

The Scholarship of Application

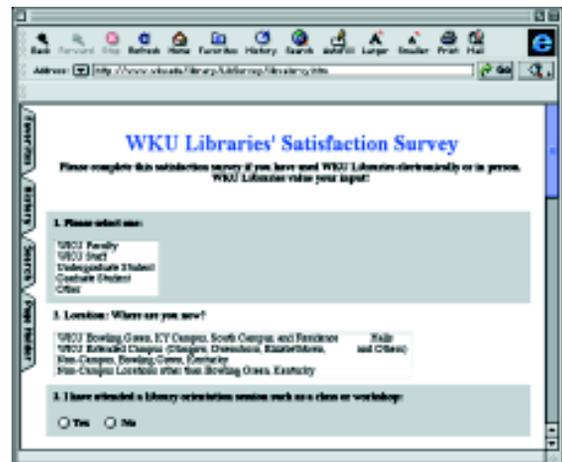
BY MAI P. HOANG

WHEN DR. GAY PERKINS LEARNS SOMETHING NEW SHE DOESN'T LIMIT ITS USE TO A CERTAIN FIELD. PERKINS, A BUSINESS LIBRARIAN AT WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY, IS USING METHODS SHE LEARNED WHILE STUDYING INDUSTRIAL AND COUNSELING PSYCHOLOGY TO ENHANCE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MANAGEMENT AT THE HELM-CRAVENS LIBRARY.

"My goal is the scholarship of application – to bring social science topics and methodology to library and information sciences," Dr. Perkins said.

At Western, she uses methods in industrial psychology, such as behaviorally-based performance measurement, upward (subordinate) evaluations, electronic workshop evaluations, and Web based satisfaction surveys to benefit those involved in the field of library and information science. "Much of the methodology has been used in psychology," Perkins said.

Perkins published a summary of relevant articles on behaviorally-based performance measurement, the process of evaluating an individual by rating scales defined by behavioral statements. She applied this technique at Western's libraries. For example, it is meaningful to tell a faculty member, "You received a 'highly effective' rating in research/creative activity and scholarship because you produced a print or nonprint publication of substantive quality or you have demonstrated significant progress on a long-term research project." Using these ratings, an employee's performance and possible promotion can then



be more accurately determined. "When something is a good idea in one field, it's interesting to see how it works in another field," Perkins said.

This review led to piloting another type of evaluation, upward (subordinate) evaluation in libraries. Perkins was instrumental in developing a procedure for library employees to evaluate their supervisors. Supervisors benefited from feedback based on employees' perceptions. The information was not forwarded to higher administration unlike employee performance evaluations. Thus, upward

