Meet the UVM class of 2014!

Report of the 2010 First-Year Library Survey

Why conduct the survey?

Goals & Method

In an effort to improve services to undergraduate students, the University of Vermont Libraries recently surveyed incoming first-time first-year (FTFY) students in the class of 2014.

The goals of the survey were to:

✦ learn more about student access to technology
✦ learn more about the previous research and writing experiences of FTFY students
✦ assess confidence in performing research related tasks, and
✦ assess skills in performing research related tasks

The survey was conducted online and ran from August 11, 2010 through August 31, 2010 using a secure online survey tool. Invitations to participate were sent to all 2494 FTFY students and had a response rate of 29%. Final enrollment figures for FTFY students for the fall of 2010 indicate that 2472 FTFY students were still enrolled after the add/drop period.

Who is the class of 2014?

Demographic Data

All responses were anonymous and respondents were not asked to provide any information that would personally identify them.

64% of respondents indicated that their gender is female and this percentage is slightly higher than the actual enrollment percentage of 58%.

Colleges and schools in which respondents are enrolled is consistent with official enrollment data. The University does not routinely include the Honors College as a separate school or college in their official enrollment reports but we wanted to capture this information for planning and assessment purposes.
12% of students indicated that they are the first person in their immediate family to attend college; however, data concerning the highest level of education completed by their mother and father provides a slightly fuller picture.

The things they carry

**Technology Access**

Student access to personal technology has a huge impact on planning and services not only in the library but across campus. Questions in this section of the survey covered three areas: personal computers, cell phones and handheld devices, and the use of e-book readers.

The most striking finding relating to technology is that 97% of students reported that they would be bringing a laptop to campus this fall. Of those computers, the majority (54%), are Macs.

This information could have implications for decisions on how to improve teaching and learning spaces in the library. Configuring spaces so that students can bring their own computers to class, ensuring that ample power and work spaces are available in public areas, increasing wireless capacity in Bailey/Howe, and enabling printing services for laptop users are all initiatives that facilitate mobile computing.

Similar issues relating to supporting so many laptops in classrooms and study spaces exist across campus.
While cell phones and other portable devices are not as ubiquitous as laptops, their presence is significant.

86% have either a cell phone or a smartphone.

55% have a smartphone or iPod Touch.

Different devices suggest different service and teaching possibilities. Cell phones are particularly well suited to SMS based services and numerous studies have demonstrated that college aged people prefer SMS to traditional voice telephone services. Smartphones and iPod Touches open up the possibility of specialized apps of all types that take advantage of their unique capabilities. Smartphones and iTouches also function as e-book readers.

11% of respondents indicated they currently access e-books using some type of portable device. A variety of devices are being used for this task including Amazon's Kindle but by far the most popular devices for reading e-books are the iTouch and smartphones - technology that students already possess. As with the general population, the use of e-books by students is likely to increase. The Library is currently considering implementing a program in which the library would purchase electronic books based upon patron-driven requests. Libraries throughout the country are experimenting with a wide-range of service models that range from loaning pre-loaded Kindles to purchasing titles in e-pub format from vendors such as ebrary.

11% read books on a portable device.

56% of students who use e-books use an iTouch or smartphone to access e-books.

Trends in e-book use on college campuses will also have implications for college textbook publishing and sales; however, recent studies have indicated that students currently prefer print for traditional textbooks.

**Reading, Writing, & Research**

**Previous Experience**

Several questions were used to measure the amount and type of academic experiences FFY students had during their senior year in high school. The charts on the following pages divide these experiences into three categories: writing and oral expression, use of print materials, and use of online materials.
Writing and oral expression experiences in senior year of high school

How many papers over 5 pages did students write

- None: 4%
- 1-3: 36%
- 4-6: 31%
- 7-10: 15%
- 11 plus: 14%

Number of papers w/ a bibliography

- None: 1%
- 1-3: 16%
- 4-6: 28%
- 7-10: 21%
- 11 plus: 34%

Number of oral presentations

- None: 1%
- 1-3: 19%
- 4-6: 31%
- 7-10: 19%
- 11 plus: 31%

Use of printed research materials in senior year of high school

Number of times library books were used by students

- Never: 7%
- 1-3: 32%
- 4-6: 28%
- 7-10: 18%
- 11 plus: 15%

Number of times print encyclopedias were used

- Never: 25%
- 1-3: 43%
- 4-6: 17%
- 7-10: 9%
- 11 plus: 7%

Number of times print periodicals were used

- Never: 14%
- 1-3: 39%
- 4-6: 23%
- 7-10: 15%
- 11 plus: 10%

Interpretations of the data on written and oral expression will vary depending upon what we think is minimally acceptable. 71% of students wrote 6 or fewer papers 5 or more pages in length over their entire senior year and may not have much experience building a sustained written argument.

