

AskColorado Evaluation 2005

Introduction

AskColorado began functioning as a statewide virtual reference service on September 2, 2003. A 24/7 service, AskColorado's popularity is growing. During the first ten months of its existence (September 2003 through June 2004), the librarians were involved in an average of 2,000 reference transactions per month. In its second year of existence (July 2004 through June 2005), that number rose to average over 3,500 transactions in each month. In February 2005 alone librarians were involved with 6,483 reference transactions. Note, a reference transaction is defined as a discrete online reference session with a user(s) which may include one or more questions and answers.

AskColorado is a collaborative project, staffed by over 250 library personnel from public and academic libraries throughout the state. The service is made possible with funds provided by the Colorado State Library under the Library Services Technology Act (LSTA) in conjunction with funds and staffing from participating Colorado libraries.

This report will chronicle the results of the built-in evaluation survey for AskColorado's second year. Outcome-based evaluation has been built into the project since its inception on September 2003. During the first year of service, there were two surveys administered to users of the service – a pop-up customer satisfaction survey and an outcome survey emailed to those who opted-in to take this follow up survey. For Fiscal Year 2005, these two surveys were slightly changed and condensed into one pop-up exit survey. The surveys were in either English or Spanish, depending upon the language used in the reference transaction.

AskColorado Patron Survey

A pop-up survey, in English or Spanish as appropriate, was presented to users of the AskColorado following each virtual reference transaction. Between November 2004 and June 2005, 3,828 responses were received – 3,679 in English and 59 in Spanish. During this time frame, there were 34,988 English-language reference transactions, and 582 reference transactions completed in Spanish, meaning 10.5% of English-speaking users and 10.1% of Spanish-speaking users responded to the pop-up survey. The following analysis combines the responses of both language groups. Of these respondents:

- Over two-thirds (68%) found the virtual librarian to be helpful or very helpful, with over half (53%) perceiving the librarian as very helpful. (See Chart 1.)
- Sixty-two percent were satisfied or very satisfied with their answer, with 43 percent being very satisfied. (See Chart 2.)

- Three-quarters (75%) stated that they were likely or very likely to use the service again, with 60 percent being very likely to return. (See Chart 3.)
- Over a third of the respondents (38%) learned about the service via word-of-mouth – from a friend, teacher, or family member. Over a quarter of the respondents (26%) learned about it via a link from another website, either from the Colorado state website, a local library’s website, or the Colorado Virtual Library. (See Chart 4.)
- Nearly one-third (31%) of the respondents used AskColorado to obtain a specific fact or document. Almost one-quarter (23%) of them used it to do research for homework or a school project, and another 22% identified a new source of information to search while using AskColorado. (See Chart 5.)

Chart 1
How helpful was the virtual librarian?

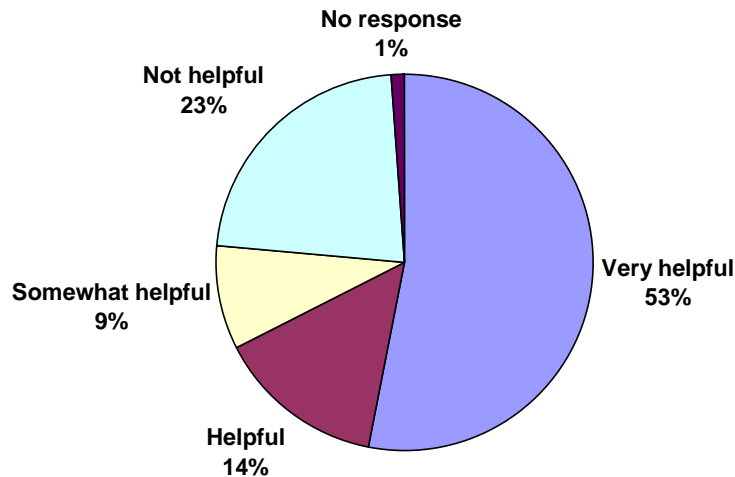


Chart 2
Did you get your question answered to your satisfaction?

