# Report on the 2016 Survey Regarding Library Resources

**June 21, 2016**

## Introduction

A survey was conducted by UNB Libraries between March 14 and April 1, 2016, seeking information from faculty and graduate students on their use of library resources for research and teaching. The following is a brief report of the findings from that survey.

The questions in the survey focussed on four categories of library resources: library tools (e.g. indexes and abstracts, databases), journals, books, and other library resources (e.g. audiovisual materials and data). The following considers each of these categories separately and provides a summary of responses as well as observations on the information gathered. The survey instrument can be found in Appendix A of the report.

Participation in the survey was high amongst faculty and much lower amongst graduate students, with 189 faculty and 113 graduate students submitting responses (only a few non-completed). This compares to a total population of potential respondents (using 2013-14 statistics) of 652 faculty (435 F, 121 SJ, 96 STU) and 1,685 graduate students (1,435 F, 250 SJ). This corresponds to a 29.1% response rate for faculty and 6.7% for graduate students.

Respondents were asked to identify themselves in survey question 1 and most complied. Representation came, to varying degrees, from every part of the University – Business Administration, Arts, Science, Engineering, Kinesiology, Nursing, Education, Forestry, Computer Science and Law – and from both campuses. Twenty-two (22) STU faculty also participated and their responses are part of the aggregate data.

As we continue to plan for the future of library collections at UNB, capturing an accurate picture of faculty and graduate student needs for research and teaching is critical. UNB Libraries are grateful to all those who took the time to complete the survey.

An important caveat: this report adopts a fairly anecdotal style in keeping with the purpose for which the survey was conducted, that is as a practical rather than an academic exercise. While numbers are cited in the text, no tables are provided beyond lists of titles specifically cited in the feedback. These lists are attached to the report.

## Library Tools

Survey question 2 asked, "What library tools (e.g. indexes, databases) do you use to stay aware of new research in your field and to develop your courses?" We sometimes refer to these types of resources as discovery tools as they allow users to search for relevant citations on a given topic.

Many types of resources were cited in response to this question, from subject-specific indexes to journal articles such as *PsycInfo,* to full-text multidisciplinary databases like *Academic Search Premier*; from aggregated collections of reference books such as *Oxford Reference Online,* to specific titles such as

*Birds of North America Online*; from streaming video (*NFB Campus* & *Kanopy*) to image databases (*ARTstor*); and from text to statistical databases. Several journal packages were also listed in response to this question as well as a few print resources. Responses ranged from very expensive subscribed databases such as *IEEE Explore* to free open access resources such as the *Directory of Open Access Journals* and *Google Scholar*.

In all, faculty named a total of 621 resources (for a de-duplicated list of 188 titles), while graduate students listed a total of 265 (or 96 de-duplicated).

Important to note are the comments about *Web of Science*. *WoS* was mentioned by 19 faculty and 16 graduate students. Feedback on the non-renewal of *WoS* last fall ranged from "very disappointed" to "want it back" to "disappointed but am transitioning to *Scopus* and *Google Scholar*." Some expressed a desire for more communication and consultation in the face of major cuts while others accepted the reasons for the cancellation (communicated well in advance of the January 1, 2016 cut-off on the library website) and were satisfied with the alternative tools. Twenty-two (22) faculty respondents mentioned *Scopus* as being an important tool for them, while 24 cited *Google* and *Google Scholar*. The graduate student responses numbered 16 for *Scopus* and 8 for *Google* or *Google Scholar.*

The journal packages named in response to this question include *Academic Search Premier, Business Source Premier, Association of Computing Machinery (ACM), Annual Reviews, Canadian Business and Current Affairs (CBCA), Communications & Mass Media Complete (CMMC), Elsevier Science Direct, Emerald, Wiley InterScience, IEEE Xplore Digital Library, JSTOR, Project Muse, American Psychological Association (APA),* and *SpringerLink.*

The de-duplicated list of library tools identified in response to question 2 can be found in Appendix B of this report.

**Journals**

Survey questions 3 and 4 focussed on journals, asking the following respectively: "Which journal titles are most important to you for your research?" and "Which journal titles are most important for your teaching (if different from #3)?"

