



Faculty perceptions of librarian-led information literacy instruction in postsecondary education

Christina Nilsen

Thompson Rivers University
Kamloops, BC, Canada

Session:

105 — *International and comparative librarianship: toward valid, relevant and authentic research and education* — Library Theory and Research, Education and Training and LIS Education in Developing Countries Special Interest Group

Abstract:

Many academic libraries identify information literacy (IL) instruction as one of their core mandates. At the same time, one of the main challenges faced by instructional librarians is gaining access to the very students that they are tasked with educating. At most postsecondary institutions, there is no formal requirement that faculty devote classroom time to IL instruction, nor any requirement that a librarian participate in its planning or delivery. Faculty are typically the gatekeepers to their classrooms, and to this end, faculty perceptions of and attitudes toward academic librarians and library instruction tend to be critical to the success of IL programs. Using data collected using a web-based questionnaire, this paper explores the perceptions and attitudes of instructional faculty at postsecondary institutions across Canada toward academic librarians and IL instruction.

Keywords

Bibliographic instruction, information literacy, IL, library instruction, postsecondary education, organizational culture, research skills

1. Introduction

In the wake of the “digital revolution”, the information literacy (IL) skills of postsecondary students have become a serious concern for educators, including librarians. Information has become abundantly available to anyone with access to an Internet connection and a computer, and yet it is, in fact, the very

proliferation of readily available information that has amplified concerns about IL. Information literacy (IL) refers to “the ability to identify, locate, evaluate, organize, and effectively create, use and communicate information to address issues or problems at hand” (Spenser, 2003). These skills are critical for active engagement in society today, and while many students believe that they have above average IL skills, research has shown that many students overestimate their competencies in this area. Furthermore, this high level of confidence decreases their likelihood of seeking help, even when their information seeking strategies fall short (Latham & Gross, 2011).

Today, most academic libraries identify IL instruction as one of their core mandates, and this mandate is supported by international standards including the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Information Literacy Standards for Higher Education¹. However, incorporating IL instruction across curricula in postsecondary education requires collaboration between faculty and librarians, and as Gloria Leckie observed in a study of IL in science and engineering undergraduate programs, “librarians and faculty do not understand each other’s role or expectations very well” (1999, p. 10). Certainly, one recurring challenge faced by instructional librarians is gaining access to the very students that they are tasked with educating. At many postsecondary institutions, there is no formal requirement that faculty devote classroom time to IL instruction, nor any requirement that a librarian participate in its planning or delivery. Faculty are typically the gatekeepers to their classrooms, and to this end, faculty perceptions and attitudes toward academic librarians and library instruction are critical to the success of IL instruction programs.

2. Literature Review

For at least 40 years, academic librarians have been writing about faculty perceptions of librarians in academe. In particular, the notion that teaching faculty do not, in general, view librarians as their academic equals, nor as central to the teaching process has, and continues, to shape the direction of a great deal of literature about librarians in higher education. Early writings about faculty perceptions of librarians in academe focused on organizational culture and the role of status, gender and ego in perpetuating faculty-librarian conflict. For example, in 1968, Robert Blackburn wrote an article about college libraries in which he attributed faculty-librarian conflict to competing roles, jealousies, and competition for control over students, egos, and status aspirations (pp. 171-77). In 1969, Maurice Marchant added that as well as status, gender was a critical factor in librarian-faculty relations, with male-dominated faculty tending to view the female-dominated library profession as inferior (p.2887). In an essay entitled “Faculty recalcitrance about bibliographic instruction,” an Earlham College professor of English wrote that faculty members regard librarians as they regard secretaries and ground keepers, as their errand boys and girls, not as their colleagues” (Thompson, 1993, p. 103), and the title of a 1979 article entitled “Librarians as teachers: The study of an organizational fiction” more than speaks for itself (Wilson, p. 153). The perceived marginalization or lower status of librarians compared to and in the eyes of their Ph.D-holding teaching faculty colleagues has endured as a topic of interest in library and information studies (LIS) literature, even as the research methods employed in these studies have evolved. Since the 1980’s, surveys, sometimes in combination with structured interviews, have also been used to investigate faculty perceptions of academic librarians, including questions about the academic status of librarians (Cook, 1981; Divay, Ducas & Michaud-Oustryk, 1987; Ivey, 1994; Thompson, 1993; Hardesty, 1995).

¹ The term information literacy instruction is a recent variant of a succession of similar and overlapping terms that includes bibliographic instruction, library instruction, research instruction, and library research instruction. All of these refer, at bottom, to teaching people how to find, critically evaluate, and use information. I use these terms – information literacy instruction and library instruction in particular - interchangeably throughout this paper.

Questionnaires have also been used to explore hypothesized relationships between the incorporation of IL instruction in the classroom and characteristics of instructional faculty such as academic rank, tenure, teaching experience, discipline, gender, age, teaching style, library usage habits and perceptions of the IL skills of students. For example, faculty in colleges of education and the humanities, and particularly English and history have, in some studies, been found to view the contributions of librarians as more substantial than have faculty in colleges of business or technology, or the sciences in general. Philosophy and mathematics have typically been found to make the least use of library instructional services (Budd & Coutant, 1981; Maynard, 1987; Cannon, 1994). Among the science departments, faculty in nursing, biology and earth sciences have been found to make the highest use of library instruction, with chemistry, computer science, physics and mathematics at the opposite end of the spectrum (Leckie & Fullerton, 1999).

Although the various studies on faculty attitudes toward library instruction published over the years point to a variety of important and interrelated aspects of this issue, piecing together the conclusions from these individual studies is somewhat problematic. As Maynard put it, faculty attitudes toward library instruction are “highly variable and inconsistent” (1987). Furthermore, most of the literature reports the results of surveys of instructional faculty at only one or just a few institutions, and many of these studies are at least 15 years old by now. To gain a stronger image of the current issues that influence faculty perceptions of IL instruction, what is needed is a multi-institutional study with a wide, national or international scope.

3. Background & Objectives of the Study

In 2010, the IFLA Library Theory and Research group launched a new mentoring initiative called the Researcher-Librarian Partnership. The purpose of this initiative was to create an opportunity for new information professionals to develop research skills under the guidance of experienced Library & Information Science (LIS) researchers. I participated in this program during 2010-11 under the mentorship of Dr. Heather O’Brien, Assistant Professor at the School of Library, Archival, and Information Studies at the University of British Columbia, and the project I undertook aimed to revisit and update the somewhat provisional and dated conclusions of past research exploring faculty perceptions of academic librarians and IL instruction. This body of literature consists largely of survey research conducted at single institutions at various points over the past 40 years. One (perhaps overly ambitious) objective of this project was to cast a wider net than previous studies by recruiting survey respondents from postsecondary institutions across Canada with the hope of recruiting a sample of sufficient size and breadth to support findings of relevance to IL program development at postsecondary institutions and academic libraries across North America.

