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Boston University 2010 faculty library survey report

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Boston University

2010 Faculty Library Survey Report

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MARCH 2011

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the fall of 2010, the Boston University Libraries surveyed BU faculty to determine their use of and satisfaction with library services and resources. The survey was adapted by BU's Library Assessment Committee from one developed by the University of Washington Libraries, and the research protocol was approved for exemption by BU's Institutional Review Board. In October, Provost Campbell requested that all faculty on both the Charles River and Medical Campuses take the survey. Of the 3,235 faculty contacted, 1,027 (32%) completed the survey.

IMPORTANCE OF BU LIBRARIES TO FACULTY

The survey results show that the faculty use and value library resources, are generally satisfied with library services, and believe the BU Libraries make an important contribution to their work.

Two-thirds of faculty access the library's website weekly or more frequently. A high percentage consider the library's databases (68%) and e-journals (77%) very important to their work. The numbers are lower for print books (37%) and journals (30%), but print resources remain vital for many disciplines; 85% of faculty in the humanities rate print books as very important to their work.

Faculty ranked the ability to borrow books or journal articles not owned by the Libraries as the most important service, with 68% rating the service important or very important, and 85% of those using the service being satisfied or very satisfied. Similar ratings of satisfied or better are given for those who use course reserves (87%), librarian-led instruction (78%), and staff assistance (83%). Overall, 70% are satisfied or better with library services in general.

The Library makes an important contribution to the faculty's work, with a sizable percentage reporting that it makes a significant or major contribution to being a more productive researcher (62%), keeping current in their field (65%), finding information in new or related fields (64%), and enriching student learning (55%).

CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

From the survey results, the Libraries have identified areas to improve support of faculty teaching and research. These areas include:

- Strengthening online collections.
- Increasing collaboration with faculty to offer students more information literacy instruction.
- Enhancing digital access to books.
- Providing online tutorials for research tools.

- Improving integration of library resources with course management software.
- Assisting with open access issues.

When asked about their satisfaction with online collections, 46% of faculty said they were satisfied or very satisfied. This contrasts with the importance faculty place on online collections to their work: 87% of respondents rate e-journals as important or very important, and 77% rate databases as important or very important. The Libraries will continue to make every effort to strengthen online collections.

*“If BU wants to be a first rate university among the great learning institutes, having first rate professors alone is not enough – it must upgrade its libraries!”**

Questions about five skills related to finding, evaluating, and using information reveal a gap between the importance faculty places on these information literacy skills and their assessment of actual student performance. For undergraduates, these skills are considered important or very important by 72% to 91% of faculty expressing an opinion (the exact percentage varying across the five skills), but student performance in these skills is assessed as being good or excellent by only 19% to 31%. Graduate students have a smaller but still pronounced gap between importance (94%-98%) and performance (57%-74%). The Libraries recognize this is an area where better support of faculty and students in achieving critical learning outcomes is necessary.

When asked about the usefulness of some proposed library services, 59% responded that more e-books related to their discipline would be useful or very useful. The faculty also showed support for online tutorials for databases and research tools (57% useful or very useful), and assistance with integrating the Library with course management software, e.g., Blackboard, (53%). These are initiatives the Libraries will pursue more vigorously.

Open access has been an area of growing interest for BU and the BU Libraries. While the survey shows some awareness of the issue, with 39% of faculty reporting submitting an item to a journal that allows open access, 61% still have not or are unsure. When asked about assistance with open access issues (funding mandates, publisher agreements, copyright), 49% consider such assistance useful or very useful. Again, this is an area where the Libraries will do more.

NEXT STEPS

After this report has been presented to Provost Morrison, customized reports will be disseminated to key stakeholders including the Faculty Assembly, Deans of the Schools and Colleges, and library staff. Library staff will continue to analyze results, including the more than 700 comments made by faculty in the survey, and also will begin adapting and developing graduate and undergraduate student surveys. The Libraries envision conducting surveys of faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates on a triennial cycle.

The Libraries will respond to the findings of this survey and future surveys by changing and adapting priorities and services to the expressed needs of faculty and students. The findings will contribute to the overall assessment of the Libraries and will help determine future strategic initiatives undertaken by the Libraries. Changes in services, resources, and priorities that result from the findings of this survey will be tracked and reported.

* All quotes in report taken from comments made by faculty in the survey.

FULL REPORT

In the fall of 2010, the Boston University Libraries surveyed BU faculty to determine their use of and satisfaction with current library services and resources. Survey findings will contribute to the overall assessment of the Libraries and help determine future library strategic initiatives.

SURVEY INSTRUMENT AND PROTOCOL

The survey instrument was adapted by BU's Library Assessment Committee from one developed by the University of Washington Libraries, and the research protocol was approved for exemption by BU's Institutional Review Board. In October, Provost Campbell requested that all faculty on both the Charles River and Medical Campuses take the survey. Of the 3,235 faculty contacted, 1,027 (32%) completed the survey.

This anonymous, web-based survey (see attached) asked faculty for their demographic information, including campus, college, and department affiliation; full- or part-time status; whether they taught undergraduate and/or graduate students; whether they taught in a clinical setting; and whether they received external funding for research. By breaking down the data by these variables, the responses of specific faculty groups can be more closely examined.

The survey asked faculty:

- How frequently they visit the BU Libraries.
- How often they access BU library resources online.
- The importance of various types of resources and finding aids for their teaching and research.
- The relative importance of various factors in deciding where to publish journal articles and if respondents had ever submitted to an open access journal or an institutional repository.
- The importance of specific information literacy skills to student success in their programs and about their assessment of student performance in these areas.
- The importance of a variety of library services to their teaching and research and their satisfaction with these same services.
- How useful four proposed services would be to their work.
- The contributions the Libraries make to various aspects of their work and their overall satisfaction with services, collections, and facilities.

Opportunities to comment were interspersed throughout the survey so that faculty could clarify their responses.

FINDINGS

1. DEMOGRAPHICS

AFFILIATION

Sixty-five percent of the respondents are affiliated with the Charles River Campus and 35% are affiliated with the Medical Campus. The response rate for the individual schools and colleges ranged from 22%-59% of the faculty contacted in those schools. Four schools and colleges had a response rate of 50% or higher. The data, broken down by demographic characteristics, will be incorporated as appropriate into customized reports for the Deans, Heads of the Libraries, and library liaisons.

