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Listening to What Students Are Asking: The Role of an Academic Library in Institution-Wide Knowledge Management

Elizabeth Jardine
LaGuardia

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Metadata Librarian | LaGuardia Community College




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LaGuardia CC

Our students were having difficulty receiving clean, correct, and consistent answers to their questions about college processes.



OPEN

What is KM?

There is no single definition of knowledge management, but the following is one that works for our purposes.

Knowledge management (KM) can be broadly defined as the ways institutional knowledge is gathered, organized, and made available in coordinated ways that are useful to the organization.

But the most important thing to remember about KM isn't in the definition: The success of KM rests at least as much on people as it does on technology.


OPEN

Ask LaGuardia

Our College President recognized the problem as one of knowledge organization and access, with librarians having the expertise to propose a solution—the Ask LaGuardia knowledge base.

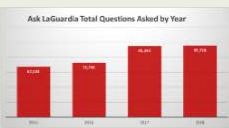
[Visit [Ask LaGuardia](#)]

Our KM Workflow



OPEN

Use Data



Year	Total Questions
2014	12,000
2015	15,000
2016	18,000
2017	20,000

This chart shows our user activity in Ask LaGuardia

OPEN

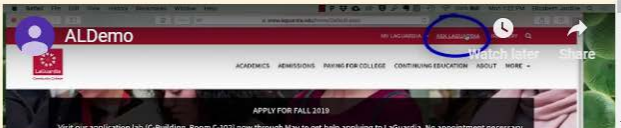
Challenges

LaGuardia Students:

- may lack background knowledge about higher education that can help them succeed
- may not have financial or emotional support for their higher education dreams
- may face rigorous schedules of school, work, family obligations, and have no time to waste on multiple visits to school to handle administrative problems

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Ask LaGuardia Demo Video & Marketing Materials



ALDemo

Watch later Share

APPLY FOR FALL 2019

Visit our application lab (C-Building, Room C-302) now through May to get help applying to LaGuardia. No appointment necessary.

OPEN

Try KM Yourself!

What is your KM challenge? Is it keeping reference staff who work off-hours informed of new products, new procedures, or problems with databases? Is it providing a place for employees to find policy documents? Whatever it is, here's a way forward:

Step 1: Find out what your colleague's challenges are.

OPEN

ABSTRACT

Students at our public, urban community college were experiencing difficulties finding correct, consistent answers to their questions about navigating college processes, information students needed to succeed in school. These difficulties were fueled not only by our students' backgrounds—they are often the first generation in their family to attend college, may require additional academic preparation, or lack support for their higher education dreams—but also by the siloed information environment prevalent in academia. When our college president realized the extent of student challenges in this area, she looked to the college's librarians, campus experts in knowledge organization and provision, for direction with a knowledge management initiative to support our students.

Knowledge management can be broadly thought of as the ways institutional knowledge is gathered, organized, and made available in coordinated ways that are useful to the organization. Along with Student Affairs, the Library co-led the development of a college-wide knowledge base, the goal of which was to provide students and other users, including college faculty and staff, with the correct answer to common questions. The Library hired a part-time metadata librarian originally just for this project, but that librarian was later appointed full-time faculty while continuing to manage daily operation of the knowledge base.

Now in its fifth year, the collaborative *Ask LaGuardia* (<http://laguardia.edu/ask>) knowledge base has become an institution at the college. Usage has grown. Librarians involved in knowledge management have forged new connections with Student Affairs colleagues, and the Library's already strong reputation has grown. However, challenges remain such as finding time to keep knowledge base content updated in this fast-paced college environment and trying to meet students where they are in what they know about the community college experience.

LAGUARDIA CC

Our students were having difficulty receiving clear, correct, and consistent answers to their questions about college processes.



