- as I am rarely able to physically go to the library.
Keep up the excellent job you are doing!

There were a few suggestions that respondents gave that could be helpful to librarians and several responses provided insight as to why online research services are important to Zahnow Library patrons.
Conclusion
Overall, respondents found this service to be helpful and appreciated the quick email responses to their queries. Patrons also noted that this was one of the most convenient ways to get a hold of a librarian and to get questions answered. There was only one respondent that had a bad enough experience to rate they were not satisfied with the service and would not use it again. One respondent said that this was a last resort and that they prefer to chat live with a librarian over sending an email.

Recommendations
According to the feedback, this service works well for the library, but there are improvements that can be made. One recommendation is to include a time frame for responses in the away message. Telling people that responses could take up to 24 hours would help alleviate some patrons’ frustrations with not receiving what they deem a timely response. This would also increase satisfaction if responses were sent out before the time limit. It could also be important to advertise librarian hours in the “Chat is Away” box. One respondent suggested that all questions should be answered by the end of library hours, not realizing that librarians are not available the entire time that the library is open. As library hours continue to expand, it is important to let patrons know what hours they can expect service help.

It is also recommended that librarians email the patron when they started working on answering their question to let the patron know that someone has received their query and is answering their question. This could cut down on what patrons see as the “response time” and give librarians a place to ask follow-up questions and include quick links to the patron.

Rebranding what this service is called will also alleviate some confusion as to what "Ask a Librarian" service this survey assesses. Some respondents seemed to be answering the survey for chat interactions with librarians instead of the email service.

For the survey itself, it is recommended to add a question to the end of the survey that states, “How could we improve the Ask-a-Librarian service?” This question could be used instead of or in addition to Question 12. The addition of this question would give respondents a place to suggest improvements to the service, even if they have had an overall positive experience with the survey.

It is also recommended to move the survey to SurveyGizmo. Here is a link to an example survey created for this assessment in SurveyGizmo.
TIPS FOR IMPROVING
Ask a Librarian
Research Service

#1 Communicate with Patrons
- Post message that responses could take up to 24 hours
- Advertise librarian hours near chat boxes
- Encourage librarians to email patrons when they begin searching for a complicated topic

#2 Rebranding Service
Changing the name of the service from "Ask a Librarian" could help with some patron confusion.
Since chat is also called "Ask a Librarian" and receives an immediate response, this could help with expectations of response times.

#3 Keep Up the Good Work
97% Satisfaction Rate
96% of respondents would use this service again!
"Thank you, this is a wonderful service and truly appreciated."
Continue to have
- Fast Response Times
- Convenient Links
- Correctly Answered Questions
Survey

1. Gender
   a. Female
   b. Male
2. Age
   a. 18 to 24
   b. 25 to 29
   c. 30 to 39
   d. 40 to 49
   e. 50 to 59
   f. 60 to 69
   g. 70 or more
3. Status:
   a. Undergraduate Student
   b. Graduate Student
   c. Faculty
   d. Student
   e. Community Member
4. Why did you choose the Ask-a-Librarian service, versus contacting the library by phone or visiting the library?
5. How would you rate your experience with the Ask-a-Librarian service?
   a. Not satisfied
   b. Somewhat satisfied
   c. Satisfied
   d. Very Satisfied
   e. Extremely satisfied
6. Would you use the Ask-a-Librarian service again?
   a. Yes
   b. No
7. Concerning question No. 6, briefly state why you would or would not use this service again.
8. Were you satisfied with the response time to your question?
   a. Not satisfied
   b. Somewhat satisfied
   c. Satisfied
   d. Very Satisfied
   e. Extremely satisfied
9. Do you have any comments concerning response time?
10. What aspects of the Ask-a-Librarian service did you find most valuable?
11. Have you used the Ask-a-Librarian service more than once?
a. Yes
b. No

12. Do you have any comments or suggestions regarding this service?