

## Project Cover Sheet

<b>Project</b>	<b>Ask Us – Survey</b> <i>Survey of users regarding their choice of buttons to represent the Ask Us reference service</i>
	The University of Michigan Library’s reference service is currently branded “Ask Us” and is represented on the web as such, including an image of a cartoon thought bubble with a question mark in it.
<b>Committee &amp; Members</b>	Usability Working Group  Kat Hagedorn (chair), Suzanne Chapman, David Carter, Michael Creech, Shevon Desai, Karen Downing, Anne Karle-Zenith, Shana Kimball, Molly Kleinman, Gurpreet Rana, Robert Tolliver  Julie Piacentine & John Suci (student interns)
<b>Report Info</b>	Report Author(s): Michael Creech, Karen Downing, Anne Karle-Zenith & Molly Kleinman Contact Information: <a href="mailto:ul-usability@umich.edu">ul-usability@umich.edu</a> Report Date: April 2008; Last Revised: May 2008
<b>Objectives</b>	The goal of this survey was to offer users the opportunity to select a graphic to represent the Ask Us reference service from a variety of options (as determined by a review of how other libraries represent this service). Specifically, we wanted to learn if users prefer Ask Us or Ask a Librarian and if they prefer text to describe the methods for contacting a librarian, icons to describe the methods for contacting a librarian, or neither text nor icons.
<b>Methodology</b>	Method – Survey (web based) 115 participants Dates of study: December 2007 – February 2008
<b>Results &amp; Analysis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Ask a Librarian button with text descriptions was on average rated the most “informative”</li><li>• The Ask a Librarian button with text descriptions was also rated as being the best icon choice (~48%)</li></ul>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use the Ask a Librarian button with text descriptions</li><li>• When promoting the Ask Us chat service, emphasize speed and convenience.</li></ul>

## INTRODUCTION

The Ask Us reference services at the University of Michigan (including email, chat and IM) were initiated in 1998, 2002 and 2005 respectively. Over the past year, the Usability Working Group (UWG) has undertaken a number of tests to examine various aspects of the Ask Us services. During Fall semester of 2007, the UWG worked with the coordinator of the Ask Us services to develop and implement a brief online survey to assess Ask Us user satisfaction and ease of use of the Ask Us services, and to determine the users' preference for labeling of the Ask Us navigation button. The survey questioned users of Ask Us about the frequency of their use, how they navigated to the Ask Us services, which contact method (telephone, IM, email or in-person) they preferred, which of several navigation buttons they felt were most eye catching and explanatory of the range of reference services provided, and what they thought about their Ask Us experiences.

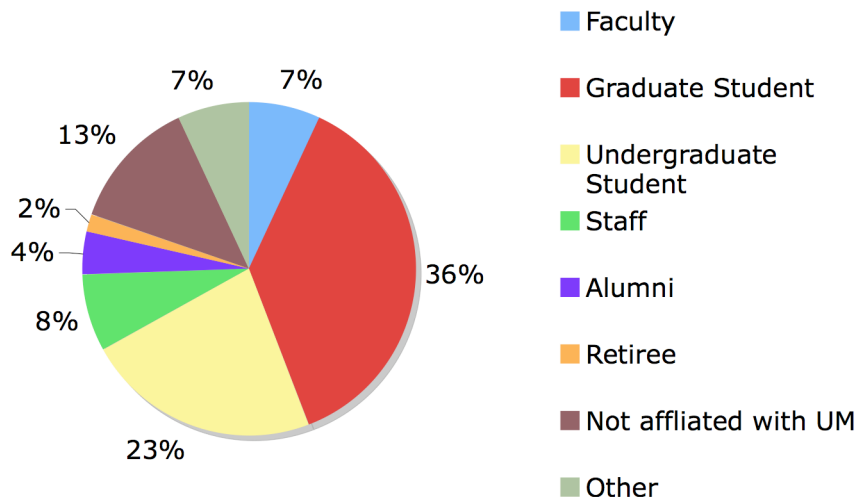
Note: Graphics depicting the different button choices were created to help illustrate the different options for the purposes of the survey only. This report does not aim to recommend a particular style for the button, only possible changes to the service name and accompanying text.

