

Library Book Use by Science and Engineering Undergraduates

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Why do this study?

- To follow-up from the LibQual+ survey done in 2003
- To get specific information to help with collections decisions
- To better understand our users
- And because even in this electronic age, books are still important

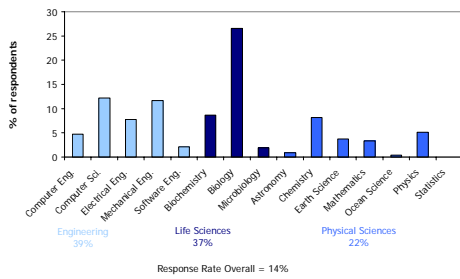
We created a web-based questionnaire and sent the URL to all Science and Engineering students via bulk e-mail. Faculty members were also informed of the survey, and were invited to share the URL with their students and encourage them to participate. An announcement was also posted to the Library's homepage. Of all the recruitment methods, the bulk e-mail proved to be the most effective.

Survey Questions and Summary of Responses

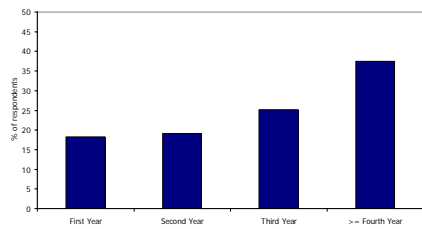
To begin, please tell us what you are studying.

1. What year of study are you in?

Percentage of Respondents by Area of Study

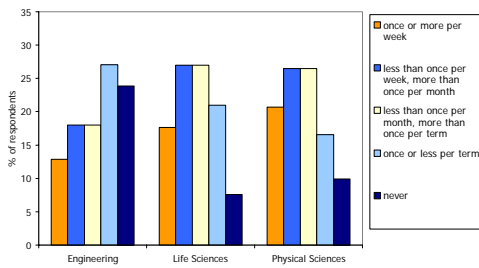


Percentage of Respondents by Year of Study

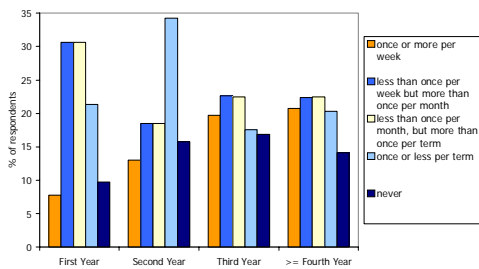


2. Approximately how often do you use books from McPherson Library?

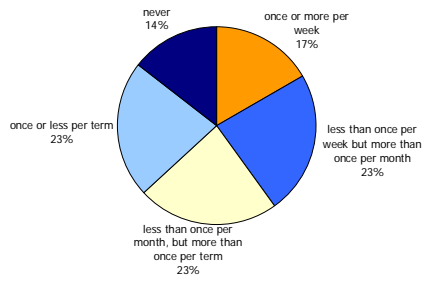
Frequency of Library Book Use by Broad Area of Study



Frequency of Library Book Use by Year of Study



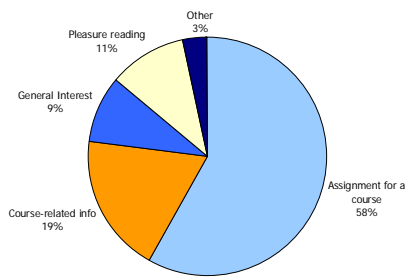
Frequency of Library Book Use Overall



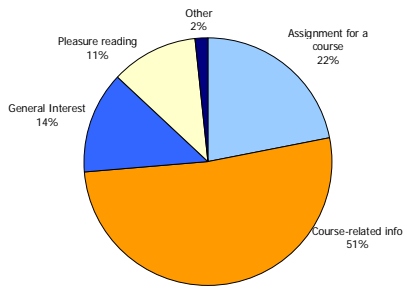
3. For what purpose(s) do you use books from the library?

Please order from 1 to 5, where 1 is your main purpose for using books.

#1 Reasons Cited for Use of Library Books



#2 Reasons Cited for Use of Library Books

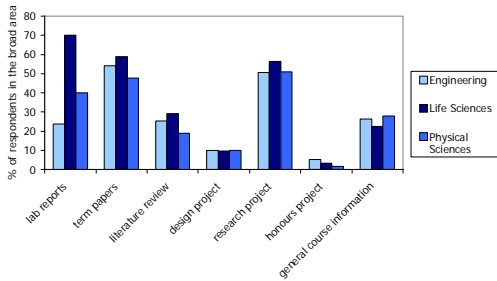


4. Please select the types of assignments for which you have needed to use library books.
Please check all that apply.

**Types of Assignments
Ranked by Broad Subject Area**

Engineering	Life Sciences	Physical Sciences
1. Term papers	1. Lab reports	1. Research projects
2. Research projects	2. Term papers	2. Term papers
3. General course information	3. Research projects	3. Lab reports
4. Literature reviews	4. Literature reviews	4. General course information
5. Lab reports	5. General course information	5. Literature reviews
6. Design projects	6. Design projects	6. Honours projects
7. Honours projects	7. Honours projects	

**Types of Assignments
by % of Respondents in the Broad Subject Area**



- Please list courses, assignments or subject areas for which you were **able to find** the books you needed in the library.
- Please list courses, assignments or subject areas for which you **had trouble finding** books in the library.