The low usage of print encyclopedias and print periodicals is neither particularly surprising nor alarming given the wide availability of materials online. However, 67% of college-bound seniors used library books for research 6 or fewer times during their senior year of high school and this may indicate that students are not accustomed to reading in depth for research.
As noted above, students indicated that they infrequently used print periodicals in the last year. This is mitigated by the use of articles from online article databases. Whereas only 25% of respondents had used print periodicals more than 6 times in the last year, that percentage rises to 41% in the online environment.

Affordable online databases through vendors such as Gale and Ebsco have made academic journal literature available to high school students in ways that would have been unimaginable in the past. In Vermont several databases are made available to school libraries through the Vermont Online Library (VOL) a service that is negotiated by the Vermont Department of Libraries.

As was expected, the most frequently used research resource was the Web. Students choose the Web because it is ubiquitous and easy to search. Our job as teachers continues to be to ensure that students can locate the highest quality information and that they are prepared to critically evaluate the information they find no matter the mode of access.

Students have clearly been provided with instruction in evaluating standard open-web resources.
I can do that!

**Student Confidence**

In this section of the survey students were asked to indicate whether they strongly disagreed, disagreed, agreed, or strongly agreed with a series of statements concerning research tasks that started with the phrase, “I feel confident...”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>searching a library catalog to locate materials.</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>searching library databases to locate articles.</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>evaluating if resources are reliable or not.</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, incoming FTFY students are very confident. As a group they are most confident in their ability to evaluate research materials but their actual skill in evaluating materials is highly dependent upon the type of material and criteria being used in their evaluation. Students indicated their lowest level of confidence in the area of searching a library catalog for materials and given how infrequently they used library books in their senior year of high school that is not surprising.

Pinpointing student skills

**Skills Assessment**

Students were asked to answer 14 questions designed to assess their ability at constructing effective searches, interpreting and evaluating search results, evaluating materials, and understanding of plagiarism and the basics of citing one’s work.

Students were assigned 1 point for each correct answer and overall scores ranged between 2 and 14 points with an average score of 10.2 points (or 73% which would be a grade of C).

**Constructing a search**

Which search will produce the fewest hits?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Search Expression</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tourism OR tourists</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism AND tourists AND touring</td>
<td></td>
<td>55%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>27%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism AND tourists</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
71% of respondents were able to identify where to add a term for a new concept in order to narrow the above search.

Interpreting and evaluating search results

58% of respondents correctly identified the journal title in the citation above.

40% of respondents correctly identified the above citation as being a chapter from a book.

Evaluating materials

Percentage of students who correctly matched the following types of periodicals with their definitions.

- Popular: 87%
- Trade/Professional: 77%
- Substantive: 57%
- Scholarly: 58%
The skill areas where students performed the poorest were those of interpreting and evaluating materials. In particular, students had difficulty reading a citation and differentiating a scholarly journal article from a popular or substantive magazine article. The inability to properly perform these tasks will cause students considerable problems. For example, a student who cannot identify the title of a journal will have a very hard time figuring out if UVM has access to the article they are looking for. Likewise, students who cannot distinguish scholarly journal articles from other types of articles will frequently find themselves in the position of not locating material appropriate for college-level research.

On the bright side, students have received training in evaluating Web sites as is evidenced by their knowledge of the production practices of Wikipedia. Similarly, while students may not be familiar with the particular citation styles used in various academic disciplines, they generally know that when they consult works, whether online or in print, they must cite those materials in their own work.

What now?

Conclusion

Numerous programs and courses currently exist across the campus to help FTFY students make a successful academic transition to college. Among these, the Library currently works closely with the TAP Program in the College of Arts and Sciences; with CALS 001 in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, and with English 1, and HCOL 095.

The academic expectations placed upon UVM students are high and there is a growing emphasis at UVM, as elsewhere, upon students conducting original research during their undergraduate education. In order to meet our collective expectations all students need to have an opportunity to learn and master the basics of academic research and writing early in their college careers and to broaden these skills as their work becomes more specialized within their major.

The Libraries looks forward to continuing to work closely with partners across campus to find creative and effective ways to improve student research and writing throughout students’ college career.

Plagiarism and citing one’s work

98% of respondents know that information found on the Internet must be cited when used in a paper.

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MORE INFORMATION

Online

This report, as well as a copy of the survey, are available online at: library.uvm.edu/faculty/fyls2010.

Questions or Comments

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