Based on map by PerryPlanet

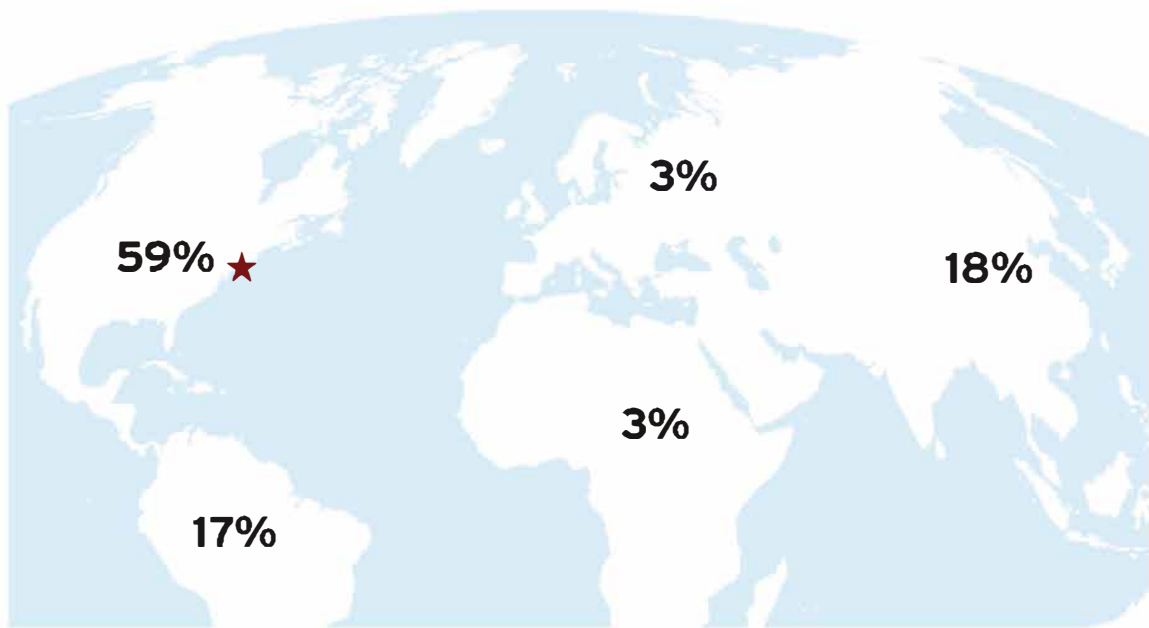
LaGuardia Community College is located in New York City's most diverse borough, Queens.

50% of LaGuardia students are the first generation in their family to attend college.

Over half of our students receive financial aid



Where our students come from



CHALLENGES

LaGuardia Students:

- may lack background knowledge about higher education that can help them succeed
- may not have financial or emotional support for their higher education dreams
- may face rigorous schedules of school, work, family obligations, and have no time to waste on multiple visits to school to handle administrative problems
- often expect any staff member to answer all their questions even if questions are outside staff member's area of expertise
- often are unfamiliar with higher education terminology and have difficulty communicating their questions and understanding answers

LaGuardia Staff:

- are not usually cross-trained outside their administrative areas
- may not wish to share knowledge, which leads to information silos between administrative units
- may be uncomfortable having others manage sources of information about their areas

Students and Staff:

- are not always up-to-date on name changes for programs and initiatives, adding to communication difficulties

WHAT IS KM?

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ASK LAGUARDIA

Our College President recognized the problem as one of knowledge organization and access, with librarians having the expertise to propose a solution--the *Ask LaGuardia* knowledge base.

[Visit *Ask LaGuardia* (<http://laguardia.edu/ask>)]

Our KM Workflow



About the *Ask LaGuardia* Knowledge Base

- Online, always available Q&A platform for students, staff, and others to find answers to commonly asked questions about the College
- Uses natural language search. Students type in a question and *Ask LaGuardia* matches it to best response in the knowledge base

- If it finds more than one match, alternatives are presented. If no match, user is asked to try rephrasing their question
- Listed with each response are Suggested and Related responses to lead students to other information they may not realize they need or that might interest them
- If users don't get the information they need, they can "escalate" their question by emailing the Student Information Center directly from the knowledge base
- Top 10 always available on Ask LaGuardia home page, reflecting what students are asking about now
- Allows users to ask about a topic in multiple ways, without having to be familiar with college terminology

