

ASKCOLORADO'S FIRST YEAR ONLINE

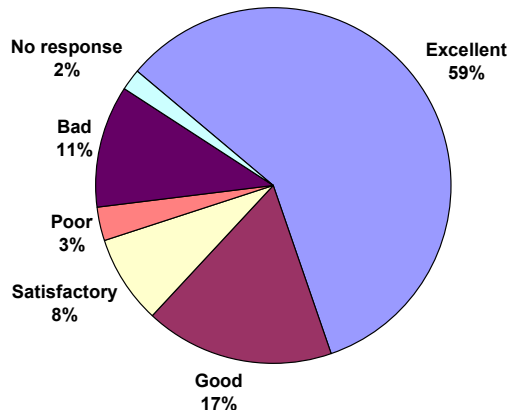
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Coloradans Embrace Virtual Reference Service

AskColorado, a statewide virtual reference service, was launched on September 2, 2003. The service, available for both English and Spanish-speaking patrons, is staffed by over 200 library personnel from all types of libraries throughout the state. AskColorado is funded through a combination of local contributions from Colorado libraries, federal funds provided by the Colorado State Library under the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA), and state general funds allocated to the State Library. Available online 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at <http://www.askcolorado.org>, the librarians at AskColorado answered, on average, over 2,000 questions a month during the service's first year of operation. The service's usage figures have continued to increase. During the first two months of 2005 an average of over 5,000 questions were answered per month, over half of them from K-12 students.

Chart 1
Overall, how would you rate the AskColorado virtual reference service?



Of all respondents:

- Three out of four rated the service overall as excellent or good. (See Chart 1.)
- Two out of three were very satisfied or satisfied with the answer to their question. (See Chart 2.)
- Almost three out of four found the service very helpful or helpful. (See Chart 3.)

AskColorado Highlights

- Over 2,000 reference questions were answered per month (on average) during AskColorado's first year online.
- In early 2005, over 6,000 questions were answered during a single month.
- Nearly three-quarters of respondents found the service to be "helpful" or "very helpful."
- Well over half of respondents under age 18 (59%) and aged 18-24 (71%) used AskColorado to do research for homework or another school project.

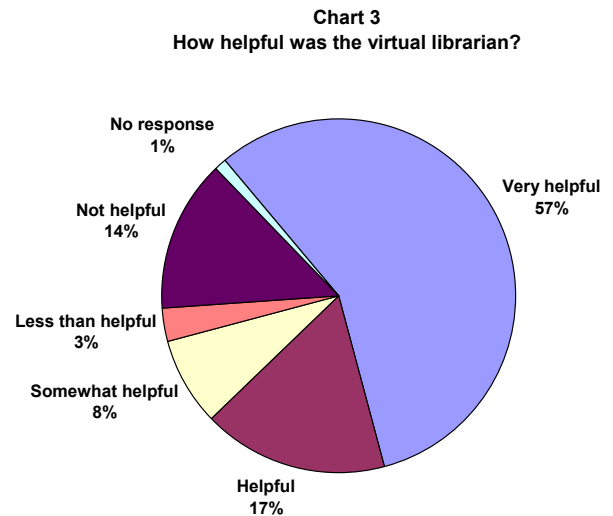
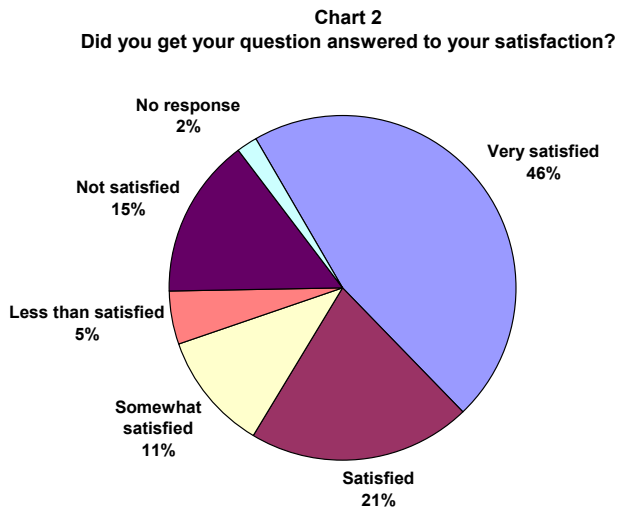
Customer Satisfaction Survey

A pop-up survey, in English or Spanish (as appropriate), was presented to all users of the AskColorado virtual reference service between September 2003 and June 2004. Of the 5,382 responses, 5,322 in were English and 60 were in Spanish. Approximately 23,100 virtual reference questions were answered during the same time period, producing a survey response rate of 23%.

"The reference question was answered quickly and since this was my first experience with the system, the librarian was concerned that my question was answered completely. Wonderful service."

