**The Urbana Free Library Patron Survey**

**Final Report**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

General findings from a survey of Urbana Free Library patrons are summarized below. A total of 367 patrons completed the survey yielding a response rate of 31.6%. Please note that * denotes a statistically significant finding that is discussed in greater detail in the body of the report.

## Overall Library Evaluation

- *The majority of patrons rated the Urbana Free Library as excellent overall.* Over two-thirds (68.4%) rated the Urbana Free Library as a 1 (excellent) on a scale of 1 to 5 when asked to provide an overall evaluation. Written comments included:

  o "The Free Library is a huge asset to the Urbana community. The fact that it is always busy may be the best part. Keep up the great work. Thank you"

  o "We have access to so many books, movies, and magazines: Something we couldn't afford. And the staff in the library is extraordinarily nice. The library has a very welcoming, warm atmosphere. It's just great"

- *The quality of customer service was also considered excellent.* Nearly nine out of ten (87.7%) rated the customer service at the adult desk as 1 (excellent) or 2. Almost two-thirds (65.9%) of respondents felt the customer service at circulation was either a 1 or 2. No one rated the quality of customer service received at the archives, circulation, or service by phone as "poor" (rating of 5).

- *The library's adult book collection was also considered especially strong.* Over three-quarters (76.0%) rated the adult book collections as either a 1 or a 2 on a scale of 1 (excellent) to 5 (poor). The movie collection is also rated highly, with nearly half (49.3%) of respondents who rated the library's collection of movies as 1 or 2.

## Library Publicity

- *Two out of five patrons want to be notified by email of library programs or services.* The most popular ways patrons wanted to be notified included email (40.7%), flyers and posters (19.5%), and library mailings (14.9%).

## Library Visits

- *Three out of ten patrons wanted no change to library hours while another three out of ten patrons preferred having the library remain open longer on Friday evenings.*

  o More people who speak a language other than English at home preferred having the library remain open on Friday evenings, compared to those who spoke only English in their household (45.1% versus 26.4%).*

  o Preference for longer hours on Friday evenings was also mentioned in the open-ended comments: "One small change would be to remain open until 7pm instead of 6pm on Friday – one more hour to make it a bit more convenient to stop by after work."

- *Most patrons came to the library by car.* Four out of five patrons (82.1%) often or sometimes drive to the library, 40.8% often or sometimes walk to the library, 31.3% often or sometimes

ride their bike, and 14.7% often or sometimes take the bus to the library. More respondents from census tracts located nearest to the library walk or ride their bike to the library than those from other census tracts.*

- *Patrons' ability to find library parking was a concern.* Two-fifths (42.2%) of those arriving by car said they "sometimes" had trouble finding parking, while 11.7% said they "often" do. Comments included:

  "More parking would be nice."         "Have more space in the parking lot."

  "Additional parking (preferably free)."      "Get rid of parking meters. Improve parking layout."

- *Most patrons tolerated parking limitations, but it was a deterrent for one in five patrons.* Nearly two-thirds (63.2%) of respondents reported parking "someplace else nearby" when they drive to the library and cannot find a parking space. Almost one-third (28.1%) said they circle the lot until a space opens up.

  o 21.6% of respondents said they decided not to visit the library and left when they could not find parking.

  o Respondents in households with at least one African American or black member were less likely to park nearby when no parking was available than respondents who did not have African American members in their household, (65.4% versus 33.8%, respectively).*

## Library Collections

- *More patrons used the Urbana Free Library to get books and audio books than other sources.*

  o Nearly two-thirds (63.8%) of patrons reported getting books from the Urbana Free Library "often" while 23.7% said they "often" get books at another library. One-third (33.5%) of respondents said they get books from another, non-library source "sometimes." Amazon.com, Barnes and Noble, Borders, and the local Pages for all Ages received frequent mentions in the write-in responses.

  o More respondents got audio books from the Urbana Free Library "often" or "sometimes" than another library or other source.

  o One-fifth (21.0%) of patrons said they "often" get music from the Urbana Free Library, while 6.3% often used another library and 15.8% often used some other source to get music. Both iTunes and Amazon.com were frequently mentioned in the write-in responses for this question.

  o Approximately one-third of respondents used the Urbana Free Library "often" (31.3%) or "sometimes" (33.2%) to get movies. Roughly one-fifth of respondents said they "often" (23.4%) or "sometimes" (20.7%) use a source other than libraries to get movies.

- *Most patrons were not interested in borrowing video games from the library.* Nearly three-quarters (72.0%) said they did not want to borrow video games. Wii was mentioned frequently in the open-ended comments along with most major gaming platforms.