Implementation challenges

- Knowledge base maintenance-- staying up-to-date in a fast-paced, urban college environment
- Difficult questions--ambiguous or incorrect terminology
- Workload--time needed to manage knowledge base from already stretched staff and faculty
- Assessment--measuring success in the middle of a sea of initiatives
- Vendor--changes our customer liaison regularly

Project personnel

- Co-led by the Library Department Chair (Academic Affairs) and the Director of the Student Information Center (Student Affairs)
- Metadata Librarian manages content collection, editing, metadata, and maintenance
- Marketing & Communications staff contribute content and coordinate promotion of Ask LaGuardia
- IT staff member works to integrate the vendor-hosted implementation into our website
- Liaisons in major administrative areas and more casual contacts in other offices also contribute content

ASK LAGUARDIA DEMO VIDEO & MARKETING MATERIALS

[VIDEO] https://www.youtube.com/embed/5ykQS_LWVto?feature=oembed&fs=1&modestbranding=1&rel=0&showinfo=0
[Visit *Ask LaGuardia* (<http://laguardia.edu/ask>)]

Promoting Ask LaGuardia

Ask LaGuardia "business cards" we hand out at orientation, outreach events, and have on hand at the reference desk.

A business card for Ask LaGuardia. The top half has a dark grey background with the text "YOU HAVE QUESTIONS? We have answers:" in white. The bottom half is white with a large, faint grey question mark in the background. Contact information is listed in red and black text. The LaGuardia Community College logo is in the bottom right corner.

YOU HAVE QUESTIONS?
We have answers:

24/7:
Ask LaGuardia online:
www.laguardia.edu/ask

PHONE:
718-482-5935

EMAIL:
callcenter@lagcc.cuny.edu

ON CAMPUS:
Visit the Welcome Center
Shenker/M-Building Lobby
Mon. - Thu. 9 am - 7 pm



LaGuardia
Community College

Graphic used on Facebook promotions.