4. The Current Study

This research project employed a web-based questionnaire to survey teaching faculty at postsecondary institutions across Canada about their perceptions of IL instruction and the role and status of academic librarians. (See Appendix A for the complete questionnaire.) One of the primary objectives of this research was to build upon and test the conclusions of previous research. Most previous studies on this topic used questionnaires to survey teaching faculty at a single college or university. Although that research has produced useful findings, the samples collected have been too small in size and scope to support broad conclusions about the North American population of teaching faculty as a whole. By contrast, this project aimed to recruit respondents from the entire population of postsecondary teaching faculty in Canada.

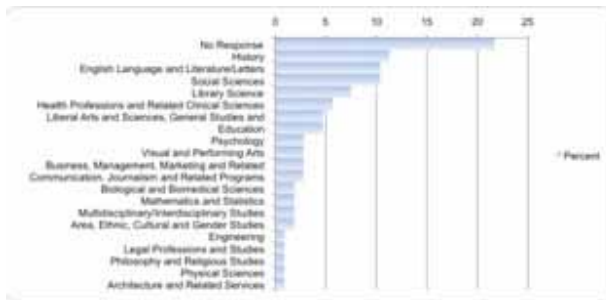
At the highest level, the questionnaire was designed to investigate how postsecondary faculty perceive academic librarians and how much importance they place on IL instruction for students in their disciplines. More specifically, survey questions were designed to collect information about respondents that could be hypothesized to exercise an influence upon faculty support for IL instruction and perceptions of academic librarians. The survey thus included questions about respondents' demographic and employment-related characteristics, library usage habits, frequency of contact with librarians, real and perceived academic status of librarians at respondents' institutions, how respondents learned to conduct research as postsecondary students, their perceptions of the importance of IL skills and instruction for postsecondary students, perceptions of students' existing IL skills, and their views about the impact of the "digital revolution" on the need for IL instruction. The survey also asked respondents to indicate whether and how often they had requested that a librarian provide in-class IL instruction, as well as a rationale for those who had not done so, and to indicate who they felt was responsible for providing IL instruction (i.e. librarians, other teaching faculty, or both).

Despite the original intent of recruiting a sample of sufficient size and breadth to be truly representative of postsecondary instructors across Canada, the actual sample turned out to be neither random nor truly representative of the population under investigation. Additionally, due to the use of the snowball recruitment method, there is no way to calculate an overall response rate. Furthermore, as Anita Cannon points out in her faculty survey of library research instruction, regarding voluntary surveys, individuals with a positive interest in the research topic are more likely to complete a questionnaire than those with a neutral or negative attitude toward it (1994). In this case, 106 instructors, lecturers, or professors of any rank at post-secondary institutions across Canada completed the questionnaire, and if I were to characterize the most typical respondent, I would describe a 46 year old female, employed in a history or English literature department at a mainly undergraduate university in the province of British Columbia. Specifically, 61% of survey respondents were female and 28% male. (11% did not disclose their gender). Respondents' ages ranged from 28 to 69, with a mean and median age of 47 and 46 respectively. Additionally, 33% worked at universities classified as mainly undergraduate, 23% at community colleges, 17% at medical doctoral universities, and 10% at comprehensive universities. (The survey used the same post-secondary institution categories as were used in the 2010 *Maclean's* magazine's annual Canadian university rankings².) The teaching experience of respondents was fairly evenly distributed, with 19.8% reporting over 20 years experience, 9.4% 15-19 years, 19.8% 10-14 years, 20.8% 5-9 years, and 19.8% less than 5 years. Additionally, 63.2% reported that they conduct original research in addition to their teaching responsibilities, while 24.5% reported that they do not. In terms of geography, 57.5% of the sample resided in British Columbia at the time of the study, followed by 16% in Ontario, 6.6% in Alberta and a very small distribution through the other provinces and territories. The overrepresentation of faculty from institutions in British Columbia is most likely due to the fact that the researcher had direct access to the faculty listserv at Thompson Rivers University in British Columbia where she is employed as a librarian, and because individuals who knew her personally may have been more inclined to respond to the invitation to complete the questionnaire than others at other institutions with whom she was not acquainted.

² Postsecondary institutions were classified and defined as follows. Mainly undergraduate universities are primarily focused on undergraduate education with relatively few graduate studies or graduate-level professional programs. Examples: Mount Allison, Acadia, UNCB, Lethbridge, Wilfred Laurier, Trent, St. Francis Xavier, Bishop's, UPEI, Winnipeg, Saint Mary's, Lakehead, Ryerson, Thompson Rivers, Cape Breton etc. Comprehensive universities offer a broad range of undergraduate and graduate programs including graduate-level professional programs. Research is a significant part of scholarly activity at these institutions. Examples: Simon Fraser, Victoria, Waterloo, Guelph, Memorial, New Brunswick, Carleton, Windsor, Regina, York, Concordia, UQAM etc. Medical/Doctoral universities offer a wide range of Ph.D. Programs and have a medical school. Research is a prominent part of scholarly activity at these institutions. Examples: UBC, Toronto, McGill, Alberta, Queen's, Western, Saskatchewan, Ottawa, Laval, Sherbrooke, Manitoba, Western, Dalhousie etc.

Additionally, assuming that previous research (demonstrating a tendency for instructors from history and English to be more likely to have a librarian provide research instruction to their classes than instructors from other departments) holds true, the disciplinary affiliations of the survey respondents, taken as a whole, appear consistent with Anita Cannon’s observation that those with a positive interest in a research topic are more likely to complete a voluntary survey on that topic, than others with a neutral or negative attitude toward it (1994).

Figure 1: The Sample by Discipline



Note that respondents were asked to identify the academic department to which they belong from a pick-list consisting of Statistics Canada’s Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) <http://stds.statcan.gc.ca/cip-cpe/2digit-2chiffres-eng.asp#I>. Respondents belonging to more than one department were instructed to choose the one that they considered to best represent their primary field of expertise, and if none of the options provided applied, to select “no answer” and write in the name of their department in a comments box.

5. Methods

The questionnaire developed for this study was web-based, built using Lime Survey <http://www.limesurvey.org/> and hosted by Hosted in Canada Surveys <http://www.hostedincanadasurveys.ca/>. The completely anonymous survey response data was hosted on a server located in Canada and then retrieved in electronic format, exportable to SPSS for analysis. A second Lime Survey, also hosted by Hosted in Canada was used to collect participant data for the incentive prize.

The survey was distributed using the snowball sampling method (Heckathorn, 1997). Although no monetary remuneration was offered to survey respondents, an incentive prize draw for one iPod Nano was used to encourage survey completion.

