The Research Process of Distance Students

Danielle Skaggs, University Libraries
Research Reports

"Staying Smart: How Today's Graduates Continue to Learn Once They Complete College," Alison J. Head, Project Information Literacy, Passage Studies Research Report, January 5, 2016. (Two different versions available: Full report with appendices, 112 pages, PDF, 6.9 MB or report without the appendices, 71 pages, PDF, 6.5 MB). An open access survey dataset, including the survey instrument, frequency codebook, and user guide, is available through OpenICPSR. Infographic of report results is available here.

"Phase One: Trends from the Lifelong Learning Interviews with Recent Graduates," Alison J. Head, Project Information Literacy, Progress Report for the Lifelong Learning Study, July 29, 2014, 6 pages, PDF, 130 KB.

"Learning the Ropes: How Freshmen Conduct Course Research Once They Enter College," Alison J. Head, Project Information Literacy, Passage Studies Research Report, December 4, 2013. (Two different versions available: Text with appendix, 48 pages, PDF, 5.78 MB or text without the appendix, 29 pages, PDF, 5.47 KB)

"Learning Curve: How College Graduates Solve Information Problems Once They Join the Workplace," Alison J. Head, Project Information Literacy, Passage Studies Research Report, October 15, 2012. (Two different versions available: Text with appendix, 38 pages, PDF, 5.8 MB or text without the appendix, 29 pages, PDF, 5.7 KB).

ERIAL Project, 2007
Study Details

Replication of Head (2008) – primary researcher of PIL
16 questions, plus demographics

Sent to 1442 identified distance students
241 responses (16.7% response rate)

20 telephone interviews

Conducted with funds from a University Research Fund grant

Demographics – Type and Gender

Type of Distance Student
- Distance Grad - 113
- Distance Undergrad - 8
- Grad Center Grad - 77
- PHL Grad - 21
- PHL Undergrad - 22

Gender
- 48 Male
- 198 Female
Demographics – Age, GPA

- **60 and up**: 5
- **50-59**: 14
- **40-49**: 28
- **30-39**: 51
- **23-29**: 125
- **18-22**: 16

75% Master’s, others split between undergraduate and doctoral

76% gpa of 4.3 or better
Similarities
Steps in Research

First step:
• Use a textbook or other reading(s) from the class – 42.5%
• Use the library’s online resources – 35.0%
• Use a search engine to find resources (e.g., Google, Yahoo!) – 15%

Second step:
• Use a search engine to find resources – 29.7%
• Use the library’s online resources – 26.4%
• Use a textbook or other reading(s) from the class – 25.5%

Third step:
• Use a search engine to find resources – 23.2%
• Use a textbook or other reading(s) from the class – 18.2%
• Use the library’s online resources – 16.5%
• Talk to the professor – 16.0%
• Use an online or print scholarly encyclopedia - 11.4%
First steps – in interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptor Matrix</th>
<th>Library</th>
<th>Google</th>
<th>Class reading</th>
<th>No resource mentioned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buy a book(s) that has information I</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consult a WCU reference librarian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk to the professor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use a search engine to find</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use a textbook or class reading</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use an online or print scholarly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use an online &quot;community&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use the online resources available</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Helpfulness of Library Resources

Online databases: 83.61%

Library instruction: 45.30%
(47% neutral)

Reference librarians: 43.64%
(49% neutral)
Professors Help Me Do Better By...

Commenting on a draft, and letting me revise: 79.70%

Having separate deadlines for parts of the assignment: 65.00%

One-on-one coaching sessions: 59.30%

52.7% Strongly Agree
Differences
Types of Research Papers Assigned

- Case studies: 32.49%
- Literature reviews: 27.00%
- Theory papers: 26.16%
- Argument papers: 5.91%
- Thesis/dissertation/capstone: 5.06%

In Head (2008): Argument: 30%; Literature reviews: 17%; Theory papers: 16%; Case studies & TDC: 10% each
Time spent:

Researching:
- Under an hour: 2.5%
- 1-2 hours: 21.0%
- 3-5 hours: 47.1%
- 6-9 hours: 13.0%
- > 9 hours: 16.4%

Writing/editing:
- Under an hour: 0.8%
- 1-2 hours: 8.4%
- 3-5 hours: 40.8%
- 6-9 hours: 26.6%
- > 9 hours: 24.4%

Head (2008):
77% of students spent 1-5 hours

Head (2008):
72% of students spent 1-5 hours
Problems During Research

1. Figuring out what each professor wants (72.3%)
2. Overcoming procrastination (65.1%)
3. Not enough info from professor to begin (64.7%)
4. Narrowing down a topic (64.6%)
5. Feeling overwhelmed by information (50.9%)
6. Overcoming anxiety about the research process (41.6%)
7. Having to write the actual paper (40.5%)
8. Trying to find resources on the library website (34.9%)

Head (2008): Overcoming procrastination (77%), feeling overwhelmed by info (60%), narrowing down a topic (59%)
What if no full text is available?

“I usually just skip it. I get angry and then I move on.”

• 6 of 20 students skip it if there’s no full text available
• 4 of 20 contact library or use ILL
Takeaways

- Use Project Information Literacy
- Research Assignment Directions – more is more
- Library marketing + UX
- Observational studies > surveys, interviews