Complete accuracy in reporting these results is impossible given the open-ended nature of the survey questions and the guess-work sometimes required to interpret the responses. For instance, journal titles were sometimes referred to in a shorthand form (or inaccurately) and the search to verify the title sometimes proved difficult or inconclusive.

The responses from both faculty and graduate students produced a de-duplicated combined list of 1,621 unique journal titles claimed to be important to the respondents' research and teaching. Most faculty indicated, either by stating it in the answer to the question or by not answering the question at all, that they used the same journals for teaching as they did for research. That said, approximately 150 titles in the combined list of essential journals were contributed as titles needed specifically for teaching. Clearly there is a significant correlation between titles used for research and those used for teaching, confirming the academic view that research informs teaching and vice versa.

The de-duplicated "master list" of journal titles cited in the survey responses is available as Appendix C to this report. The list answers one question and raises others.

An analysis of the responses received to this question reveals some discrepancy between what we heard and what our usage statistics show. Many of our most-used titles were not cited in the survey responses while some titles that receive little or no use were listed by the respondents. This suggests that while participation in the survey was strong, we are missing important data from faculty and graduate students who did not participate, and also that important titles may go unused for some time only to later re-emerge as key.

Also interesting – and important – to note, is that the top publishers represented in the title list are those whose journals are licensed as bundles ("Big Deals") through the Canadian Research Knowledge Network (CRKN): *Wiley* (185 titles), *Science Direct* (178), *Taylor and Francis* (144), *JSTOR* (122), and *Sage* (102). Much smaller packages, *Cambridge Journals Online* (49) and *Oxford* (41) nonetheless also made a strong showing. In all, 1,238 of the titles listed come to us through package deals. These data support the analysis presented to the Senates in the fall, that the journal packages are well-used and good value for money.

**Books**

There were in fact two questions related to books embedded in question 5 of the survey. The first asked, "How important are books to your discipline (as compared to other library resources)?" The second asked about preferred format: "Given comparable pricing, do you have a preference for print or electronic books?"

Of the 157 faculty responses to the question on the importance of books, 85 rated them as important or very important, while 72 rated them as somewhat important, not very important, or less important than journals.

Of the 93 graduate students who responded to this same question, 56 considered books to be important or very important, while 37 rated them as somewhat important, not very important, of less important than journals.

It is interesting to note that faculty respondents who considered books important or very important could be found over the broad range of disciplines taught at UNB. While the attachment to books (the term is not used pejoratively) was particularly strong in some of the Arts disciplines and especially for English and History, the importance of books was also signalled by respondents from Forestry, Computer Science and some of the Sciences.

Sixty percent (60%) of graduate students considered books important, a slightly higher percentage than for faculty (54%). Interestingly, many Engineering students rated books as very important: Electrical and Computer Engineering (4), Mechanical Engineering (6), Chemical Engineering (2), Geodesy and Geomatics Engineering (3), and Engineering (1). This compares to one faculty respondent in Engineering considering books important. While this is interesting, it is hard to draw conclusions from a limited sample of faculty and graduate students, particularly as research is highly individual, and the results may be influenced by the number of graduate students who responded to the survey compared to faculty.

To the supplementary question about format, 158 faculty provided feedback: 80 preferred print, 38 preferred ebooks, and 40 indicated they had no preference. The graduate student split was 34 expressing a preference for print and 39 for ebooks, while 16 said they had no preference.

These results show that acceptance of ebooks has grown considerably since they started to become more prevalent in our collection about a decade ago. Another way to characterize these responses is that while 80 faculty remain very attached to print (for some very good reasons), 78 are happy with ebooks as a substitute for print. For graduate students the split is 34 preferring print to 55 preferring or accepting ebooks as a suitable substitute.

