Value of Scholarly Reading to Graduate Work: An Academic Survey of 3 U.S. Universities

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IMLS Lib-Value Scholarly Reading project:

- What are article reading patterns by students?
- What is the value and outcome of scholarly reading for students?
- What is the role of the academic library collections?
- Are there differences in reading patterns by demographic factors of readers?

Methodology/Previous Studies:

- Builds upon Tenopir & King reading and scholarship surveys conducted since 1977 in the U.S. and internationally
- Measures purpose, outcome, and value from scholarly reading by focusing on critical incident of last reading
- Includes all reading (from library and not)
- Open ended questions provide another dimension
- Funding by the Institute of Museum and Library Services

About the project:

- 3 U.S. universities: University of Colorado, Boulder; University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, and Seton Hall University
- Online survey (e-mail) sent to graduate students in spring 2012.
- 897 responses

- Asks 3 types of questions: (Gives insight into readers and readings)
  - Demographic
  - Recollection
  - Critical Incident

“The following questions in this section refer to the SCHOLARLY ARTICLE YOU READ MOST RECENTLY, even if you had read it previously. Note that this last reading may not be typical, but will help us establish the range of patterns in reading.”

## Findings:

- **Graduate students read A LOT!**
  - The average student reads 27 articles per month and spends 29 minutes per reading.
  - That is the equivalent of 231 hours per year or 26 eight-hour work days.

- **Students become aware of articles through their instructors or the library**
  - A third of readings are found through an instructor or course syllabus.
  - A quarter of the readings are found through the library’s search and discovery tools.

- **The library’s electronic subscriptions are vital sources of scholarly articles.**
  - 58% of readings are obtained from the library’s e-collection.

- **Older articles are important to graduate work, in addition to current publications.**
  - A third (14%) of readings are in the first eighteen months of publication and 10% are over ten years old.

- **Article readings add value to the core activities of graduate students.**
  - 41% of readings are considered “very important” or “absolutely essential” to the principal purpose of reading, and only 2% are considered “not at all important”.

### The Role of the Library:

- **The library’s subscriptions support all graduate students.**
  - The majority of readings in each discipline are obtained from the library’s subscriptions.

- **Library-provided readings support graduate work.**
  - Readings for thesis/dissertation work or to help complete a course assignment are more likely to be obtained from the library than another source.

- **E-journal collections save the readers’ time.**
  - Electronic sources allow the reader to obtain the article from their office or lab.
  - They rarely read in the physical library.

- **Students cannot always differentiate library-provided material from sources.**
  - Library-provided articles include: 35% from library subscriptions, 25% from school/department subscription, and 2% from interlibrary loan.

### Findings:

- **Principal purpose of the last article reading**
  - Of the 682 respondents:
    - Thesis/Disertation: 22%
    - To Complete Assignment: 19%
    - Informed: 16%
    - To Keep Up: 12%
    - Principal purpose of last article reading: 96%
    - Required Reading: 7%
    - Other: 10%

- **Source of last article reading**
  - Of the 682 respondents:
    - Library/School: 62%
    - Other: 15%
    - Free Web: 27%
    - Library: 12%
    - Another Person: 8%
    - Home: 3%

- **Number of article readings in the past month by respondent’s discipline**
  - Science: 28
  - Medical: 29
  - Engineering: 24
  - Social: 33
  - Humanities: 29

- **Principal purpose of library-provided readings**
  - Of the 696 respondents:
    - Thesis/Disertation: 33%
    - Course Assignment: 22%
    - Required Reading: 12%
    - To Keep Up: 10%
    - Principal purpose of library-provided readings: 100%

- **Where graduate students read library-provided articles**
  - Of the 704 respondents:
    - Office/Lab: 35%
    - Library: 8%
    - Home: 49%
    - Other: 6%

- **Evaluating the impact of new technologies (eg. social media, Blackboards, mobile devices) on library collections**
  - They play a significant role, as I am currently living out of state with my family while working completing my dissertation. E-resources provide the main link back to my university.

- **Value of Scholarly Reading to Graduate Work:**
  - “Value is demonstrated by time invested in reading, by purpose of reading, by value to purpose, by outcomes of reading, and by how library services contribute to the mission of the institution.”

Graduate Students Speak!

- “Value is demonstrated by time invested in reading, by purpose of reading, by value to purpose, by outcomes of reading, and by how library services contribute to the mission of the institution.”

Future Studies & Further Questions:

- Reading surveys currently being conducted in the U.S. in 2012 with faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates.
- Issues with transparency of library services—good for user, bad for assessing ‘value.’
- Does the obvious success of e-journals mean there is a market for e-books?
- What does the dominance of e-library mean for the physical library space? What is the role of the librarian?
- Will new technologies (eg. social media, Blackboards, mobile devices) affect how the library’s collections are presented?

For further information:

http://libvalue.cci.utk.edu

### Bibliography: