User Perceptions of Library Resource Discovery

Discovery Working Group
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Background

The Discovery Working Group analyzed user comments submitted via the 2016 LibQual Survey in order to identify common pain points within the information search and retrieval process. Over 450 comments related to search, the library website, online catalog, and interlibrary loan were reviewed and coded according to theme. The goal of the study was to identify those aspects of the current discovery environment with which users are least satisfied in order to develop a prioritized list of problem areas for the working group to address.

Method

Working group members were divided into teams and assigned to review one of four sets of user comments. Each team was asked to read and categorize the comments according to theme. Since comments often expressed more than one idea, reviewers were asked to assign as many categories as applicable. Categories were reviewed and revised for clarity, accuracy, and consistency and the total number of comments in each category was tabulated. Although both positive and negative comments were included in the analysis, only the negative comments are discussed for the purposes of this report. Categories with the most negative comments suggest areas of high user dissatisfaction which can be used to prioritize improvement efforts.

Limitations

Although surveys are helpful for gauging how users feel about library services, they do not always reveal the exact nature of a problem or the means to fix it. Unlike interviews or focus groups, surveys do not typically yield the most detailed or thoughtful responses. Comments tend to be brief or superficial and are usually removed from the context of the activities they describe. Unlike observational studies or usability testing, surveys are a self-report of what users say they do, not what they actually do. As a result, they are subject to the frailties of human memory and limitations on what respondents are willing to disclose. Accordingly, survey responses should be taken with a grain of salt or used in conjunction with other forms of assessment. The following observations outline some of the limitations of this study.

- Comments were often not specific enough to identify the nature or source of the problem. For example, comments such as “the website is confusing” or “the catalog is difficult to use” indicate dissatisfaction with these services, but do not provide sufficient information to pinpoint the source of dissatisfaction. Further investigation would be required to determine exactly what these users found confusing or difficult. As a result, many comments were lumped into a large “general” category because they were simply too vague or ambiguous to classify.
• Library systems are complex. Users pass through a variety of interrelated products and interfaces to reach the content they need and are not always aware of the subtle distinctions between them. As a result, it was not always clear which products or resources users were referring to in their comments. For example, a user might have a poor experience with a licensed product or database but describe it as a problem with the library website. This ambiguity sometimes made responses difficult to categorize resulting in the double or triple counting of comments assigned to multiple categories.

• User perceptions of library services are not always entirely accurate. They sometimes complain that the library doesn’t have a particular resource when it does. They may criticize the functionality of a product without fully understanding how it works. But while user comments are sometimes misinformed, these misunderstandings are often themselves an indication of an underlying user experience problem or unmet expectation.

Despite these limitations, comment analysis can provide a useful means of processing open-ended survey responses in order to yield clear, actionable insights. By organizing and ranking user comments according to category, the working group was able to shed light on those aspects of the current discovery environment with which users are least satisfied as means of identifying areas for improvement.

Findings

The following is a summary of the top three themes expressed in negative user comments related to search (n=106), the library website (n=96), online catalog (n=25), and interlibrary loan (n=68). For a complete breakdown of comments by theme see Appendix A.

Search

Link Resolver

Over one-third of negative comments related to search involved the process of locating full text via the link resolver (Get it @ R). Overall, users find the link resolver to be confusing, cumbersome, and unreliable. Several respondents described Get it @ R as “fickle” and “inconsistent.” And while link resolvers are known to fail for a variety of reasons,¹ it seems that at least part of this perception may be attributable to a gap in user expectations. Most users expect the link resolver to lead them directly to electronic full text and are generally disappointed with any other outcome (i.e., print holdings or interlibrary loan). As several respondents made clear, any result other than online full text is perceived as a failure. To complicate matters further, the menu that appears when full text is unavailable is generally unhelpful and contains many links which may or may not lead to the desired

Users expressed frustration about being unable to determine whether or not the item they want is available at the library and the number of clicks required to find out.

In their own words ...

