

# Evolving and Enduring Patterns Surrounding Student Usage and Perceptions of Academic Library Reference Services

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This descriptive study analyzes results from an 18-item survey that assessed students' usage and perceptions of library reference services at a comprehensive public metropolitan university. Among 235 surveys completed between November 2016 and January 2017, the majority of respondents represented the "Generation Z" population of college students, 18 to 24 years of age. Quantitative and qualitative findings revealed patterns of reference service usage, perceptions of librarians, and barriers and facilitators to seeking help from a librarian. These findings can inform decision making to improve marketing and outreach to students regarding general reference services, reference models, and liaison roles.

## Introduction

Exemplary reference service is a natural goal for any academic librarian. Yet, regardless of efforts by librarians to provide optimal service, there are always students who do not take advantage of a librarian's expertise and enthusiasm to provide assistance. Librarians at The University of Toledo (UT), investigating new reference models in light of shrinking personnel and a library reorganization, became curious about the use of their reference services across a wide spectrum of students from the humanities to the STEMM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, and Medicine) disciplines. The authors, three faculty librarians at UT (liaisons for engineering, health and human services, and nursing) developed and distributed a survey to UT students with the aim of answering the following research questions:

- *Are there differences in characteristics among students who do or do not use library reference services?*
- *What are students' perceptions of reference librarians' identities and approachability?*
- *What are students' perceived barriers and facilitators to seeking reference assistance from a librarian?*

Survey respondents represented every degree-granting college at UT, except for students in the College of Law whose library is separate from the UT Libraries organizational structure.

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