- AskColorado User





Outcome Survey

A supplemental outcome survey was also administered to respondents who provided their e-mail addresses for follow-up contact. The English and Spanish versions of this survey produced a total 335 responses. Respondents provided information about their gender, age, and general location, as well as how AskColorado helped them. While the relatively small percentage of AskColorado users represented (1.5%) makes it difficult to draw definitive conclusions, the survey provided a useful initial portrait of the service's patron base, and establishes a baseline for future evaluations. Highlights of the survey's findings included:

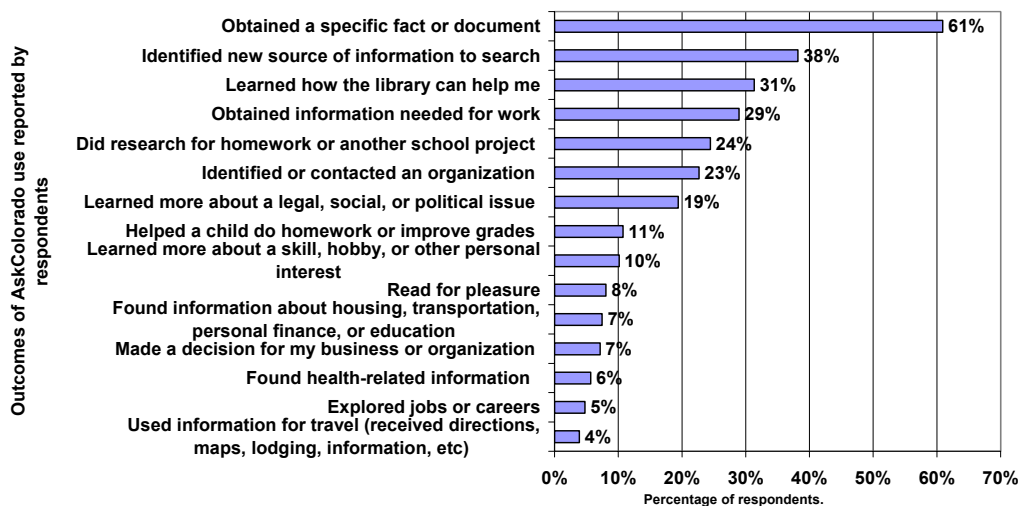
- Over half of AskColorado outcome survey respondents (51%) reported having a bachelor's or higher college degree.
- People ages 40-59 represented the biggest group of AskColorado outcome survey respondents at 42%. The next biggest group was 25-39 year olds at 26%.
- Over half (61%) of the outcome survey respondents said they used the service to obtain a specific fact or document. (See Chart 4.)
- Over one-third of respondents (38%) identified a new source of information to search through AskColorado. Almost one-third of respondents learned how the library could help them (31%) or obtained information needed for work (29%). (See Chart 4.)
- Close to one-quarter of these AskColorado users were using the service to do research for homework or another school project (24%) or to identify or contact an organization (23%). (See Chart 4.)

"This is a great service. I looked through numerous web sites to try and find this specific information, obviously to no avail. Thank you for this wonderful opportunity. I have never corresponded with a virtual librarian before and certainly will not hesitate to do so again."

- AskColorado User



Chart 4:
As a result of my recent use of the AskColorado
Virtual reference service, I...



Values do not add to 100% because respondents could select more than one outcome.

Cross-tabulations of outcomes reported by AskColorado users and their gender, age, and educational attainment were examined for statistically significant differences. Findings included the following:

- Almost one-quarter (24%) of male respondents and 16% of female respondents reported using AskColorado to learn more about a legal, social, or political issue.
- Respondents in the younger age groups used the service for homework questions. Well over half of respondents under age 18 (59%) and aged 18-24 (71%) used AskColorado to do research for homework or another school project. (See Chart 5.)
- Over one-third of respondents ages 40-59 (37%) and over one-quarter (28%) of 25-39 year olds said they used the service to obtain information needed for work. (See Chart 5.)

“Este servicio esta padrisimo es una buena fuente para encontrar facil y rapidamente lo que se esta buscando. Gracias.” (This service is a good source to easily and quickly find what you're looking for. Thank you.)

