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Assessing Faculty Awareness of Library Services in Two Georgia Undergraduate Institutions

By Sofia A. Slutskaya, Rebecca Rose,
Anne A. Salter, Laura Masce

Introduction

Student success can be linked to effective use of library resources for classroom assignments, especially research, and, as the originators of classroom assignments, faculty members are the prime motivators of student library use.

As librarians, our daily interactions with students help promote information literacy and its relevancy to the assignments originating with the faculty. We also promote library services and resources to the faculty, the key tacticians in the use of resources and services. Including faculty in this area of awareness is challenging, but nevertheless important in demonstrating the value of library resources essential for student success.

Determining a baseline of faculty awareness of library products and services makes traditional interactions with faculty, such as workshops and orientations, more effective. In order to determine this baseline, librarians in Georgia Perimeter College (GPC) and Oglethorpe University (OU) collaborated to survey their constituents. Results were obtained and compared to ascertain distinctions between use at a small, private liberal arts college and a large, commuter- focused, public institution. The results were indicative of the differences, yet revealing in areas of similarity of use.

Librarians know the importance of their product base, but demonstrating this value to other campus constituents is always challenging. The survey and its results provide an excellent

benchmark from which further constructive interaction can be derived.

Methodology

The project used an online survey to capture data. The original survey was created by the GPC librarians. The Oglethorpe librarians used the same survey with slight modification to reflect OU's lesser emphasis on online classes. The surveys were conducted by librarians at Georgia Perimeter College, a state community college, in Fall 2010 and Fall 2011; Oglethorpe University, a small, private, liberal arts institution, conducted its survey in Spring 2012.

The surveys targeted faculty and had similar goals, to:

- Explore faculty awareness of the library tools and resources.
- Increase awareness of library tools and resources available.
- Identify existing tools and services that faculty find useful.

The outcomes of the survey are better understood in the context of each campus' environment.

Georgia Perimeter is a diverse, multi-campus college offering on-site and online classes in 38 programs of study, and it is the University System of Georgia's third largest higher-education institution. According to the Office of Institutional Research in the Fall of 2011, GPC enrolled almost 27,000 students who were

taught by over 1120 faculty; of these faculty, over 350 were full-time. Stationed at each location is a campus library with more than 30 full- or part-time librarians. Holdings include over 300,000 physical items with 670 unique titles of print journals, magazines, and newspapers, and almost 60,000 e-books. GPC students have access to more than 200 electronic databases, including those in GALILEO and through additional database subscriptions. Even though GPC faculty are involved in research, their primary responsibility is teaching and supporting student learning.

Oglethorpe University is a small, private, liberal arts university offering on-site classes. The holdings include more than 147,000 volumes, 14,000 e-books, more than 200 databases, and electronic access to journals and publications. The full-time professional staff provides information literacy and online searching instruction to the campus, and two of the librarians teach a for-credit academic research class. Academic research instruction is also provided in the first-year experience program by offering two for-credit classes during the fall semester. While a few faculty members are experimenting with “hybrid” classes with discussions and learning occurring online through the campus course management system, most faculty use traditional face-to-face instruction. Oglethorpe University offers 28 programs of study, including a master’s degree in education. There were 1,158 full-time equivalent students in Spring 2012.

Because of the growing interest in online education and remote access to all resources and services, GPC chose to focus survey questions on faculty perceptions and awareness of electronic resources and services at the library. Oglethorpe University focused on similar aspects including services, products, and use of the same. Their survey was intended as an awareness-raising tool, as well as a system for feedback to improve services.

Literature review

Faculty use of libraries is extensively researched and discussed in professional literature. In recent years, the focus has shifted to studying the effects of the rapidly changing electronic environment on libraries’ relevance in higher learning settings. The national study “Faculty Survey 2009: Key Strategic Insights for Libraries, Publishers, and Societies” (2010), conducted by Ithaka S+R, sets the background of recent trends of library interactions with faculty. The survey outlined faculty perceptions of three traditional functions of the library: a gateway function (the library as a starting point for research); a buyer function (the library pays and manages access to resources); and an archive function (the library preserves and keeps track of resources).