6. Findings

Using SPSS, initial analyses of the survey data focussed on a few broad questions to begin with: how much importance do postsecondary instructors place on IL skills and instruction for students in their discipline; how strong are students’ existing IL skills according to their instructors; and what proportion of instructors actually utilize librarians in their classes in the provision of IL instruction. Perhaps the most interesting finding from this survey is that despite rating IL skills and instruction as very important to students in their disciplines, and despite ranking the IL skills of lower-level undergraduate students in particular as largely poor to fair, nearly half of the respondents indicated that they do not regularly request in-class library instruction from a librarian for any of the classes that they teach. This study looks at the reasons provided by instructors themselves as explanations for not utilizing librarians

in IL instruction, in addition to some of the professional, formative, and demographic data collected by the survey instrument and hypothesized to influence perceptions of librarians and IL instruction.

6.1. Perceptions of students' existing IL skills, and of the importance of IL skills and instruction

Respondents were asked to identify the importance of IL skills and instruction for students in their disciplines from a five point scale: very important, moderately important, important, of little importance, or unimportant. They were also asked to rank the existing IL skills of their students using a four-point scale: excellent, good, fair, or poor. As figures 2.0-2.2 show, overall, respondents identified IL skills as being very important for all levels of students, with 60.4% of the respondents rating IL skills as very important for upper-level undergraduate students, followed by 58.5% for graduate students, and 50% for lower-level undergraduate students.

Figure 2.0. Perceived importance of IL skills for lower-level undergraduate students

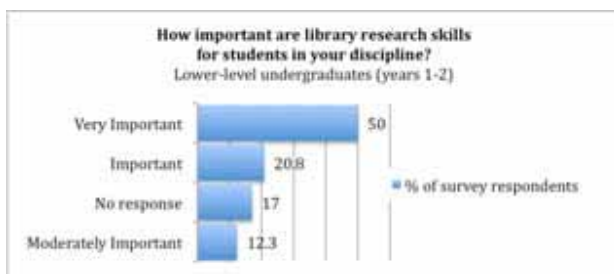


Figure 2.1. Perceived importance of IL skills for upper-level undergraduate students

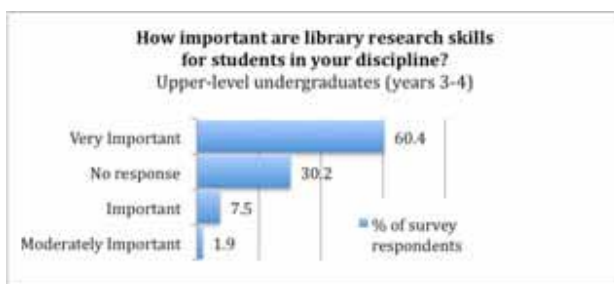
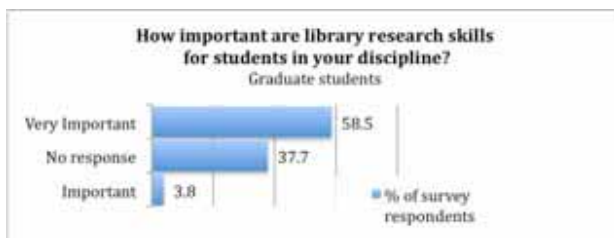


Figure 2.2. Perceived importance of IL skills for graduate students



If IL skills are very important for postsecondary students of all levels, lower-level undergraduates do not yet, according to their instructors, possess great strength in this area. 40.6% - the highest proportion - of respondents ranked the existing IL skills of lower-level undergraduate students as only fair, followed by 32.1% of respondents who thought that the IL skills of this level of student were actually worse than that – i.e. poor. However, according to instructors, these skills improve markedly by the time students reach years 3-4 of their studies, with 30.2% of respondents ranking their IL skills as good and 24.5% as fair. Only 19.8% ranked graduate student IL skills as good, followed by 14.2% as fair, but this result is presumably skewed by the fact that 58.5% did not respond to the question, quite possibly because they do not teach graduate-level students.

Figure 3.0. Ratings of lower-level undergraduate student IL skills

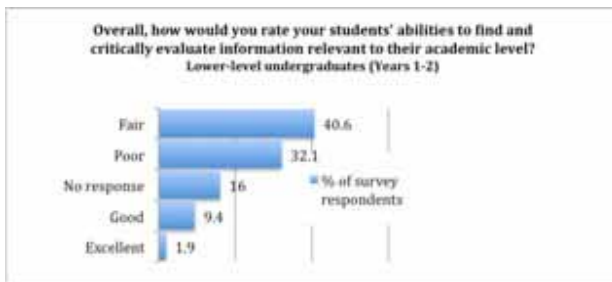


Figure 3.1. Ratings of upper-level undergraduate student IL skills

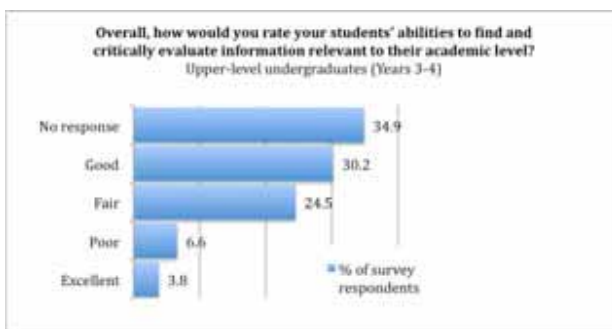
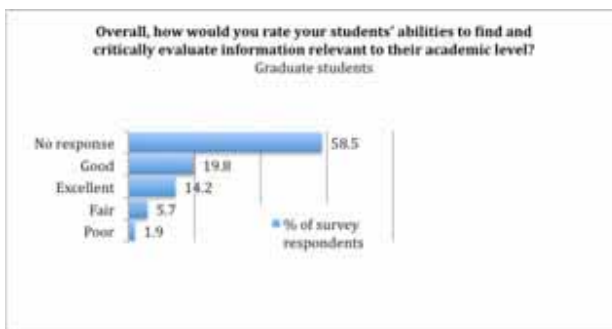


Figure 3.2. Ratings of graduate student IL skills



Logically, considering the weaker IL skills of lower-level undergraduate students in the eyes of their instructors, 53.8% of the respondents rated IL instruction as very important for students at this level, followed by 40.6% of respondents, who rated IL instruction as very important for upper-level undergraduate students, followed by 32.1% for graduate students.