“The ‘Get It @ R’ function almost never works”

“The "Get it at R" button results are inconsistent - sometimes they take you directly to prohost/Scopus/etc., sometimes they take you to a page suggesting you search for the journal in the Rutgers library”

“I wish the Get @RU button wasn't so fickle because sometimes it works and leads you to a source, and other times it's a dead end. It really wastes time and is inefficient for people trying to research to have to gamble whether to look at a source or not”

“Half the time when using Get it at R, I was not able to open and view pdf files, even though the screen indicated I should be able to.”

“Sometimes I have no access to the electronic sources with get@RU. I don't know if it's because that our library did not subscribe them or there was technical issues”

“It can be difficult to figure out if I can access the article through Rutgers. I find that I will have to do a lot more searching to find the article the search engine states that Rutgers has access to”

“I often have to utilize the ‘Get it at Rutgers’ option and wait for my desired resources. This can be frustrating.”

“I understand that we can request certain articles but a ‘get it @ R’ button does not count as full-text. I don’t have the time to swing by and pick an article up I needed two days ago”

Finding Articles

Users come to the library looking for all kinds of information, but searching for articles seems to be a particular source of frustration. 25% of negative comments related to search focused on the process of locating articles. In particular, users complained about the lack of clear, intuitive starting point, the confusing labyrinth of licensed databases that must be traversed, and the need to search multiple sources in order to find the content they need. Above all, users expressed frustration about seeing articles in their search results to which the library does not provide full text access. Once again, comments suggest an expectation gap insofar as users expect the content they need to be available online. As has been

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2 The link resolver menu has since been revised to address many of these concerns.
reported elsewhere, convenience is a strong motivating factor in resource selection. Several users described the experience of encountering results that offer only a citation or abstract as a “dead end” or “waste of time”. Although many of these articles may be requested through article delivery or interlibrary loan, users seem interested in seeing only results that can be quickly and easily accessed online.

| In their own words ...

| “It's annoying when they list the article, but have no way of accessing it”
| “It is very frustrating when my online searches yield a non downloadable response.”
| “It is completely aggravating (and completely useless) to find articles for which we do not have full text rights by default. I can see how some students (doctoral or seniors working on theses) might find it useful to be able to request things through loan or later purchase, but for most students, if we don’t have the full text, it is not going to work as a source and it cluttered up my search results and wasted my time to even see it.”
| “I find a lot of sources just searching through the Rutgers databases that are unavailable except for the abstract. I can’t use a source with just the abstract. It would be more helpful for the library to have an option to get rid of those in the search field”
| “Library services are very helpful but it can be difficult finding pdf’s of specific online articles attached to the abstracts being provided”
| “Many times, I cannot read or download some articles that showed in the searching result list. When I click into these article, it would lead me to library category and I cannot find these article”
| “Many electronic articles that can be searched up on the library website only link to dead end pages that just contain the citation and not the actual pdf of the article.”
| “Attempts to merge Rutgers own electronic catalog with resources located ‘anywhere’ can be confusing ... If I wanted to search across the entire planet, I would go straight to GOOGLE. When I want to search the Rutgers catalog plus the electronic journals to which the university subscribes, that is ALL I want to search”

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Search Interface

Approximately 19% of comments related to search pertained to the overall design of the library’s search interface. Unfortunately, users did not always explain what they specifically disliked about the interface. Many simply described it as “confusing”, “cumbersome”, or “inefficient.” Others compared it unfavorably with Google or Google Scholar. A few pointed to the lack of specific search options (e.g., DOI) or difficulty locating specific types of materials (e.g., media). However, one recurring theme among these comments was the desire to search all sources simultaneously. Users often expressed frustration with the separation of materials by format or the need repeat their search in different resources. Instead, they expect to be able to search and retrieve all library materials from a single interface.

In their own words ...

“The interface of the library search page is very NOT intuitive even after a few recent modifications. This makes the experience of getting access to the resources so inconvenient. Please fix this.”

“I would like to see a somewhat more user-friendly electronic search interface. Often, I will search for information on Google and then go to the Rutgers library to download a journal article. This process does not always go smoothly or quickly and I do not always find the article I'm searching for on the first try.”

