



# How Do You Know: Information Literacy November 2005

## INTRODUCTION

This survey focuses on Penn State students' knowledge and use of the Penn State libraries and how they obtain academic information. Included in the survey are questions concerning students' abilities related to finding information, the library resources they have used, and where they get instruction and assistance when searching for information. This survey, conducted by Student Affairs Research and Assessment, was administered by phone and also by Web<sup>1</sup> at the request of University Libraries and Teaching and Learning with Technology.

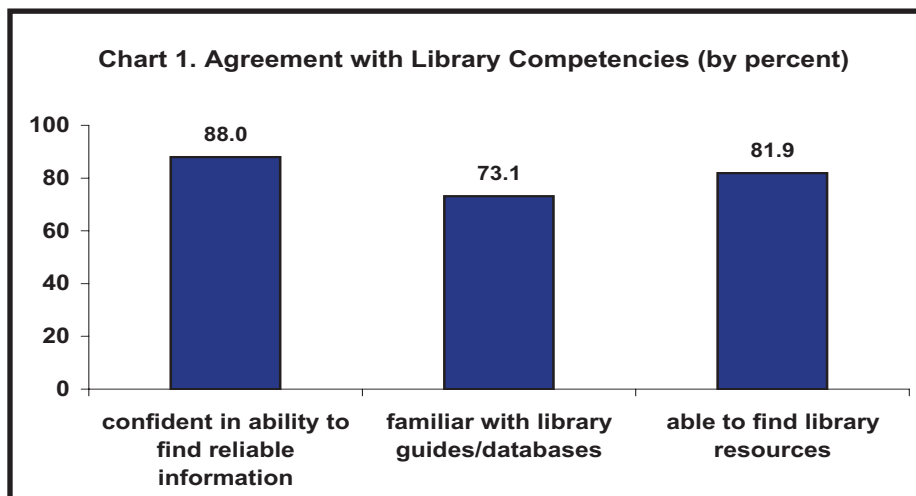
In total, 2,003 undergraduate students across 20 Penn State campuses responded to the survey. By phone, 551 University Park students responded for a 23.0% response rate; of those contacted, 59.2% participated. By Web, 1,452 responded for a 16.2% response rate. The confidence interval for the total sample is +/-2.00%. Of the respondents, 53.1% are female; 84.3% are white/Caucasian; 52.9% are first- or second-year students; and 53.1% attend University Park. For additional information on the Pulse methodology, please visit <http://www.sa.psu.edu/sara/qa.shtml>.

## FINDINGS

### Library and Research Competencies

Students were asked a series of questions regarding self-reported measures of competency related to library use and research, which formed two factors.<sup>2</sup>

- Among the library competencies, students expressed the greatest confidence with their abilities to find reliable information (see Chart 1). (Note: the questions depicted in Chart 1 comprise the factor of LIBRARY COMPETENCY for which the average was 4.07.)



This survey focuses on PSU students' knowledge and use of PSU libraries and how they find information.

For more information please visit Student Affairs Research and Assessment at <http://www.sa.psu.edu/sara>

<sup>1</sup> The Web survey administration is utilized in order to account for students for whom local phone information was unavailable.

<sup>2</sup> Factors are a data reduction tool that combines multiple questions into a larger concept based on logic and statistical analysis. The factor composition is typically found in the corresponding table, and factor names are denoted by the use of SMALL CAPS.



Penn State Pulse is a project of Student Affairs Research and Assessment.

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- Approximately 90% of students responded that they properly cited information when using material from both print sources and the Web (see Table 1).
- Upper-class students and students attending the Commonwealth campuses reported significantly higher levels of LIBRARY COMPETENCY when compared to first- and second-year students and University Park students, respectively (data not shown).

**Table 1: Research Competencies**

Percent who agreed:	
When I use material from print sources for a research paper / project, I properly cite the information.	91.1
When I use material from the Web for a research paper / project, I properly cite the information.	89.5
When searching the Web, I consider which sources provide trustworthy and reliable information and which do not.	88.1
I am able to distinguish between scholarly / professional publications and popular periodicals.	82.7
<b>RESEARCH COMPETENCY (average)</b>	<b>4.39</b>

Scale: 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree

### Use of Research / Library Resources

Two sets of questions focused on students' usage of various research / library resources when looking for academic information.

- Among the general research resources, students reported using the World Wide Web to find academic or course-related information most frequently (see Table 2).
- Despite the frequency of using online resources, 76.7% reported using print library resources at least sometimes (or at least once or twice a semester) (see Table 2).
- Among the online library resources, students reported using library guides or databases most frequently (see Table 3).
- Students reported using library course e-reserve materials more frequently through ANGEL than the CAT (see Table 3).
- While first- and second-year students were significantly more likely to be frequent users of library course e-reserve materials via ANGEL than were juniors and seniors, juniors and seniors were significantly more likely to use the CAT and full-text journal sites (data not shown).
- University Park students were significantly more likely to be frequent users of a number of the resources including the CAT, full-text journal sites, and library course e-reserve materials via ANGEL and the CAT than were Commonwealth campus students (data not shown).

