

Library Focus Group Report Spring 2012



Background

Focus group participants were almost exclusively undergraduate students (95%) and the majority was from SSHA (70%). Students came from all years of study with the majority being juniors or seniors. Twenty individuals participated in a total in two focus groups of 10 each in April 2012. Individuals were recruited through Writing lecturers, website (Spotlight, News & Events), and print signage in library spaces. All individuals were given a \$25.00 gift certificate for their participation. Students Assessing Teaching and Learning (SATAL) recorded and compiled the information from each session into a single report.

Information Resources & Information Finding

When asked what information or search tools they use from the library, a few participants mentioned the library's website and databases in general. Some individuals named specific databases/search tools including Melvyl, Academic Search Complete (EBSCO), Web of Science, and PubMed. The search tools mentioned were not surprising.

Amount of use of the search tools varied and seems to depend heavily on assigned course work. Fifty percent of the respondents used the search tools for classes/assignments, while 30% used for personal research or research with a professor. One individual specifically mentioned using the search tools for literature reviews which would also fall into classes/assignments. Another individual reported using search tools as part of her campus job.

Based on the focus groups, 75% of the participants were *satisfied* or *very satisfied* with the library resources. Twenty percent were *somewhat satisfied* and no one was *unsatisfied* though one individual had never used the resources. In examining the follow-up comments, participants spoke about the ability to access and locate information more than about the information resources available.

Student comments highlight the importance of making resource access transparent, easy, and consistent. Individual students indicated satisfaction with the ability to obtain items through Interlibrary loan and borrowing items with long loan periods. One student was satisfied since s/he had learned how to use the databases. Some respondents were dissatisfied due to difficulties in finding articles or thinking something was going to be full-text PDF but then discovered it was not available. A couple respondents indicated that UCeLinks did not always work for them, 20% wanted print books of interest, while another 20% found it difficult to conduct searches / find terminology that directed them to relevant information.

Communication

Students indicated a variety of ways in which they found out information about the UC Merced Library. The greatest number of individuals (50%) found out more about the library through classes while another 15% learned more about the library through workshops e.g. RefWorks. Students also referred to roommates, word of mouth, a high school tour, and figuring it out on their own as ways in which they learned about the UC Merced Library.

When going through a list of items, the greatest number of students learned about the library through information from faculty/classes (70%), instruction (65%), website (50%), and the iPod Touch Library Tour (35%). When students learned about the library, they heard about how to contact a librarian, 24/7 chat service, interlibrary loan, RefWorks, how to reserve a room, and UCeLinks. Students were prompted to use the UC Merced Library and its services primarily by assignments (research papers), classes, and the need to reserve a room (e.g. for meetings).

Sixty-five percent of the student participants indicated that they viewed digital signage. They were aware of exhibit information, upcoming events and deadlines (e.g. reference to Student First area), and weather. A couple individuals noted that location was very important for the signs. Two individual did not report finding useful information on the signs.

Physical Space

Individuals referred to many library locations when asked what areas they used the most. Many individuals liked the fourth floor for a variety of reasons including “desks for two people” and “that’s where my favorite books area”, quiet rooms for study, and areas to study with “my sorority”. The third floor was called out for classroom space, the Green Room, and meeting room. A couple individuals like the new partitions and white boards on the second floor and another individual liked the ease of getting in and out of the second floor especially when in a hurry. Students referred again to the collaborative work rooms and rooms for meetings as useful. In the comments, an individual mentioned using the Social Science Management for studying when the library was busy. The food and drink policy was viewed positively and students liked the computer labs (no library space).

Fifty percent of the participants printed on campus often. Thirty percent preferred to print from the standup library computers rather than from their own computer. Twenty percent of the participants had experienced printing problems such as having only one page print but being charged for all pages. Someone mentioned that an extra step was required to convert Word documents to PDFs before being able to print. (This is likely the process on the standup computer workstations.) Twenty percent reported never having a problem printing awhile 15% said the printing situation had improved but sometimes print jobs still got stuck. Overall, printing seems to be improving but there are still issues. Printing appears less reliable from personal devices than library provided devices.

Fifty-five percent of respondents indicated that they were *very satisfied* or *satisfied* with the UC Merced Library’s physical resources. (This may be less than expected due to the previous questions asking students to convey their experience with printing in the library though only 20% indicated a printing problem.) Thirty-five percent were *somewhat satisfied* while 10% were *not very satisfied*.

Library Instruction

Thirty percent of the participants had not received library instruction in a Writing class at UC Merced while 30% had received library instruction once and another 40% two or more times in a

Writing class. Eighty percent of the participant had not received library instruction in class other than a Writing class at UC Merced while 20% had once.

Only a quarter of the participants had used a library research guide. Of that 25% only 15% found it useful. One individual expressed a preference for going directly to the library's website while the other individual did not find what he needed. However, this individual was not using the guide in conjunction with a specific class. One individual noted that it was helpful in narrowing down what resources to explore. Participants accessed library research guides in a variety of ways e.g. learned how to access in a workshop, connected through UCMCROPS, used link provided by professor, or stumbled upon it.

Fifteen percent of participants indicated that their most useful take away from a library instruction session was greater knowledge of the databases. The other items mentioned as most useful included learning about RefWorks (20%), how to search more effectively (20%), and knowing how to determine if a source was scholarly (20%).

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When asked if receiving library instruction increased their ability to find useful information, 57.9% indicated *yes*, 5.3% indicated *quite a bit*, 21% indicated *some*, while 15.8% indicated *not at all*. While over 60% seemed to be helped significantly another 35% are not finding it incredibly useful.

When asked if receiving library instruction increased their level of confidence in using and finding information for their class assignment, the results were a bit more positive with 47.3% responding *yes*, 31.6% responding *quite a bit*, 15.8% responding *some*, while 5.3% responding *not at all*.

Students noted some of the challenges in finding and using information. Students found it most challenging to use and manage the VPN (15%) and to identify keywords for a topic search (15%). The next two major challenges included getting to full-text easily (10%) and finding relevant information (10%). Participants also indicated that allowing enough time for research, creating a proper bibliography, and finding suitable databases to search were challenges. In this comment area, one individual noted that finding what s/he needed was easier with Google. Someone also reported having issues with RefWorks.

What the Library Enables Students to Do

Participants were asked to comment on what they were able to do in the library the last time they used it. They mentioned that it was a good place to work/study (40%), print documents (15%), use/enjoy space (15%), access articles (10%), complete other leisure activities such as personal reading, check email (10%), and seek assistance from library staff (10%).

Overall Summary

- strong connection of information needed linked to class requirements
- positive comments about RefWorks
- students are also learning about the library through library instruction, workshops, and iPod Touch Library tour
- access to econtent may be confusing e.g. UCeLinks window, wording re: access to PDFs
- challenges surrounding search terms, locating relevant information, using VPN
- while library instruction is useful, students may still not find it easy to locate the information needed
- most students are aware of digital signage, what they notice seems to be exhibits, events, deadlines, items of interest
- multiple spaces in the library are appealing to students, surprised that students did not indicate greater satisfaction with library physical resources
- printing overall seems to be improving, still some inconsistency is working well
- library guides overall received well, not used by many participants

In reviewing the focus group results, there were not strong threads requiring action. However, overall areas which can still be improved upon include clearer access to online resources, increased reliability in printing, and greater effectiveness in library instruction.