“I appreciate the access to journals via the website, but the interface is slow to use (many clicks to find and access a journal, often takes multiple searches to find something)”

“The library website makes it somewhat cumbersome to find desired articles and studies through eJournals and databases and causes the user to go through multiple searches trying to find the right search tool. A more streamlined website would be appreciated”

“Suggestions for improvement: more online access and a better search function (especially not separating searches for books from searches from articles) would be ideal.”

“My only suggestion (and I know it is difficult), is to somehow simplify the many catalogs listed here: http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/find_books. For the newcomer, it is hard to understand what all these sources are. It would be amazing if the Rutgers Library Search could search all of these catalogs at once”

“I hope that users will soon be able to search all electronic resources from a single, combined, platform.”
Website

General
Just over a quarter of comments related to the library website were classified as “general” because they were too broad or vague for categorization. Comments tended to be brief and perfunctory; expressing more how users felt about the website than articulating any specific problem. “Confusing”, “cumbersome”, “non-intuitive”, and “outdated” were just some of the adjectives used to describe it. Although respondents felt the website needed improvement, they didn’t always explain what could be improved.

In their own words …

"Website is confusing"
"Website is cumbersome"
"The website is very clunky, non-intuitive, and difficult to use"
“Website and search function of the library is clunky, inefficient and outdated.”
"I wish the website was more user friendly"
“Web page needs work”
"Website interface could use an overhaul"
"Web page needs to be improved. It would be great if it was more user friendly."

Information Architecture
When users did articulate a specific grievance about the website, it tended to involve some aspect of information architecture. Approximately one quarter of website comments mentioned difficulty navigating the site or locating specific resources. Respondents felt that important information was buried too deep or required too many clicks to reach. They also expressed dissatisfaction with the overwhelming number of menu options, unfamiliar jargon, and dizzying array of new tabs and windows. Overall, respondents suggested that the current website was not optimally structured to meet their needs and that a “simpler”, “more streamlined”, and “user friendly” website could help them to accomplish their goals more efficiently and effectively.
In their own words …

“The website is kind of confusing. It's hard to navigate and find what I need without help.”

“I often have trouble finding what I want in the library web site. I don't use it that often and I have trouble remembering how it works”

“Sometimes it's hard to find the right buttons on the webpage ... if it were better organized it would make using it faster.”

“My wish would be for accessing journals be more streamlined. It opens up multiple windows and if I walk away, I sometimes have trouble figuring out where I am in the process.”

“The website now requires more clicks and opens more tabs to get to things”

“The library home start up page is awful. 95% of the time, all I want to do is search the library catalog or look for a journal article, and you do your best to hide that function. It used to come up, front and center, first thing when you went to the library home page.”

“On the website, there is too much clicking needed to get to the desired end location. You have to click through so many menus to get to one thing. The databases are hard to get to, it's not very straightforward. It's taken me four years to really feel comfortable using the online databases, but it still can be confusing and I'll get lost in a vortex of clicking”

“Libraries website for data base should be a little more elaborated. sometimes I get confused, and can't find what I want... or at least add some more of help tips.”

“The search-ability and user friendliness of the web resources is abysmal. The library pages are loaded with jargon familiar only to those who constructed that particular web page. I am a scientist not a librarian, but I feel like I need a library degree to navigate our system. Frankly it's an embarrassment.”

Remote Access

Approximately 22% of comments related to the website involved remote access to library resources. According to survey comments, users seem to have an extraordinarily difficult time accessing licensed resources from off-campus. Respondents said they find the login process both confusing and cumbersome. A large number of users cited frustrations with the number of steps required to login to the proxy or the number of times they were required to authenticate. Several noted that they prefer to access resources directly rather than being forced to access them through the library website. Some favored alternative solutions such as authenticating through Shibboleth, VPN, or browser plugins.
In their own words ...

“The system for getting remote access to journals is not user-friendly and quite frustrating”

“It would be very beneficial to access journal articles via the web for non-University computers. The process is not straightforward and cumbersome at best.”

“My main complaint about accessing databases from off-campus is the repeated need to sign-in. It gets annoying”

“Being asked to log in (multiple times a day! why does central authentication time out at all?) in the middle of my search is disconcerting”

“The library website requires inputting my password entirely too many times (does the library have access or not? If it does, why do I consistently need to input my password?)”