The above is not to suggest there are no issues surrounding ebooks. While they are liked for their convenience (multi-user and 24x7 off-campus access, practicality for distance students, rental option for textbooks, access to researchers in the field), respondents also identified a number of frustrations with ebooks as they currently "work", amongst others:

- difficulty in navigating the screen;
- limited printing;
- inability to download certain titles;
- disappearance of titles; and
- fatigue when reading on a screen for a long time;

One respondent commented, "I am gradually getting used to ebooks." Adapting to the new technology is more difficult for some than for others. It is interesting to note too that the difference in take-up between disciplines (whether Arts & Humanities or STEM) and age groups (faculty versus graduate students who are typically younger) were not as stark as one might expect. Of course, this may be a reflection of the cohort who chose to respond to the survey which itself was an online instrument. It is also true that many "Arts" disciplines rely heavily on statistics (e.g. Psychology, Sociology, Economics) and approach their subjects from a more "scientific" framework than others. These may find online information much easier to access and use than print.

While UNB Libraries have not made a practice of preferring "e" to "p" without the full consent of the faculty concerned, there is no question that ebook usage continues to rise while print circulation continues to drop. Clearly change is taking place and it remains to be seen how practices will evolve.

**Other Library Resources**

Question 6 asked, "What other library resources…are key to your work?" The de-duplicated list of responses can be found in Appendix D. Of the 207 responses received from faculty and graduate students, fully 25% referenced film, whether the Library's DVD collection or streaming video products such as *Films on Demand, Kanopy* and *NFB Campus*. This would appear to indicate that film has become an integral part of classroom teaching and that the Library is well-placed to meet the demand. A couple of respondents mentioned *Youtube* as another important source of documentary film.

Another 25% of responses cited data and statistics from varied sources such as Statistics Canada and the UN as important to their research. Other types of resources mentioned included government documents, dissertations and theses, newspapers and online journals, and reference materials such as

dictionaries, encyclopaedias and handbooks. Resources supporting psychology were clearly appreciated, especially *Psychotherapy.net* online videos.

The open-ended nature of the survey questionnaire led to some confusion with respect to the difference amongst the various categories of library resources. As a result, titles cited under question 2 (library tools) may have been cited by others under question 3 (journal titles) or question 6 (other library resources). While this creates issues with reporting results from the survey, these are easily solved by cross-referencing titles as needed. For instance, there were mentions of Scopus (2) and Web of Science (1) in response to question 6, although these titles appeared more frequently in response to question 2 about library tools.

**Resource Needs of Students**

Questions 7 and 8 asked about the resource needs of undergraduate and graduate students respectively. Answers tended to refer to broad categories of materials such as books and online journals. Indeed many repeated the feedback given to other questions. While many faculty commented that students, and particularly graduate students, needed the same resources as themselves, there was a general theme that undergraduates rely more on textbooks than do graduate students, require online information, and need the guidance of librarians.

**Comments**

The final question (9) prompted for other comments as needed. The comments can be found in Appendix E of this report.

**Conclusion**

The survey was conducted in the face of severe financial challenges and a projected shortfall in the acquisitions budget 2016-17 of $1.4 million. The intention was, and it remains, to use the data gleaned from the survey to inform collections decisions.

The fiscal situation has changed since the survey was launched. The Library is very grateful that University Administration, acknowledging library acquisitions to be "critical to mission", committed to covering the budget shortfall with a one-time allocation of $1.33M and an increase to the base budget of $52,876. Unless the Canadian dollar takes a sharp dip, the additional funds should see us through this fiscal year. While book purchasing will be restored, there is still a need to look for savings within the acquisition budget to reduce base spending forward. In putting its budget proposal forward in January 2016, the Library committed to finding $200,000 in standing order cancellations in order to reduce the projected shortfall (which would have been $1.6 million otherwise).

The Collection Development Committee spent the last year reviewing standing orders and had come up with a list of "potential cancellations" when the survey was launched. The Committee was able to test its assumptions about key resources versus expendable ones using the feedback from the survey to

come up with a final list of cancellations. The resources to be cancelled will be communicated widely and as expediently as possible using the means at our disposal.

Contacts:

If you have questions or comments about the survey or this report, please contact your liaison librarian or:

Jocelyne Thompson
Director, Collections Services
UNB Libraries
(506) 457-0147
jlt@unb.ca