COLLEGE FRESHMEN:
AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Part I User Information Needs and Information Behavior

INTRODUCTION

College freshmen are in an unique position as a group of information users. They are usually making a transition from either high school, or perhaps the work-world into a sphere that is different from which they are accustomed. Academia requires specific research methodologies, many of which are unfamiliar to an incoming college freshmen. “It is especially important that students be exposed to effective educational practices at the beginning of college in order to develop a solid foundation for success” (Kuh, Boruff-Jones, & Mark, 2007). The Your First College Year Survey, a nation wide survey, taken by 37,935 students in 2005 revealed that the majority of incoming freshmen felt that they only somewhat successfully adjusted to the academic demands they faced during their first year of college. (Oseguera 2007) The learning curve for college level literacy is fast and steep, leaving freshmen scrambling to bridge the gap between what they think they know, what they actually can do, how much they have to learn, and what they are expected to produce.

Fortunately, much attention has been paid to this unique user group. Studies have been conducted to find out exactly where college freshmen need the most help. Academic library professionals then plan and attempt to use bibliographic instruction during students’ freshmen year to help prepare them for their research tasks ahead.

Jacobson and Mark write that college freshmen generally “lack the critical-thinking skills and database-searching proficiency necessary for them to find-tune their information searches. They need to know how to focus their topics, where to search and how to evaluate and use the information they retrieve” (2000). This essentially sums up
the position that college freshmen are in as they approach higher learning research. While they may have past experience with research, they are not nearly as competent as they need to be.

DESCRIPTION

College freshmen as a user group have received a great deal of attention in the past 15 years because undergraduate academic libraries recognize that they have an important duty in helping prepare these students for their academic career. A growing number of colleges and universities have begun to include a bibliographic instructional component in the traditional freshmen orientation. In a survey conducted by Geffert and Christensen, they found that 79 percent of 521 incoming freshmen were exposed to library research skills even in high school. (1998) Additionally, a large number of studies have been conducted to determine what knowledge freshmen generally bring with them to college and what they do not. As Caspers and Bernhisel write, “librarians need an awareness of the concepts, skills, and confidence that students bring to the work of acquiring information” (2006).

Some of the issues concerning college freshmen as information users include information retrieval, using the library and the library’s resources, and searching of the internet for sources that satisfy academic standards. In a survey conducted at Kent State University, college freshmen were judged to “lack the critical judgment to both select appropriate sources and develop strategies for finding information when their first efforts fail. They also do not have the experience and skills to use information technology effectively” (Kunkel, Weaver & Cook, 1996). An example of the lack of ability with information technology can be found in the previously mentioned survey given by
Out of the 521 college freshmen surveyed, 61 percent felt that material found on the internet was equally reliable as information found in books or articles in an academic library. (1998) This is troubling considering the strict requirement that information used for academic purposes should be truthful, accurate, timely, and unbiased. It is clear that if college freshmen “are only developing superficial computer skills in searching information, they may neither understand nor accept the need for instruction in developing more sophisticated information literacy skills, particularly those related to finding materials they perceive as less readily accessible, such as library print materials” (Oseguera, 2007).

SUMMARY

According to the research available, freshmen are faced with the daunting task of learning how to conduct research at a collegiate level and are not often prepared for this new paradigm of information literacy. Their most essential tool is clearly the library and librarians, although not all students turn to their academic libraries for help. Most of the studies also show that use of libraries for information literacy is directly correlated with a student’s comfort level with the library.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY


**Method(s) of Searching:** Google Scholar

**Search Strategy:** how college freshmen use libraries

Through a nationwide survey, the authors of this article surveyed 368 people whose responsibility is to teach college freshmen how to use libraries. Included in their surveys was information about the behavior of college freshmen as they use libraries for research purposes.

Casper and Bernhisel surveyed 246 college freshmen at Linfield College, in Oregon, as part of their student orientation. The purpose of this survey was to determine both students’ perceptions of their information literacy, as well as assessing their actual skills and knowledge in this area. This article includes information of previous studies, their own results, and a discussion of what these results mean in terms of how these students need to be taught in order to improve their information literacy skills.