## Library Spaces / Services

- *At least one out of four patrons use the library's inside seating, computers, coffee shop, or wireless Internet.*

  - Most popular was the library's inside seating, with nearly three-fifths (58.3%) of respondents using it "often" or "sometimes," followed by library computers (38.4%), the coffee shop (35.9%), wireless Internet (28.4%), children's play areas (22.3%), outside seating (15.3%), study rooms (15.0%), and meeting rooms (10.9%).

  - Nearly half (46.4%) of respondents with an African American or black member in their household said they "often" use the library computers compared to 11.6% of those without African American members in their household.*

- *More patrons asked for help from library staff in locating items than for suggesting possible titles, researching information, or using the online catalog.* Two-thirds (68.4%) of respondents said they often or sometimes ask for help in locating items, while only 32.4% often or sometimes need help researching information, 25.9% need help using the online catalog, and 17.5% often or sometimes ask for suggestions.

  - More respondents with an African-American or black member in their household said they "often" or "sometimes" ask for assistance in researching information compared to those in households without African American members (22.7% versus 6.4%; 45.5% versus 28.2%, respectively).*

  - Over two-fifths of respondents with a 4-year college degree or less said they "never" ask for help researching information (45.5% of those with some college or less and 41.5% of those with a 4-year college degree) compared to 27.3% of those with postgraduate education.*

- *Patrons would like to see changes made to the library's checkout and drop-off procedures.* At checkout, 77.5% of respondents would like to have the due date stamped on each item, 58.7% of respondents want to receive a reminder before items are due, 40.4% would like to have self-checkout stations, and 35.4% would prefer to have a receipt listing all items checked-out.

## Library Programs

- *The majority of patrons were interested in attending library programs.* Nearly two-thirds of respondents (63.9%) said they were interested in programs, while 36.1% were not.

  - Over half of those interested in library programs (base = 221) wanted to see more music programs (53.7%) and more author and artist visits (51.9%) at the library. More than two-fifths of respondents interested in library programs wished there were more programs dealing with international cultures (44.9%) and social issues (42.1%), programs for adults (42.1%), and book discussions (42.1%).

  - Only one-fifth (19.4%) of respondents with white or Caucasian members in their household wanted the library to have additional programming for school-age children, compared to two-fifths (41.2%) of those with no white members in their household.*

  - Almost three-quarters (72.5%) of those who speak a language other than English wanted the library to have more programming on international culture, compared to 39.1% of those who speak only English.*

- One-quarter (24.6%) of those who expressed interest in library programs (base = 221) would like children's programming on Monday through Friday between 9am and 1pm. Saturday afternoons between 1pm and 6pm were the second-most popular time (15.5%).

- One-third (33.2%) of those who expressed interest in library programs (base = 221) said Monday through Thursday evenings between 6pm and 9pm would be a good time for adult programs, while one-fifth (20.1%) preferred Sunday afternoons between 1pm and 5pm.

## Library Website

- *The majority of patrons expected the library website to have a variety of features.*

  - The more popular features patrons expected to find on the library website included being able to search the online catalog (88.6%), renew library materials (86.8%), place hold requests on library materials (84.6%), find library hours and phone numbers (82.8%), find information on library programs and events (70.8%), view lists of library purchases (60.6%), and request holds for items on order (50.8%).

  - Nine out of ten patrons with postgraduate education expected to be able to use the library website to search the catalog and renew library materials, compared to smaller percentages of people with a 4-year college education or less.*

- *Frequency of website use varied by education level.* More than one-third (34.9%) of those with some college or less have "never" used the library website, compared to 15.3% of those who are college graduates, and 11.7% of those with postgraduate education.*

- *Many features of the library website were easy for patrons to perform.* Reading the screen was easiest, with 59.6% of patrons who said it was easy, followed by returning to the home page (51.7%), navigating website pages (40.1%), finding contact information (38.7%), and searching the online catalog (37.3%).

  - Smaller percentages of respondents said it was easy to find library programs (22.6%) or find online articles (11.3%) through the library website.

  - Slightly more than one-half (50.5%) of respondents in English-speaking households felt it was "easy" to search the library catalog, compared to less than one-third (30.2%) of those who speak a language other than English.*

## Library Technology

- *The majority of patrons used email on a routine basis.*

  - Nearly all (98.8%) of respondents reported using email on a regular basis when asked about their technology habits. Over one-third of respondents also used text messaging on their cell phones (38.6%) and instant messenger services (34.6%).

  - More respondents in households with African American or black members routinely used instant messaging services and cell phone text messaging features, compared to other households.*

- *Portable media device ownership was common among patrons.* Nearly two-thirds (65.4%) said they owned a portable media player while 34.6% said they did not.

