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# Instruction: A Key to Understanding Scientists' User Behavior

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## Introduction

Library information sessions are an effective way to interact with students and faculty. Instruction sessions can take many forms: library tours, demonstrations of the online catalog and subject index databases, and individual consultations. These interactions provide details on how users access information and give insight into their perception of library resources and services.

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## User searching behavior

- Keyword searching is the norm (Scifinder Scholar, Web of Science)
- Broad, multidisciplinary databases preferred over traditional sources (Web of Science over Scifinder Scholar)
- Specialized subject search indexes are meaningless (INSPEC, Compendix)
- Users see every database as a Google search box

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## Library users' abilities

- Able to understand technology, but not searching methodology
- Comfortable crossing operating systems: PC, Mac, Linux
- Comfortable manipulating information from search results
- Difficulty in citing sources, especially using a style guide
- Learn about peer review literature earlier in academic careers (undergraduate, high school level)

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## Library users' perceptions

- See the librarian as someone that can help them
- Realize not all librarians can answer their question
- The library is primarily online- the physical space is a supplement
- Expect prompt answers to questions
- See beyond a single libraries' collections
- Unaware of many library services, especially undergraduates (Interlibrary Loan, Search, Hold, and Recalls)

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## Outside influences on users

- Media – print and television stereotypes
- Search Engines – Google, Yahoo, Ask Jeeves  
(biggest influence)
- Course Management Software – Blackboard, WebCT (fastest growing influence)

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## What affects users' perception of the library?

- Length of time spent with the user
- Type of user / Level of knowledge (undergrad, grad, etc.)
- Subject affiliation of the user

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## New influences on library users

- Course Management Software – Blackboard, WebCT
- Chat and IM Services
- Personalization of Computer Interfaces - Desktop Applications
- Social Software – sharing items online through web sites (flickr, furl, del.icio.us)
- Blogging, personal publishing
- Open Access, new scholarly publishing models

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## Suggested session types for library audiences

Activity	Audience	Topics	Length
Tour	Visitor	Library locations Library services	15 – 30 minutes
Introductory Library Session	Pre-College Nonscientists	Library catalog Call numbers Web search engines	45 – 90 minutes
Course-Integrated Library Session(s)	Undergraduate Senior Undergraduate Graduate	Subject-specific searches Search strategies Print, web sources	1 - 2 hours
Course Instruction (Team-teaching or solo)	Graduate	Narrow, refine searches	5+ hours
Personal Consultation	Graduate Researcher	Subject-specific searches	Time varies
	Faculty	Citation counts Patent searching	9

## Promote library instruction!

- Search course listings for seminar classes in departments
- Meet with faculty library representative, department chair
- Locate teaching innovators
  - Attend teaching events and conferences
  - Work with teaching centers and institutes
- Get involved with orientation sessions for new students
- Use business cards and print promotional materials

## Better understand your library users!

- Spend more time in their physical location – department, dorm, etc.
- Participate and attend campus-wide events and activities – colloquia, seminars, orientations
- Get to know student library employees
- Sponsor an open house or other promotional events
- Advertise through local media – student newspaper, mailing lists, etc.

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## Conclusion

Library instruction sessions are one effective way to better know your users and sense their perceptions of the library. Targeting instruction to the level of user also helps discover different needs among user groups. Awareness of outside influences on library users helps a librarian anticipate obstacles to learning and behavior patterns. Developing relationships with teaching innovators is an effective way to promote library services and raise visibility for the libraries in an organization.

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