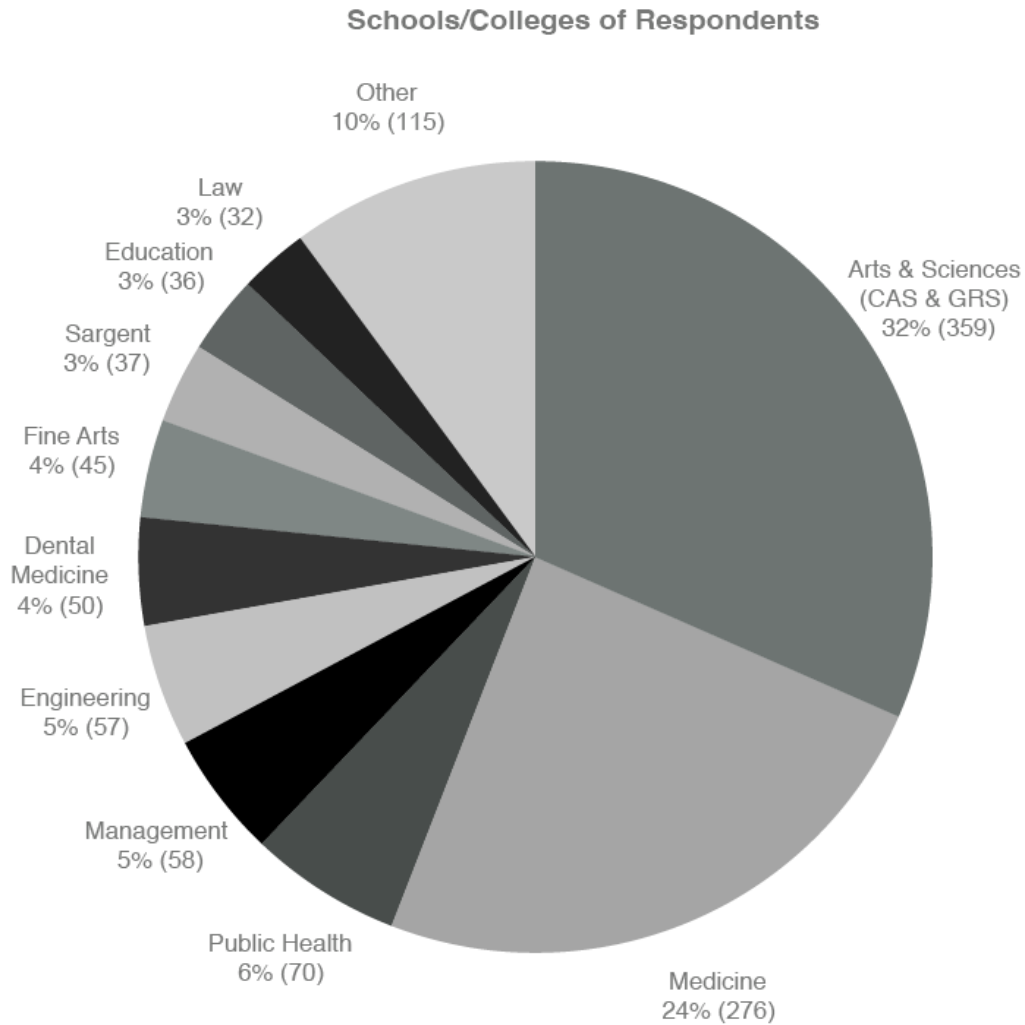


Figure 1. Percent (of faculty responding to question) who gave each college or school as their primary affiliation. In parenthesis is number of respondents who gave that choice. "Other" includes CELOP, College of Communication, College of General Studies, Metropolitan College, School of Hospitality Administration, School of Social Work, and School of Theology, each of which represents less than 3% of responses.

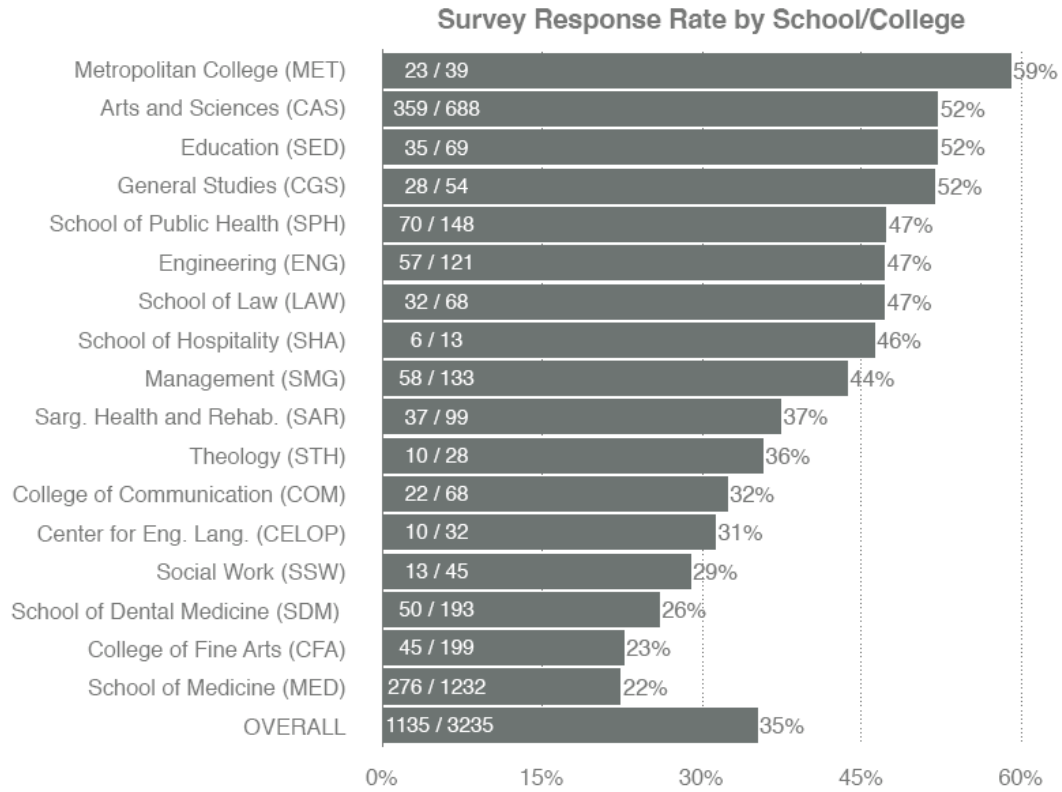


Figure 2. Number of survey respondents giving each school/college as their primary affiliation, as a percentage of the number of faculty solicited in each school/college (taken from breakdown of e-mail list provided by Human Resources). On the bars is number of responses over number of e-mails sent for each school/college.

STATUS

The overwhelming majority of respondents are full time. During the past academic year, approximately two-thirds of the respondents taught a graduate course and more than half taught an undergraduate course. During the last year, external funding was received or used by approximately 40% of respondents. The chart below highlights differences between respondents on the two campuses.