**Database:** DIALOG -- ERIC

**Method(s) of Searching:** Keyword searching

**Search Strategy:** s (college(w)fresmen or first(w)year(w)college(w)student?) and librar?(!use


**Method(s) of Searching:** Google Scholar

**Search Strategy:** how college freshmen use libraries

Gardner and Eng analyze and report the results of a library user survey conducted at Thomas and Dorothy Leavey Library at the University of Southern California. They surveyed 1,982 undergraduates, asking them about their library behaviors. Once completed, they coded the surveys and used the data to create spreadsheets and graphs displaying the information gathered.


Geffert and Christensen gave a questionnaire to 521 freshmen at St. Olaf, in Minnesota, to determine students’ knowledge of and feelings toward libraries as they enter college, and their information literacy skills. The article shows how they put together the questionnaire and the results gathered, as well as delineating any and all correlations that they found among the results. Also provided is an example of the questionnaire they gave out. The article concludes that they have been able to accurately assess students’ attitudes toward research and library use in general, as well as their own abilities.

**Method(s) of Searching:** Citation Searching— Endnote chasing

**Search Strategy:** End note in Caspers, J., & Bernhisel, S.M. (2007). What do freshmen really know about research?


This article is based on a study of students at Saint Mary’s College of California. The purpose of the study was to determine how students conduct research, with a special emphasis on what internet resources they search. Head concludes that this study demonstrates that while students do make use of basic search engines for their research, there is a complicated issue of students not understanding the proper methodology for academic research.

**Method(s) of Searching:** Google

**Search Strategy:** College freshmen and librarians


Jacobson and Mark contend that while students are able to use the internet as they enter college, they are not able to identify sources that are valid for academic research – they lack the skills to separate the wheat from the chaff. Throughout the article, the authors focus on three concepts that they define early on: information literacy, critical thinking, and database-searching proficiency. Their ultimate conclusion is a defense of bibliographic instruction in the academic environment to help students move from performing inept research online to becoming savvier in their searches.

**Method(s) of Searching:** Citation Searching—Endnote chasing


**Method(s) of Searching:** Google Scholar
Search Strategy: how college freshmen use libraries

The authors did a study of 522 students, of which 150 of them were college freshmen. The purpose of this study was to determine frequency of library visits and the purpose for visiting the library.


This article is a result of a survey conducted at the Colorado State University campus by the Office of Instructional Services. The purpose of the survey was to determine exactly what kind of knowledge incoming freshmen had in terms of internet technology. The article includes the methodology of the survey and the ultimate results, as well as the authors’ conclusion, which was that while students were very familiar with internet uses, such as email and web surfing, they once again lacked the finesse needed to conduct academic level research via computer.

Method(s) of Searching: Citation Searching—Endnote chasing


The authors of this chapter contend that a student’s first encounter with their college library will set the tone for future visits (or lack thereof!), so it is important to engage freshmen as they come to learn about the library. The article describes the various reasons that students would avoid the library, including library anxiety. The obvious conclusion the authors make is that it is important to reach students early in their academic careers in order to stymie future stigma.


Method(s) of Searching: Citation Searching—Endnote chasing
This article looks at the results of a questionnaire taken by more than 300,000 students between 1984 and 2002, specifically looking at the changes in how students use libraries for academic purposes. With approximately 166 questions, the questionnaire they gave out looks at how students study, how they use the library, and how they conduct research. They specifically break down those taking the tests into Freshmen, Sophomores, Juniors, and Seniors to compare information between the different class levels.


The authors of this article surveyed 245 freshmen students at Kent State University to assess their frequency in using libraries at the college level, their comfort levels in using libraries, and their past library usage. They also had very specific question on the test asking students to identify and interpret information found in the card catalog, indexes, and databases.

*Database:* EBSCO Host – Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts

*Method(s) of Searching:* Keyword searching

*Search Strategy:* College Freshmen


This report is based on a study of first year college students performed by the librarians at Northern Michigan University’s Olson Library. They administered a library skills test developed by the Illinois Association for College and Research Libraries, which allowed them to look at the behaviors and methodology of the first year college students who used their library.

*Method(s) of Searching:* Citation Searching—Endnote chasing


This chapter makes use of two surveys, Cooperative Institutional Research Program Freshman Survey and the Your First College Year Survey to demonstrate that the way freshmen use their time is related to their information literacy skills. Included in the various tables is information on the frequency that freshmen use library resources for homework and research.


