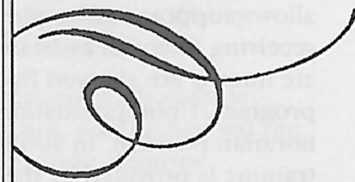


IUPUI UNIVERSITY LIBRARY USE AND THE RELIGIOUS STUDIES DEPARTMENT

by Beverly Burmeister, Tara Oldfield, & Sonia Schatzlein



INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was two-fold, to determine to what extent the Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) religious studies faculty expected students to use library resources and to discover the needs of the Religious Studies Department in an effort to improve library services and thus increase the use of the library.

In initially exploring these questions, the University Library studied the circulation statistics and noted some trends. The statistics showed that IUPUI religious studies faculty routinely used interlibrary loan but that undergraduate and graduate students seldom used this service. Also, as might be expected, use of print journals was declining and use of electronic resources increasing. There were no apparent differences in the frequency of use of religious studies materials on electronic reserve by students in introductory level courses compared to upper level courses. The library wanted to know whether the religious studies students were completing projects that did not require library resources or whether they were finding the resources they needed elsewhere.

As a result, the study was designed to provide qualitative data related to the information needs of the Religious Studies Department from the perspective of the faculty. This could later be used as the foundation for further study by the library.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Faculty Influence on Student Library Usage

University libraries are often touted as the heart of an academic institution; however, research on the actions of faculty and students have not supported this assertion. Students are unlikely to use library resources if they are not required to do so for their coursework. According to Baker (1995), professors "...are not requiring their students to independently find, use, and evaluate information as an integral (and graded) component of the courses they teach" (p. 377). Therefore, students frequently do not use the resources available at their university's research library.

As early as 1959, researchers were aware that professors often did not require students to use library resources. Patricia Knapp (1959), a notable researcher in the area of inquiry, stated in her book, *College Teaching and the College Library*, that "Use of the library is not an essential element, perhaps not even an important element, in the education of the college student" (p.1).

Baker (1995) calls for more research into the behavior of teaching faculty. In particular, he suggests more study on the course objectives and teaching methods professors adopt and how librarians can influence a research element in the curriculum. Unfortunately, Baker's suggestions have yet to be acted on. Few recent research studies appear to have been completed relating to faculty expectations for library research, and whether course requirements regarding library research may be changing and evolving in recent years. However, there are a number of studies which examine student and faculty use and expectations related to accessing information and library resources.

Particularly interesting is the impact professors have on students' opinion and use of the library. Faculty that attach value to library research and provide direction and motivation to students influence the students to use the library (McInnis, 1978). McInnis (1978) states that professors' "influence is most often the difference between a perfunctory use of materials and a dedicated examination of the rich store of scientific literature typically available in most college libraries" (p. 3).

STUDENT AND FACULTY USE OF LIBRARIES

In a study of library services and how they are used by students and faculty, Kinnucan (1993) examined different factors that influenced the use of interlibrary loan (ILL) and document delivery. Kinnucan's study utilized interviews to determine when and how students and faculty would make use of either library service. In his study, he found that the price of services and wait times were most influential in patrons' decisions of whether or not to use either ILL or document delivery. The study showed that issues of price

were marginally more important to graduate students while delivery time was marginally more important to faculty.

Young and Von Seggern (2001) conducted focus groups to identify the information seeking needs and expectations of students and faculty at the University of Iowa. The researchers explored questions related to information needs, how students and faculty wanted to use the library, and whether they expected to find materials in electronic form. Young and Von Seggern found that, for the most part, the members of the focus groups were skilled in using the library. However, they also found that the participants still struggled with searching effectively, using unstandardized database interfaces, and determining the best sources for their research. The researchers cited limited numbers in the study and concluded that, while the focus groups were a good first step in identifying the ideas and issues, there should be a follow-up quantitative study by survey or questionnaire.

Clougherty, Lyles, Persson, Walters, and Washington-Hoagland (1998) conducted a user study to measure how undergraduates use specific services provided by the library. The mailed survey sent to a random sample of the entire undergraduate student body focused on needs assessment, expectations, and use of library services. Results indicated that undergraduates' main concerns were physical facility shortcomings of the library and frustration at not being able to find library materials. The survey also revealed a lack of awareness of available library resources and services.

In 1993, Valentine explored attitudes and skills in library research among undergraduates. Her findings indicated that undergraduates tended to look for the easiest, least painful way to complete research in order to get into and out of the library as quickly as possible. In her study, Valentine utilized both focus groups and interviews. Focus groups were found to be beneficial in identifying common themes and were efficient in use of researchers' time. Interviews resulted in more abundant and richer data. Although citing the shortcomings of a small sample and somewhat subjective analysis, Valentine considered the findings beneficial. She also identified that what educators expect the students to gain from the research experience has not been explored and is a topic for further research.