ITHAKA’s study shows the gradual decline in the perceived importance of the “gateway” function and the increase in the perceived importance of the “buyer” function. The disturbing trend noted by the study that “... the library has been increasingly disintermediated from the research process...” (ITHAKA 2010, 8) can also be applied to teaching and learning. Many see “libraries developing new services and seeking to direct faculty attention to existing activities” as the solution to this dilemma (ITHAKA 2010, 10). Ithaka’s *Faculty Survey 2009* results, along with studies conducted by various higher education institutions in the United States, led Ithaka’s researchers to believe that “the relationship built through engaging faculty in supporting their own teaching activities may be an especially beneficial way to build relationship with faculty members more broadly.” (ITHAKA 2010, 10)

The ideas and suggestions emerging from faculty surveys conducted by librarians at the University of Iowa (Washington-Hoagland and Clougherty 2002), University of North Texas (Thomsett-Scott and May 2009), Pennsylvania State University (Cahoy and Moyo 2007) and

other institutions of higher education seem to support the ITHAKA S+R group findings (Hines 2006; Guthrie and Housewright 2011). The studies can be loosely divided into two groups: surveys of library faculty services in general, and surveys of faculty services developed specifically to support online teaching and learning. The articles by Washington-Hoagland and Clougherty (2002) and by Hines (2006) provide a summary of faculty surveys of library resources conducted between 1992 and 2004, and outline general trends. The authors point out tendencies for faculty “to be unaware of the range of information products and services already available in or provided by their institution’s library” (Washington-Hoagland and Clougherty 2002, 632). They also suggest that “faculty will make use of these products and services, whether electronic or not, when they are relevant to their needs and readily accessible” (Washington-Hoagland and Clougherty 2002, 632).

The studies of library resources used for online teaching put more emphasis on the faculty’s influence on student use of the library. However, the findings in both groups of studies are similar. Cahoy and Moyo (2007) point out faculty’s “low level of awareness and usage of library resources, coupled with low

expectations of the library’s support.” (Cahoy and Moyo 2007, 11). Their study also revealed “that faculty who had themselves used online library resources and services were more likely to require and integrate use of the library into their courses” (Cahoy and Moyo 2007, 11). The conclusion that faculty perception of the library “ultimately influences students’ use/non-use of the library” (Cahoy and Moyo 2007, 11, *emphasis added*) is a common denominator of all studies. These studies also suggest that a problem of low awareness “... could be solved by more aggressive marketing of these services through liaison librarians, including links in courseware...” (Thomsett-Scott and May 2009, 131).

Both GPC and Oglethorpe are undergraduate institutions. For this reason, when designing and conducting our own surveys, we concentrated on the faculty use of library resources for teaching and supporting student learning. Our survey results are similar to the results of studies discussed above. However, we believe that combining the knowledge of general trends from our survey findings, along with interacting with our faculty, will aid us in developing strategies to increase faculty, and inevitably student, involvement with the library.

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Analysis and Results

An electronic survey was distributed to full-time and part-time GPC and Oglethorpe faculty through e-mail. At GPC, 1120 surveys were sent out and 337 responses were received (30% response rate). The total number of surveys distributed at Oglethorpe was 104; the total number of responses was 38, with the response rate equaling 37%. In both colleges’ surveys, demographic questions were included. Table 1 shows the breakdown of survey participants by subject area. The survey was voluntary. The response rate for different subject areas serves as an indicator of faculty use and interest in library resources.

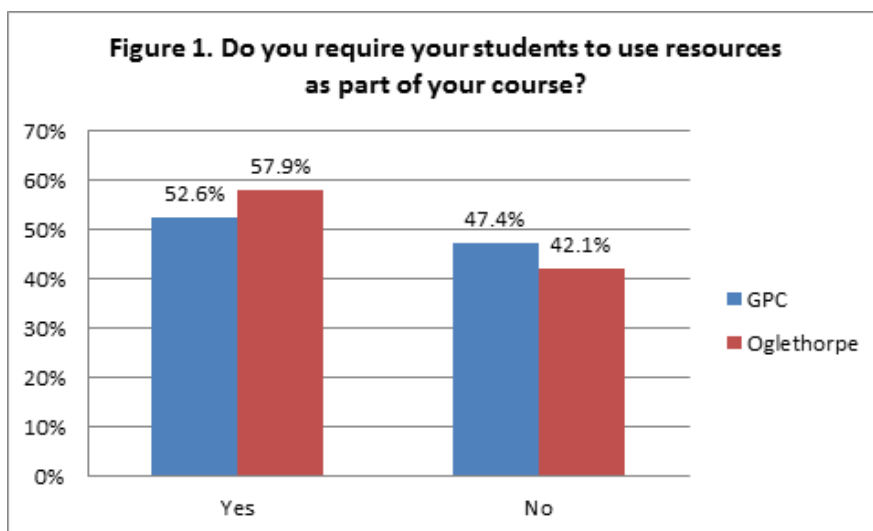
Humanities (36.2% at GPC) and Social Sciences (42.1% at Oglethorpe) faculty were the most active survey participants.

