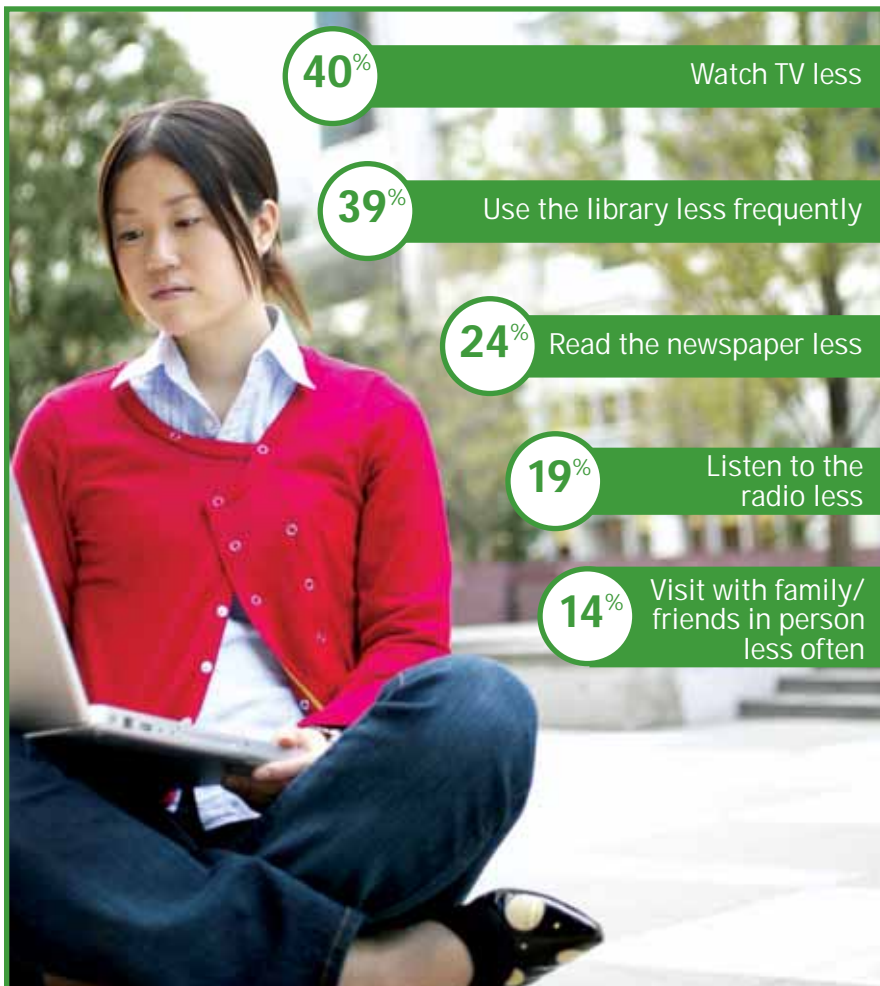




Conclusion

Libraries, many of their resources and services, and the information experts who work in libraries appear to be increasingly less visible in a universe of abundant information, but without data we could not say with any certainty how extensive this apparent shift has become. The *Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources* report provides this data.

College students' decreased activities due to Internet use...



College Students' Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources presents a subset of that data. It includes the responses of 396 survey participants who identified themselves as current attendees of a postsecondary institution. The report also includes a chapter on some of the responses of U.S. survey participants between the ages of 14 and 17 to provide contrast and comparison with the college students, as these young people are potential college attendees of the future.

The purpose of the report is to provide a clear picture of the perceptions of college-attending respondents, for the benefit of academic librarians and their colleagues. The report is the result of a need to better understand the interests, habits and behaviors of college students using libraries—or not—in a time of information abundance.

Data for college students are often presented in comparison with data for the total respondents, but it is important to note that the data for students are a subset of the data for all respondents.

A summary of the findings related to college students as well as a few conclusions and observations follow.