INFORMATION LITERACY STANDARDS AND BIBLIOGRAPHIC INSTRUCTION

Information literacy is defined in the Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education as the ability to "recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information" (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2005). In the document, the

Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) defines five standards with performance indicators and outcomes. The first standard is that the student is able to determine "the nature and extent of the information needed" (p. 8). The information literate student is also able to "access needed information effectively and efficiently" (p. 9). The third standard states that "the information literate student evaluates information and its sources critically and incorporates selected information into his or her knowledge base and value system" (p. 11). The fourth competency standard is that "the information literate student, individually or as a member of a group, uses information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose" (p.12). The final standard states that "the information literate student understands many of the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information and accesses and uses information ethically and legally" (p.13).

With competencies related to the ACRL Information Literacy Standards now required for accreditation by an increasing number of accrediting agencies, more studies are being carried out related to these standards. Burke, Germain, and Xu (2005) looked at student reference desk transactions before and after the library offered an information literacy course. They also conducted a survey of students taking the course. The analysis of reference desk transactions showed an increase in number of reference questions, reference interviews, and lengthy (more than five minutes) reference interviews following instruction. The longer interviews included assistance with more electronic resources than previously. The student survey results also showed a significant increase in student reported usage of reference services, and a majority of students indicated they would use the services again in the future. The authors conclude that information literacy instruction will result in better citations in student research papers and likely will increase the demands on reference departments.

Stamatopols and Mackoy (1998) conducted a survey of undergraduate students and found that library perceptions can be changed through bibliographic instruction. Stamatopols and Mackoy discovered that an increased knowledge of and satisfaction with the university library can be attained through these means. The researchers surveyed the students before and after bibliographic instruction sessions to see if their skill levels had increased and to also measure levels of satisfaction with the library. They determined that satisfaction with services increased after the sessions, but student skill levels changed very little. While skill levels did not change appreciably, confidence levels in skills already possessed did increase.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, the research team conducted personal interviews of faculty members. This qualitative method

was applied to explore to what extent religious studies faculty expected students to use library resources. While quantitative measures would illuminate circulation trends, they would not reveal the underlying reasons behind this trend. This method allowed the research team to uncover why few religious studies materials were being used.

FINDINGS

The eight faculty members in the study were teaching a total of sixteen introductory courses and nine upper level courses. Respondents were asked to describe the types of assignments they gave their students. Assignments included a variety of written papers including religious autobiographies, book reviews, and response to readings. Additionally, the faculty assigned readings and texts, exams and essays, oral presentations, research papers, and class participation. The most frequently cited assignments for the introductory classes were papers at eight times, followed by exams and quizzes at four, readings at three, presentations at two, and films at two (see Figure 1). The most frequently cited assignments for upper level courses were also papers at six times, followed by readings at three, exams and quizzes at two, presentations at two, research papers at two and class participation at one (see Figure 2).

Respondents were asked what resources they expected their students to use for class assignments. Most resources were assigned by the faculty and were self-contained in the courses as follows: the response of assigned readings was given five times, textbooks were given two times, assigned Internet research was given two times, scholarly journals were given two times, and student selected/professor approved sources was given once (see Figure 3).

Respondents were asked what sources they used. Seven faculty members used interlibrary loan for their own research, three traveled to other Indiana University libraries for sources, three traveled to libraries outside the Indiana University system to find the sources they needed, and three used primary sources (see Figure 4).

Respondents were asked what library instruction they or others gave students before they completed assignments. Five of the faculty members did some type of library instruction themselves in their own classes for their students. Two have utilized librarians for instruction and one utilized computer technology staff (see Figure 5). Types of instruction given were source lists at two, Internet search strategies at two, research models at one, database sources at one, and bibliographic instruction at one (see Figure 6).

Respondents were asked to evaluate their students' ability to use library resources. For the most part, they expressed concern about their students' inability to use

library resources and confirmed that the students did not use these resources. Three faculty members assessed that their students did not know how to use library resources well, and two assessed that their students had a wide range of ability levels. Two observed that their students rely on the Internet to the exclusion of other sources, and one indicated that students seem more comfortable with a public library than the university library (see Figure 7).

Respondents were asked what they observed to be the biggest obstacle to their students accessing information they needed. The students' inability to evaluate resources was most frequently given at five times. The second obstacle was students' lifestyle issues such as work, family responsibilities, lack of interest, and poor access to Internet at four times. Other obstacles identified were reliance on the Internet for information at three times, and insufficient available resources in the subject area cited once (see Figure 8).