“It is tedious to constantly have to log in every time I change search engines, or want to bring up an article, etc.”

“Authentication has to be entered an excessive number of times during a single session.”

“I use electronic access to journals that the library has subscriptions to daily. This works great when I am on campus (more or less seamless), but the process has become more cumbersome of late when accessing the library's collection from off-campus; it still can be accomplished, but it takes a lot of time and clicking, which is a pain when one is trying to survey the literature on a topic”

“Most often I access publications remotely, using Rutgers subscription and Rutgers IP address. In some instances, I am forced to go via the library website that is inconvenient”

“Better access to resources from off-campus is needed - when I click on an article from a publisher website, there should be a way to download without having to login to the library (use cookies, whatever).”

“It would be a huge time saver to be able to access articles from my computer at the journal websites directly rather than going through the library, esp. when at home”

“The library proxy server not being accessible directly as a plug-in in a browser is the main draw back and reason for the lower rating.”
Online Catalog

Holdings/Availability
24% of negative comments about the library catalog mentioned issues related to holdings and availability. Over the years, library catalog records have become increasingly complex with elaborate holdings statements and various codes to indicate status, location, and availability. While the information conveyed in these records may seem obvious to librarians, it is not always intuitive to our end users. Respondents cited difficulties determining whether items are circulating or non-circulating, available or checked out, in print or online, or which particular volumes and issues are held and where.

In their own words ...

“The library catalog is shamefully difficult to use. What are the loan periods? Why is it so hard to tell if something circulates or not?”

“Recent changes in catalog display have made it less user-friendly. It has become more difficult to know if the library has physical copy of a particular book.”

“Distinguishing between journals the library has on hand vs. those it has electronically vs those it does not have is often difficult.”

“There have been some instances where a journal I find in the library catalog is listed as being available only as an e-journal, but no link was provided to give access to the e-journal, and no instructions on how to access it through other means”

“Some of the books are missing from the stacks (at Dana) even though the library website says that the texts are available”

Relevance
The relevance of search results was also mentioned in 24% of comments about the library catalog. Respondents cited difficulty searching for items in the catalog even when the exact title was known. Many users expressed frustration with having to revise their query multiple times or wade through a number of irrelevant results before finding what they were looking for. Whether these difficulties are rooted in product design or user search strategy remains to be determined. Further investigation would be required to evaluate the impact of user search behavior on the relevance of results.
In their own words ...

“The website (especially the catalog) is not user-friendly. I cannot access the book or the article easily, the search sometimes yields too few sometimes too many results”

“My most important concern with current library services at Rutgers is the new library catalog - it does a very poor job of returning accurate and relevant results. For example, several times I have searched for a book using its title and the corresponding item is on the third page of results”

“Search for books does not bring out required results. Instead, the search brings out unwanted list of books not asked for. The search should list the books one is looking for. Spot on! This is frustrating”

“The library catalog is confusing and often must be searched in many different ways to find that a resource is in the system”

“What is this random order of results, and displays? Why do you search for one thing and find yourself in an unrelated results list? Why can't I find things I know are there?”

Account Management
20% of catalog comments discussed issues related to account management. Some respondents expressed the need for improved communication such as book delivery notifications, due date reminders, and overdue notices. Other users suggested potential feature enhancements that would help them better manage requests, checkouts, and borrowing history.

In their own words ...

“Need so send emails when books that are requested come in. otherwise we don't know we are supposed to pick them up.”

“Last time I had an overdue book, all of my late notices arrived on the same morning”

“I have accidentally reserved books by accident online (2-3 times) and when I try to cancel the reservation I am unable to do so through my account. I hope there is a plan to change this so that users can cancel a book that may have been reserved by mistake or reserved and then find out is not need for a course.”

“Is it possible to keep a record of my book-borrowing history in my account so that when I need to borrow some books again, I do not need to check their information again?”

“The library account 'checkout’ list would be more helpful if it were possible to sort the list of checkouts by specific categories (not just due date, but also author, title, if possible)”
Interlibrary Loan

Delivery Time/Notifications
32% of negative comments related to ILL expressed frustration with delivery times. Respondents complained that requested materials (particularly physical items) took too long to arrive and these long wait times were incompatible with assignment deadlines. Users also suggested that it is not always clear how long it will take to receive their items and suggested that communication regarding the status of requests could be improved.