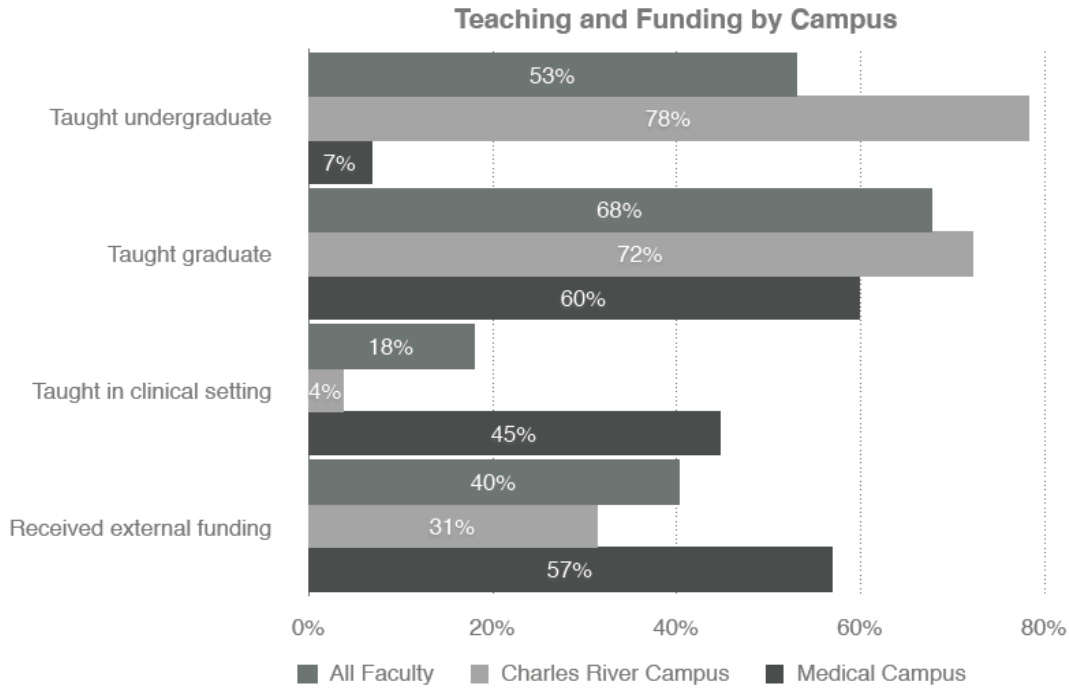


Figure 3. Percent (of faculty responding to question) who report teaching graduate or undergraduate courses, in a clinical setting, or receiving or using federal or external funding in the past academic year. Shows results for all faculty, and by campus.

2. LIBRARY RESOURCES

The faculty were asked how often they visit BU Libraries in person and online. The results indicate that 66% of the respondents access a BU Library website once or more per week, while 10% visit a BU library in person that frequently. When the student populations are surveyed in 2012 and 2013, it will be possible to see how the behavior of faculty compares to that of undergraduate and graduate students.

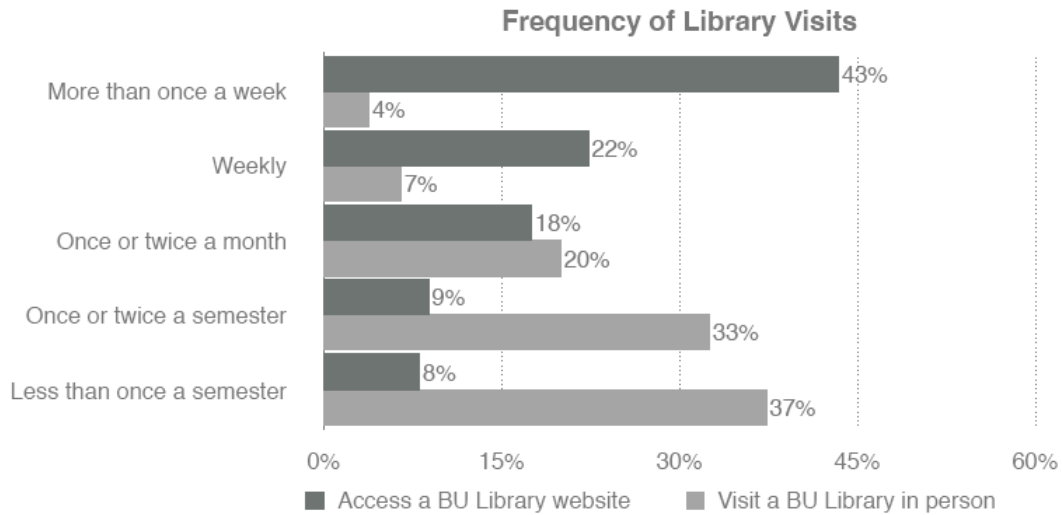


Figure 4. How frequently faculty report visiting BU Libraries by accessing a BU Library website or in person. Percents are of all faculty responding to this question.

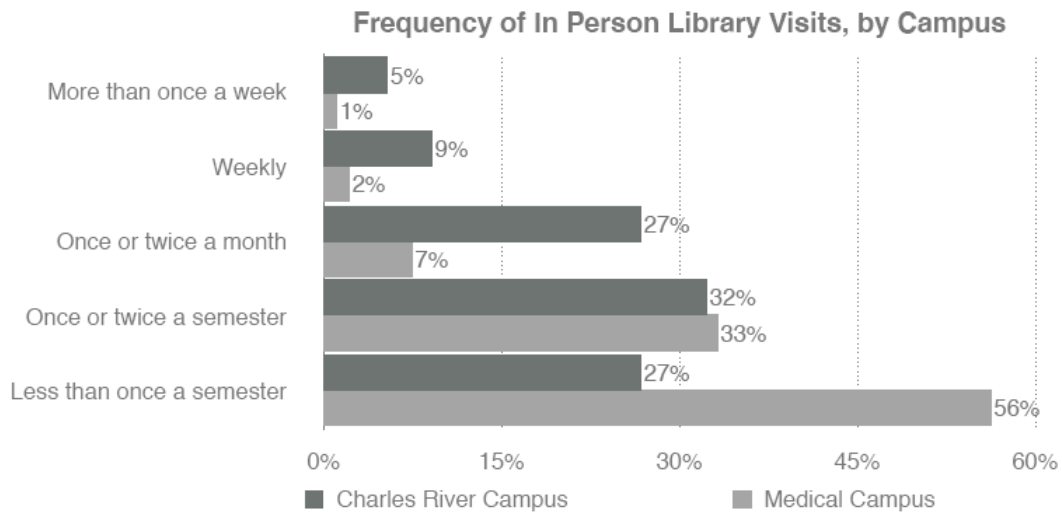


Figure 5. How frequently faculty report visiting BU Libraries in person, by campus. Percents are of all faculty responding to this question.

When faculty were asked to rate the importance of a variety of library resources to their teaching and research, their responses clearly demonstrate the importance of electronic resources. However, when the data are examined by discipline, over 50% of faculty from the Humanities and Social Sciences indicated that both print books and print journals are important or very important to their work.