- Over four-fifths (84.1%) of those in Asian or Pacific Islander households own a player compared to 62.5% in non-Asian households.*

- Over 70% of those living in census tracts 51, 52, 59, and 60 (76.7%), tract 58 (76.7%), and tracts 53 and 54 (71.9%) owned a media player. Percentages for other census tracts were lower but still greater than 50%.*

- Most patrons wanted to be able to download music at the library (87.9%), followed by audio books (64.4%), e-books (51.7%), and movies (48.9%).

- *Patrons expected to be able to do a variety of activities in the library computer lab.* Most wanted to be able to use a scanner (58.8%), save files to CD or DVD from library computers (44.6%), attend technology classes (41.2%), get technology assistance from staff (36.7%), submit online forms or applications (35.0%), and edit and save digital images (33.3%).

  - Nearly half (48.9%) of respondents who spoke a language other than English wanted to be able to submit forms and applications at the library, compared to 30.8% of English-only speaking households.*

  - Almost half (46.9%) of English-only households said they were interested in receiving technology assistance from library staff, compared to one-quarter (24.4%) of those who spoke another language.*

## CONCLUSIONS

Overall, patrons of the Urbana Free Library are pleased with the library, its collections and especially the quality of service. It was clear from the written comments that people value the library and see it as a place where all members of the family can go to find materials of interest to them. Respondents generally rated the library collections they had used highly, and for many types of items, including books and audio books, the Urbana Free Library was a major source for those materials.

Suggestions for improving collections tended to emphasize the particular interests of a respondent. Having a greater selection for the audio book, music, and movie collections was echoed by a number of patrons in the written comments, and these collections also had higher percentages of respondents rating them as a 3, 4, or 5 (on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being "poor"). Some commented that it could be difficult to locate materials, and the concern is corroborated by the number of patrons who reported asking for help in finding items relative to other types of staff assistance.

Parking was a concern for many respondents. It featured prominently in the written comments, with complaints about the number of spaces available, the layout of the lot, and the fact that meters are enforced during the day. Most patrons often or sometimes come to the library by car, and over half reported having difficulty finding parking often or sometimes. Respondents with an African American or black member in their household are more likely to leave and do not visit the library if there is no parking available than those from households with no African American members. Given the Urbana Free Library's urban location, it may be difficult carve out

additional room for parking spaces. Attempts to increase awareness of additional parking options will continue to be important in the future.

The analysis by socioeconomic factors like ethnicity, language, and education indicated some of the differences in library use by different subpopulations. Respondents who spoke a language other than English in their household not only preferred having the library open later on Friday evenings, but also wanted the library to have more programming on international cultures and be able to submit forms and applications in the library computer lab. More respondents with African American or black members in their household used the library computer lab and reported asking for assistance in researching information than those in households without African American members. Education level was also associated with library website use and whether or not people asked for help when researching information. These variations suggest ways in which library services can be tailored to meet the needs of these subpopulations.

Nearly all respondents said they used email on a routine basis, and perhaps not so surprisingly, email was the most popular way people wanted to be notified of library services and programs. But email communications should not just be limited to this, as many patrons were also interested in receiving email reminders for when checked-out items were due. Although approximately one in ten library patrons used RSS on a regular basis, it was not a popular means for library announcements. Since RSS technology is relatively simple and inexpensive to implement, the library may want to consider incorporating it into their website at some point; however, there is a clear demand for library communications via email currently. Nevertheless, print options should still be available for those who wish it, since flyers and posters and library mailings were the second and third most popular choices for library announcements.

Ownership of portable media devices like iPods and other types of digital players was very high, with at least 50% of respondents from every census tract reporting owning one. Respondents showed moderate levels of interest in being able to download media from the library, particularly music, and the library may want to consider making this type of content available to patrons. Whether the library should have a video game collection was a polarizing issue. Although the majority of respondents did not feel it was necessary, others were interested in being able to borrow games. A number of respondents said the library should not do this in the open ended comments, suggesting that some may view it to be out of scope for a library traditionally focused on books. And this tension probably portends of more to come as Urbana takes steps to position itself to address changes in media and technology.

Some patrons expressed concern that the library would change too many things, presumably as a result of this survey, with comments ranging from "We love the Urbana Free! As it is," to "Don't change too much!" to "Quit trying to please everybody and be everything." These views suggest that new strategies or policies for the Urbana Free Library need not be implemented quickly and they also showed that diminishing existing services could prove to be controversial. Ultimately, the Urbana Free Library is in the best position to interpret the results from this survey and address the needs of their patrons.