Figure 4.0. Perceived importance of IL instruction for lower-level undergraduate students

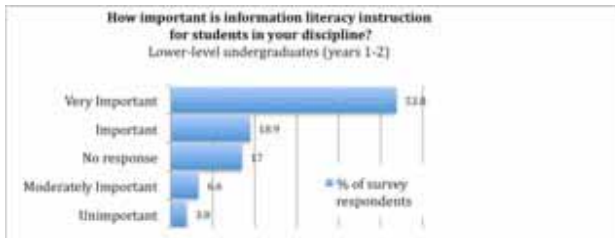


Figure 4.1. Perceived importance of IL instruction for upper-level undergraduate students

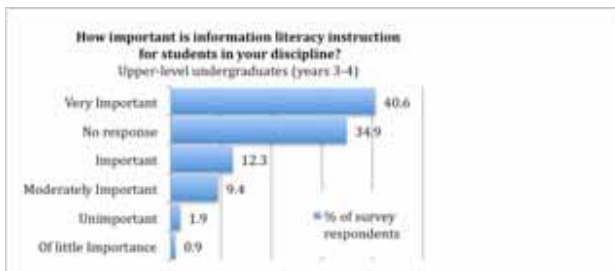
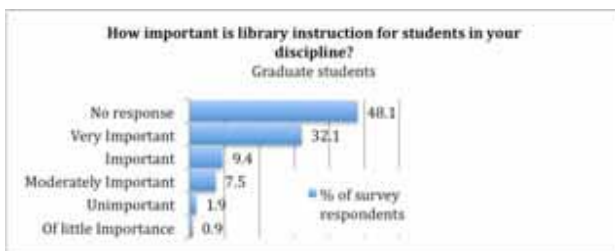


Figure 4.2. Perceived importance of IL instruction for graduate students



6.2. Utilizing librarians for in-class IL instruction

Perhaps the most interesting finding from this survey is that despite rating IL skills and instruction as very important to students in their disciplines, and despite ranking the IL skills of lower-level undergraduate students in particular as largely poor to fair, nearly half of the respondents indicated that they do not regularly request in-class library instruction from a librarian for any of the classes that they teach.

Figure 5.0. Utilizing librarians for in-class instruction

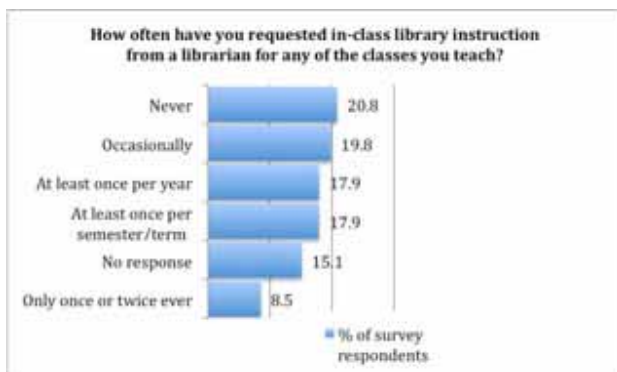
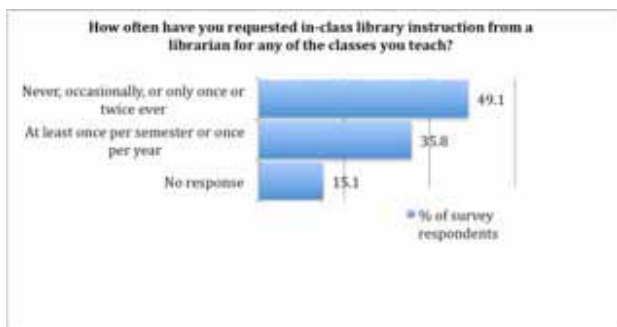


Figure 5.1. Utilizing librarians for in-class instruction

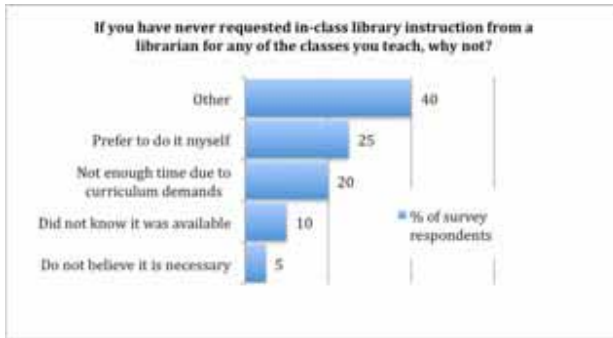


Those who indicated that they never utilize in-class library instruction from a librarian in the classes they teach were asked to indicate the reason why by selecting one of five options: they prefer to do it themselves, lack of time due to curriculum demands, lack of awareness about its availability, belief that it is unnecessary, or other, with a corresponding comment field.

Among those who selected “other” and provided comments, their responses are varied, but point to specific issues. A few respondents referred to a lack of coordination of IL instruction at the departmental level, and expressed their concern about avoiding duplication of materials taught in other classes. One respondent wrote that their department had made a conscious pedagogical choice to integrate library instruction into the curriculum, but that it was “led by faculty, not librarians”. Another expressed a kind of ambivalence toward the issue:

Somehow it always slips my mind until part-way into the term, at which point the course schedule is already set and I don't feel I can fit it in; b) as an undergrad I recall basic workshops on library skills being extraordinarily dull and few of my peers attending them... so I guess I haven't felt it would be worthwhile? (Which is stupid, because I know it would be, in some measure.)

Figure 6.0. Reasons given for not utilizing librarian-led IL instruction



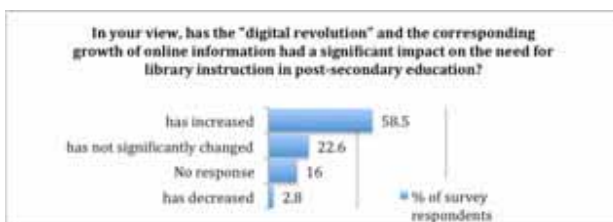
6.3. Perceived impact of the “digital revolution” on the need for IL instruction

Survey respondents were asked whether, in their view, the “digital revolution” and the corresponding growth of online information has had a significant impact on the need for library instruction in postsecondary education. Respondents were asked to choose one of three options: the need for library instruction has increased, has not significantly changed, or has decreased. 58.5% indicated that they believe the digital age has increased the need for library instruction. Their comments in response to this question reiterate this finding, and repeat similar observations – that students tend to be skilled at social networking, over-reliant on Google, lack the skills to critically evaluate the abundance of online information, do not understand issues such as scholarly authority, ownership and plagiarism, and require assistance in learning how to use research databases and other library search tools. One respondent characterized this issue in a comment:

More than ever, students need to know how to wade through the sea of shiny floating crap to get to the good stuff underneath. They don’t know they need it because they can’t discriminate between vouched-for information and noise. We’re all trying to help them but it’s hard going. The young are impatient and checking the bona fides of a piece of information is time consuming. I guess, though, you can’t attract students to ‘library instruction’ since they’re at the point where ‘libraries’ are books and they’re digital...