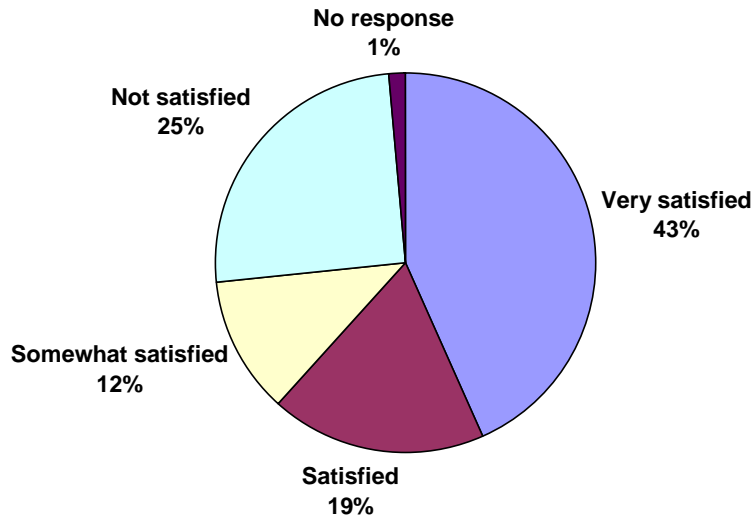


Chart 3
How likely is it that you will use the AskColorado virtual reference service again?

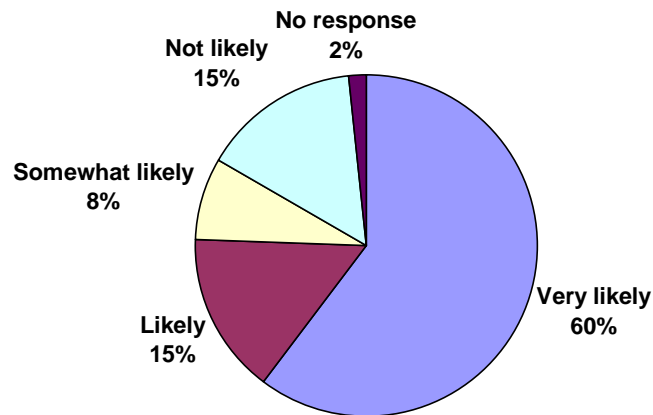


Chart 4
If this is your first visit to AskColorado, how did you learn about the service?

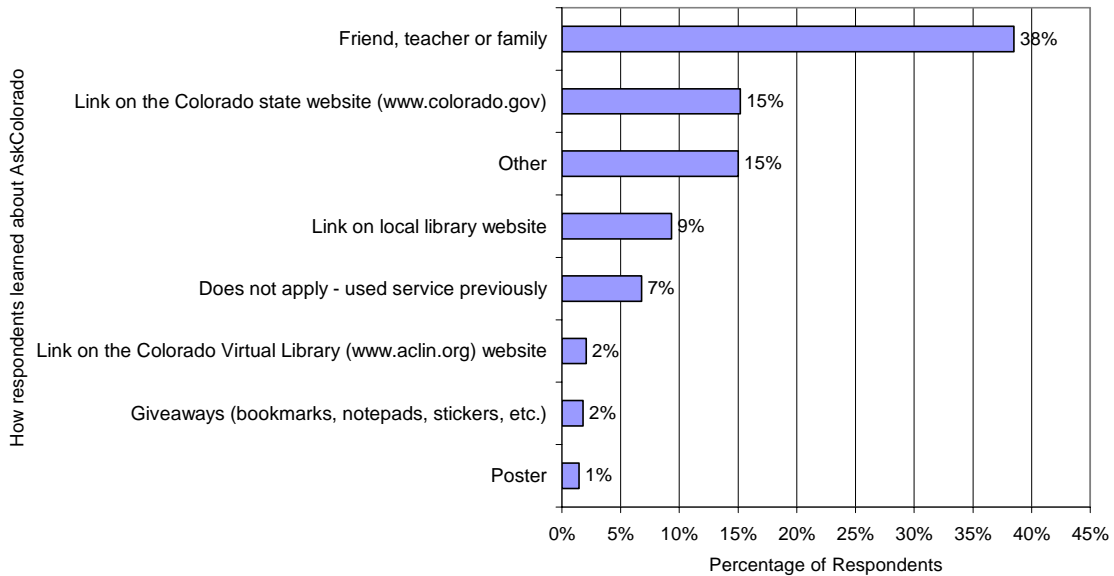
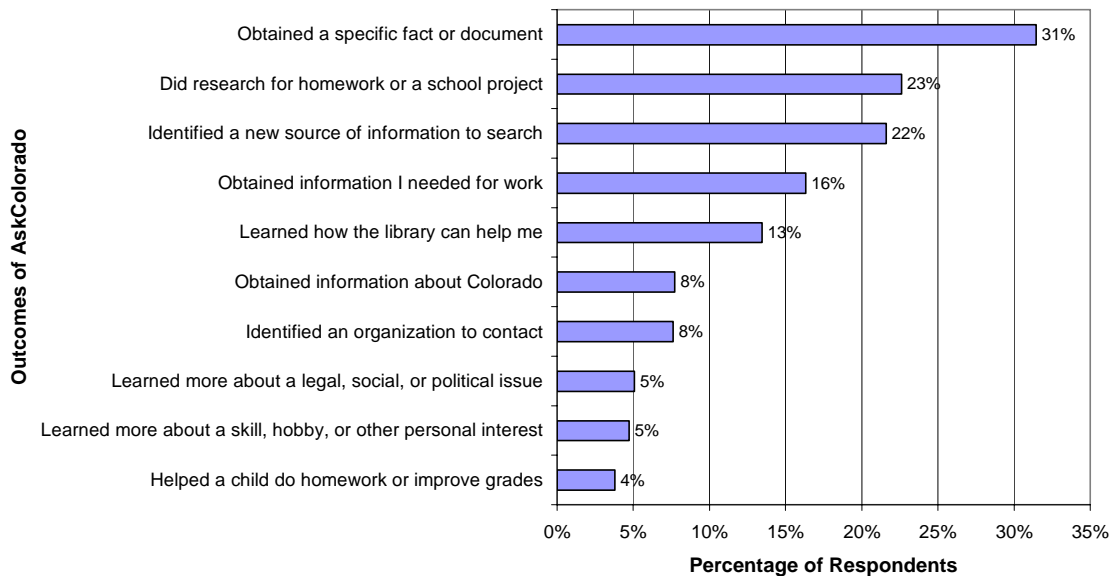