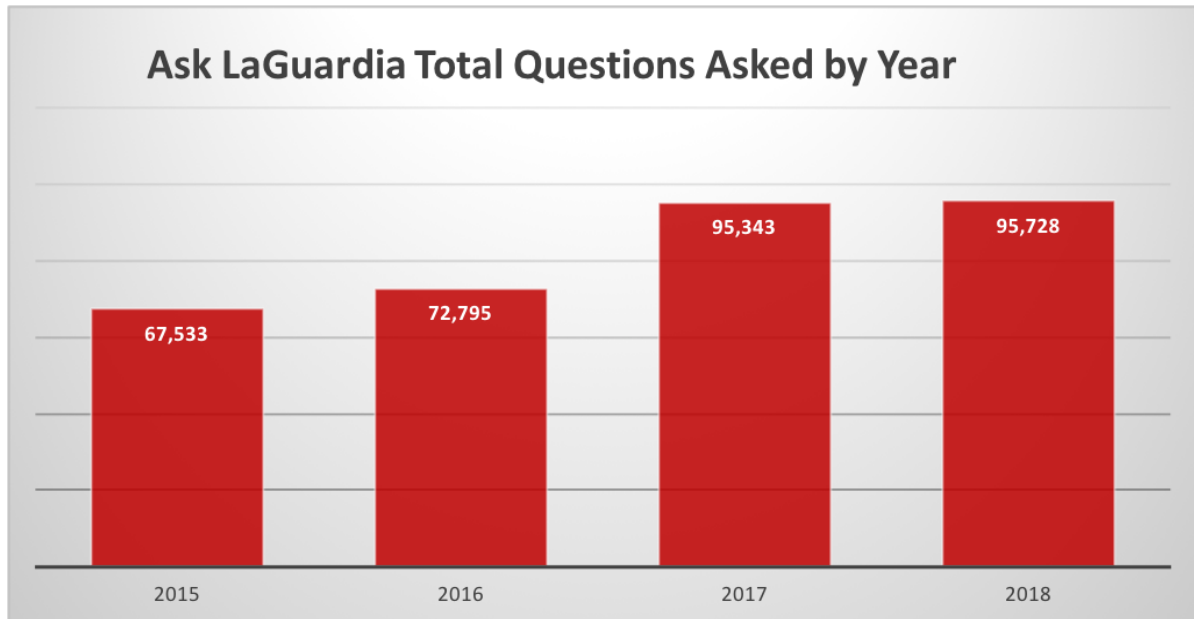
**YOU HAVE QUESTIONS.
WE HAVE ANSWERS.
LAGUARDIA.EDU/ASK?**

Some of us include *Ask LaGuardia* in our email signatures.

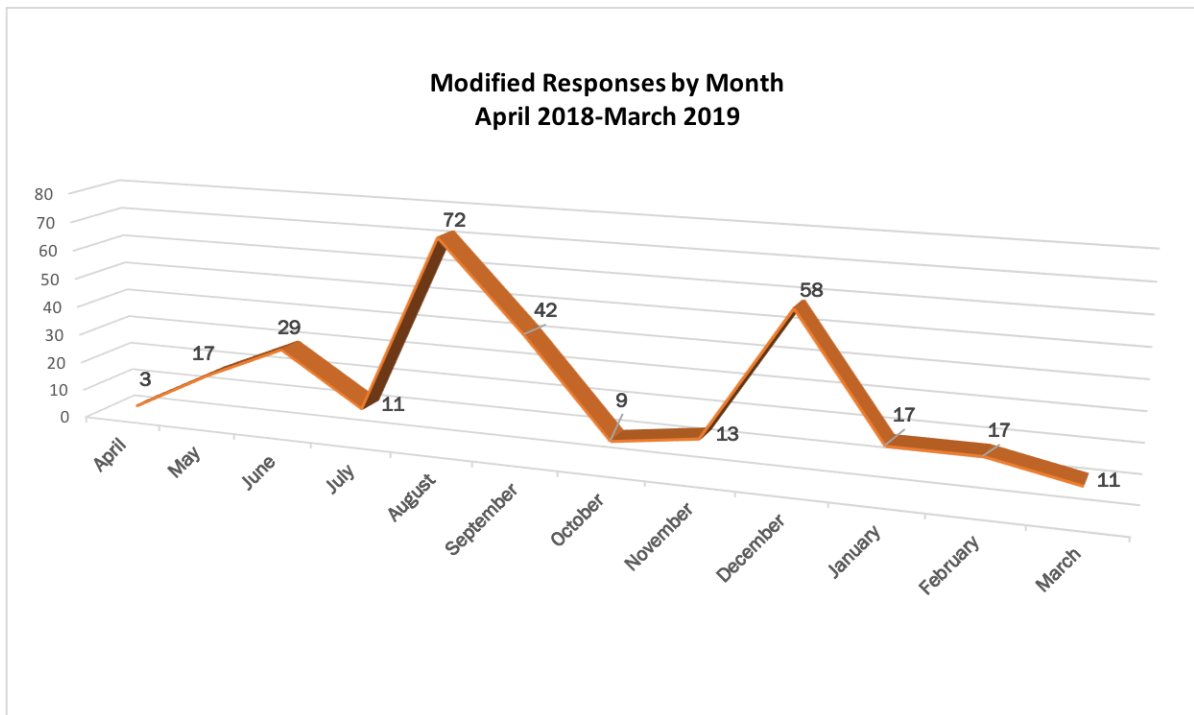
*Library Dept.
LaGuardia Community College
31-10 Thomson Ave, Room E101-H2
Long Island City, N.Y. 11101
(718) 482-5450
ejardine@lagcc.cuny.edu*

Have a Question? [Ask LaGuardia!](#)