Comments from those who felt that the need for library instruction has not significantly changed in the wake of the “digital revolution” tended to emphasize the importance of IL instruction, pointing out that information formats and effective search strategies had changed, but that instruction in this area had always been important, and would remain so.

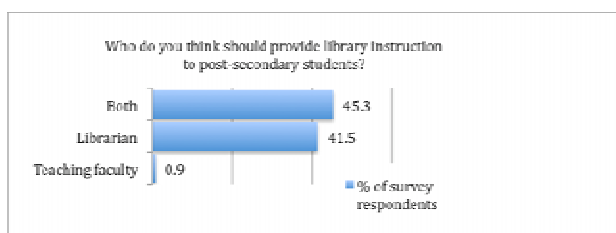
Figure 7.0. Impact of the “digital revolution” on the need for IL instruction



6.4. Responsibility for providing IL instruction

Respondents were also asked who they believe should be responsible for providing IL instruction: librarians, (non-librarian) instructional faculty, or both. The purpose of this question was to isolate perceptions of librarians as providers of IL instruction from broader views about the overall importance of IL instruction. 45.3% replied that they felt both librarians and non-librarian instructional faculty are responsible for this, followed by 41.5% who replied that librarians are solely responsible. Just .9% excluded librarians from this role entirely.

Figure 8.0. Responsibility for providing IL instruction



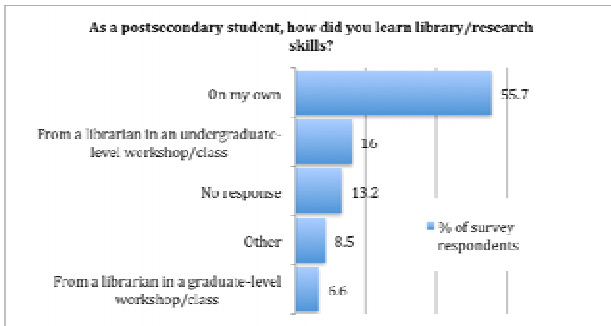
Respondents were also given the opportunity to provide a comment in response to this question. While most of these comments referred to the importance of the librarian’s instructional role in teaching research skills, and the synergy between teaching faculty and librarians who bring mutually complementary approaches to IL, one comment critiqued sessions with librarians for being “cookie cutter” and “not tailored to particular needs or courses”:

I used to book sessions that I attended with the librarians, but they are cookie cutter sessions and while useful they are not what I want. The sessions are not tailored to particular needs or courses, so I prefer to do what I want and do that. As a result I cannot book the computers or even a space to put down our books or coats, so we enter the library in a group to do this like "invaders/terrorist/certainly unwelcomed guests" and it is very successful even if we do have to wander like vagabonds and sit on the floor, drag our stuff around like a band of sherpas. Oh well. It works. It's just too bad that it has to be like that.

6.5. Formative experiences with IL instruction

Premised on the hypothesis that there might be a relationship between the formative experiences of instructors as students and their later teaching practices, respondents were also asked how they had learned to conduct research during their postsecondary studies. In other words, does having received IL instruction from a librarian as a student predispose one toward inviting librarians to provide IL instruction in ones own classes years later as an instructor? 55.7% of respondents reported that they had learned library/research skills “on my own”, and just 22.6% reported that they had learned from a librarian in either an undergraduate- or graduate-level instructional class or workshop.

Figure 9.0. How instructors learned research skills as students



To determine whether a statistically significant relationship between the way in which one learned library/research skills as a postsecondary student and the tendency to utilize a librarian for in-class library instruction as faculty, responses to the survey questions 21 & 23 were re-coded, each into two categories. Responses to question 21 – As a postsecondary student, how did you learn library research skills - were re-coded into two categories: 1. Respondents who claimed to have received instruction from a librarian in either an undergraduate- or graduate-level class or workshop; 2. Respondents who claimed to have learned library/research skills on their own, or who chose “other”. Responses to question 23 - How often have you requested in-class library instruction from a librarian for any of the classes you teach? – were re-coded into two categories: 1. at least once per semester/term OR at least once per year; 2. occasionally, only once or twice ever, or never. The data reveals a weak but statistically significant relationship between having received instruction from a librarian in a class or workshop as a postsecondary student and the likelihood of utilizing librarians as instructors in ones’ classes as an instructor. $\chi^2(1, N=106) = 7.125, p=.283$.

6.6. Perceived status of librarians within the academy

Existing literature on faculty-librarian relations and organizational culture in academe also suggests that faculty perceptions of and attitudes toward the status of academic librarians may influence their willingness to utilize librarians as instructors in their classes.

At 67.9%, the majority of respondents clearly identified academic librarians as professionals as opposed to academics, clerks, administrators, or semi-professionals. At the same time, 61% identified librarians as academic equals to other (non-librarian) faculty.

Figure 10.0. Perceived status of librarians

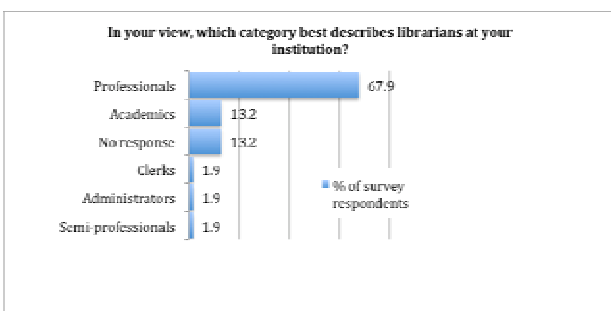
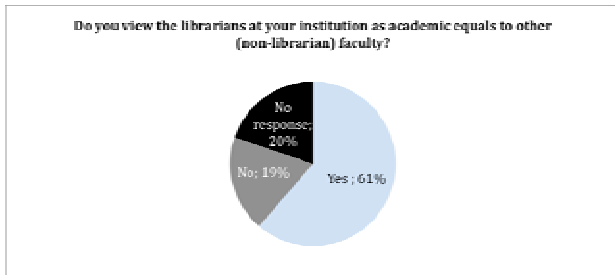


Figure 10.1. Perceived status of librarians as academics



Among those who responded that they do not view librarians at their institution as academic equals to other (non-librarian) faculty, 20% responded that this is because librarians do not engage in original scholarly research, 15% responded that this is because librarians lack the depth of subject knowledge that other faculty possess, 10% responded that this is because librarians have lower academic credentials (i.e. lack a Ph.D), 35% responded that this is for all of the above three reasons, and 20% indicated “other”. Supplemental comments from respondents reflect diverse perceptions of academic librarians in general, but also the particular contracts and collective agreements at individual institutions, which vary. (At some, but not all postsecondary institutions, academic librarians have faculty status, go through tenure and promotion processes that parallel other faculty, and are expected to conduct research and/or devote time to professional service).