Respondents were asked for any other information that the library should know in order to provide the services needed for them and their students. Respondents were generally positive about library services. Suggestions included more resources in the religious studies subject area, more online resources, more signage in the library, more unifying of IU libraries, more education for students and faculty about the library, and improvement of the Electronic Reserves System (ERROL). More resources was cited three times, more online resources two times, student education one time, faculty education one time, and the improvement of ERROL one time (see Figure 9).

CONCLUSIONS

Through the interviews with the religious studies professors it became apparent that they viewed the research skills of their students with some wariness. This mentality was evidenced by the low number of research projects assigned to students; the trend was especially apparent in the lower level courses, but was also seen in the upper level courses. Student reliance on non-peer reviewed sources, their inability to evaluate sources, and issues of plagiarism all played into the faculty members' stated reasons for not assigning work that would require research and, thus, use of library resources.

Even though faculty mentioned a number of times that they felt their students did not know how to use the library resources, it does not appear that they are making use of library resources and staff to remedy this situation. Only two of the eight said that librarians provided some type of instruction for their classes. In most cases, research assignments have been removed from the syllabi or modified so that the faculty can control the sources students use.

It appears that the chief reason that the religious studies students are not making use of the university library is that faculty members do not require students to use library resources. Although the religious studies faculty members use the university library for their own research, they do not actively encourage students to use library resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS

More study is needed to confirm the findings and conclusions of the graduate student team. The circulation data might be disaggregated and the faculty syllabi might be examined to further determine to what extent IUPUI religious studies faculty expect students to use library resources. We believe that the findings of this work will confirm the conclusions made from the research conducted by the graduate student team.

The IUPUI University Library has an exciting opportunity to positively impact the Religious Studies Department. It is our hope that faculty will be more receptive to library services after the study. Their interaction with the researchers may help to pave the way for more productive collaborations between the religious studies faculty and the library.

The graduate student team recommends several strategies to strengthen the relationship between the library and the Religious Studies Department. We recommend that the library offer continued and consistent communication to the department, with an emphasis on outreach to new faculty members. The library liaison may consider attending periodic religious studies faculty meetings to offer innovative information literacy related services including team-teaching research methods, bibliographic instruction, and library tours to the faculty's classes. In addition, the library may share the information literacy standards with the faculty and offer to help them to assess and improve their students' skills. These proactive steps will reinforce the library's commitment to meeting the department's needs. Through these efforts, the religious studies faculty may feel more supported and be more willing to offer research assignments to their students and therefore expect students to use library resources. The library may see an increase in religious

studies library material as a result of these outreach efforts.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

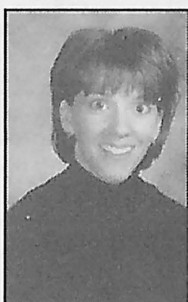
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IUPUI Religious Studies Department and Library Use -- Graphs