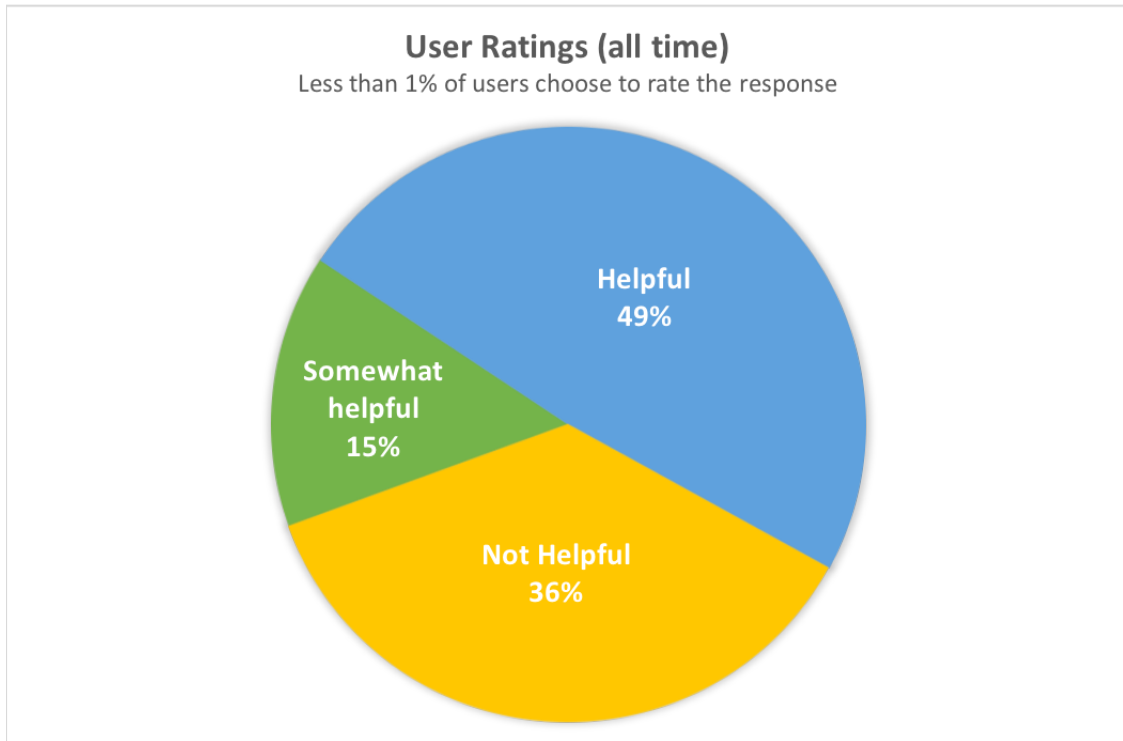
USE DATA



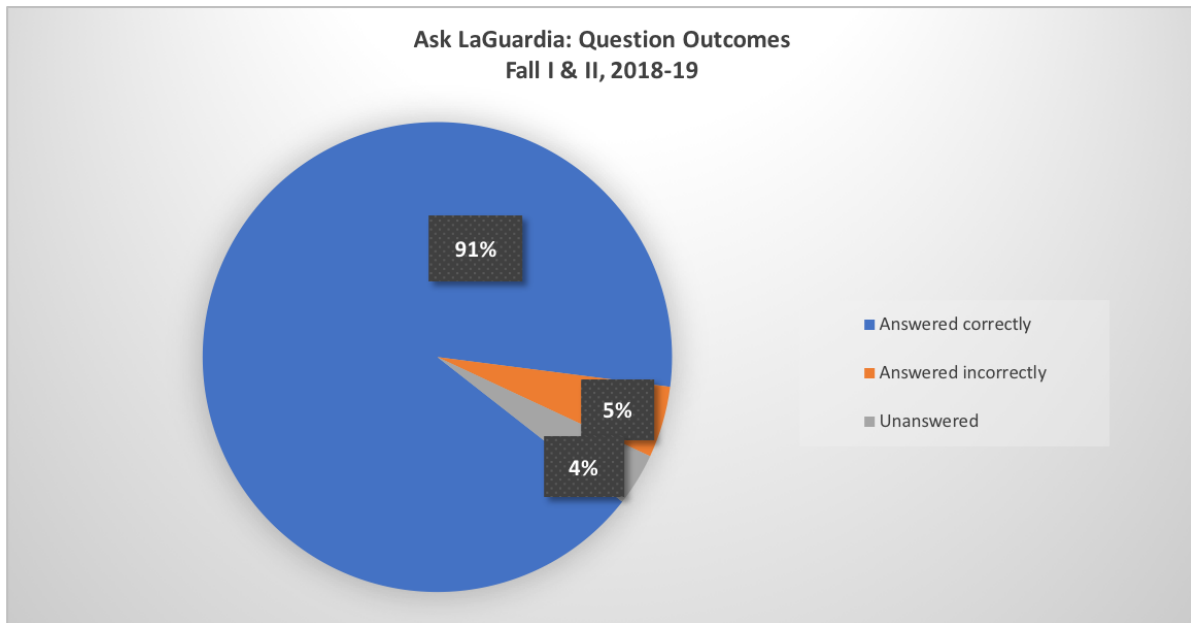
This chart shows our user activity in *Ask LaGuardia* as measured by the number of questions asked of the knowledge base.