- I've never regarded librarians as faculty, more like administration. Thanks for enlightening me.
- They are not tenured professors; they are part of the professional support staff. Among other things, this means they do not have the academic freedom that the professorate has.
- They don't teach and do not normally conduct research.
- I think it is a misleading question. They have a different role. It isn't an equality issue. Tenure-track faculty have a different role than do research associates, librarians, lecturers, academic administration, etc. All are academics, and deserve to be treated with respect as academics, but they shouldn't be treated the same (as equals), because they are inherently different.
- I would like to qualify that I consider them equals as human beings, but not academic equals and not academic colleagues in the same sense that I consider other researchers to be. Also, it is not a question of `credentials` - doing a Ph.D is bloody hard work and it transformed my way of thinking about the world - it is a substantive thing, not a set of letters after one's name.
- While I have the utmost respect for the expertise of librarians, this question is quite strange, as we are not hired for the same work or based on the same criteria. The librarian's role is not the same as that of the professor, despite their increasing importance in accompanying students in developing information skills.

7. Discussion

It's probably safe to say that most, if not all, academic librarians involved with instruction have, at some point, stood in front of a classroom of overconfident undergraduate students. This is hardly surprising, with Google and Wikipedia at our fingertips, popular mythology about libraries as relics of a past, pre-Internet age, and widespread misunderstandings about the supposed “ease” of finding information in the age of the World Wide Web. The majority of survey respondents seem to have recog-

nized this issue, however, with 58.5% indicating that they believe the digital age has increased the need for IL instruction.

The differences between rankings of IL skills and instruction of students at different levels of postsecondary studies, however, warrants some discussion. For example, although IL skills were identified as being very important overall for all levels of students, they were ranked as being considerably more important for upper-level than lower-level undergraduate students, and slightly more important for upper-level undergraduate than graduate students. The higher reliance on textbooks during the first two years of study in some disciplines might explain this, combined with a greater likelihood of being assigned research essays and other projects that require literature reviews in the upper levels of undergraduate studies. Further analysis would help to illuminate the reason(s) why instructors believe IL skills are more important for upper-level undergraduate than for graduate students. Perhaps a comparison of the responses by discipline, for example, would provide a more nuanced finding.

Nevertheless, despite rating IL skills and instruction as very important for students in their disciplines, and ranking the IL skills of lower-level undergraduate students in particular as largely poor to fair, nearly half of the respondents indicated that they do not regularly request in-class library instruction from a librarian for any of the classes that they teach. Why?

Perhaps the answers supplied by faculty themselves in response to this question are the most instructive. Keeping in mind that the majority of survey respondents affirmed the importance of IL skills and instruction, individual comments nevertheless included the observation that this instruction was being provided in another class; that IL instruction is “boring” and that such lectures would be poorly attended by students; and that in some classes, students are provided with all of the materials they require in the form of textbooks or course packs.

In analyzing the reasons why a high proportion of instructors may not utilize librarian-led IL instruction, it may also be important to avoid assuming that this is or reflects a problem. Much of the existing literature about faculty perceptions of librarians seems to have been motivated by a desire on the part of librarians themselves to explain their own ostensibly marginalized status vis-à-vis other academic staff, and by extension, to better understand some of the barriers that instructional librarians face in their endeavours to provide IL instruction to students. However, there really is no evidence that students necessarily benefit from library instruction in every single course, and if decisions about the integration of IL instruction into the curriculum were made at the departmental or faculty level as opposed to being left up to the preferences of individual instructors, problems such as duplication of efforts and uneven delivery across the student body as a whole might be avoided. At many North American universities and colleges, the delivery of IL instruction is somewhat haphazard in that all of the courses in which one student is enrolled might happen to include instructional workshops from librarians, while at the other end of the spectrum, few or none of another student’s courses would.

Even where decisions about whether or when to integrate IL instruction into the curriculum are being made at the broader departmental or faculty level, however, it can be helpful to be aware of faculty perceptions of librarians and library instruction so that misinformation or unconsidered assumptions around status, roles, and expectations do not unduly influence decisions about pedagogy and curriculum.

8. Limitations of the study

As stated in Section 4: The current study, one of the main limitations of this study is the sample itself. Although one of the original objectives of the research was to survey postsecondary instructors across Canada, it proved difficult to recruit a sufficient number of participants to produce a truly representative sample of the population under investigation. Additionally, due to the use of the snowball recruitment method, there is no way to calculate an overall response rate.

The second major limitation of the study is the fact that it relies solely upon survey data, and does not include structured interviews, which would have provided opportunities to collect more nuanced explanations for some of the survey results.

The third major limitation of the current study is that the questionnaire itself included too many questions to analyze meaningfully in one paper. Further analysis of the data collected should be completed to test hypothesized relationships between additional demographic and professional characteristics and behaviours of faculty, and their perceptions of academic librarians and the need for IL skills and instruction for their students.

7. Conclusions

The results of this study suggest that the majority of postsecondary instructors rate IL skills and instruction as very important to students in their disciplines. Furthermore, the majority of postsecondary instructors identify librarians as either entirely or at least partially responsible for providing this instruction. However, at the same time, despite rating their students' skills in this area as less than stellar, especially for lower-level undergraduates, less than half regularly request in-class instruction from a librarian for any of the classes that they teach. While 25% of those instructors simply prefer to provide this instruction themselves, for others the reasons include time constraints, a lack of awareness that librarians provide this service, and for a few, a lack of confidence in the effectiveness of such instruction. However, in the survey, the most frequently selected reason for not utilizing librarian-led in-class instruction was "other", and the comments provided in combination with the multiple choice answers to this question were varied, but telling. These comments describe a lack of coordination of IL instruction at the level of departments and faculties, and the resulting problems including duplication of content, as well as, conversely, conscious departmental decisions to integrate library instruction into the curriculum, but without utilizing librarians in the delivery of that content. The comments also illustrate ambivalences on the part of individual instructors, who might forget to include library instruction in their course schedules, or worry on some level that their students will be disinterested in the subject matter and thus fail to attend.

