

“Great Service!” Coloradans Embrace AskColorado and AskAcademic

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AskColorado (www.askcolorado.org), a statewide virtual reference service, was launched on September 2, 2003. Colorado libraries joined the cooperative as members to provide 24/7

“This was my first time using the website. I LOVE IT! The librarian was very nice and helpful. I will definitely return.”
-AskColorado User

chat reference service to Coloradans. Over the years, the cooperative honed in on three essential and high-use entry-points for patrons: K-12, General, and Academic. These entry points remain today. In 2008 the cooperative’s academic libraries voted to accept academic members from outside the state of Colorado; and

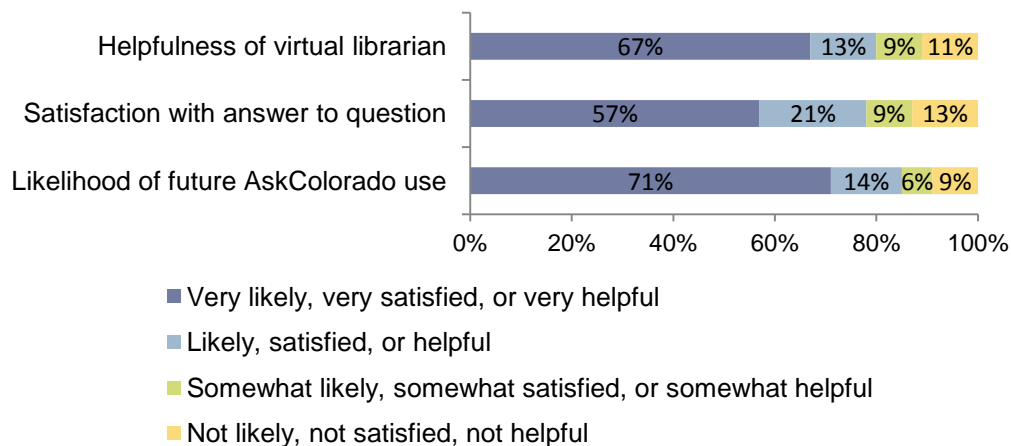
in 2010, the academic queue was re-branded as AskAcademic and a separate website was launched (www.askacademic.org). AskColorado and AskAcademic are funded with contributions coming directly from the member libraries and federal funds provided by the Colorado State Library under the Library Services and Technology Act.

Though AskColorado as a whole was previously evaluated by the Library Research Service (LRS), 2011 marks the first year LRS has evaluated AskAcademic as a separate entry point. This Fast Facts presents the results of the AskColorado and AskAcademic customer exit surveys that were administered to almost 1,300 people (1,091 AskColorado users and 206 AskAcademic users) between April and October 2011.¹

AskColorado User Satisfaction

Responses show that the majority of AskColorado users are pleased with the service and are likely to be repeat users (see Chart 1). Four out of five users (80%) rated AskColorado

**Chart 1
2011 AskColorado Satisfaction**



¹ For more detailed results, see the Closer Look Report, “2011 AskColorado and AskAcademic Evaluation,” at http://www.lrs.org/documents/closer_look/AskCOAskAcademic2011_Closer_Look_Report.pdf



librarians as “very helpful” or “helpful,” and six out of seven users (85%) said that they would be “very likely” or “likely” to use the service again. Responses to the question “To what extent are you satisfied with the answer(s) to your question(s)?” were similarly positive: More than three-fourths (77%) of AskColorado users were “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with the answers they received. Compared with previous evaluations of AskColorado, in 2011 the service received the highest ratings yet on the questions of librarian helpfulness, future use, and overall satisfaction.