**Method(s) of Searching:** Citation Searching—Endnote chasing


Profeta and Kendrick studied 66 college freshmen at Indian River Community College in Fort Pierce, Florida to determine what ILS skills freshmen actually have and do not have. The authors of this article surveyed the students for their behavior in their use of both print and online resources, as well as their critical thinking skills and searching techniques.


**Database:** DIALOG – ERIC

**Method(s) of Searching:** Keyword searching

**Search Strategy:** s (college(w)freshmen or first(w)year(w)college(w)student?) and (information(w)need? or information(w)literacy or user(w)need?)/1995-2008
Research for this article was conducted by interviewing first-year college students at Virginia Tech to find out how these students acquire and use information. The purpose of this study was to get a better understanding of how freshmen make use of libraries.


**Method(s) of Searching:** Google Scholar

**Search Strategy:** how college freshmen use libraries

Swain observed and interviewed 28 college freshmen as they began to do research for a paper. Her purpose was to determine what their processes were and how they did their research.


**Method(s) of Searching:** Google

**Search Strategy:** College freshmen and librar*

Waldman conducted a survey of college freshmen at Baruch College. Her purpose in doing this was to analyze their library and computer use in order to determine what abilities they have in conducting research.

**Part II Resource Selection & Evaluation**


This is a wonderful book that allows a user to read through it and do exercises that help the user understand the research process at each step. The exercises are clear and easy to understand, but still requires thought. It discusses aspects such as how to prepare for research, how to use books, catalogs, periodicals, indexes, and the internet. A college freshmen would only benefit from looking at this book when confronted with doing research for the first time on the level of higher education.

This is one example of an online tutorial created by Concordia University that helps students become familiar not only with general information literacy, but also their individual college resources. More frequently, colleges are creating these kinds of tutorial programs to help their students with their information literacy. Most of them are self-paced, allowing a student to go through them and complete them in their own time, but many colleges and universities are requiring that their students complete these tutorials as part of their freshmen English courses. Any college freshmen who does not have this kind of tutorial at their college could easily go on Concordia’s tutorial and benefit from the exercise.


As a resource for college freshmen, this book looks at five areas of learning as applied to information literacy: content understanding, problem-solving, metacognition, collaboration, and communication. The book is designed as a practical guide to tackling these areas, containing many exercises to help students. It is easy to understand and includes diagrams and drawings to explain how research is conducted and how to create searching techniques.


This is a recently published book that instructs students on how to become savvy seekers of information. It teaches them how to use sources as well as how to become discriminating in choosing their resources, a fundamental part of academic research. The activities in the book can be easily understood and are not time consuming. This book is a very valuable resource for students.


A college freshman could not go wrong using this resource. It is focused on helping students locate, select, and evaluate information, designed to help them develop their literacy information skills for an academic setting. The book will build confidence in any searcher, which is a defining element in how well a student does in their research. The book is broken up into three areas. The first area talks about how to use printed and electronic resources. The second area is designed to help with the research process. The final area is an introduction to using the internet. One of the most valuable aspects of this book which keeps it from being dated is that it focuses on the processes involved in how students should research rather than on specific resources.

This resource is probably more advanced than many of the other resources listed here, and at times, it is rather heavy to use, whereas the other resources are fairly simple. However, it is not to be discarded for that reason. It is a bit of a throwback to pre-computer age resources because it focuses more on print resources than online resources. It is for that reason that it is a valuable tool for all academic researchers. It delves into the many benefits of using the actual library, not just for its databases or access to online material. However, Mann does also go into using online resources, cautioning his readers to be aware of the trade-off between virtual and real libraries.


Because internet research is such a necessary part of academia these days, a book like this can be extremely helpful. It explains how to explore the internet’s resources, allowing readers to develop skills that will help to use online sources effectively and critically. At the end of each chapter, the reader is given a set of exercises that will allow them to practice what they have read.

**Part III Conclusion**

From the students’ perspective, it can be really frustrating to enter college and not understand what is expected of you. While it is ideal to say that students in this situation should be proactive, I believe that academic libraries also need to be proactive in teaching students the information literacy skills necessary for their future success. Oseguera concludes “that difficulties in making the transition to college academics might be reduced if students were exposed to an encouraged to use the Internet and the physical library as resources in their academic pursuits – an area that information literacy personnel can directly influence” (2007) From the research I conducted for this project, I found that many libraries throughout the nation are concerned and are both discussing and planning how to support the institution and assist students in their critical thinking and information literacy through bibliographic instruction.