Overachievers, procrastinators, and failed Googling: exploring why students ask librarians for assistance

Jaimie Beth Colvin, Pepperdine University
Marc Vinyard, Pepperdine University
Colleen Mullally, Pepperdine University

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/jaimiebeth-colvin/11/
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By Marc Vinyard, Jaimie-Beth Colvin and Colleen Mullally
National Trends and Headlines

Whose Decline? Which Academic Libraries are “Deserted” in Terms of Reference Transactions?

Rachel Applegate

This study examines the role of librarians in academic libraries.

Librarians were tremendously underutilized by students. Eight out of 10 of the respondents reported rarely, if ever, turning to librarians for help with course-related research assignments.

Does Generation Google REALLY Need Us?

Peter Sidorko
University Librarian
University of Hong Kong Libraries
Hong Kong, China

Dianne Cowan
Head of Information Services

The Chronicle of Higher Education

April 26, 2011

ARE REFERENCE LIBRARIANS DEAD?

When I accepted my current position, Information Services Manager at AHML, I knew going in that there was some risk in linking my career with a traditional reference department. Ultimately, I decided to take the job in large part because of the challenge of

...
National Reference Statistics are Declining

Average Reference Transactions 2005-2014

2005-2014: -60% Decline

Source: ACRL Metrics on Mean reference transactions for Doctoral universities
Some California libraries are Declining

Changes in reference transactions from 2011 to 2014

- University of Southern California: -19%
- California Institute of Technology: -48%
- Glendale Community College: -28%

Source: ACRL Metrics
Not all libraries are experiencing declines!

2012-2014: 13% Increase

Pepperdine References Questions 2012-2014

Why?
Other Southern California Libraries are thriving

Source: ACRL Metrics
More Granular Reference Statistics

ACRL Information Literacy Framework

Follow-Up to Class
- Yes
- No
- I don't know

1/3
Why do First-Year Students ask librarians for Assistance?

Table 3. Factors that Influenced Students to Use Reference Services (self-reported)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Percentage of Subjects</th>
<th>Number of Subjects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Librarian mentioned services during instruction session</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noticed the “Ask A Librarian” link on a library webpage</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spoke with a librarian during orientation</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Required by a professor or teaching assistant</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommended by a classmate or friend</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had used reference services at another library</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noticed the reference desk</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>.8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total use</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student Information Seeking Behavior

Figure 8: Resources Used When Course-Related Research Contexts Arise

Our Research Project

What leads students to ask us for help?

we conducted Semi-structured In Depth Interview.

Answering this question will help us:

Identify what we’re doing right
understand cultural trends in order to continue thriving
IRB approval

Training

Nuts and Bolts
IRB approval

Training

Cost

Creating & field testing Question Guide

Nuts and Bolts
Nuts and Bolts

IRB approval

Training

Creating & field testing Question Guide

Cost

Recruitment

Interviewing
1. Please think back to a time in the past semester where you needed help locating information after trying to find the answer on your own. How did you begin searching for that information? Please talk about this experience.
   a. type of information sought, including specifications; why it was sought; list all places searched; physical locations when searching;
   b. length of time attempted on own before thinking to ask for help; how felt when realized help would be needed
   c. thought process when seeking out help from someone else; what made you seek out the person who helped you find your answer or think through your problem?

1. Please focus now on a time when you utilized the help of a librarian. Please tell us about this experience.
   a....
   d. what the librarian did when you asked for help
   ...j.

1. Next, please talk about any difficulties you may have encountered when asking a librarian for assistance in this experience or in any encounter you’ve had. How can librarians be more approachable?

1. I’d like to end by asking if there’s anything you would like to add.

Avoid:
- Jargon
- Leading
- Double barrel

Be: Open Ended
& Get them to be specific (probes)
We’re officially recording now.
Let’s begin.
STUDENTS TALK ABOUT THEIR RESEARCH HABITS
THE THINGS THEY SAID ABOUT LIBRARIANS
A Few Other Revelations
Reflections on Conducting Interviews
Our Next Steps
Marc Vinyard Marc.Vinyard@pepperdine.edu

Jaimie-Beth Colvin JaimieBeth.Colvin@pepperdine.edu

Colleen Mullally Colleen.Mullally@pepperdine.edu