Chart 5
What did you achieve today by using the AskColorado reference service?



Demographics

The AskColorado patron survey also included a series of demographic questions. Results from these questions included:

- Twice as many women as men responded to the customer satisfaction survey. 58% of respondents were women, 28% were men, and 14% did not give their gender. (See Chart 6.)
- Nearly half of the respondents were under 18 years old (49%). The rest were relatively evenly distributed between a collection of older age groups. (See Chart 7.)
- Of current students, 68% replied that they were in the K-12 grades – 13% in elementary school, 35% in middle school, and 20% in high school. (See Chart 8.)
- Of those who were not currently students, nearly half of the respondents (48%) had at least a college degree, with half of these (24% of the total) holding a graduate degree. (See Chart 9.)
- Respondents came from every county in Colorado except one. Sedgwick was the only county without a respondent. (See Table 1.)

Chart 6
AskColorado Patron Survey - Gender

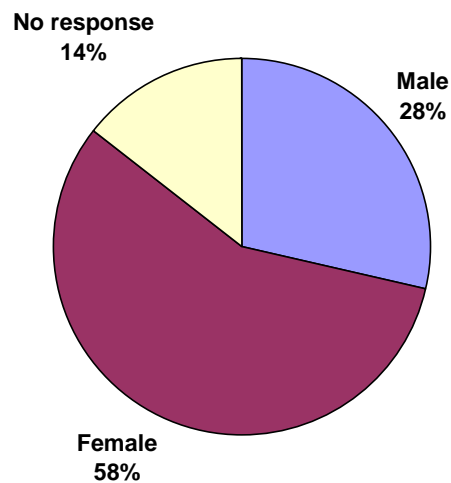


Chart 7
AskColorado Patron Survey - Age

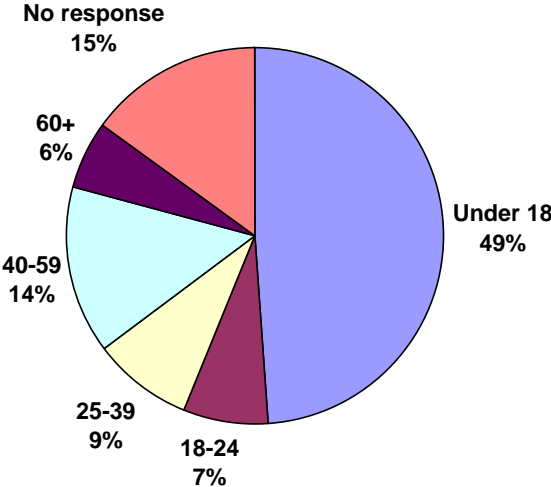


Chart 8
AskColorado Patron Survey - Current Student Status

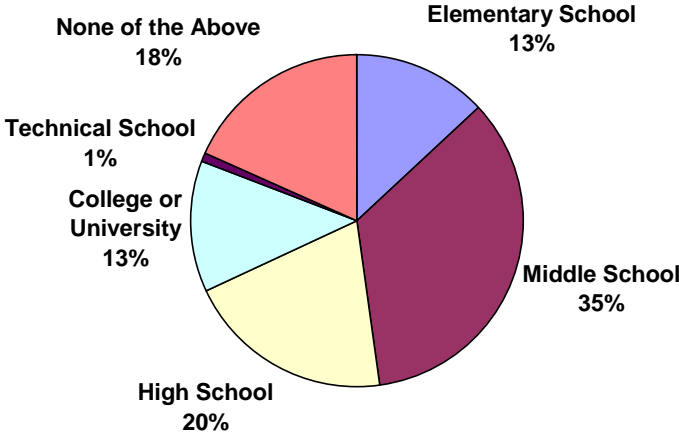


Chart 9
AskColorado Patron Survey - Educational Attainment

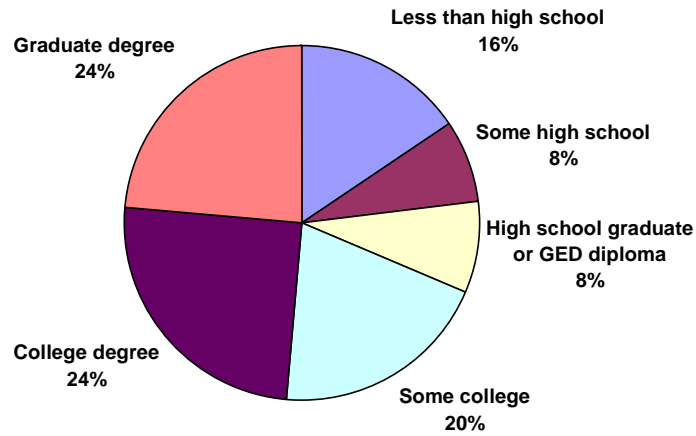


Table 1
Outcome Survey Respondents By County

Adams	123	Fremont	25	Morgan	25
Alamosa	11	Garfield	29	Otero	15
Arapahoe	222	Gilpin	3	Ouray	2
Archuleta	14	Grand	23	Park	6
Baca	19	Gunnison	10	Phillips	6
Bent	47	Hinsdale	3	Pitkin	4
Boulder	211	Huerfano	11	Prowers	17