Table 1: Courses by Subject	GPC(%)	Oglethorpe(%)
Business	5.3	7.9
Humanities	36.2	15.8
Social Science	14.8	42.1
Science	7.1	7.9
Math/Engineering	18.4	5.3
Health/PE	7.7	0
Fine Arts	6.5	15.8
Foreign Language/ESL	4.2	13.2
Other	6.8	2.6

In addition to subject areas, GPC faculty reported their level of use of iCollege (GPC’s learning management system). Eighty-one percent (81%) indicated using iCollege in their courses, justifying GPC survey questions’ emphasis on electronic resources. As e-resources are easily incorporated into learning management systems, providing those kinds of resources benefits both online and face-to-face students and faculty.

Library services survey questions can be loosely divided in two groups. Faculty were asked if their students are required to use library resources and to define difficulties their students encounter when accessing and using library resources. Also, faculty were questioned about library resources they find useful for their classes and recommend to students.

As Figure 1 shows in both colleges, more than half of surveyed faculty requires their students to use library resources.



The majority of respondents at GPC and Oglethorpe do not think their students are aware of existing library resources and services (Figure 2, Table 2). When asked about specific problems with using library resources, students' reliance on general websites for their research was the highest ranking concern (68.9% at GPC, 94.3% at Oglethorpe). This data, in combination with faculty perceptions of students' inability to evaluate the quality of information (52.5% - GPC; 62.8% - Oglethorpe) and to cite it properly (51.3% - GPC; 54.3% - Oglethorpe) indicates the need for a stronger role for information literacy instruction (IL) in partnership with the academic program. IL instruction and its relevance in resolving some of the observed weaknesses in students' interaction with the library and its resources were further strengthened by faculty comments in follow-up meetings. Faculty mentioned the need for students to understand plagiarism and academic integrity.

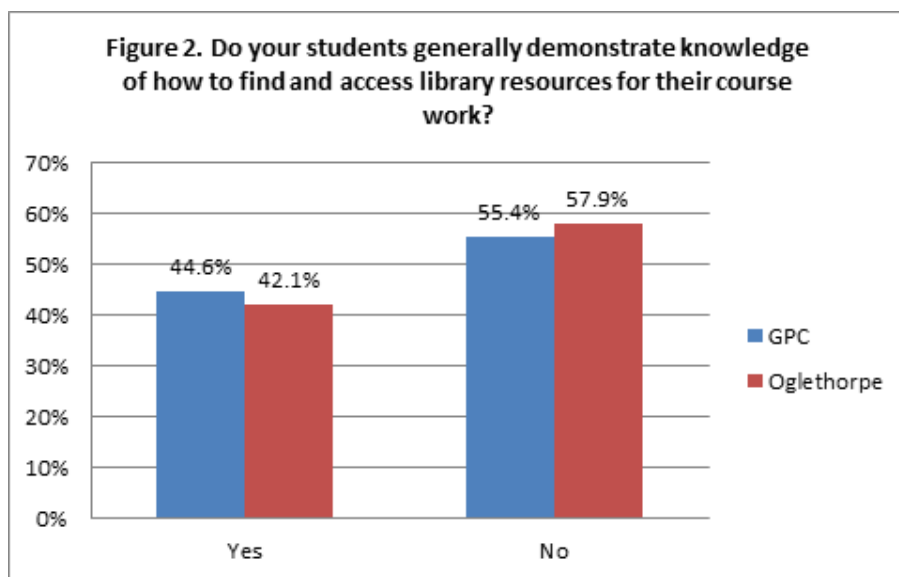


Table 2. What problems do you find your students facing with regard to using library resources for their course work	GPC	Oglethorpe
They rely primarily on general web sites as research sources	68.5%	94.3%
They do not know how to evaluate the credibility/quality of a resource	52.5%	62.9%
They are not aware of the existence of many useful resources /services available to them	55.2%	60%
They do not know how to cite properly	51.3%	54.3%
They do not know how to search for and access library resources	36.5%	42.9%
They do not understand academic honesty or when to cite	43.3%	34.3%

