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Coding practices decoded: Using NVivo software to analyze LibQUAL+® comments

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BACKGROUND: A presentation at the 2010 Library Assessment Conference noted that while the majority of LibQUAL+® users perform qualitative analysis on survey comments, the literature on the coding procedures employed is sparse. While coding is not a one-size-fits-all endeavor, there is value in sharing effective practices among institutions, and those outlined below were successfully employed at California State University, Monterey Bay. Our analysis of LibQUAL+® comments was facilitated by NVivo, a software package designed for qualitative analysis. Less than 8% of the libraries surveyed in the above study used NVivo software, the majority preferring instead to employ software not specifically designed for qualitative data (e.g. Microsoft Excel). Specialized software packages such as NVivo may be useful to libraries looking to get a full understanding of their LibQUAL+® comments; some benefits and drawbacks of this software are outlined here.

The LibQUAL+® Experience at CSUMB:

Our Campus
- 5000 students
- 7 librarians

The LibQUAL+® Survey
- 1157 responses
- 460 comments

About NVivo:
- Product of QSR International
- Analysis of multimedia, qualitative data
- $670 for education license (one computer)
- Used by anthropologists, social scientists

What is coding and how do I do it?

"The research librarians are very good. I like the building. I need much greater access to online subscriptions, journals etc. A physical concern I have is that there are very few places that I can find to study where there are not people talking. It would be helpful if library staff would circulate regularly, listen, and especially in quiet designated areas, ask people to be quiet or move."

Comment coded at nodes:
- Personnel Positive
- Physical Space Positive
- Materials access
- Noise level

Nodes used at CSUMB:
- Art
- Circulation
- Computers and Printers
- Computers need more access
- Computers Positive
- Discipline
- General positive
- Hours
- Hours Improvement
- Hours Positive
- Instruction
- IT comments
- Library Personnel
- Library services
- Library website
- Materials access
- Misc. suggestions or comments
- Noise level
- Other programs
- Periodicals
- Physical Space
- Cleanliness
- Physical Space Improvement
- Physical Space Positive
- Reference
- Sex
- Study areas
- Library as a good place to study
- Need for more study space
- Survey
- Third floor

Benefits of NVivo:
- Generate reports
- Collocate and disseminate comments by topic or user group
- Illuminate trends

Drawbacks of NVivo:
- Cost
- Training
- License limits number of computers
- Difficult to share coding workload

What coding told us about library user satisfaction:
- Positive feelings about library building and services
- Most commonly expressed desires:
  - More quiet study spaces
  - Longer hours
  - Additional computers
- Survey results reinforced and further explicated
- Perception of library varies by discipline and user group