Broomfield	51	Jackson	10	Pueblo	53
Chaffee	18	Jefferson	260	Rio Blanco	6
Cheyenne	15	Kiowa	6	Rio Grande	11
Clear Creek	12	Kit Carson	47	Routt	22
Conejos	8	Lake	2	Saguache	6
Costilla	4	La Plata	18	San Juan	2
Crowley	6	Larimer	55	San Miguel	3
Custer	4	Las Animas	3	Sedgwick	0
Delta	24	Lincoln	62	Summit	19
Denver	321	Logan	20	Teller	5
Dolores	8	Mesa	140	Washington	10
Douglas	154	Mineral	4	Weld	95

Eagle	16	Moffat	9	Yuma	9
Elbert	25	Montezuma	32	Other US State	346
El Paso	315	Montrose	42	Outside US	77

Cross-tabulations of outcomes reported by AskColorado users with gender, age, current student status, and educational attainment were examined for statistically significant differences. Statistical significance indicates that connections between outcomes and demographic variables are unlikely to be due to chance. The cross-tabulations in which statistically significant differences were identified are presented in the four charts that follow. The charts display results by gender, age, current student status, and educational attainment to show how respondents in different groups varied in their reported outcomes of AskColorado use.

Highlights include:

Gender:

- Over a third of male respondents (36%) and nearly as many female respondents (32%) used AskColorado to obtain a specific fact or document. (See Chart 10.)
- Male respondents were more likely than female respondents to cite using AskColorado for the following reasons: obtaining information needed for work; learning more about a legal, social, or political issue; helping a child do homework or improve grades; learning more about a skill or hobby; and obtaining information about Colorado. (See Chart 10.)