## METHODOLOGY

A ten question web-based survey was developed during Fall 2007. The survey was active December 2007 through February 2008. Some users of Ask Us email service received an invitation to take the brief survey with an URL link to the survey. There were also links to the survey from the Library's News and Information page, and from the Ask Us website. Altogether, 115 users of the Ask Us service completed the survey, the vast majority of which were graduate and undergraduate students (62%).

## SURVEY RESPONSES

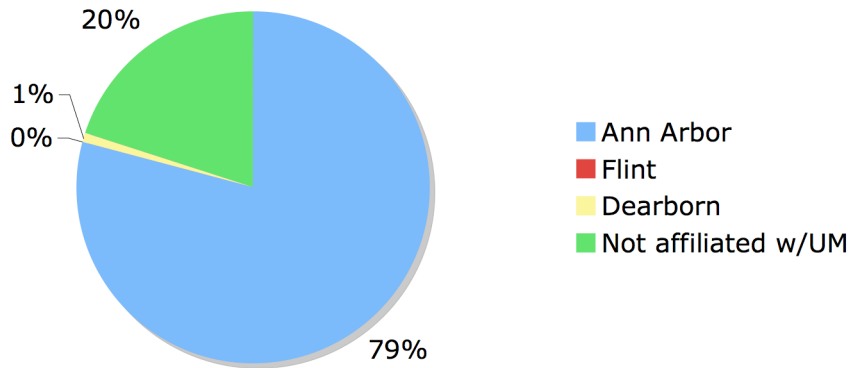
**Q1. Please indicate your primary affiliation to the University of Michigan (you may select more than one).**



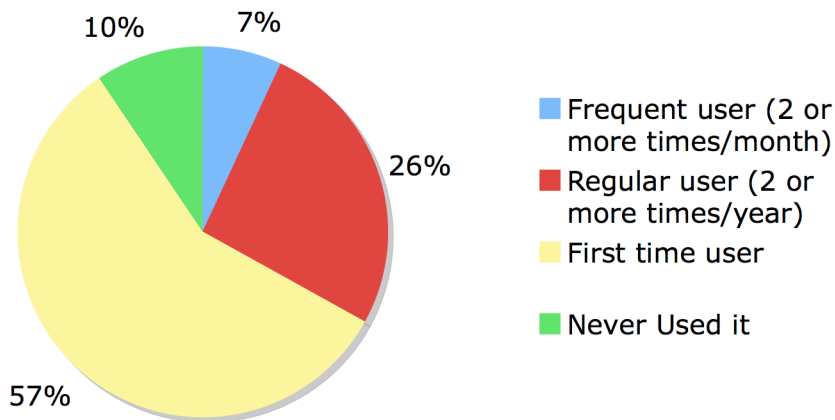
“Other” responses included:

- Assistant to 5 faculty members
- EMU faculty
- Interested in a study
- Internet user
- MRLT grad student
- Public
- Research fellow
- Visiting Scholar

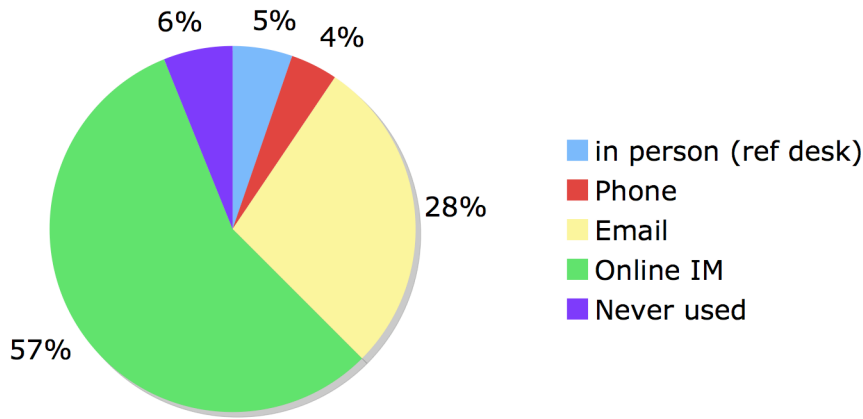
**Q2. Please indicate which University of Michigan campus you are affiliated with.**



