The ROLE OF THE LIBRARY In the RESEARCH-CREATION PROCESS of FINE ARTS UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS at the UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA
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Fine Arts at the University of Victoria

The University of Victoria in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, has a robust and flourishing Fine Arts faculty with four academic departments and one school: History in Art, Theatre, Visual Arts, Writing; and the School of Music. Consistently ranked as one of the top Fine Arts faculties in Canada, their vision is to support creative thinking, problem solving, decision making, collaboration and communication through critical discourse and evaluation.

Research-Creation

Fine Arts students produce works of creative research versus traditional academic papers: a process called research-creation. Defined as an approach to research practice that brings together creative processes with academic research techniques, research-creation (also called “arts based research” in the US) is an emerging research area that brings together the theoretical, technical, and creative aspects of research for the purpose of developing new knowledge, innovation, investigation, and experimentation.

DO UVIC FINE ARTS STUDENTS USE THE LIBRARIES’ RESOURCES AND SERVICES TO SUPPORT THE PROCESS OF RESEARCH-CREATION? IF SO, IN WHAT WAYS DO THEY USE THEM? AND IF NOT, WHAT ARE THEY USING AND WHY?

- 47% of respondents visited the library weekly, 23% monthly
- 24% of respondents came to the physical library to look for materials, 21% to study independently and 20% to conduct research
- Print is still important: 73% indicated their preference for print, especially for images and scores; while only 15% preferred online sources for images
- Library catalogue was the most popular way respondents searched for all types of materials
- Most frequent users of the physical library are Music students at 70%, followed by Theatre (58%) and Visual Art students (44%)
- Primary reasons for coming to the library: Music students (95%) and Theatre students (80%) come to find print materials, whereas 71% of Writing students come to study independently

- Students from all disciplines use all formats of materials, though the intensity of the uses vary
- With the use of recordings, Music had the most respondents selecting Frequently (34%) or Sometimes (33%)
- Data analysis revealed that when selecting music recordings, more respondents selected Rarely or Never (18%, 8%) which might indicate the higher use of online recordings which are easily accessible online
- Not surprisingly, Film Studies students were the heaviest users of video recordings, with Theatre students being a distant second
- All respondents showed an overwhelming preference for online recordings with only 9% of respondents selecting Sometimes and 3% indicating Never

- When looking for inspiration 70% of respondents use the Internet, 52% ask a colleague or teacher, 40% listen to recordings, and 37% browse the library collection
- When coming to the library, 30% of respondents indicated that they “know what they are looking for” however 35% like to browse
- Overwhelming majority of Fine Arts students prefer print books over e-books, with percentages ranging from 67% in Music to 76% in Visual Arts
- Preferences between print or online images among Visual Arts was split almost equally (36%, 38%), while the respondents in other disciplines overwhelmingly preferred online images (close to or over 50%) over print
- Music students overwhelmingly prefer print over online scores (58%, 16%)
- Many highly specialized visual art resources, including copyrighted materials, are not available online and many of our interview respondents reported being inspired by serendipitously browsing through the stacks for inspiration from print materials

The Role of the Library

As a research team specifically investigating the research behaviours of undergraduate Fine Arts students in Theatre, Visual Arts, Writing and Music, we wanted to know how and in what ways students use the library to support the process of research-creation, if at all. Although History in Art is part of the Fine Arts faculty, we designated them out-of-scope for our study because their research methods parallel the humanities.

Method

We designed and implemented a survey that was sent to 950 undergraduate students in the Departments of Theatre, Visual Arts, Writing and School of Music. We received 282 responses, yielding a 30% response rate. The survey focused on use of the physical library, services, resources and virtual access to the library. We also asked about student preference for print or online materials as well as how students seek inspiration for their creative projects. From the survey data, we generated more specific focus group questions that pertained to their understanding and process of research-creation and the role of the library.