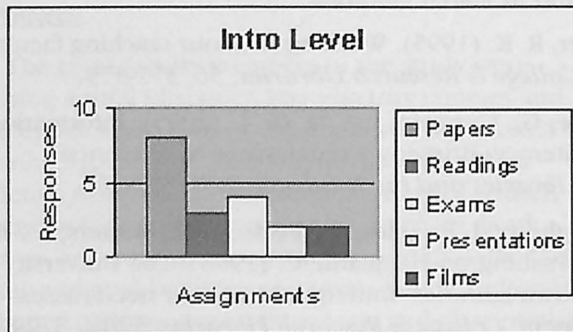


Figure 1

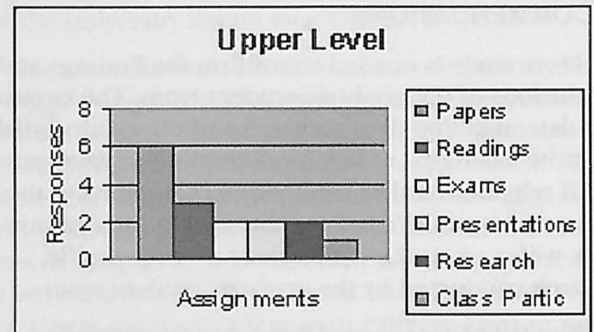


Figure 2

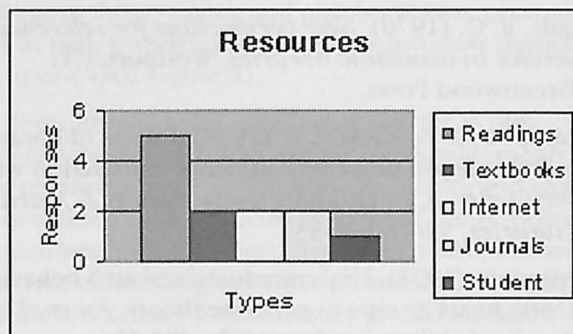


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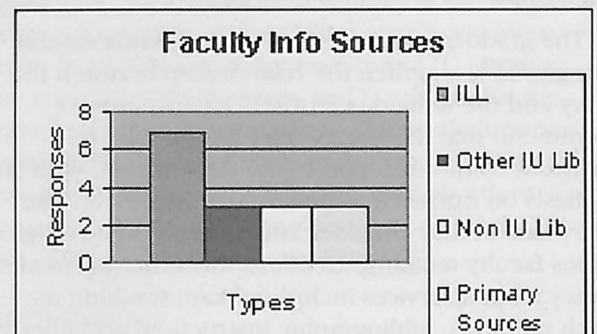


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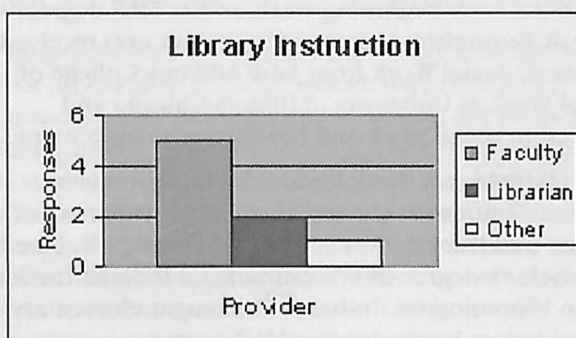


Figure 5

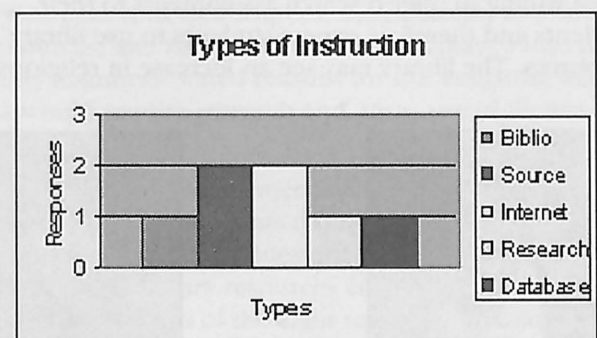


Figure 6

IUPUI Religious Studies Department and Library Use -- Graphs

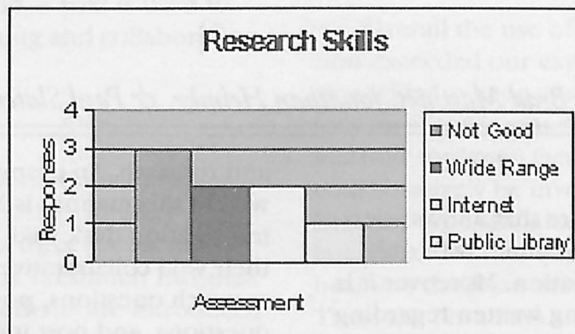


Figure 7

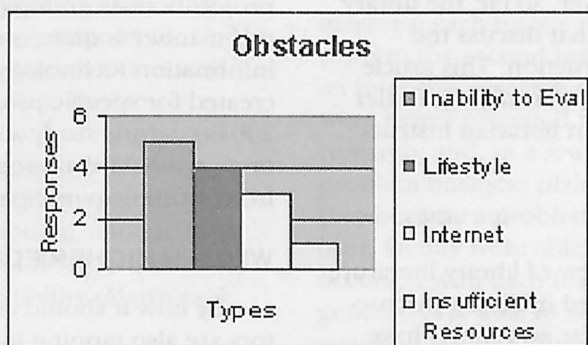


Figure 8

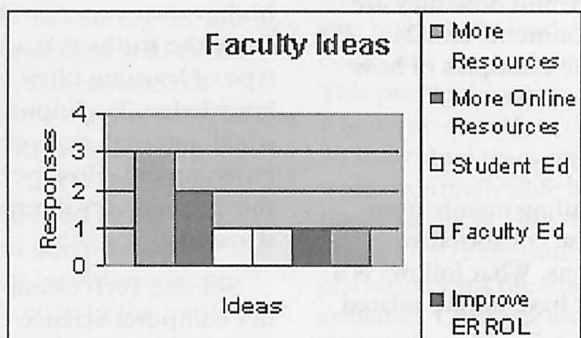


Figure 9