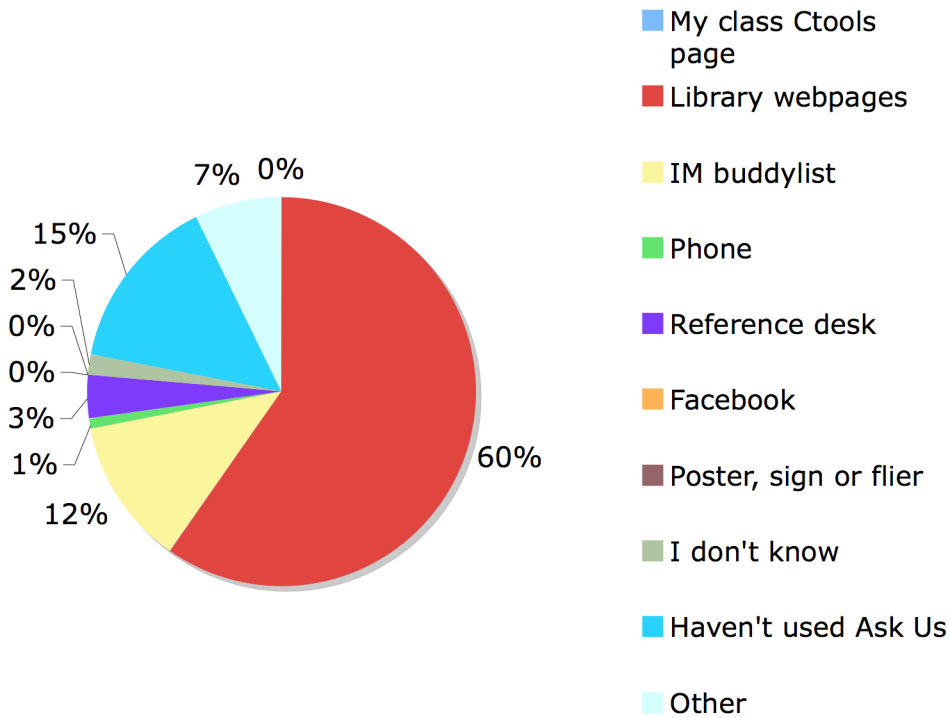
**Q3. How many times have you used the Ask Us reference service via email, instant message, phone, and/or in person?**