In their own words ...

“I wish that online materials that Rutgers does not have would be available quicker”

“Some papers take long to deliver”

“The book delivery from UC Borrow/Palci takes a long time”

“Seems most of the articles that I need are only available thru inter library loan. I usually get them, but it sucks to have to wait several days for info when you’re writing a paper”

“Frequently an article I need is not in PDFs form and takes several days to get which my class schedule does not allow for”

“E-ZBorrow takes forever and the staff at the library are unable to provide dates for when it will arrive or transit information”

“E-ZBorrow is amazing; would love if it gave an estimated time until the book would be available”

“There should be more transparency about how long ILL will take and if it will be possible to get a book, rather than waiting more than a week only to find a cancellation notice with a stock reason given”

“Need so send emails when books that are requested come in. otherwise we don't know we are supposed to pick them up.”

“It's hard to trace the book delivery request except for asking a librarian”

“E-ZBorrow is somewhat frustrating to use and I can never be sure if my requests are processing or when they will arrive”

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4 It should be noted that a large number of respondents (27%) praised ILL for its speedy turnaround times. This discrepancy in user perception is likely attributable to the variations in delivery time depending on item format and/or lender.
Restrictions/Cancellations

24% of negative comments about interlibrary loan (ILL) involved complaints regarding restrictions on the number or requests or types of materials that can be borrowed. For example, several users cited difficulties obtaining textbooks, dissertations, and media. Others complained about limits on the number of times articles from a particular journal can be requested. Still others complained about having their ILL requests cancelled without sufficient explanation. Respondents perceive these rules as arbitrary, senseless, and an impediment to their work.

In their own words ...

“Interlibrary loan is not reliable and has far too many restrictions, even something as arbitrary as having had more than 3 requests for a text from the entire university (and therefore exceeding the university's limits for requesting that text). So if two other scholars or students are interested before me, I can't receive the material even though the library doesn't own it. It becomes extremely frustrating trying to figure out how to get work done.”

“When trying to obtain articles via interlibrary loan I’m often frustrated by the annual "cap" that applies to certain journals. Why would a research university library limit the number of requests from a journal to five per year - total? Not per user!”

“The interlibrary loan system as implemented at Rutgers is frustrating and just stupid. I can do a request, and then it is arbitrarily canceled by staff because it is "standard textbook." And no further help is provided how to obtain a copy. How am I supposed to know if something is a standard textbook when it is clearly not a standard textbook at Rutgers? You waste faculty time and resources by making them do requests that then just get canceled and do not provide any further assistance on obtaining the book”

“I wish the interloan system was more helpful in getting textbooks”

“Allow for borrowing of textbooks and e-textbooks from partner libraries”

“Also, some of the books I have requested through the inter-library loan have been cancelled because the library did not have the book in the first place (that is what the email said).”
Ease of Use
18% of negative comments about ILL pertained to ease of use. Respondents suggested that the request process itself was inefficient and cumbersome. Several users complained about the usability or intuitiveness of certain interfaces such as E-ZBorrow. Others complained about the number of required steps such as the need to re-enter login credentials and/or citation information. Above all, users expressed frustration over the lack of a single, simple, and seamless request option. Respondents cited difficulties distinguishing between the library’s various borrowing services (ILL, E-ZBorrow, UBorrow) and suggested that these be consolidated into a single system in order to make requesting materials easier and more efficient for the user.

In their own words ...

“I still am struggling with the inter-library loan feature. Don't really understand how to use it”

“While ILL is often an option, it tends to be easier and more efficient for me to use another library, such as NYU's Bobst Library, to access such materials”

"I frequently have to use the E-ZBorrow system for books that I need, or occasionally even the broader (and much slower) Inter Library Loan system. E-ZBorrow, in fact, displays just how far behind other university libraries we often fall."