It is also curious that the majority of respondents in this study indicated that they view librarians as professionals (rather than academics, administrators, or clerks), but also that they view librarians as academic equals to other (non-librarian) faculty. Is there a relationship between this – the perceived status of librarians – and decisions on the part of faculty to utilize librarians in an instructional role in the classroom? Further analysis of the data collected in this study is necessary to test relationships between demographic and professional characteristics and practices of instructional faculty and their perceptions of librarians and IL instruction. As well, a follow-up study using structured interviews would provide more nuanced information about the reasons why instructors do or do not utilize librarians in IL in-

struction, and what, if anything, this has to do with their overall perceptions of the status and role of librarians within academe.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to Dr. Helen Partridge, Library and information science education coordinator at Queensland University of Technology, for coordinating the IFLA Librarian-Researcher Partnership. Thanks to the Library and Theory Section of IFLA for sponsoring the Librarian-Researcher Partnership. Thanks to Dr. Heather O'Brien, Assistant Professor at the School of Library, Archival, and Information Studies at the University of British Columbia for providing mentorship throughout this project and for acting as the Researcher in the Librarian-Researcher Partnership.

References

- (2010, November 10). Our 20th annual university rankings. *Macleans.ca*. Retrieved from <http://oncampus.macleans.ca/education/2010/11/10/our-20th-annual-university-rankings/>
- Association of College and Research Libraries. (2003). *Guidelines for instructional programs in academic libraries*. Retrieved October 11, 2010, from <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/standards/guidelinesinstruction.cfm>
- Boosinger, M. L. (1990). Associations between faculty publishing and opinions regarding student library skills. *College & Research Libraries*, 51, 471-481.
- Bruce, C. (2001). Faculty-librarian partnerships in Australian higher education: Critical dimensions. *Reference Services Review*, 29(2), 106-115.
- Budd, J., & Coutant, P. (1981). *Faculty perceptions of librarians: A survey*. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.tru.ca/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.tru.ca/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=ED215697&site=ehost-live>
- Cahoy, E. S., & Moyo, L. M. (2005). Faculty perspectives on e-learners' library research needs. *Journal of Library and Information Services in Distance Learning*, 2(4), 1-17.
- Cannon, A. (1994). Faculty survey on library research instruction. *RQ*, 33(3), 524-541.
- Chiste, K. B., Glover, A., & Westwood, G. (2000). Infiltration and entrenchment: Capturing and securing information literacy territory in academe. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 26(3), 202-208.
- Cook, C. M. (1981). Rank status and contributions of academic librarians as perceived by the teaching faculty at southern illinois university. *College & Research Libraries*, 42, 214-223.
- Given, L. M., & Julien, H. (2005). Finding common ground: An analysis of librarians' expressed attitudes toward faculty. *The Reference Librarian*, 43(89 & 90), 25-38.
doi:10.1300/J120v43n89_03
- Gonzales, R. (2001). Opinions and experiences of university faculty regarding library research instruction: Results of a web-based survey at the university of southern colorado. *Research Strategies*, 18, 191-201.
- Gullikson, S. (2006). Faculty perceptions of ACRL's information literacy competency standards for higher education. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 32(6), 583-592.
- Hardesty, L. (1995). Faculty culture and bibliographic instruction: An exploratory analysis. *Library Trends*, 44(2), 339-367.

- Heckathorn, D.D. (1997). "Respondent-Driven Sampling: A New Approach to the Study of Hidden Populations". *Social Problems*, 44: 174-199.
- Holbrook, F. (1968). Faculty image of the academic librarian. *Southeastern Librarian*, 18, 183-192.
- Ivey, R. T. (1994). Teaching faculty perceptions of academic librarians at Memphis State University. *College & Research Libraries*, 55(1), 69-82.
- Julien, H. (2000). Information literacy instruction in Canadian academic libraries: Longitudinal trends and international comparisons. *College & Research Libraries*, 61(1), 510-523. Retrieved from <http://crl.acrl.org/content/61/6/510.full.pdf+html>
- Latham, D. & Gross, M. (2011). What's skill got to do with it?: Information literacy skills and self-views of ability among first-year college students. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 63(3), 574-583.
- Leckie, G. J., & Fullerton, A. (1999). Information literacy in science and engineering undergraduate education: Faculty attitudes and pedagogical practices. *College & Research Libraries*, 60(1), 9-29.
- Marchant, M. (1969). Faculty-librarian conflict. *Library Journal*, 94, 2886-2889.
- Maynard, J.E. (1990). A case study of faculty attitudes toward library instruction: The Citadel experience. *Reference Services Review*, 18, 67-76.
- Singh, A. B. (2005). A report on faculty perceptions of students' information literacy competencies in journalism and mass communication programs: The ACEJMC survey. *College & Research Libraries*, 66(4), 294-310.
- Spenser, T. (2003). *Information literacy meeting of expert: Conference report* Prague: US National Commission on Libraries and Information Science and the National Forum on Information Literacy with the support of UNESCO. Retrieved from http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/files/19634/11228859241Prague_Final_Report__12-10-033.doc/Prague%2BFinal%2BReport%2B%2B12-10-033.doc
- Thomas, J. (1994). Faculty attitudes and habits concerning library instruction: How much has changed since 1982? *Research Strategies*, 12, 209-223.
- Thompson G.W. (1993). Faculty recalcitrance about bibliographic instruction. In L. Hardesty, J. Hastreiter & D. Henderson (Eds.), *Bibliographic instruction in practice: A tribute to the legacy of Evan Ira Farber* (pp. 103-105). Ann Arbor, MI: Pierian Press.
- Wilson, P. (1979). Librarians as teachers: The study of an organizational fiction. *Library Quarterly*, 49(2), 146-162.

About the author

Christina Nilsen is a faculty librarian at Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops, British Columbia, Canada. Phone : +1-250-852-7287 (office), Fax: +1-250-852-7658, Email : cnilsen@tru.ca

Appendix I: Web Questionnaire

Question Group 1: Qualifying Question

1. Are you currently employed as an instructor (any rank), lecturer (any rank) or professor (any rank) at a post-secondary institution in Canada? *

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Yes
- No

If No:

This survey is intended solely for instructors at post-secondary institutions in Canada.

As you have indicated that you are not currently employed as an instructor (any rank), lecturer (any rank) or professor (any rank) at a post-secondary institution in Canada, you are not eligible to complete this survey.

If Yes: Survey continues/begins

Question Group 2: Demographic and Institutional Characteristics

2. In what province or territory is the post-secondary institution where you are employed located?

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- British Columbia
- Alberta
- Saskatchewan
- Manitoba
- Ontario
- Québec
- New Brunswick
- Nova Scotia
- Newfoundland
- Prince Edward Island
- Yukon Territory
- Northwest Territories
- Nunavut

3. At what type of post-secondary institution are you currently employed?

Choose the answer that best describes your institution:

- University: Mainly Undergraduate:**
Institution is primarily focused on undergraduate education, with relatively few graduate studies or graduate-level professional programs. Example: Mount Allison, Acadia, UNBC, Lethbridge, Wilfred Laurier, Trent, St. Francis Xavier, Bishop's UPEI, Winnipeg, Saint Mary's, Lakehead, Ryerson, Thompson Rivers, Cape Breton etc.
- Comprehensive University**

Institution offers a broad range of undergraduate and graduate programs, including graduate-level professional programs. Research is a significant part of scholarly activity at these institutions. Examples: Simon Fraser University, Victoria, Waterloo, Guelph, Memorial, New Brunswick, Carleton, Windsor, Regina, York, Concordia, UQAM etc.