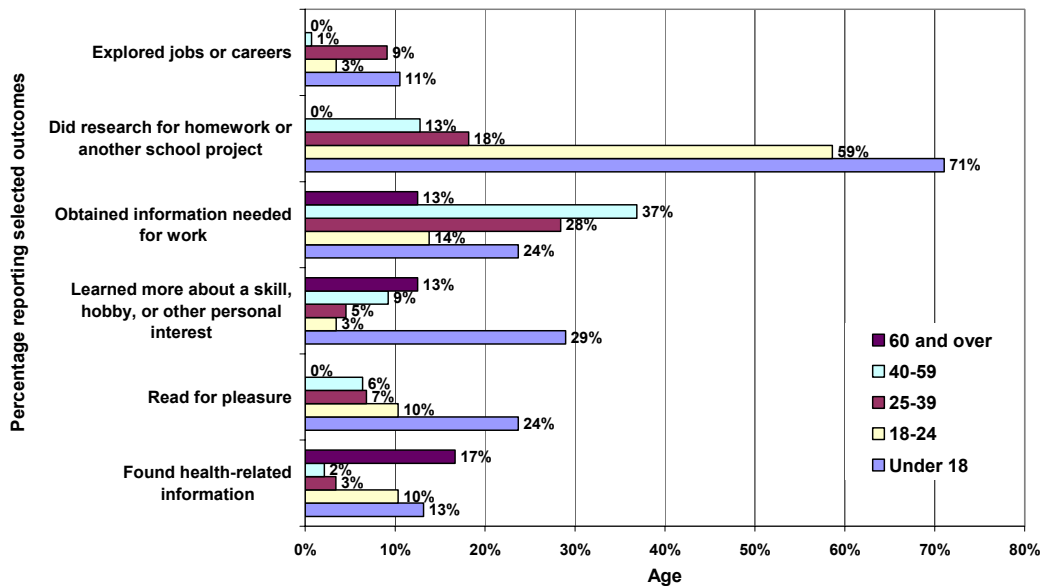
-AskColorado User

“I just discovered this service. It's one of the coolest things I've ever heard of. What a great luxury to have a librarian on call, 24/7! This is the most amazing thing.”

-AskColorado User



Chart 5
Percentage of Respondents Reporting Selected Outcomes of AskColorado Use by Age Group



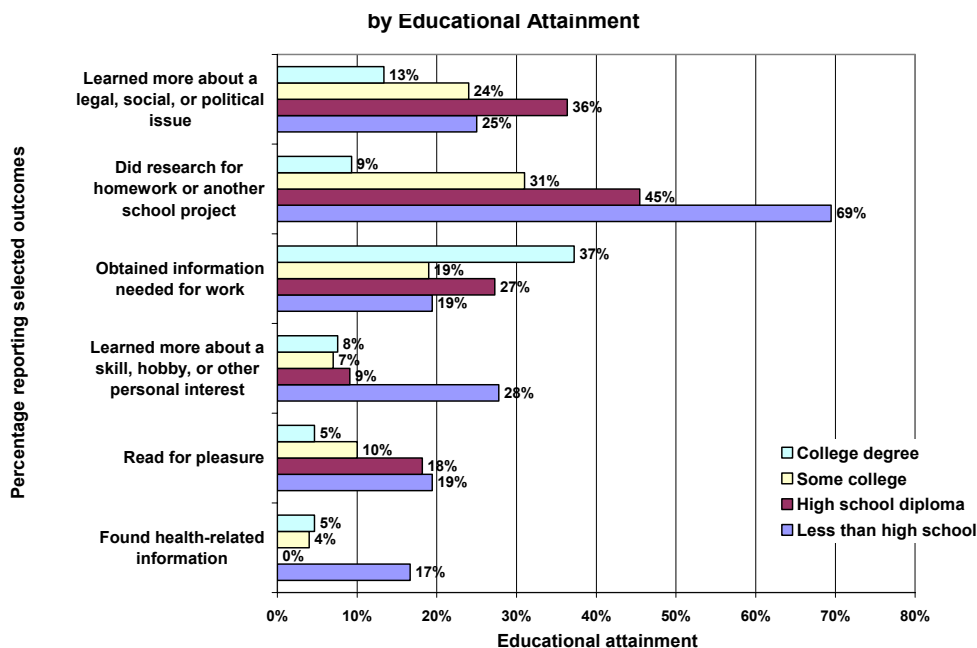
- Those with a college degree used AskColorado to obtain work-related information almost three times as often as the next most frequently cited outcome – learning more about a legal, social, or political issue (37% versus 13%). (See Chart 6.)
- Almost one-third (31%) of respondents who listed their education as “some college” indicated they used the service to do research for homework or another school project. Almost one-quarter (24%) of these users learned more about a legal, social, or political issue by utilizing AskColorado. (See Chart 6.)
- Respondents with a high school diploma also seem to be pursuing further education. In this group, 45% indicated they did homework or schoolwork with AskColorado’s help. Over one-third (36%) of this group also learned more about a legal, social, or political issue and over one-quarter (27%) obtained information needed for work. (See Chart 6.)
- Over two-thirds (69%) of the users with less than a high school education reported using the service to do research for homework or another school project. (See Chart 6.)

“What a great service! It feels so good to know that there are trained people there to help you when overwhelmed with a large research task. The staff person that I spoke with was very helpful and friendly. I will definitely recommend this service to ALL of my classmates!”

- AskColorado User



Chart 6
Percentage of Respondents Reporting Selected Outcomes of AskColorado Use
By Educational Attainment



"I had not used AskColorado before, and I am amazed at how quickly I was able to get the information I needed. I did not realize until I asked my question, that I would be communicating in real time with a librarian. I will be telling people about this great service -- I hope you don't mind!"

- AskColorado User

By all indications, the AskColorado virtual reference service has been well-received and has successfully fulfilled a wide array of information needs during its first year of operation. Use of the service is on the increase, and in February 2005 AskColorado librarians answered a total of 6,483 questions, the majority of them from K-12 students.

Starting in late 2004, a second series of customer satisfaction and outcome surveys was made available to AskColorado users. This continuing commitment to evaluating this online resource over time will provide a greatly enhanced view of how – and how well – the service is being utilized by its patrons.

Visit the AskColorado virtual reference service at <http://www.askcolorado.org/>.



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