**Q4. Which method do you prefer when using the Ask Us reference service?**



**Q5. The last time you used the Ask Us reference service, where did you start?**



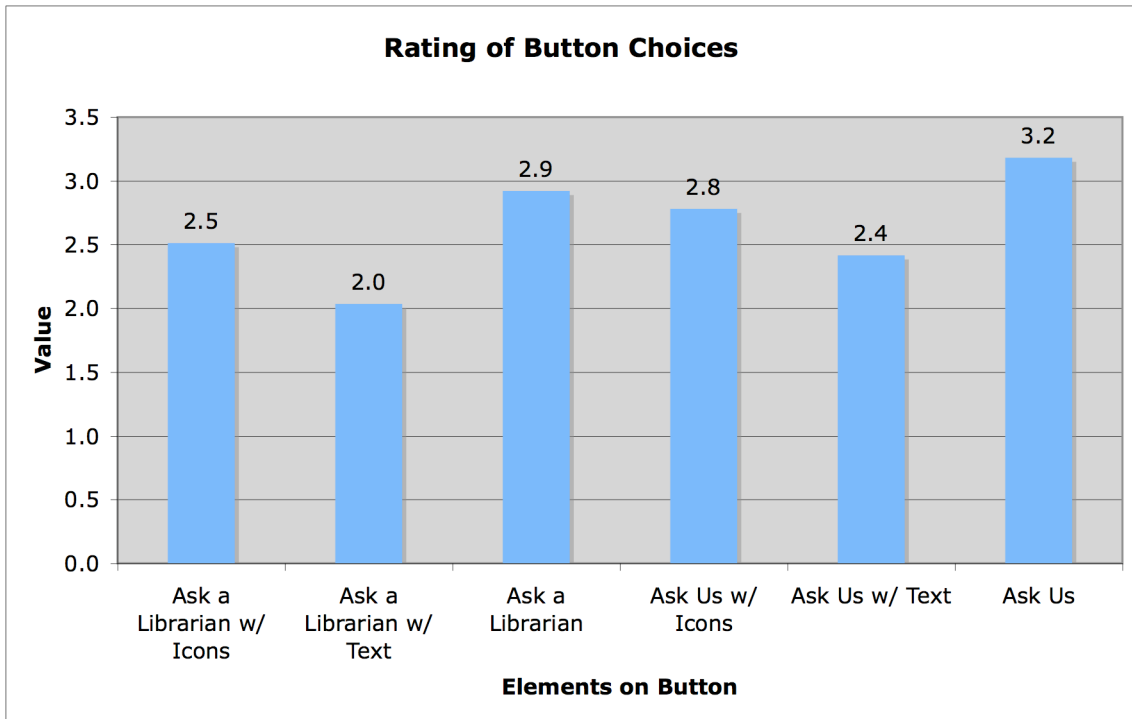
“Other” responses included:

- Email
- Found a reference on Google
- From “ask us” link in ERIC database
- From OCLC
- Google
- Internet

**Q6. Of the icons listed below, please rate how informative each icon is in representing what the Ask Us reference service is about.**

- 1 = Very Informative
- 2 = Informative
- 3 = Neutral
- 4 = Uninformative
- 5 = Very Uninformative

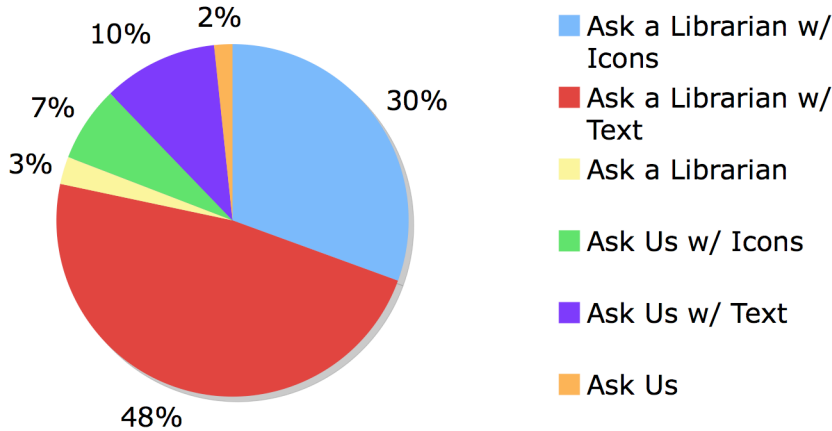




On this scale, the lowest number represents the best rating. The Ask a Librarian button that incorporated text to explain the methods for asking a librarian received the best average rating (2.0). The Ask Us button that incorporated text was second best (2.4) followed closely by the Ask a Librarian button with icons representing the methods for asking a librarian (2.5). The other three options, Ask Us button with icons (2.8), Ask a Librarian button with no text or icons (2.9), and Ask Us button with no text or icons (3.2), had average ratings closer to 3 on the scale.

**Q7. Of the icons that you have previously rated, please select which icon you think is the best.**

**Best Icon Choice**



Of the 115 survey respondents, 55 (~48%) chose the Ask a Librarian button that incorporated text to be the best icon choice. The icon chosen as second best was the Ask a Librarian button that incorporated icons with 35 votes (~30%). In total, 78% of respondents preferred the button with the words “Ask A Librarian.”