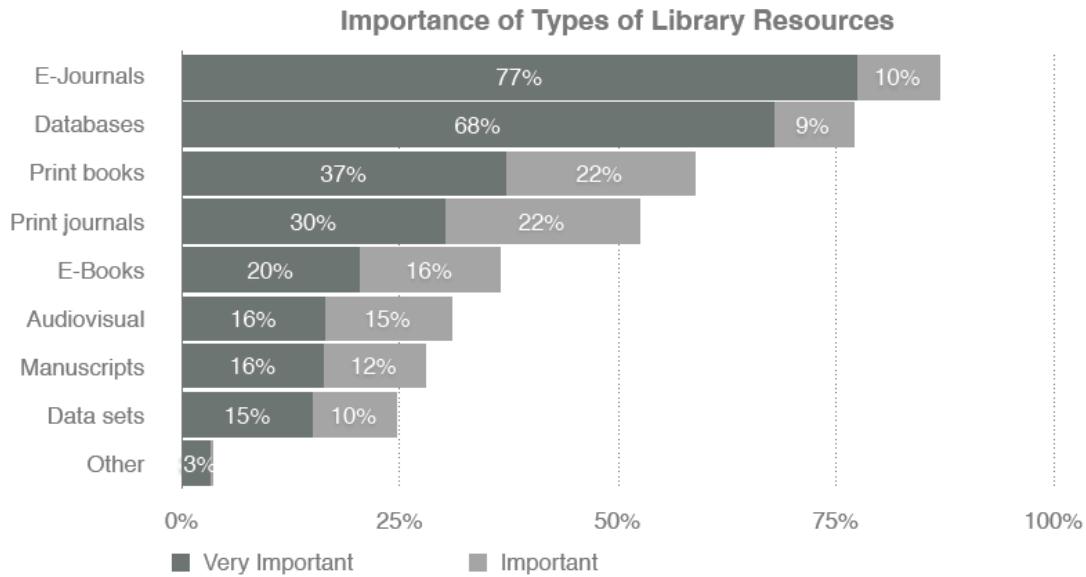


Figure 6. Percent (of faculty responding to question) who rate each information source as "Very important" or "Important" to their teaching/research/clinical work.

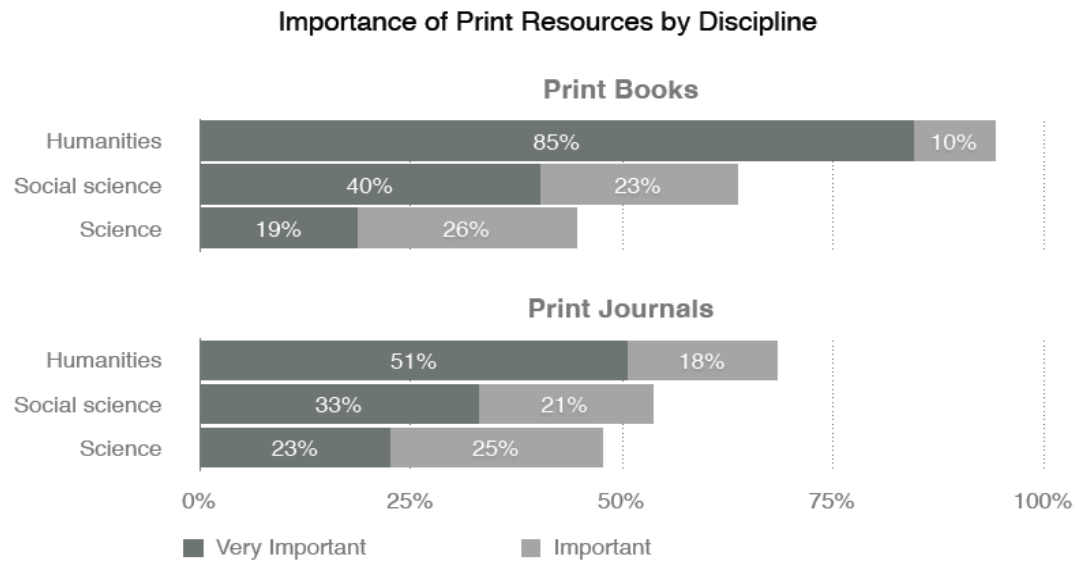


Figure 7. Percent (of faculty responding to question) who rate each information source as "Very important" or "Important" to their teaching/research/clinical work, broken down by broad discipline (based on department).

“I would like to see more in the eBook category. Perhaps more media tools as well.”

Faculty were asked to rate the importance of a variety of finding aids or tools for their teaching and research. Although faculty rate Internet search engines as the most important finding aid for their work, more than two-thirds rate library databases as very important.

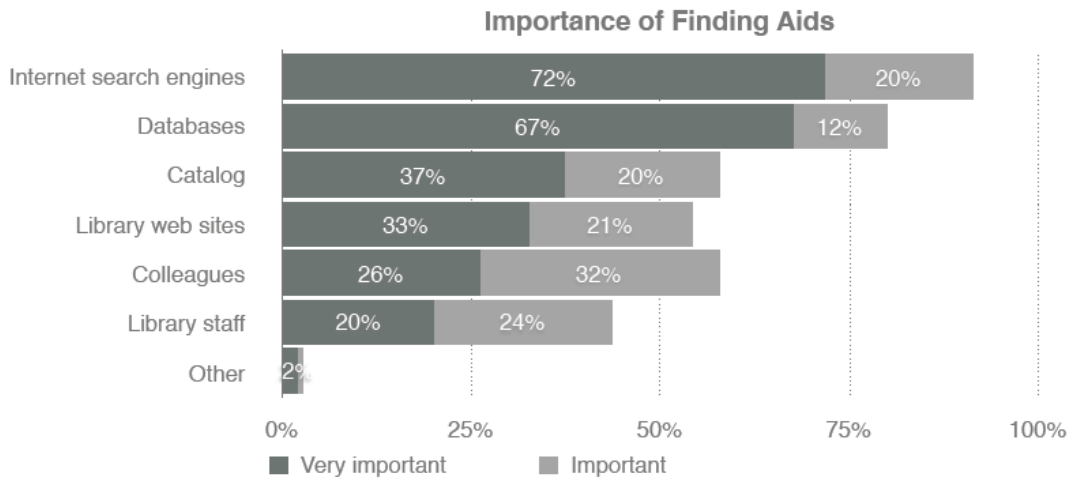


Figure 8. Percent (of faculty responding to question) who rate as "Very important" or "Important" each method for finding the resources they need for their teaching/research/clinical work.

3. PUBLISHING AND OPEN ACCESS

Faculty were asked to rate the importance of a variety of factors in their decision on where to publish journal articles. The three most important factors to faculty are journal reputation, online availability, and affiliation with a scholarly society. Note that the financial factors (author charges, library subscriptions, and costs for libraries) are deemed less important.