Modified records are those that have either been edited, added, or deleted. This chart shows the amount of knowledge base maintenance that has been done over the past year. The wide variations reflect not only the number of responses that need updating need but also the availability of faculty/staff to perform maintenance on *Ask LaGuardia*.



This chart shows the percentage of users (self-selected) who have rated the response they received from *Ask LaGuardia*.



The percentage of questions answered correctly by *Ask LaGuardia* is based on random sampling done by the vendor.

TRY KM YOURSELF!

What is your KM challenge? Is it keeping reference staff who work off-hours informed of new products, new procedures, or problems with databases? Is it providing a place for employees to find policy documents? **Whatever it is, here's a way forward:**

Step 1: Find out what your colleague's challenges are. What are the pain points? How could they be alleviated? What won't help? Go in with an open mind. The best solution may not be what you think/want it to be.

Step 2: Choose a system to best address colleague's needs keeping in mind cost, technical expertise of users, maintenance requirements of system, and labor.

Success of KM is rarely due to technology and mostly due to user buy in and maintenance.

Step 3: Decide what content is needed and collect content from those with the authority and knowledge to provide it. How will you keep it up-to-date? Can your content experts help or notify you when maintenance is needed?

Step 4: Add content to your chosen solution, editing as necessary.

Step 5: Tag, classify, or otherwise apply any necessary metadata so users can find what they need efficiently.

Step 6: Assess how well the system is working. Are there any activity reports your solution provides that can help with this such as number of downloads or links clicked? Go back to those colleagues you spoke to in your pre-implementation stage to get feedback.

Step 7: Use feedback to make changes to improve your knowledge management endeavor.

Step 8: At this point, I wish I could say something like 'sit back and enjoy the feeling of a job well done' but knowledge management projects usually require ongoing maintenance. Collect accolades for your hard work and carry on!

AUTHOR INFORMATION

Elizabeth Jardine is an Assistant Professor and Metadata Librarian at LaGuardia Community College (<http://laguardia.edu>), part of the City University of New York system. In addition to her work on the Ask LaGuardia (<http://laguardia.edu/ask>) knowledge base, she organizes the MoneyBoss (<http://guides.laguardia.edu/moneyboss>) series of personal finance and entrepreneurship workshops and is a Campus Coordinator for CUNY's institutional repository Academic Works (<https://academicworks.cuny.edu/>).

Her past positions include indexing and cataloging work at the Modern Language Association, The New-York Historical Society, and Columbia University Press.

An article about the *Ask LaGuardia* knowledge base has just been published:

Jardine, E. (2018) The library leading: Knowledge management supporting community college institutional strategy. *New Review of Academic Librarianship*, 24(3-4), 394-405. doi: 10.1080/13614533.2018.1511437 (<https://doi.org/10.1080/13614533.2018.1511437>)

REFERENCES

Thanks to Isaac Fowler of Student Affairs for creating the Workflow graphic.