Age:

- Respondents in the younger age groups were more likely to use AskColorado to do research for homework or a school project. Over one-third of respondents under eighteen (34%) and more than one-quarter of those between 18-24 (28%) cited this as a reason for using the service. (See Chart 11.)
- Respondents in the middle age groups were more likely to cite using AskColorado to identify a new source of information to search and to learn how their libraries can help them. (See Chart 11.)
- Older respondents were more likely to use AskColorado to identify an organization to contact or to obtain information about Colorado. (See Chart 11.)

- Though general satisfaction with the service was high, older and younger respondents were more likely to respond that they were less satisfied. (See Chart 12.)

Current Student Status:

- College students were more likely to use AskColorado to identify a new source of information to search than were K-12 or technical school students. Over one-third (34%) of college students used the service for this. (See Chart 13.)
- College and technical school students were more likely than K-12 students to use AskColorado to learn how their libraries can help them or to identify an organization to contact. (See Chart 13.)
- Elementary, middle, and high school students were more likely to use AskColorado to do research for homework or a school project (See Chart 13.).

Educational attainment:

- Respondents with lower levels of educational attainment were more likely to use AskColorado to do research for homework or a school project, suggesting that they will be raising their educational attainment level. (See Chart 14.)
- Respondents with higher levels of educational attainment were more likely than those with lower levels to use AskColorado for the following reasons: identify a new source of information to search; obtain information needed for work; identify an organization to contact; and obtain information about Colorado. (See Chart 14.)

Chart 10
Percentage of Respondents Reporting Selected Outcomes of AskColorado Use by Gender

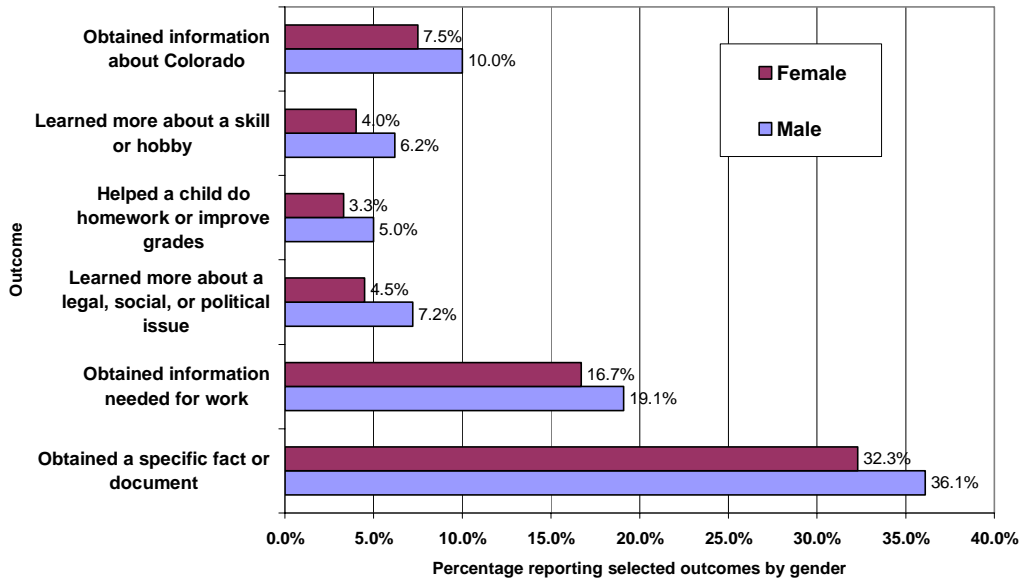


Chart 11
Percentage of Respondents Reporting Selected Outcomes of AskColorado Use by Age Group