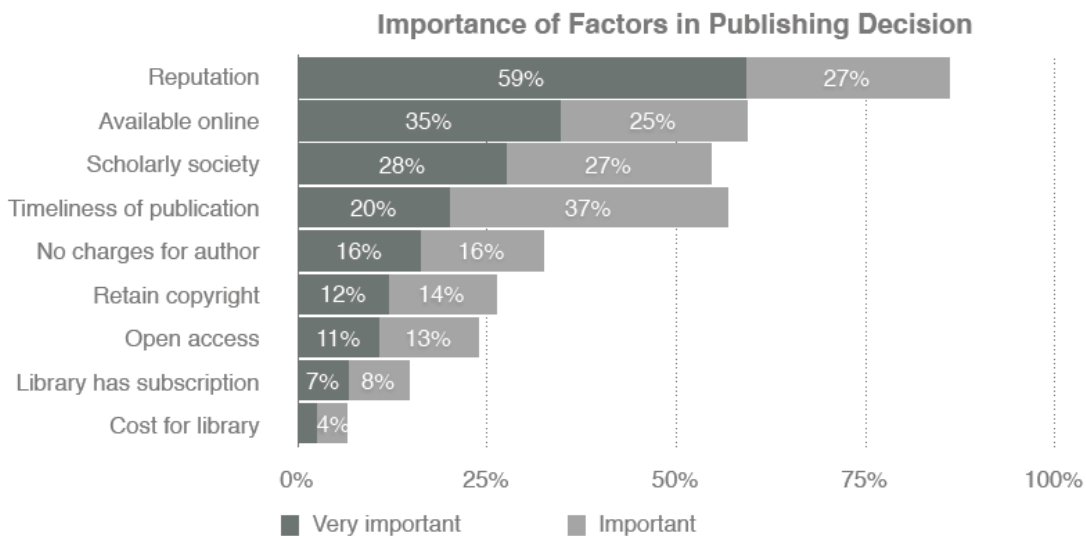


Figure 9. Percent (of faculty responding to question) who rate each factor "Very important" or "Important" when deciding where to publish journal articles.

When faculty were asked about open access participation, nearly 40% indicate that they have submitted an article to an open access journal. Breaking down the numbers by campus is revealing; more respondents on the Medical Campus (50%) than the Charles River Campus (33%) have submitted to a journal or repository allowing Open Access. The longitudinal data from the Libraries' planned triennial surveys will reveal how faculty participation in Open Access and BU's Digital Commons changes over time.

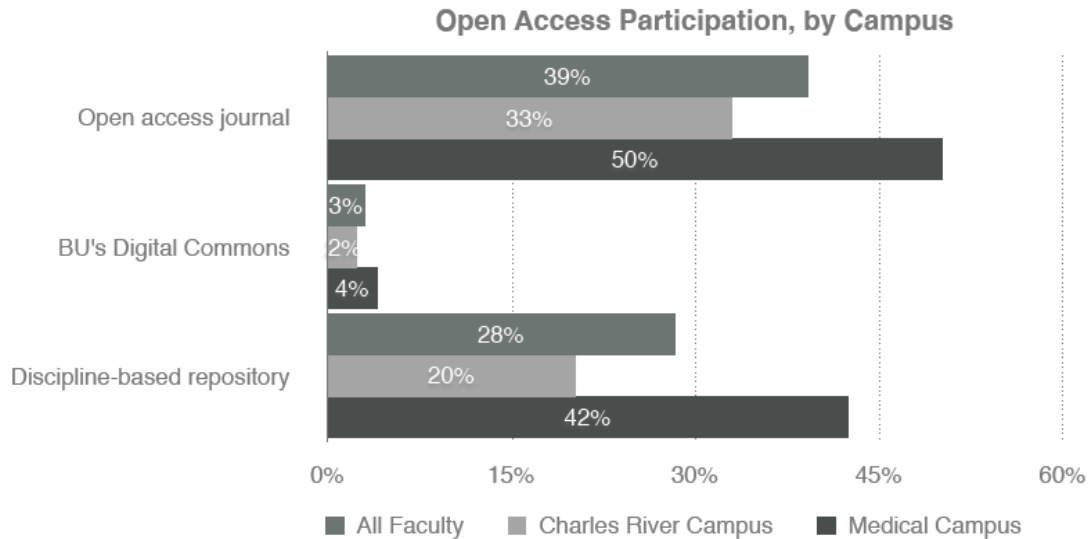


Figure 10. Percent (of faculty responding to each question) who report submitting an item to a journal that allows open access, to BU's Digital Commons, or to a discipline-based repository such as PubMed. Shows results for all faculty, and by campus.

“I strongly support open access, but feel my hands are tied by the need to publish in high-impact factor journals (generally controlled by the big publishers like Elsevier).”

4. INFORMATION LITERACY SKILLS

Faculty were questioned about the importance of five skills related to finding, evaluating, and using information to undergraduate success. They also were asked about student performance in these same five skills. Large gaps exist between rated importance and rated student performance.

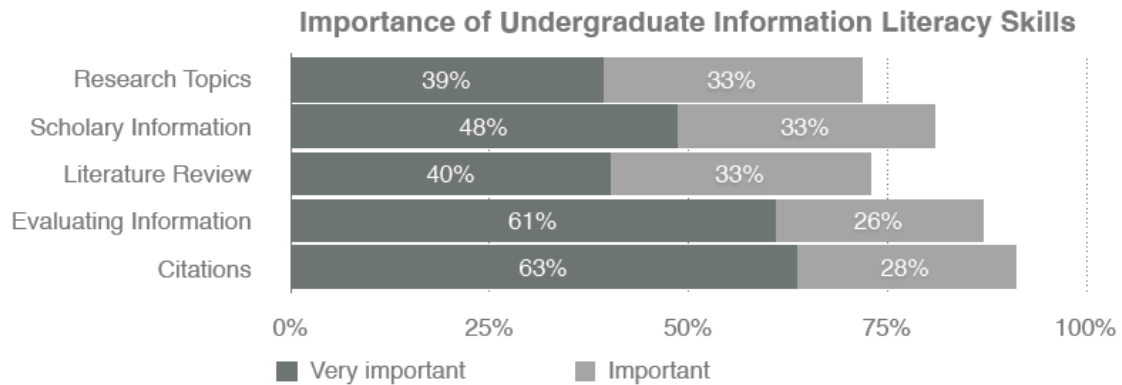


Figure 11. Percent (of faculty expressing an opinion on that skill, ignoring "N/A" responses) who rate the importance of five information literacy skills to undergraduate success as "Very important" or "Important."

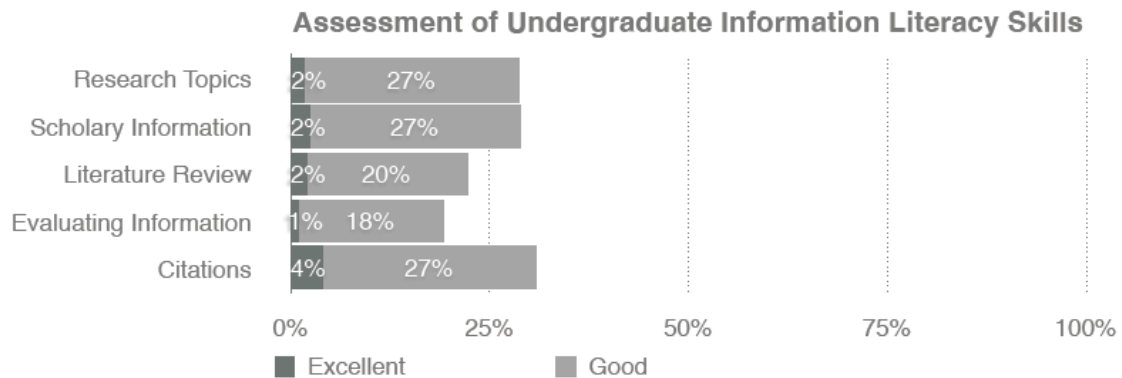


Figure 12. Percent (of faculty expressing an opinion on that skill, ignoring "N/A" responses) who assess undergraduate performance in five information literacy skills as "Excellent" or "Good."

