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## **The Information Literacy of Undergraduate Students: How knowledgeable are they when entering university?**

**Abstract:** For many years academic librarians have been involved in library instruction. However, most of these librarians have the impression that when students arrive at the university their knowledge of the information research process is quite limited. Given that the library's instruction programs and workshops, offered to the students mainly as a voluntary activity, do not necessarily reach the majority of the students, librarians are worried about the impact that such a knowledge gap could have upon the students academic success.

Such field observations, which describe rather accurately the concerns of the Quebec academic librarians, lead to the development of a research project involving all the 15 universities in Quebec which offer undergraduate programs. The project's data gathering took place in the Summer of 2002. This paper presents a summary of the research entitled: *Information Literacy: Study of Incoming First-Year Undergraduates in Quebec*. As stated in the title above, in essence the research question was: When entering the first year of an undergraduate program, how information literate are the students? Over 3,000 participants returned a mail questionnaire for a response rate of 56.9%. While 12 of the 15 universities contributing to the research are mainly operating in French, three universities, that is McGill, Concordia, and Bishop are primarily English language universities.

This paper will report on the findings as well as the rather distinctive research design being followed. The research comprised a multifaceted process involving the cooperation of numerous partners and first and foremost, the Conference of Rectors and Principals of Quebec Universities (CREPUQ), Sub-Committee on Libraries, and the members of the Library Instruction Working Group. While the Working Group was responsible for developing and implementing the research, the data could not have been collected without the cooperation of the following units in each of the 15 participating universities: the office of the Library Director, the office of the Vice-Principal, responsible for the library, and the Registrar's Office. Furthermore, the packets to be mailed to the participants comprising a covering letter, a questionnaire and a return envelope were prepared by: the CREPUQ staff.

In terms of results, to the research question "Do students entering university have the necessary knowledge (know how) to find, use and evaluate information?" despite the limited number of variables (20) of this study, the results indicate that a significant number of students have limited knowledge of basic elements characterizing the information research process. While further results will be presented and discussed, one

of the most striking findings, so to speak, is that for 11 of the 20 questions investigating the students' knowledge of the information research process, the highest accurate response rate was 35.8%, thus less than 36%.

Finally, given the topic (Information Literacy) being addressed in this proposals, I should mention that this relate rather well to the second area (Skills) of the Conference theme which comprises Information Literacy in its description.