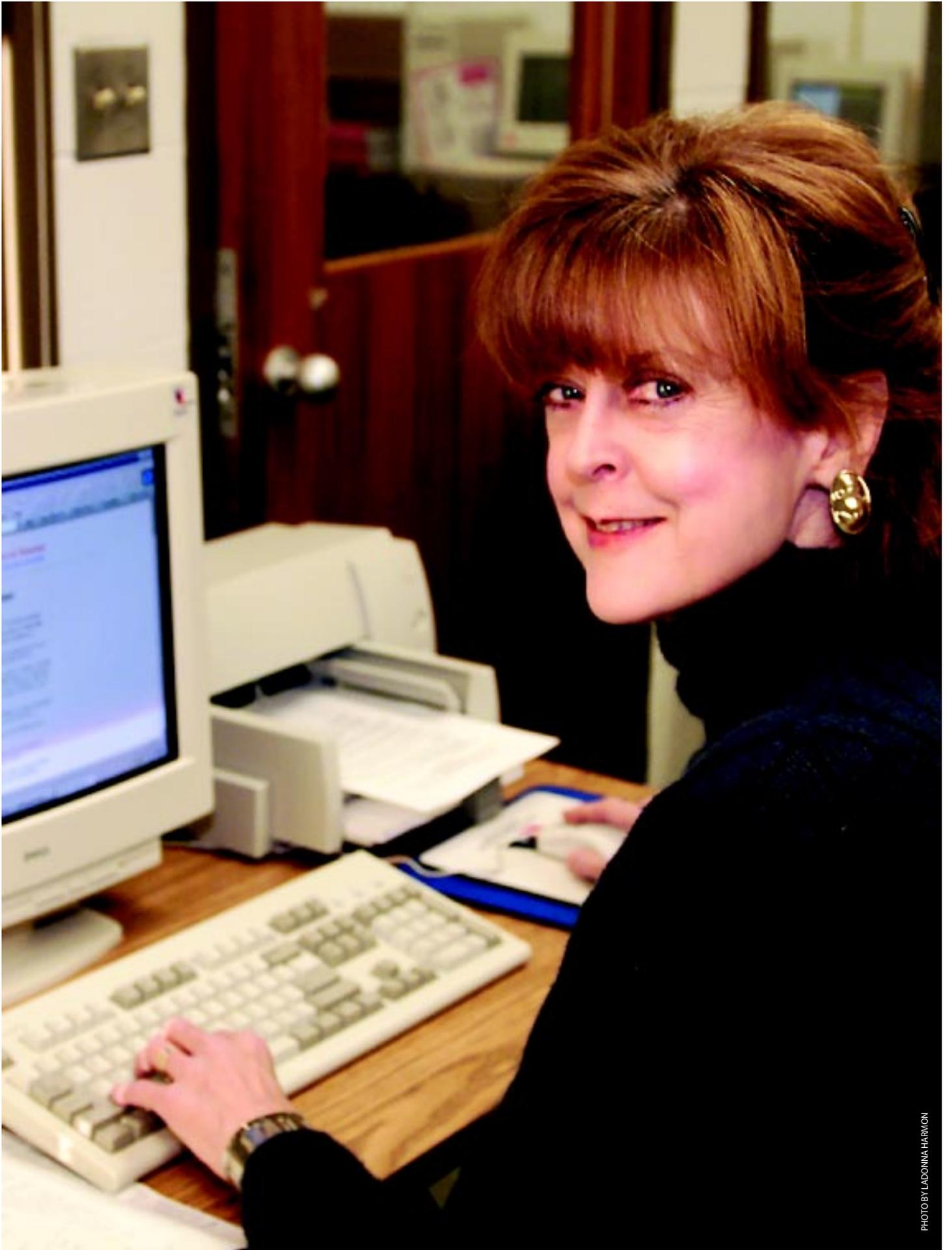


PHOTO BY LADONNA HARMON

evaluation was used more for developmental purposes rather than for determining promotions.

Since researching behaviorally-based performance measurement and subordinate evaluation, Dr. Perkins has continued to pursue new projects during her 13 years at Western Kentucky University Libraries. Perkins said her ideas for research have come from library administrators, colleagues and her own personal interests. "For example, you might come across something interesting you read or see on the Internet," Perkins said. After studying a number of library satisfaction surveys on the web, Perkins found that there was limited analysis of the data.

Perkins led a piloted Web-based satisfaction survey and complete data analysis of the results. Colleague Haiwang Yuan used Message Parse and Microsoft Excel to convert the user responses from the Web form to a file usable by data analysis software. Web-based satisfaction survey results could be meaningfully used to evaluate atti-

tudes of remote patrons in an existing library or a virtual university program. The data provide information about demographics and attitudes, enable very broad sampling from the community, and require only inexpensive software and relatively little labor for analysis.

The creation of a program to analyze web data led Perkins to her current research interest, comparing the result of paper-and pencil surveys to those on the Web. Perkins determined that slightly lower ratings were given on Web-based satisfaction surveys; however, these surveys were generally more efficient than paper-and-pencil surveys. The Web-based surveys worked well for a larger sample of people and utilized far less human, time and material resources. Now Perkins is following up the comparison of Web-based and paper-and-pencil surveys. She is increasingly interested in the effect that web technology is having on library and information science.

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Although Dr. Perkins enjoys pursuing her interests, she doesn't hesitate to hear suggestions from others. In past projects she has worked with other library faculty and staff on task forces and with students. This research has given them all, including Perkins, a learning experience.

Dr. Perkins won the WKU Libraries/Technology Research Award in 2001 and has been published in nationally recognized library professional journals.

Perkins had an early eye toward employment and applying what she had learned on the job. She received a B.S. in Hotel and Restaurant Administration at Cornell University and worked as a management trainee at the Rotterdam Hilton Hotel. Upon receiving her doctorate in psychology at the University of Minnesota, she worked in assessment at the Kentucky State Reformatory. While doing both library and site research, she developed a set of behaviorally-based interview questions for the selection of correctional officers. Enjoying the library research, Dr. Perkins then received a library degree and applied at Western Kentucky University Libraries.