“Our undergraduates... have no library skills, rarely know how to conduct research, and simply do not set foot in the stacks unless they have to. Very sad for the future of the humanities.”

Faculty were questioned about the importance of these same five skills to graduate student success. Faculty also were asked about graduate student performance in these five skills. Faculty regard these skills as more important for graduate students than for undergraduates, and assess graduate student performance in these skills more highly than that of undergraduates.

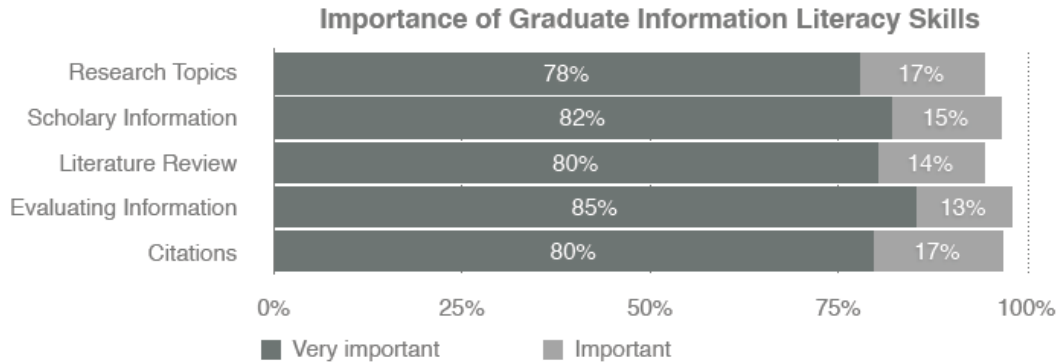


Figure 13. Percent (of faculty expressing an opinion on that skill, ignoring "N/A" responses) who rate the importance of five information literacy skills to graduate student success as "Very important" or "Important."

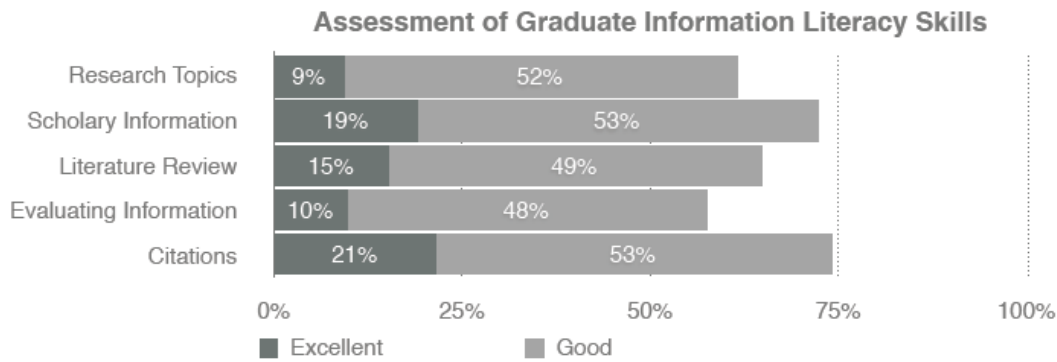


Figure 14. Percent (of faculty expressing an opinion on that skill, ignoring "N/A" responses) who assess graduate student performance in five information literacy skills as "Excellent" or "Good."

5. LIBRARY SERVICES

Faculty were asked about the importance of six current library services to their teaching, research, and clinical work. Faculty also were asked about their satisfaction with these six services, and their responses allow an indirect measure of their usage of the services. Interlibrary loan is the most used service (79%), followed by staff assistance (73%) and course reserves (54%). Faculty also consider interlibrary loan the most important service, with over two-thirds rating it as important or very important. Of those reporting use of each service, 74%-87% were satisfied or very satisfied with each service.

“Interlibrary Loan has also been very important for my research. And I can't say enough about how helpful and knowledgeable the staff has been.”

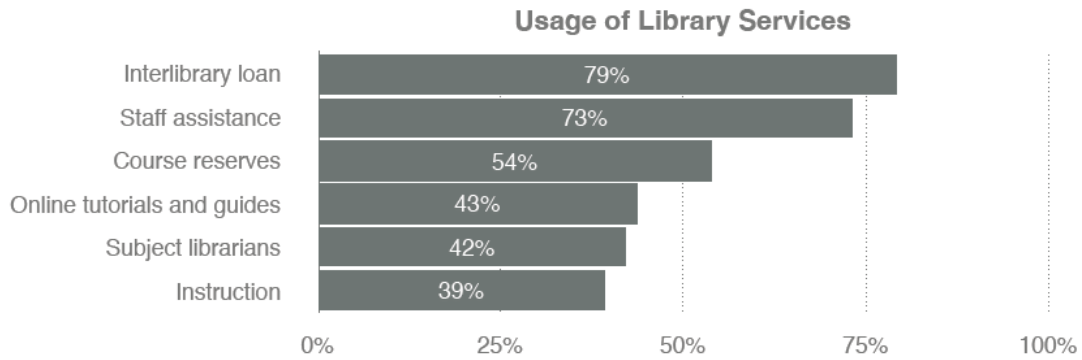


Figure 15. Percent of faculty who use each service, i.e., percent (of faculty responding to any service question) who gave each service a satisfaction rating (rather than responding "Don't Use" or giving no response).

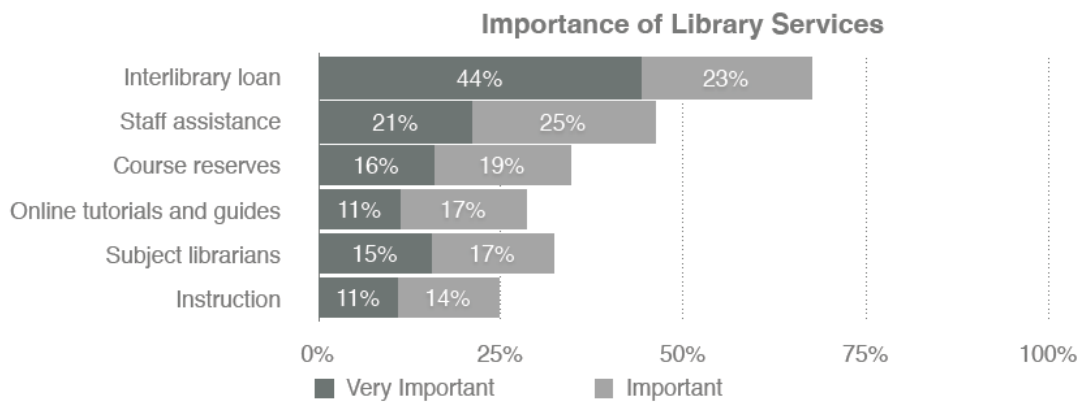


Figure 16. Percent (of faculty responding to question) who rated each library service as "Very important" or "Important" to their teaching/research/clinical work.