What was the primary reason you had trouble?

- the books I needed were checked out
- there weren't enough (or any) books on my topic
- the books on my topic were too old

More students answered #5 than #6:

- 363 students filled in at least one topic for which they **were able to find** books, for a total of 915 subject areas or courses;
- 231 students filled in at least one subject area for which they **had trouble finding** books, for a total of 429 subject areas or courses.

A recurring theme in the comments was that students find the library's book collection to be old and outdated, so it was both surprising and reassuring to see that they are nonetheless able to find books in the library. A small number of students (57) filled in the same topic for both questions 5 and 6, indicating that while they could find books on their topic, the collection in that area was not adequate. Similarly, about half of the students who provided comments used that space to elaborate on their answers to questions 5 and 6.

When students were not able to find books, the most common reason given was "not enough books on my topic", followed by "the books on my topic were too old". A few students said that the books on their topic were too advanced, indicating that perhaps our collection development has focused too much on providing materials for faculty and graduate student research needs.

Each subject librarian will further analyze the answers for the subjects that fall in her liaison area. This will indicate which areas should be targeted first for updates or additions to the collection. Some subject areas have significant overlap between the answers to the two questions; that is, some students are able to find enough material, while others are not. Courses in these areas will be identified as possible avenues for introducing information literacy.

7. Any other comments? Also, if you have suggestions for specific books you think the Library should have, please list them here.

207 students provided comments of some sort, and 86 of them provided book suggestions, a higher number than was anticipated. Comments ranged from one-liners such as "the library is doing a great job" and "no idea how to find anything in the library" to long paragraphs, and even a one-page description of myriad ways in which the library could improve.

Comments were coded according to the four LibQual+ dimensions:

- Access to Information
- Affect of Service
- Library as Place
- Personal Control

Each comment was coded by two librarians. Several themes emerged from this analysis; therefore, the comments were re-coded according to the following categories:

- **Materials & Services Used:** students mainly use materials on reserve and online journals. Interlibrary Loan (ILL) services were also mentioned often.
- **Student Impressions of the Collection:** the most common statement was that the library's books are too old. Many Computer Science and Engineering students told us they do not use books at all, and a few students called the book collection "useless".

- **Collection Policy Issues:** students want multiple copies of items and more course textbooks; however, our current policy is that we do not buy course textbooks and rarely buy multiple copies. Students also want to see more online material, and expressed some frustration that the library does not provide wider online access (i.e. subscribe to backfiles).

- **Customer Service Provided:** generally, they are pleased with the services provided, although there was some frustration with regards to the amount of time it takes for ILL materials to arrive. There were also a number of general compliments to the library.
- **Reasons to Visit the Library:** students use the study spaces, including group study rooms, and materials on reserve. One engineering student remarked that "The Library really does not seem to be trying to draw engineers into it."

- **Ease of Use:** students like remote access for e-resources, but a common remark was that journal articles are hard to find and the databases are hard to use. Some students also said that books were hard to find in the stacks, and suggested better signage.
- **General Policies:** there were many comments in support of longer loan periods for materials on reserve and longer building hours. Students also want to see all course textbooks on reserve.

What will we do next?

The results of the survey indicate several areas in which to direct our efforts:

- Focus on marketing to our users
 - Increase liaison with departments
 - Inform faculty & students about our resources & services
- Look carefully at book suggestions

What will we do next?

We will also encourage other Information Services Librarians to do the questionnaire with undergraduates in their areas, so that we can build a knowledge base across the university.

Yes, they really said this...

- There is no reason for engineers to use the library other than the reserve room and to meet girls. (4th year Mechanical Engineering)
- I personally think your book collection is disastrous especially in the technical areas like engineering and science. (4th year Electrical Engineering)
- When I do look for a book, there appear to be a lot of useless books in there. (2nd year Chemistry)

Yes, they really said this...

- All the information I could possibly need is available in more recent edition online. The sole exceptions to this have been in Philosophy or English electives where I have had no choice but to comb the stacks looking for dead-tree versions of dead-person writing. (3rd year Computer Science)
- i don't really use books from the library. sorry. (1st year Biology)

Yes, they really said this...

- I can never find any books that aren't course related in the library. I read fantasy novels for fun and the library doesn't have them. If you could get some novels that would be great. (3rd year Physics)
- I never use the library except to sleep in the big black chairs and to take out non-required textbooks around finals. (2nd year Chemistry)