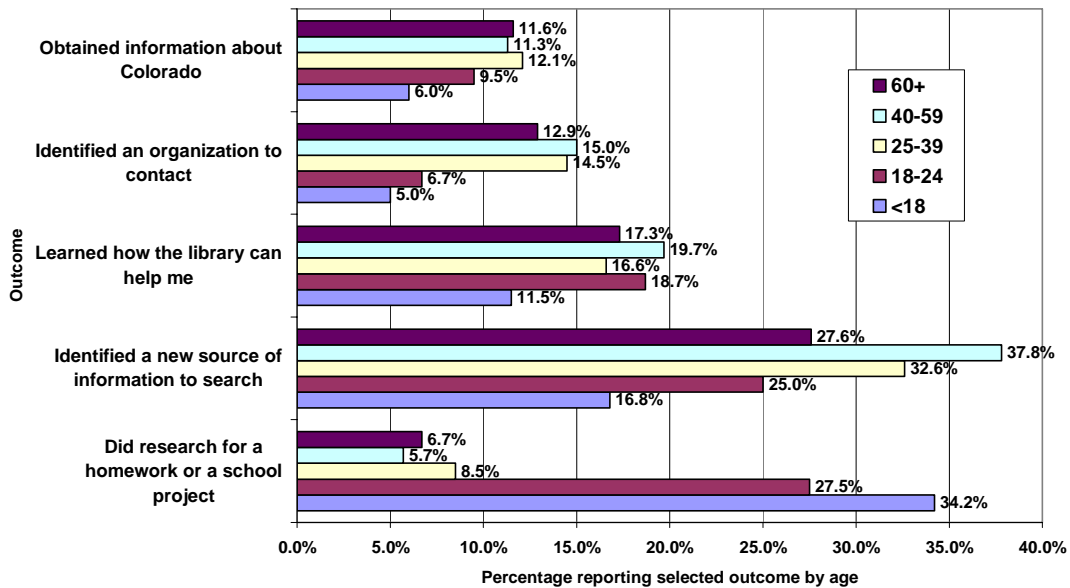


Chart 12
User Satisfaction with AskColorado, by Age

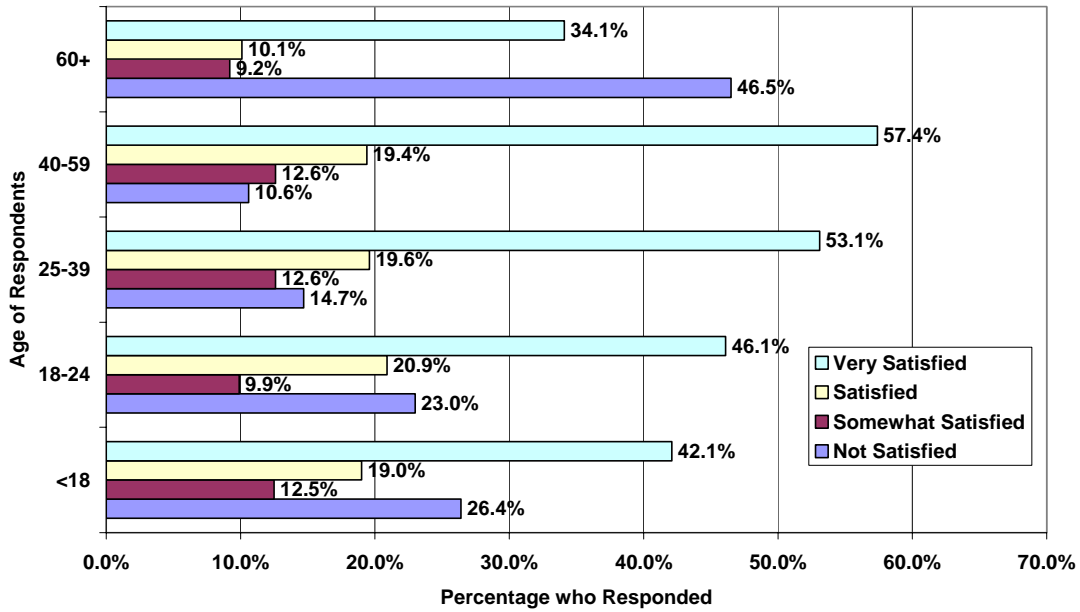


Chart 13
Percentage of Respondents Reporting Selected Outcomes of AskColorado Use by Student Status