**Table 2. Use of Research / Library Resources<sup>3</sup>**

Percent who used the following during the current semester:	never	sometimes	often
the general World Wide Web (e.g. Google) to find academic or course-related information	2.6	25.4	72.0
any of the online library resources to find academic or course-related information	12.1	59.8	28.0
print library resources such as books, journals, newspapers, maps, or musical scores (not on reserve)	23.3	64.6	12.1
newspaper Web sites for course assignments	25.2	50.9	24.0
print course reserve materials in the library	44.6	45.0	10.4
library resources in other formats including music recordings, videos / DVDs, online music databases, images, or microfilm	61.7	32.4	5.9

**Table 3. Use of Online Library Resources<sup>3</sup>**

Percent who used the following during the current semester:	never	sometimes	often
library guides or databases available on library Web pages or through ANGEL (e.g., ProQuest and Psych Info)	18.2	48.6	33.3
CAT (an online catalog for materials held by PSU libraries)	21.3	59.6	19.1
full-text journal sites (e.g., Science Direct, JSTOR, or Project Muse) to access articles	39.7	49.2	11.0
library course e-reserve materials via ANGEL	44.9	36.0	19.0
newspaper articles from library databases (LexisNexis Academic, Factiva) for course assignments	45.1	47.8	7.1
library course e-reserve materials via the CAT	50.7	40.8	8.5
the "Ask!" button to have a chat session with a librarian or to contact the library by e-mail	86.6	12.1	1.4

<sup>3</sup> Note: "sometimes" refers to students who responded "once or twice/semester" or "once or twice/month," and "often" refers to students who responded "once or twice/week" or "daily."

## Assistance

Students were also asked about the frequency in which they seek assistance in finding academic or course-related information from friends, instructors, and library staff members.

- Students most frequently sought assistance from a friend or fellow student (see Table 4).
- During the current semester, 43.5% reported they never asked a librarian or library staff person for assistance (see Table 4).

**Table 4. Sources of Assistance for Academic or Course-Related Information<sup>4</sup>**

Percent who asked for assistance from the following people during the current semester:	never	sometimes	often
a friend or fellow student	21.9	53.9	23.9
an instructor	26.5	58.3	15.0
a Penn State librarian or library staff member	43.5	51.0	4.9

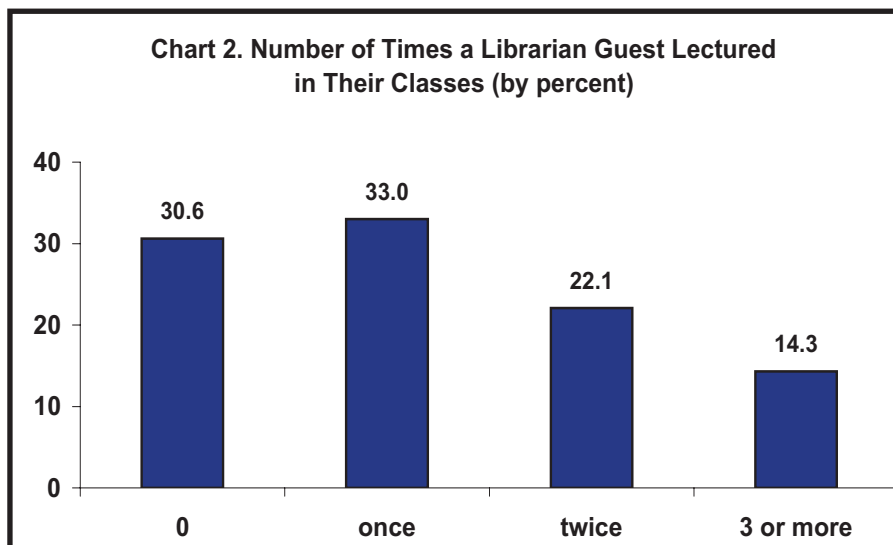
## Library Instruction

In addition, students were asked about the library instruction they received in the classroom by librarians and by professors, instructors, or TAs.

- Approximately 57% (56.7%) had a librarian serve as a guest lecturer in an intro course (see Table 5).
- In addition, 69.4% reported having had a least one librarian serve as a guest lecturer in a class (see Chart 2).
- In their fall classes, 90.1% reported having had an instructor discuss plagiarism, and 73.3% having an instructor discuss how to properly cite the work of others (see Table 6).
- First- and second-year students were significantly more likely to have had an instructor discuss how to evaluate information found on the Web, how to use library resources, how to evaluate information found in print resources, how to properly cite the work of others, and the differences between popular periodicals and scholarly publications than were juniors and seniors (data not shown).
- Differences also existed between students based on their area of study. Generally, undecided students were most likely to have had an instructor discuss many of these topics, and students in engineering and engineering technologies were least likely when compared to students in other areas of study (data not shown; additional information available upon request).

**Table 5: Classroom Instruction by a Librarian**

Percent who had a librarian serve as a guest lecturer to:	yes	no	not applicable
introduce basic concepts and behaviors of using the library during intro courses (e.g., in first-year seminar, ENG 015, or CAS100)	56.7	19.9	23.4
introduce subject-specific library resources in your major in an upper level class	28.8	42.8	28.4
provide instruction on doing higher level and original research in a research methods or capstone class	22.4	47.9	29.7



<sup>4</sup> Note: "sometimes" refers to students who responded "once or twice/semester" or "once or twice/month," and "often" refers to students who responded "once or twice/week" or "daily."

**Table 6: Instructor-Led Discussions on Information Literacy**

<b>Percent who had a professor, instructor, or TA in any of their classes this semester who discussed:</b>	<b>yes</b>
plagiarism	90.1
how to properly cite the work of others in course assignments	73.3
how to define a research topic	63.0
how to use library resources	61.2
how to evaluate information found on the Web	58.7
how to evaluate information found in print resources (books, journals, etc.)	56.7
the differences between popular periodicals and scholarly / professional publications	49.7

**Libraries Open House**

Students at University Park were asked about their participation in the Libraries Open House.

- Approximately 45% had attended the open house (see Chart 3).
- Of those who attended, 76.4% said the event at least “moderately” helped them become acquainted with the library (data not shown).

**Chart 3. Libraries Open House Attendance (by percent)**

