Internet Use through the University of Toronto Library: Demographics, Destinations and Users' Reactions

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Introduction

Who is using the Internet on our campuses and what are they using it for?

These are questions of interest to librarians and computer centre personnel who

are trying to plan services and develop networks for the future. It is

often thought that people use the Internet primarily for electronic mail (Tillman

and Ladner, 1992) but is the same true for student use of the Internet and what

are the other uses? Little data is available to answer these questions.

This study was intended to provide answers to basic questions about use of the

system and to provide direction for planned improvements. At the time of this

study, access to the Internet was provided to library card holders by a

connection to the Hytelnet software from the main OPAC menu. In this

environment we were able to investigate the following questions:

- who are the users of the Internet - do they differ from the overall

  population at the university by age, sex, academic status or discipline?

- where do they go on the Internet, why are they going there and how

  do they rate what they find?

- what changes would they like to see?

Methodology

An online survey, focus groups and analysis of a log of telnet connections were

used to answer these questions. The online survey was modelled on a study of

remote users of the OPAC at the University of California (Ferl and Millsap,

1992). Our survey questions were designed to gather demographic information,

information about people's reasons for using Internet and their ratings of the

information they found as well as of the method of providing access. In

analyzing the data, we explored correlations across demographic variables and

between various demographic variables and satisfaction ratings.

The focus groups and open questions on the survey were helpful in collecting

suggestions for improvement and explaining the uses people made of the

Internet. Examination of the logs of telnet connections identified the most

popular destinations and showed overall patterns of use.

Results

Analysis of the results is ongoing but early findings show that the users are predominately male undergraduates who own a computer and a modem. They are going to sites that provide e-mail accounts such as the FreeNets, or ones that provide access to a wide range of information such as the University of Minnesota Gopher, and they think the local interface could stand improvement.

Of the 1300 possible destinations, analysis of the logs showed that use was concentrated on about 150 sites suggesting that Internet use follows a familiar pattern of information use described by Zipf's law i.e. that 80% of the connections were to 13% of the sites. Further results will be presented orally at the conference. A paper including the final results is in preparation and will be submitted to *Information Technology and Libraries* for publication.

References

Ferl, Terry Ellen and Larry Millsap, "Remote Use of the University of California MELVYL Library System: An Online Survey," *Information Technology and Libraries* 11, no. 3 (1992): 285-303.

Tillman, Hope N. and Sharyn J. Ladner, "On the Scene: Special Librarians and the INTERNET," *Special Libraries* 83, no.2 (1992): 127-131.