

Surprises revealed in a student questionnaire at Curtin University Library

A recent online questionnaire delivered via Curtin Library's blog provides insight into the information literacy needs and habits of our student population. A surprising 85% of those surveyed used the library's databases and e-journals, compared with 74% using Google or other research engines.

Student sample

Volunteer students had two weeks to submit their online answers. The questionnaire took approximately 10 minutes to complete and responses were anonymous. Most questions were multiple choice, with 'don't know' as an encouraged option. A few questions about research habits and preferences allowed for more than one answer plus comments.

The questionnaire attracted 55 responses: 31% of those surveyed were postgraduate students and 25% students had English as their second language (ESL students). Although the response group was small, it comprised a random sample representative of Curtin's diverse student population. Undergraduate students were spread across all years and age was representative with 57% falling within the under 20 to 24 years of age bracket. All students had undertaken some form of library instruction, although this may only have been a library tour or a class demonstration of the bibliographic software, EndNote.

Questionnaire findings

Although most of the students rated their level of information literacy as high or very high, with none rating it low, only 56% could identify the indicators of a scholarly article. While all respondents could identify a book citation, several had trouble with a journal citation and only 40% realised that they needed to search for the book title in the catalogue when given a chapter citation. The majority of students could identify keywords that were present in the assignment question but only 78% could do so when the keywords were not obvious. Students also struggled with copyright and plagiarism questions. Overall, postgraduate students fared better than undergraduates in the area of information literacy, suggesting that experience or practice is a deciding factor in the acquisition of information literacy skills.

The most common research frustration for all groups was not knowing which database to search, and 40% of the ESL students were frustrated by not knowing how to identify and use keywords. In spite of these frustrations, only 47% of the students wanted to learn more about accessing databases and e-resources, revealing a discrepancy between what the students want and what they need.

Face-to-face interaction valued

The preferred way of asking a librarian for help was in person, with only

22% preferring email, 16% preferring instant messaging, and no preferences for speaking to a librarian over the telephone. When it came to library instruction, 44% preferred to attend a hands-on class during their own time, while 36% preferred to view an online tutorial. The least popular options were attending a hands-on library class during lecture or tutorial time (13%) and receiving a demonstration from a librarian during a course lecture (2%).

When asked what they would do if unable to find the information they required for their research, there was an insignificant difference between the number of students who would seek help from a librarian, a supervisor, or a friend. However, 14% actually preferred to make do with the information they had, while only 7% would view an online tutorial on how to find information.

Conclusion

Despite the small size of the response group, its random and representative nature ensures that many of these findings will play a part in the decisions made about the future directions of the information literacy program at Curtin Library.

Karen Rickman
Information Literacy Project Officer
Lesley Budrovich
Communications Officer

l.budrovich@curtin.edu.au

An unforgettable experience at the University of Tasmania

I am a student from Munich in Germany, studying library and information sciences at the University of Applied Sciences for Administration and Legal Affairs in Bavaria – Faculty Archive and Library Sciences. As a part of my studies I have to do practical placements in different types of libraries to gain a context for the theoretical knowledge acquired during my course. For one of these placements I had the opportunity to choose a library in another country to gain an overview of how libraries abroad work.

I had the impression that Tasmania is a very beautiful and interesting part of Australia and I liked the fact that I could practise my English. For these reasons I looked for interesting libraries in Tasmania and the website of University of Tasmania (UTAS) Library gave me the impression that I would enjoy such a modern looking university library. I sent my application to UTAS Library and asked if I could do a placement there. I was very happy when I received a positive answer and really excited when, nearly one year later, the time for my flight to Hobart arrived.

The placement took place from the 9 March 2010 until 31 March 2010.

During this time I visited the Morris Miller Library, all the branch libraries of the university including the library at Launceston, the library of the Cradle Coast Campus, and the library of the Australian Maritime College.

The placement offered me an understanding of the range of professional roles and information services offered by UTAS Library and how they might change in the future. I gained an awareness of information and reference services in libraries and the resources and services supporting them. I was really impressed by all the refurbishment that is done at the UTAS libraries and I learned how library spaces are changing to meet learning and teaching needs. It was very interesting to see how many services the UTAS libraries offer their students and to visit lectures and workshops for the students where librarians teach them how to best use the library.

All in all it was a great experience and I learned lots of new things. I also met lots of fantastic people that I want to thank for my great time in Tasmania.

I was not the only student in my course who did a placement abroad,

although most of them stayed in Europe.

As a conclusion, what advice would I give to library students looking for an overseas placement opportunity?

- It is really important to start to apply for a placement very early (in my case it was nearly one year before the placement took place).
- Just send your applications to libraries you are interested in. In the worst case they will say that it is not possible. You have nothing to lose!
- No place is too far away in the connected world we have today.
- Try to find an organisation which sponsors your placement (in my case it was the German organisation "Bibliothek und Information International").

So I wish every other student who does an overseas placement as much fun as I had and I am sure I will visit Tasmania again, and hopefully will also see the rest of Australia!

Jessica Meindorfer
LIS student from Germany

jessica.meindorfer@bsb-muenchen.de