Report Findings

...on College Students' Perceptions and Habits

- College students use search engines to begin an information search (89 percent). Two percent begin an information search on a library Web site. *(Part 1.2)*
- College students like using search engines. Ninety-three percent were *very satisfied* or *satisfied* with the overall experience of using a search engine compared to 84 percent who expressed the same level of satisfaction with the overall search experience, assisted by a librarian. *(Part 2.6)*
- College students like to self-serve. Many do not seek assistance when using library resources (54 percent) although more seek assistance than do respondents overall (46 percent compared to 36 percent). *(Part 2.4)*
- College students indicate a higher level of use of electronic information services than respondents overall. *(Part 1.1)*

...on Libraries

- College students have the highest rate of library use and broadest use of library resources, both physical and electronic. *(Parts 1 and 2)*
- College students use the library, but they use the library less and read less since they began using the Internet. *(Parts 1.1 and 3.7)*
- The most frequent use of the library among college students is as a place to do homework and study. *(Part 2.1)*
- "Books" is the library brand among college students. There is no runner-up. *(Part 3.8)*
- College students show high levels of awareness of library electronic resources. *(Parts 1 and 2)*
- Only 10 percent of college students indicated that their library's collection fulfilled their information needs after accessing the library Web site from a search engine. *(Part 2.5)*

...on Alternatives to Libraries

- College students use personal knowledge and common sense and cross-referencing other sites to judge if electronic information is trustworthy. They use other Web sites with similar information and their teachers to validate information. *(Parts 3.2 and 3.5)*
- Fifty percent of college students learn about electronic information sources from teachers, 36 percent from a library Web site and 33 percent from a librarian. *(Part 1.3)*
- Search engines fit college students' lifestyles better than physical or online libraries. The majority of college students see search engines as a perfect lifestyle fit. *(Part 3.7)*

Conclusions and Observations

What was confirmed and revealed

As discussed briefly in the introductions of the full *Perceptions* report and of this report, many findings of the survey confirm the trends we highlighted in *The 2003 OCLC Environmental Scan*. But what was revealed is that in many areas college students use libraries more, and are more aware of resources, than are respondents overall. Also, when correlations were done between educational attainment and library use, there is evidence that the more educated the respondent, the more likely they are to use libraries after formal education is completed.

These survey results confirm that libraries are used by college students. The number of students holding library cards is higher than among respondents overall: 90 percent of college students hold a library card, while 72 percent of total respondents hold a library card. College students use both academic and public libraries frequently. College students also expect their library usage to increase in the future at a higher rate than do total respondents.

When asked to give advice, many student respondents suggested increasing libraries' open hours, improving the lighting and furniture, hiring friendlier staff and allowing food and drink in libraries. Their verbatim comments reveal ambivalence to the physical library not exposed in the data.

The results confirm that the majority of college students are still not making high use of the array of electronic resources (online magazines, databases and reference assistance, for example) libraries make available. However, college students use electronic resources at higher rates and are the most familiar with what libraries have to offer compared to usage and familiarity of overall respondents.

Results also confirm that respondents are aware that libraries are "wired" and many use the computers in libraries to access the Internet and to use Internet resources. The majority of college students and high school students use library computers regularly.

However, there is widespread high use of general Internet information resources among college students. They regularly use search engines, e-mail and instant messaging to obtain and share information. The library is not the first or only stop for these information seekers. Search engines are the favorite place to begin a search and respondents indicate that Google is the search engine most recently used to begin their searches. Among students who have started a search using a search engine, 48 percent ended up at a library Web site. Forty-one percent went on to use the library Web site, but only 10 percent agreed the library Web site fulfilled their information needs. Twenty-seven percent indicated they also had to use other resources. The results of this survey confirm that libraries are not seen as the top choice for access to electronic resources, even among college students who have the highest level of awareness of those resources.

The survey revealed how college students make choices about electronic information resources and how they evaluate those resources, and make decisions about the

*Lots of books
to read, free
computer access.*

27-year-old undergraduate
from Australia

Source: *Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources*, OCLC, 2005, question 812a, "Please list two positive associations with the library."

quality, trustworthiness and monetary worth of resources available from libraries and generally on the open Web. Many college students do not differentiate between what is offered by libraries and what is offered by search engine companies.

While it is easy to assume that search engines are the top choice of information consumers because of the speed with which information can be delivered, the study revealed that speed is not the only, and not the primary, reason search engines are the preferred starting point.

