



*Evidence Summary*

**Journal Articles are the Most Widely Used Information Resource for Research and Teaching in all Academic Disciplines**

**A Review of:**

Borrego, Á., & Anglada, L. (2016). Faculty information behaviour in the electronic environment: Attitudes towards searching, publishing and libraries. *New Library World*, 117(3/4): 173-185. doi:10.1108/NLW-11-2015-0089

**Reviewed by:**

Dominique Daniel  
Humanities Librarian for History and Modern Languages  
Oakland University  
Rochester, Michigan, United States of America  
Email: [daniel@oakland.edu](mailto:daniel@oakland.edu)

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**Abstract**

**Objective** – To determine faculty’s information behaviour and their perception of academic libraries in the current transition between print and electronic scholarly communication.

**Design** – Online survey.

**Setting** – A consortium of 12 large universities in Spain.

**Subjects** – More than 17,380 faculty members.

**Methods** – The researchers used a questionnaire based on a subset of the questionnaire used for the Ithaka S+R Faculty Survey, with 20 closed and 2 open-ended questions. The survey was implemented via

Google Forms and sent through mailing lists. The number of recipients was not known, but university statistics for 11 of the 12 universities list 17,380 faculty (statistics were not available for one university, located in a different administrative area). The questions aimed to identify the types of documents used by scholars for teaching and research, the search tools used, the strategies used to keep up-to-date in their disciplines, preferences for print or electronic books, the sources used to access documents, their preferred channels to disseminate their own research, and their views regarding library services.

**Main Results** – The response rate was 12.7%. Based on the results, scholarly journals were the most used information resource for research across all academic disciplines, with

94% of respondents rating them as important. For teaching, faculty preferred to use textbooks for undergraduates, and journal articles for Master's students. To search the literature, faculty chose bibliographic databases and Internet search engines over the library catalog and physical collections, although the catalog was the first choice for known-item searches. Respondents favored print to read entire books or chapters but preferred the electronic format for skimming. Of the respondents, 78% rated the library as an important channel to access resources, while 61% also considered free online materials important. If the material was not available at their library, 71% frequently chose to search for a free online version and 42% used the inter-library loan service. For their own research, faculty have published in scholarly journals more often than other channels and have selected the journal based on its impact factor (77.5% ranked it as important) and on its area of coverage (73.4%). When asked to rank library services, faculty placed paying for resources highest, with 86.2% identifying it as important. Next were facilitating teaching and helping students develop information literacy skills. Finally, a majority of faculty considered themselves highly dependent on the library.

**Conclusion** – Journal articles are the most widely used information resource for research and teaching purposes, regardless of discipline. This includes arts and humanities, which are known for heavy monograph usage. Articles are also scholars' preferred channel for publishing. With regards to books, faculty have mixed feelings about print and electronic formats. Spanish faculty display information behaviours similar to their British and American counterparts, as documented in the Ithaka S+R 2012 surveys. Blogs and social networks are not widely used in spite of growing attention to such channels for research output and altmetrics. Open access is also relatively unimportant for faculty when they choose where to publish. A majority of respondents still consider library services as important, for collections as well as teaching and learning support, which may present opportunities for librarians.

## Commentary

Librarians know how important good relationships with faculty are, not only as patrons but also as teachers of the students the library supports. Librarians therefore welcome studies such as this one that provide overviews of faculty information behaviour. While the surveys conducted by Ithaka S+R since 2000 are limited to the United States and United Kingdom, researchers in this study applied Ithaka S+R questions to Spanish professors. This makes it possible to compare information behaviour in a different academic culture. The authors found no major differences between the two groups. They felt that this may reflect the "globalized scientific endeavor," as academics worldwide rely on the same documents and tools, and use the same strategies to keep up to date and access information.

The study relied on the 2012 Ithaka S+R survey, the most recent one available at the time. Since then the 2015 survey results have been published (Housewright, Schonfeld, and Wulfson, 2012; Wolff, Rod, and Schonfeld, 2016). The researchers pre-tested their questionnaire with research support librarians, who are presumably knowledgeable about academics. The usefulness of pre-tests is shown by the Ithaka S+R survey, which revealed that faculty had difficulty with definitions of terms like institutional repository. (Wolff et al., 2016) The study mentions the disciplinary makeup of the respondent population, which included health sciences faculty who are omitted from the Ithaka S+R surveys. The study does not break down results by discipline, however, except for one question – the types of documents used for research. It would be interesting to see if this study's results match those of the Ithaka S+R surveys that show marked differences by discipline. For example, humanists are less interested in e-books than faculty in other disciplines; and the use of blogs and social media to disseminate research is somewhat more common for humanists and social scientists (Wolff et al., 2016). Age matters as well (Wolff, et al., 2016).

A stimulating part of the survey dealt with the kind of library support services the faculty would like. The most valued service was acquisition of resources, but close behind was teaching support. This seems to indicate that faculty are increasingly aware of their students' weak research skills, an interesting change from the 2012 Ithaka S+R survey when faculty valued the purchasing and archival role of their library significantly more (Housewright et al., 2012). This trend was later confirmed in the 2015 Ithaka S+R survey, which shows a large increase in the perceived role of the library in helping undergraduates since 2012 (Wolff et al., 2016). This, along with the fact that faculty still see themselves as highly dependent on the library for research,

provides hope for librarians who wish to ward off a decline of users' support.

### References

- Housewright, R., Schonfeld, R. C., & Wulfson, K. (2012). *Ithaka S+R US faculty survey 2012*. New York, NY: Ithaka S+R. Retrieved May 16, 2016 from <http://www.sr.ithaka.org/publications/us-faculty-survey-2012/>
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