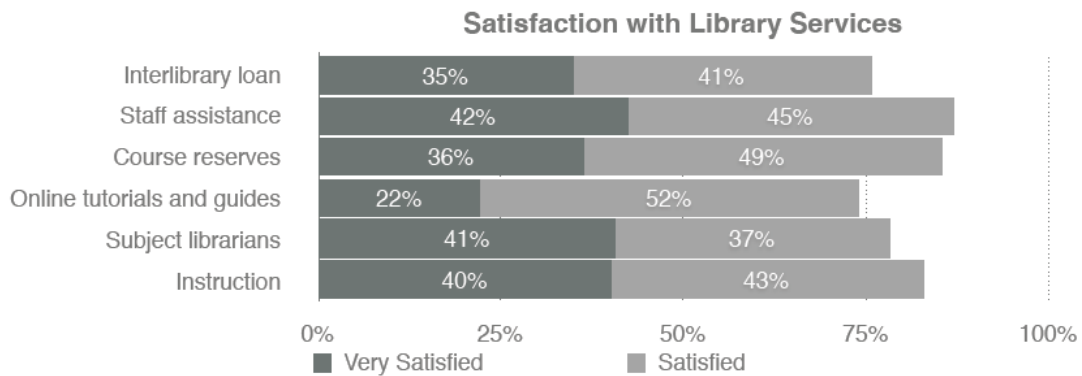


Figure 17. Percent (of faculty indicating they use each service) who rated themselves "Very satisfied" or "Satisfied" with each service.

Faculty also were asked about the importance of four proposed services to their research, teaching, and clinical work. The percentages of respondents who indicate that these proposed services would be useful or very useful range from 48%-59%, with "More e-books" receiving the highest rating.

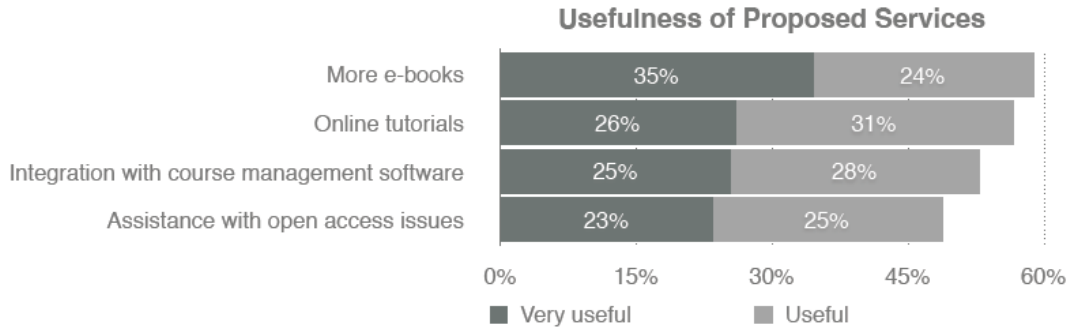


Figure 18. Percent (of faculty responding to question) who rate as "Very useful" or "Useful" each proposed library service for their teaching/research/clinical work.

Increased access to on-line journals is my number [one] priority. In-person training or on-line tutorials that teach how to better integrate on-line materials is also a high priority. I'm quite unaware of what is currently offered in that regard. I'm sure that I could learn a lot from librarians..."

6. OVERALL CONTRIBUTION AND SATISFACTION

Faculty were asked what contributions the BU Libraries make to a variety of their activities. More than 60% of respondents indicate that the Libraries make a major or significant contribution to their finding information in related fields or new areas, keeping current in their fields, and being a more productive researcher. Note that of respondents who receive external funding, more than 70% indicate that the Libraries make a major or significant contribution in these same three areas.

"Improved collections and journal subscriptions are key for assisting us in research and course development, and invaluable in attracting/retaining quality scholars."

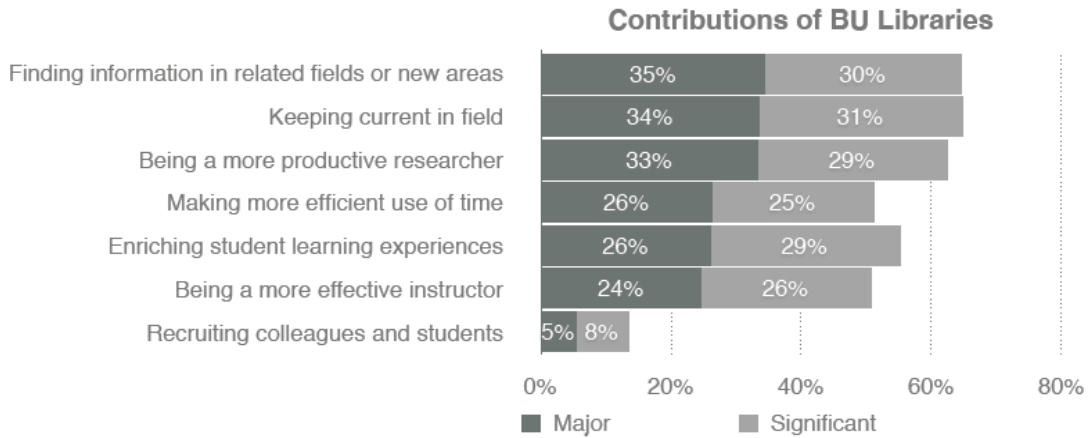


Figure 19. Percent (of faculty responding to question) who rate BU Libraries as making a "Major" or "Significant" contribution to each task.

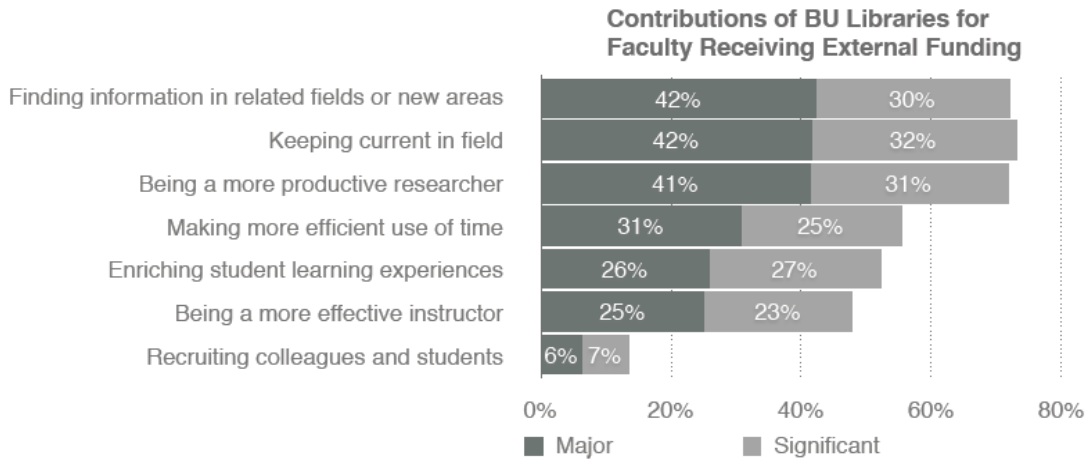


Figure 20. Percent (of faculty responding to question and who receive federal or other external funding) who rate BU Libraries as making a "Major" or "Significant" contribution to each task.