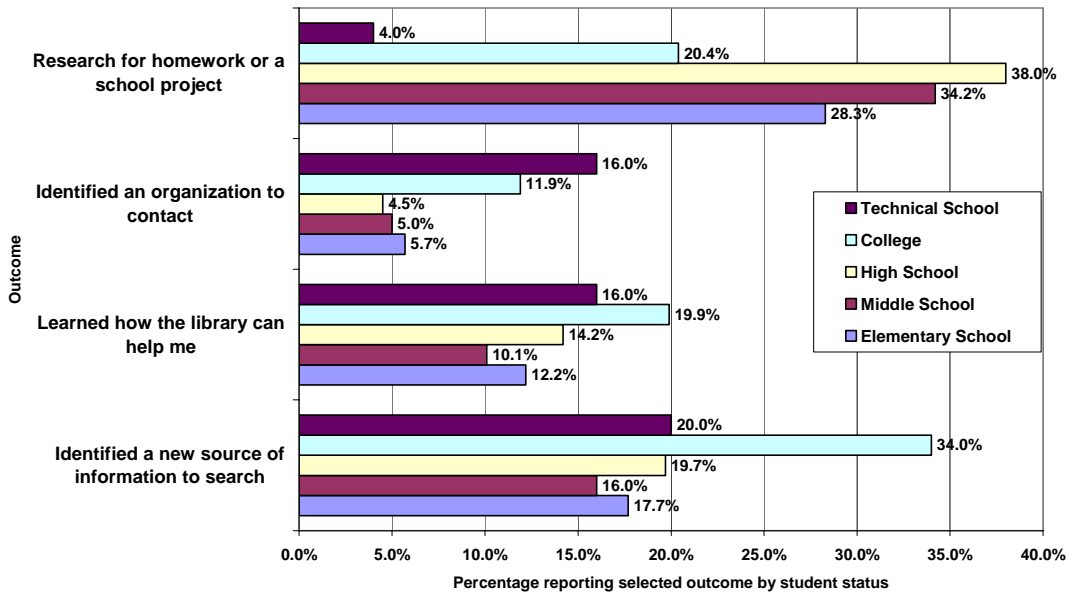
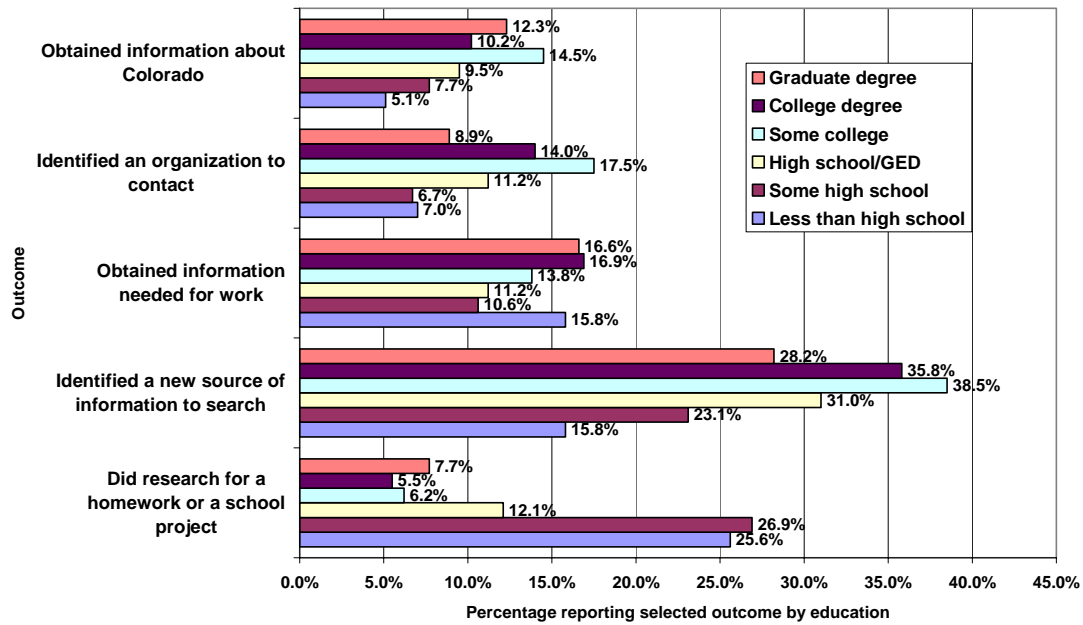


Chart 14
Percentage of Respondents Reporting Selected Outcomes of
AskColorado Use by Education



Patron Survey Comments

Respondents submitted a total of 2,090 comments to the pop-up survey. The comments were sorted into five broad categories: information quality, technology, staff, other, and irrelevant/inappropriate. The categorized, unedited comments appear in Appendix B.

Conclusion

AskColorado continues to get high marks from respondents to its pop-up patron survey, with over half of the respondents rating the virtual librarian as very helpful. The abilities of staff members are congratulated in the comments from users. There is, however, always the opportunity to improve. Relevant user comments also point to the fact that there may be some technological bugs yet to work out, and provide other valuable information for improving the service.