The Ask Us button that incorporated text was third with 12 votes (~10%), followed by the Ask Us button that incorporated icons with 8 votes (~7%), the Ask a Librarian button with no text or icons with 3 votes (~3%) and the Ask Us button with no text or icons with 2 votes (~2%).

**Q8. Please tell us why you felt that this icon was the best one to describe the library's Ask Us reference service.**

The majority of respondents to this free text question selected either the Ask a Librarian button with text or the Ask a Librarian button with icons (~78% combined). Most of the responses for these two options in which the respondents provided the rationales for their selections specifically mentioned that they prefer having the word “Librarian” in the button. As for their preference between the Ask a Librarian button with text versus the Ask a Librarian button with icons, several respondents stated that the words are more descriptive than the icons.

*Representative quotes from survey participants*

“You immediately see who you can contact (a librarian) and how you can contact (Email, Phone, IM). I think it is better than "ask us" because there you may not know who "us" is. I think it is better than with symbols because you might not know what the symbols mean, especially the last one.”

“It is clear that one is contacting a librarian and that there are several ways to contact.”

“I like the "ask a librarian" rather than "ask us" because I don't know who "us" is. I like the written words--email, phone, IM--better than the icons. The meanings of the icons aren't immediately apparent to me when viewing them out of context.”

**Q9. Please share with us any additional comments you might have about the Ask Us reference service.**

The overwhelming majority of pertinent responses to the question were strongly positive. The words that users used most frequently to describe the service were “helpful”, “great”, and “quick.” Several people expressed a particular attachment to the instant message Ask Us service, and many mentioned by name the librarian who helped them. The Ask Us librarians were “friendly,” “helpful,” “patient,” and “prompt.”

There were two suggestions from people who like and use Ask Us chat. The first was a request for longer Ask Us chat hours – “Sometimes when the library is open, nobody’s on IM and that saddens me.” The second suggested adding Google Chat to the IM service.

*Representative quotes from survey participants*

“I love the ‘ask us’ service – it’s a great resource when research is beginning to get really frustrating and overwhelming.”

“Today I used the service for the first time, online via IM. The librarian was helpful, gave simple instructions, and responded quickly. I have a tendency to call if I have a question because I know I will receive a prompt response. I thought that the IM service would be slow, but it wasn’t.”

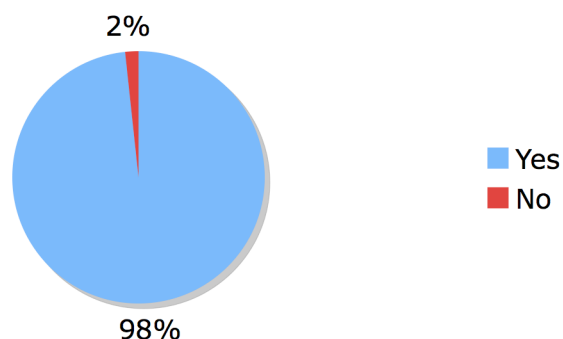
“I think it’s REALLY neat and if I ever have a question I will use it again. How easy!”

“It is really terrific for someone away from campus (in Japan). As is electronic 7-fast and ILL. It transforms the process of field research to be able to get materials. Of course, that has its minuses – I could be reading stuff in Japanese here.”



**Q10. Would you recommend the Ask Us reference service to your friends?**

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Of the 115 respondents, 113 (~98%) said that they would recommend the Ask Us reference service to their friends.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1) Based on the ratings, selections and comments from a plurality (~48%) of the respondents, the Library should change the name of the Ask Us service to Ask a Librarian and use text descriptions when possible.
- 2) When promoting the Ask Us chat service, it might be effective to emphasize speed and convenience. These were some of the traits that respondents praised most frequently.
- 3) Continue to offer multiple venues for Ask Us; phone, email, and chat were all described positively, and some respondents specifically mentioned that they like having more than one way to ask the library a question.