- Medical/Doctoral University**
Institution offers a wide range of Ph.D. programs and has a medical school. Research is a prominent part of scholarly activity at these institutions. Examples: UBC, Toronto, McGill, Alberta, Queen's, Western, Saskatchewan, Ottawa, Laval, Sherbrooke, Manitoba, Western, Dalhousie etc.
- Community College**
- Other**

4. What academic department do you belong to?

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Aboriginal and Foreign Languages, Literatures and Linguistics
- Agriculture, Agriculture Operations and Related Sciences
- Architecture and Related Services
- Area, Ethnic, Cultural and Gender Studies
- Biological and Biomedical Sciences
- Business, Management, Marketing and Related Support Services
- Communication, Journalism and Related Programs
- Communications Technologies/Technicians and Support Services
- Computer and Information Sciences and Support Services
- Construction Trades
- Education
- Engineering
- Engineering Technologies/Technicians
- English Language and Literature/Letters
- Family and Consumer Sciences/Human Sciences
- French Language and Literature/Letters
- Health Professions and Related Clinical Sciences
- History
- Legal Professions and Studies
- Liberal Arts and Sciences, General Studies and Humanities
- Library Science
- Mathematics and Statistics
- Mechanic and Repair Technologies/Technicians
- Military Technologies
- Multidisciplinary/Interdisciplinary Studies
- Natural Resources and Conservation
- Parks, Recreation, Leisure and Fitness Studies
- Personal and Culinary Services
- Philosophy and Religious Studies
- Physical Sciences
- Precision Production
- Psychology
- Public Administration and Social Service Professions
- Science Technologies/Technicians
- Security and Protective Services
- Social Sciences

- Theology and Religious Vocations
- Transportation and Materials Moving
- Visual and Performing Arts
- No answer:

If you belong to more than one department, please choose the one which you consider to be your primary field of expertise. If none of the options provided apply, please select "No answer" and type the name of your department in the comments box.

Make a comment on your choice here:

5. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Other

6. What year were you born?

7. Are you tenured?

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Yes
- No

8. How many years of post-secondary teaching experience do you have?

Please choose only one of the following:

- <5 Years
- 5-9 Years
- 10-14 Years
- 15-19 Years
- 20+ Years

(Do not include experience gained as a graduate student in this total).

9. What level of students do you teach, primarily?

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Lower level undergraduates (first and second year students)
- Upper level undergraduates (third and fourth year students)
- Both lower and upper level undergraduates
- Graduate students
- Both undergraduate and graduate level students

10. Do you conduct original scholarly research (in addition to your teaching responsibilities)?

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Yes
- No

11. How frequently do you communicate with librarians (whether in person, by email, by telephone etc.) at your institution?

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Often: at least once per week
- Regularly: a few times per month
- Sometimes: once or twice per semester or term
- Rarely: once or twice per year
- Never or almost never

12. On average, how often do you enter the (physical) library at your institution?

Please choose only one of the following:

- Often: at least once per week
- Regularly: a few times per month
- Sometimes: once or twice per semester or term
- Rarely: once or twice per year
- Never or almost never

13. On average, how often do you access online library services or information/collections through your institution's library's online portal or website?

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- At least once per week
- A few times per month
- Once or twice per semester or term
- Once or twice per year
- Never or almost never

14. Do you view the librarians at your institution as academic equals to other (non-librarian) faculty?

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Yes
- No

15. You have indicated that you do not view librarians at your institution to be academic equals to other (non librarian) faculty. Please choose the best explanation for this from the following list:

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Most librarians have lower academic credentials (i.e. lack a Ph.D)
- Most librarians are not engaged in original scholarly research
- Most librarians lack the depth of subject knowledge that other faculty possess
- All of the above
- Other (Please provide an explanation in the comments box)

Make a comment on your choice here:

16. In your view, which category best describes librarians at your institution?

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Academics
- Professionals
- Semi-professionals
- Administrators
- Clerks
- Other

Make a comment on your choice here:

17. Do librarians at your institution have faculty status?

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- No, librarians at my institution do not have faculty status
- Yes, librarians at my institution have faculty status
- Some librarians at my institution have faculty status
- I don't know whether librarians at my institution have faculty status

18. Have you ever collaborated with a librarian at your institution on any sort of project related to teaching or research?

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Yes
- No

Question Group 4: Perceptions of the Value of Library Instruction

19. How important is library instruction for students in your discipline?

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

	Very Important	Important	Moderately Important	Of little Importance	Unimportant
Lower-level undergraduates (years 1-2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Upper-level undergraduates (years 3-4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Graduate students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

20. Overall, how would you rate your students' abilities to find and critically evaluate information relevant to their academic level?

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Lower-level undergraduates (years 1-2)				
Upper-level undergraduates (years 3-4)				
Graduate students				

21. As a post-secondary student, how did you learn library/research skills?

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- From a librarian in a graduate-level library instruction class/workshop
- From a librarian in an undergraduate-level library instruction class/workshop
- On my own
- Other

Make a comment on your choice here:

22. In your view, has the "digital revolution" and the corresponding growth of online information had a significant impact on the need for library instruction in post-secondary education?

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- The need for library instruction has increased
- The need for library instruction has decreased
- The need for library instruction has not significantly changed

Make a comment on your choice here:

Question Group 5: Making Use of Librarians for In-Class Library Instruction

23. How often have you requested in-class library instruction from a librarian for any of the classes you teach?

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- At least once per semester/term
- At least once per year
- Occasionally
- Only once or twice ever
- Never

24. When you request in-class instruction from a librarian, do you usually attend the session with your students?

Please choose only one of the following:

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

25. If you have never requested in-class library instruction from a librarian for any of the classes you teach, why not?

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Did not know it was available
- Not enough time due to curriculum demands
- Difficulty coordinating / scheduling with the Library
- Prefer to do it myself

- Do not believe it is necessary
- Do not believe it is effective
- Other

Make a comment on your choice here:

26. Who do you think should provide library instruction to post-secondary students?

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Librarian
- Teaching Faculty
- Both
- Other (please explain in the comments box)

Make a comment on your choice here:

Thank you for completing the Faculty Perceptions of Information Literacy Instruction questionnaire. You are now invited to enter into a draw for a chance to win an iPod Nano.

[Please click here to enter the draw.](#)