“The E-ZBorrow interface is slow and clumsy”

“When using E-ZBorrow, authentication and search terms need to be entered again, even though they have already been entered in the Rutgers library website”

“Interlibrary loan system vs. E-ZBorrow distinction is not very clear”

“You need to make clear the difference between ILL and E-ZBorrow. Which one should I be using? How do I request a book through E-ZBorrow?”

“Requesting materials through the different UBorrow, E-ZBorrow, Book Delivery, and ILL sites is confusing and not streamlined. It should be clear what is the best method for getting a particular resource.”

“Our inter-library, E-ZBorrow, and other services are not consolidated into one system”

Ease of Use
- Request process is inefficient/cumbersome
- Unclear which borrowing service to use (ILLiad, E-ZBorrow, UBorrow)
- Need to re-enter login credentials and/or citation information
Conclusion

The preceding analysis of user comments highlights some of the most common pain points within the library discovery process and will be used by the Discovery Working Group to develop a prioritized list of goals. Further investigation may be necessary in order to better understand the nature of certain problems and develop appropriate solutions. This research may include, but is not limited to, focus groups, usage analysis, and usability testing.

Although this report focuses on the negative comments collected in the 2016 LibQual Survey, it should be noted that respondents also had many favorable things to say about the library discovery process. Examples of more positive user comments can be found in Appendix B.
Appendix A

Negative User Comments by Category

### Search (n=106)

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<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Mentions</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Link Resolver</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>33.96%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finding Articles</td>
<td>27</td>
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<tr>
<td>Search Interface</td>
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<td>Collections</td>
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<tr>
<td>Remote Access</td>
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<td>11.32%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finding Journals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relevance</td>
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<td>6.60%</td>
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### Website (n=96)

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<th>Mentions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
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<tr>
<td>Info Architecture</td>
<td>26</td>
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<tr>
<td>Remote Access</td>
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<td>21.88%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finding Articles</td>
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<td>9.38%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Help</td>
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<td>Requesting Items</td>
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<td>Finding Books</td>
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<td>3.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding Databases</td>
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<td>3.13%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finding Journals</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.13%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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### Online Catalog (n=25)

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<th>Theme</th>
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<td>Holdings/Availability</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relevance</td>
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<td>Account Management</td>
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<td>General</td>
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<td>20.00%</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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### Interlibrary Loan (n=68)

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<td>Restrictions</td>
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<td>Ease of Use</td>
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<td>Loan Period</td>
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<td>General</td>
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<td>5.88%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Website Placement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Service Fees</td>
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<td>2.94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.94%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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5 “Percent” refers to the percentage of comments in which a particular theme was mentioned. Percentages do not add up to 100 since comments were assigned to as many themes as applicable.
Examples of Positive User Comments

"Library provides excellent online access and electronic retrieval services."

"The online library is very helpful in providing information for my learning needs"

"the webpage is really very good; easy to follow interface"

"Website and catalog just keep getting better and better. Keep up the great work!"

"The website and online journal articles are the only resources I use. I find the system easy to navigate"

"Generally I use articles+ and find that to be the most useful. I like how the articles are on one search engine within the library website now."

"Overall fairly happy with web access to databases and articles. There are still some I don't get access to, but it's generally very smooth and easy"

"I use the library almost exclusively electronically, for journal articles, for interlibrary loan requests, or for delivery of materials. It works great for me, no complaints"

"I use remote library access exclusively. The extent of electronic sources or access to resources via interlibrary sources is an invaluable resource."

"I think the library does a fantastic job providing online resources to access journals, databases, and other scholarly information. I have never had a problem. When the library doesn't have something and I need to access it through inter-library loan, the information arrives very quickly"

"The website is good and easy to access databases. I have not had any complaints or difficulty with any aspect of the library or its website since starting in August. Great job!"

"In 12 years I am in this University I always was provided with the articles I needed. If they weren't available I requested and they always get it back to me from Interlibrary loan."

"On the whole, I am delighted with the RU Libraries' service and resources, especially Article Delivery, Interlibrary Loan and the digital resources available through RU Core. If the library doesn't have what I need, they can almost always get it and I appreciate the heck out of that!"

"the library system makes it simple to obtain any required information. On all occasions that I have requested information, I have received it within 24 hours - to include information that the library staff had to obtain from interlibrary loans!"