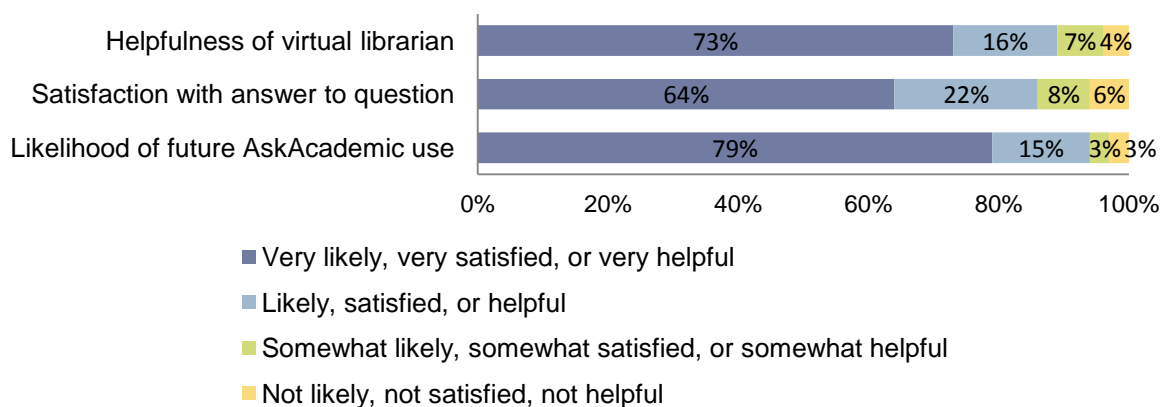
AskAcademic User Satisfaction

Satisfaction was even higher among AskAcademic users. Nearly 9 in 10 AskAcademic survey respondents indicated that the librarians who assisted them were either very helpful or helpful (89%), and most (86%) were either very satisfied or satisfied with the answers they received to their questions. Answers to a question about the likelihood of using AskAcademic again were even more enthusiastic, with 94 percent of respondents saying that they were “very likely” or “likely” to utilize the service again (see Chart 2).

“I was a little uncomfortable about using the library because I haven’t been in school for over twenty years, but the assistance I received today eased my fears and made it into [an] enjoyable experience. I am so glad for the library and now not only do I know how to use it I welcome it. Thank you!”

-AskAcademic User

Chart 2
2011 AskAcademic Satisfaction

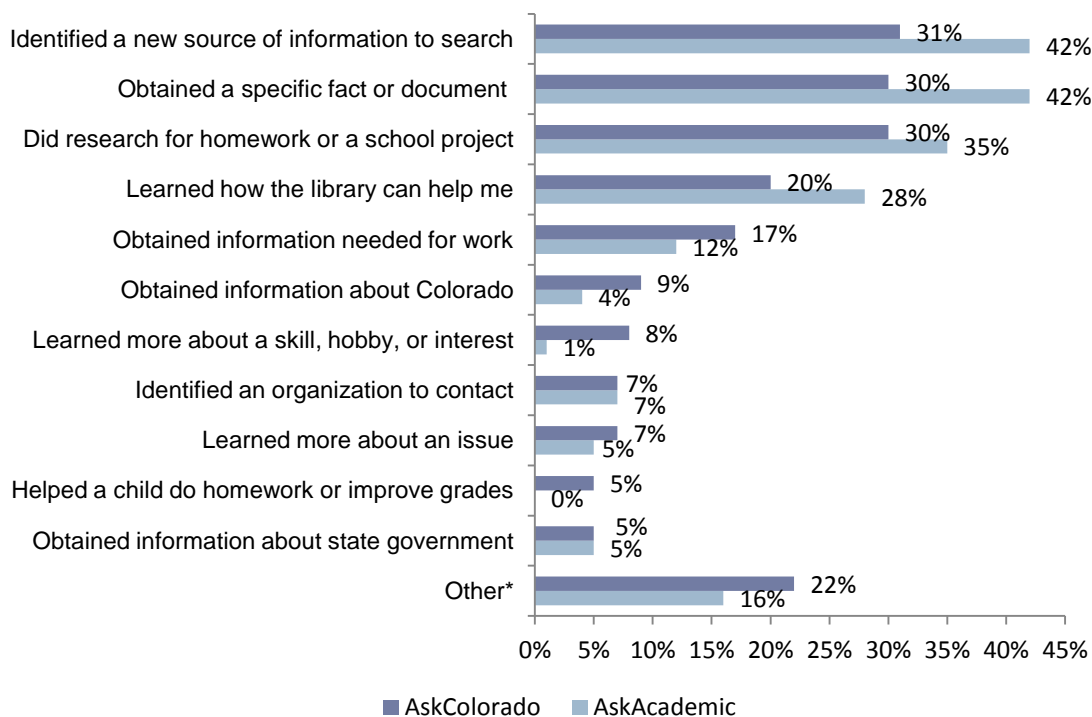


Outcomes

The surveys also asked respondents about what they achieved by using the service. Respondents could select multiple answers to this question. The most popular outcomes for both services were to “identify a new source of information to search” (31%), “obtain a specific fact or document” (30%), and “do research for homework for a school project” (30%) (see Chart 3).



Chart 3
Outcomes Achieved Using AskColorado and AskAcademic



*"Other" responses included assistance with job searches, e-readers, and other library services.

In addition, comments from AskColorado and AskAcademic users show that these virtual reference services complement and enhance traditional library services, enabling users to speak with a librarian late at night or to fill in the gaps caused by closures and reduced hours. In all five years of AskColorado evaluations, "Learned how the library can help me" has been a top outcome. Respondents may even use the services to gauge whether a trip to the library is worth their time. For example, one user commented: *"This feature showed me how I might find info at the library, making it worth a trip downtown on a Saturday. LOVED this."*

Conclusion

Survey data gathered from 2004 to the present shows that Coloradans are consistently and increasingly pleased with the virtual reference service AskColorado. In its first year of evaluation, AskAcademic performed similarly well. Respondents' comments further underscored the value users place on these services: *"[The AskColorado librarian] did her best with a difficult research problem and found information in a few minutes that took me months!"* concluded one user.

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