



# Council on Library and Information Resources Internet Use Study

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Many traditional library measures, such as gate counts, circulation, and reference visits, indicate that the use of libraries is changing. Now a Council on Library and Information Resources long-awaited national study documents the effects of Internet use of libraries. Survey protocols and results can be read on the CLIR website ([www.diglib.org/use.htm](http://www.diglib.org/use.htm)) and were published in the summer of 2002 as *Dimensions and Use of the Scholarly Information Environment* by Daniel Greenstein and Leigh Watson Healy of Outsell, Inc., the survey company that conducted the research. Interesting outcomes include faculty and student perceptions and use of the Internet, information-seeking behavior, and locations for scholarly work. This work provides major new insights into scholarly inquiry and can help librarians to redesign library services coordinately.

Internet perceptions: eighty percent of students and faculty surveyed noted that the Internet had changed their use of campus libraries. Clearly, the speed, searchability, and ease of access available for resources on the Internet are most attractive to both students and faculty. However, the major fear of many librarians—that students were unaware of the quality issues in Internet use—was not validated in the study. Only 41 percent of faculty and graduate students and 54 percent of undergraduate students indicated a trust in Internet information. Undergraduates especially still put enough faith in Internet resources to use them in class assignments. One of many library-affirming findings in this report showed that library-supplied information, both print and electronic, is universally trusted with the highest rankings in the study: 97 percent for undergraduates and 99 percent for faculty and graduate students.

Information-seeking behavior: Going online both on the Web and through library catalogs and indices was the predominant method for seeking information. Nevertheless, 47 percent of respondents still noted the use of print sources (more than one answer could be given to this question). The least-used method (only 23 percent across all



user categories) was seeking personal assistance, although more undergraduates (35 percent) tended to ask librarians than did graduate students or faculty. Some different patterns occurred among the different types of institutions (public research institutions, private research institutions, and colleges) from which the sample was drawn.

One of the most interesting lines of questions pursued in the study revolved around researchers' current information-seeking practices compared with their preferred information-seeking behaviors. A significant gap exists between how researchers get information and how they would prefer to get it—75 percent get information from the library but only 45 percent prefer to get it that way. Overall, these answers indicate a profound interest in the convenience of online delivery.

Locations for scholarly work: One-third to one-half of those surveyed report that they use the library less than they did two years ago because they now use the Internet to meet some information needs. The survey asked questions about a variety of locations—office, home, library, laboratory, and classrooms. In another question in which more than one answer could be checked, physical library scored 55 percent, residence 54 percent, office 38 percent, and laboratory 12 percent. Other locations scored 4 percent or less. Similarly, survey respondents reported spending large percentages of their time in libraries—faculty 10 percent, graduate students 30 percent, and undergraduates 34 percent. This finding, too, was affirming for the persistence of libraries, especially college libraries, as an important part of campus life.

Although the anecdotal impressions of individual librarians may vary from some findings in this report, high quality methodologies were used to create it. Deanna Marcum urged librarians to believe the results and to understand how this information could help with local decision-making. Especially when used in conjunction with local surveys, focus groups, and traditional statistics, these data can provide a picture of current, preferred, and desired information-seeking behaviors. Some librarians have already been enthused by hearing a report at the Coalition for Networked Information. Leigh Watson Healey will also be speaking at the ACRL Conference in Charlotte, and Deanna Marcum will appear on a panel hosted by the Taskforce on the Future. These opportunities, combined with the publication of the report itself, should afford all librarians access to this significant research.