At both schools, faculty were asked to rate their own awareness of specific resources and services. GPC's survey included only e-resources and e-services. Both traditional resources and services (books, journals, library workshops) and e-resources (GALILEO, Libguides) were listed in Oglethorpe's survey.

The results indicated that most faculty members are aware of GALILEO and other full-text databases. Table 3, however, shows a very high percent of unawareness of such library services as research guides (36% are unaware at GPC; 57 % are unaware at Oglethorpe) or video tutorials (32%- GPC; 82% - Oglethorpe).

Table 3. Unaware of this resource	GPC	Oglethorpe
“Ask a Librarian” email/chat	31%	39%
Galileo	5%	9%
E-books	15%	45%
Research Guides/Libguides	36%	57%
Video tutorials	32%	82%

Table 4. What resources do you find particularly useful?

Useful Resources - GPC	
“Ask a Librarian” email/chat	13.4%
Galileo	44.8%
E-books	20.5%
Research Guides/Libguides	17.8%
Video tutorials	13.4%

Useful Resources - Oglethorpe	
GALILEO	39.4%
ILL	18.4%
Films	15.7%
Books	13%
Books, journals	13%
Libguides	13%
Reserves	5.2%
Workshops	5.2%

An analysis of the list of resources that faculty found useful (Table 4) reveals a similar picture. In both cases, GALILEO and other full-text databases ranked the highest (44.8% at GPC, 39.4% at Oglethorpe). Clearly, the library is perceived as the provider of access to electronic resources. However, not all electronic resources rank equally for usefulness, especially e-books.

A surprisingly small number of GPC faculty found e-books useful in teaching online (20.3%). Thirty nine percent (39 %) of respondents are aware of e-books but never use them for their classes. Faculty on the Oglethorpe campus did not regularly use e-books. In follow up meetings with faculty, indications to incorporate them into courses were rated as a very low priority. Table 4 indicates that additional services, such as electronic research guides, video tutorials, and e-workshops are considered less useful than full-text databases. For many faculty, the survey presented an opportunity to learn about library resources and services and thus contributed to its usefulness as an awareness raising tool.

Conclusions

The survey results present an interesting contradiction. Despite faculty acknowledging the importance of the library in student learning, they often do not take advantage of library resources and services. For example, the GPC survey comments mention faculty's surprise and delight at both the quantity and quality of non-traditional library services. These comments and the survey data indicate that the issue is one of awareness. The library should improve faculty awareness of services and offerings to strengthen the use of the library and its resources by students.

The survey tool is perhaps the first place to raise faculty awareness of specific library services available for both faculty and their students. One unexpected benefit from conducting the survey was its promotional impact for the library. New contact opportunities were created as faculty responded to the survey.

The comment section acted as a conduit for the initiation of requests for services. Librarians used the information to conduct follow-up sessions. At Oglethorpe 55.2% of respondents indicated interest in working with a librarian to build a research / searching instruction session for their class. Forty six percent (46%) of surveyed faculty at GPC expressed interest in collaborating with librarians on research guides or online learning modules. Just over half of the Oglethorpe faculty requested meetings with librarians to collaborate on research projects

and instruction sessions. Faculty want to work with librarians. When faculty are given the opportunity to request collaboration, they do, thus indicating that librarians need to take a more proactive role in forming a partnership with faculty.

Another way to be proactive with faculty is to increase librarian participation in departmental meetings. Opportunities arise for library involvement if librarians are present during brainstorming sessions or the early planning stages of course design. Engagement in the educational process at the institutional level can build relationships and partnerships. These collaborative opportunities provide assessment and evaluation possibilities for student learning outcomes and prove the library's commitment to student success.

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