The last questions were about satisfaction with library services, collections, facilities, and overall satisfaction. The highest rating is for library services: 70% of faculty indicate that they are satisfied or very satisfied with library services. However, less than 50% of faculty report being satisfied or very satisfied with print collections, online collections, and physical facilities. When asked about their overall library satisfaction level, over 50% of respondents report they are satisfied or very satisfied.

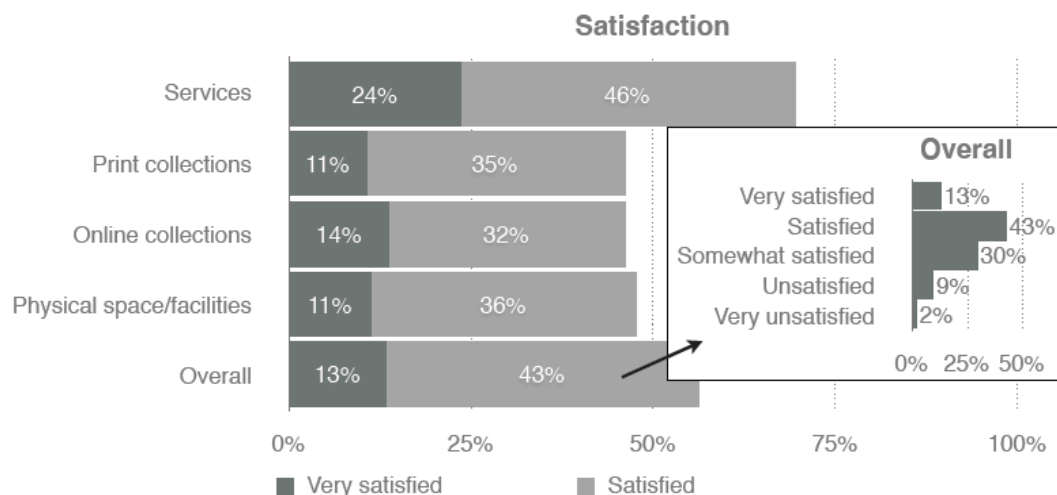


Figure 21. Percent (of faculty responding to question) who are "Very satisfied" or "Satisfied" with each aspect of BU Libraries. Inset gives full breakdown of responses to "Overall library satisfaction" question.

IMPORTANCE OF BU LIBRARIES TO FACULTY

The survey results show that the faculty use and value library resources, are generally satisfied with library services, and believe the BU Libraries make an important contribution to their work.

Two-thirds of respondents report accessing a BU library website weekly or more frequently. Seventy-seven percent of respondents consider library databases important or very important for their teaching and research; faculty also consider BU library staff (44%) and BU library websites (54%) important or very important to their work.

Seventy percent of BU faculty who responded to the survey report that they are satisfied or very satisfied with library services in general. When asked about specific services (see figure 17), including staff assistance, 74%-87% of those who use each service are satisfied or very satisfied with the service. The respondents report that the most important service for their teaching and research is their ability to borrow books or get journal articles not owned by the Libraries; 85% of the respondents who report using this service are satisfied or very satisfied with it.

The majority of BU faculty who responded to the survey report that they consider the BU Libraries to make significant or major contributions to their work in terms of their abilities to keep current in their fields, to find information in related fields or new areas, to be a more productive researcher, to be a more effective instructor, and to make more efficient use of their time. The majority of the respondents indicate that the BU Libraries make a significant or major contribution to enriching student learning experiences.

CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

The results of this survey indicate areas in which the Libraries can improve their support of faculty teaching and research. These areas include strengthening online collections, working with students to develop their information literacy skills, enhancing digital access to books, providing online tutorials for research tools, assisting with the integration of library materials and services into course management sites, assisting with open access issues, and renovating the Science & Engineering Library.

When asked about their satisfaction with online collections, 46% of faculty said they were satisfied or very satisfied. This contrasts with the importance faculty place on online collections to their teaching, research, and clinical work: 87% of respondents rate e-journals as important or very important, and 77% rate databases as important or very important. The Libraries will continue to make every effort to strengthen online collections.

Questions about five skills related to finding, evaluating, and using information reveal a gap between the importance faculty place on these information literacy skills and their assessment of actual student performance. For undergraduates, these skills are considered important or very important by 72% to 91% of faculty expressing an opinion (the exact percentage varying across the five skills), but student performance in these skills is assessed as being good or excellent by only 19% to 31%. Graduate students have a smaller but still pronounced gap between importance (94%-98%) and performance (57%-74%). The Libraries recognize this is an area where they can better support faculty and students in achieving critical learning outcomes.

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Open access has been an area of growing interest for BU and the BU Libraries. While the survey shows some awareness of the issue, with 39% of faculty reporting submitting an item to a journal that allows open access, 61% still have not or are unsure. When asked about assistance with open access issues (funding mandates, publisher agreements, copyright), 49% consider such assistance useful or very useful. Again, this is an area where the Libraries will do more.

When asked about their satisfaction with physical space and facilities, 48% of faculty reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied. However, when considering only those respondents from departments served by the Science & Engineering Library, 25% report being satisfied or very satisfied. The Libraries will continue to seek support to renovate the Science & Engineering Library.

“The Science & Engineering Library needs a major overhaul. They were supposed to move or expand and it never happened... The science library is cramped and has a shabby look. Anyone visiting would conclude that science scholarship is not important to the University.”

The Library’s Strategic Plan, which is based on the University’s Strategic Plan, outlines future directions and initiatives designed to support faculty research and teaching and strengthen undergraduate and graduate education. The findings of this survey corroborate the importance of the initiatives outlined in the Library’s Plan and help refine strategic priorities.

NEXT STEPS

After this report has been presented to Provost Morrison, customized reports will be disseminated to key stakeholders including the Faculty Assembly, Deans of the Schools and Colleges, and library staff. Library staff will continue to analyze results, including the more than 700 comments made by faculty in the survey, and also will begin adapting and developing graduate and undergraduate student surveys. The Libraries envision conducting surveys of faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates on a triennial cycle. No group will be surveyed more than once every three years.

The Libraries will respond to the findings of this survey and future surveys by changing and adapting priorities and services to the expressed needs of faculty and students. They will be used to continually improve the services and support that the Libraries provide to the BU community. The findings will contribute to the overall assessment of the Libraries and will help determine future strategic initiatives undertaken by the Libraries. Changes in services, resources, and priorities that result from the findings of this survey will be tracked and reported.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Library Assessment Committee (Linda Plunket, Dan Benedetti, Kate Bronstad, David Fristrom, Dan Piekarski, Jim Skypeck, Alex Solodkaya, and Sarah Struble) acknowledges the cooperation of the following groups: the Provost’s Office for sending out the initial email and the reminders; the Deans for encouraging their faculties to take the survey; IS&T for broadcasting the emails to faculty; HR for creating the email list; the IRB for guidance, review, and approval of the protocol; and the Assessment Committee at the University of Washington for graciously allowing us to adapt their survey to local needs.