



Letters to the Editor

Commentary on a Library Non-Use Study

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Received: 13 April 2008

Accepted: 17 June 2008

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When I read Non-use of Library Services by Students in a UK Academic Library, by Lisa Toner in *EBLIP* 3:2, 2008, I just had to write down the following comments on this wonderful article and study.

I was impressed that not only did Toner study why people did not use the library, she actually implemented the results (“the results were then fed into the library’s future strategic planning cycle”). She also looked at specific possible reasons for non-uses: inconvenient opening hours, use of electronic resources, lack of or poor introduction to the library, poor perception of library service. The methodology was excellent. The study period was long enough (three months), they did a pilot survey, used two method of distribution (mail and in classrooms) and got a quite acceptable response rate (14 percent).

Many people are quick to jump to

conclusions based on their survey results, but Toner was more cautious: “...the incidence of non-use of library services does increase with age. However, these results could also indicate that older people are more diligent in returning their survey forms.” “[After a] further analysis of the age ranges..., mode of study and age do seem to be predictors of use of the library services”.

Her report even included results that were not favorable: “The results [on information sources used] highlighted that non-users not only made no use of traditional library services but only made limited use of the electronic resources provided by the library. Just under a third of non-users did not make any use of the College’s electronic resources.... In contrast to this, the majority (88 percent) use the Internet as a source of information for their assignments.”

I was a bit surprised that in this day and age students could respond that they “did not

need” libraries (four percent) or “do not like libraries at all” (one percent). However, those that say they do not need libraries probably just don’t know that they need them or what libraries have to offer.

One very insightful and important conclusion that Toner made was, “this [respondents who buy their own books or borrow them from their friends instead of borrowing from the library] demonstrates a significant shift away from the concept of the library being the provider of all the research and information needs of students.... Students who do not borrow books are on the whole not using other library services either. Those [students who use the library via computer] who do visit the library building do so mainly for photocopying services (25 percent) or private study.” These indicate the changing nature of the library—from warehouse of information to social networking workplace.

Additionally, not only has the library taken specific steps to remedy the shortcoming revealed from the study, but they recognize that they need to repeat the evaluation cycle, as shown by the following: “The results of

the survey have shown that they library needs to become much more creative in its marketing, publicity, and promotion to non-user groups, particularly part-time and distance learners. As a consequence, the Faculty Liaison teams have been strengthened and library staff work more closely with course and program leaders to ensure that all students receive meaningful induction and subsequent training on databases, information searching, and critical thinking skills. An increasing number of students are taught not to rely totally on the Internet for their information needs. Work has been done to embed this training into the curriculum wherever possible and the library staff are increasingly included in the training of students at remote locations. Further research is needed to analyse the effectiveness of our actions in 2-3 years time when it is hoped that much of the impact of increased training and promotion will have had a positive effect on usage figures.”

This is a wonderful study—a model for others to follow.

Judith Siess