Respondents, including college students, indicated that search engines deliver better quality and quantity of information than librarian-assisted searching—and at greater speed. As more and more content becomes digital and directly accessible via search engines, quantity will increase. The amount of quality information, overall, is also likely to increase.

College students trust information they get from libraries, and they trust the information they get from search engines. The survey revealed that they trust them almost equally, which suggests that libraries have no monopoly on the provision of information.

Most college students are very familiar with search engines, e-mail and instant messaging. As more content becomes directly accessible via search engines and to handheld devices, familiarity with more and different types of digital content is likely to increase. Will trust continue to increase too?

The survey highlighted that not only are college students happy to self-serve, they are confident that they can serve themselves well. When asked how they judge the trustworthiness of information, “common sense/personal knowledge” was the top method used. This self-reliance was also reflected in college students’ use of the library. Most say they have not asked for help using any library resources, either at the physical or the virtual library.

As more and more content becomes digital and accessible via the Internet, the number of information sources available for both information discovery and validation is likely to increase, fueling increased confidence and self-reliance.

Survey respondents, including college students, are generally satisfied with libraries and librarians, but many of them, particularly teenagers, use the library less since they began using the Internet. Verbatim comments reveal strong attachments to libraries as places, but many of these positive associations are nostalgic in nature, and are not related to current experiences. Younger respondents—college students and teenagers—did not express these nostalgic associations as frequently, and commented frequently on the negative aspects of physical libraries and their staffs.

While the attachment to the traditional nature and purpose is an asset all libraries share, it is not clear that this attachment extends, or will extend, to virtual libraries and their electronic resources. The data in this report show that libraries lack relevance in the lives of younger respondents, and that their resources and services are not clearly differentiated from other information sources.

*Make the library
more inviting and
update your books.*

18-year-old undergraduate
from the United States

Source: *Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources*, OCLC, 2005, question 1240, “If you could provide one piece of advice to your library, what would it be?”

We learned that respondents had much to say, when asked, about their libraries, the people who staff them and the services offered. This suggests that libraries have an opportunity to learn much more than was revealed in this report about the perceptions of the people in their communities by conducting local polls and open-ended surveys. The data serve as a reminder to readers that college students are also heavy users of public libraries. Perhaps this suggests there could be more cooperation among all libraries in a community.

The data revealed that the more educated respondents are, the more they use libraries, even after their formal education is completed. Forty-nine percent of respondents indicating they had college degrees use public libraries or academic libraries at least monthly, compared to 25 percent of high school graduates who use public libraries or academic libraries at least monthly.

The Library Brand

*Sitting in the middle
of the stacks with
books around me,
and I am just reading
and loving it.*

18-year-old undergraduate from
the United States

Source: *Perceptions of Libraries and
Information Resources*, OCLC, 2005,
question 807, "What is the first thing you
think of when you think of a library?"

One of the most important goals of the project was to obtain a clearer understanding of the "Library" brand. What do information consumers think about libraries today? How do information consumers identify libraries in the growing universe of alternatives? What is the "Library" brand image?

What is the library's identity in the minds of information seekers? By a huge margin respondents feel that "library" is synonymous with "books." When asked about their first spontaneous impression of libraries, 69 percent of information consumers reply, "books." This is true also of 70 percent of college students.

Familiarity, trust and quality—these are intangible traits often summed up by the word "brand." All brands from search engines to cars to libraries are either familiar or not, trusted or not, provide top quality or not. We tested these brand concepts in the survey.

We asked about familiarity. Libraries are very familiar as book providers. Search engines are very familiar as electronic information providers. We reviewed the concept of trust. The lines are fuzzy. Libraries and search engines are trusted almost equally among college students. We asked about quality. College students see both libraries/librarians and search engines as providers of quality information. Again, the lines are blurred. In a tie, the data suggest the nod would go to search engines.

The "Library" brand is dominant in one category—books. It would be delightful to assume that when respondents say "books," what they really mean to say is that books, in essence, stand for those intangible qualities of information familiarity, information trust and information quality. The data did not reveal it. We looked hard. We reviewed thousands of responses to the open-ended questions that inquired about positive library associations and library purpose. We searched for words and phrases that included mentions of "quality," "trust," "knowledge," "learning," "education," etc. We found mentions of each, but they were relatively few in number. "Books" dominated—across all regions surveyed, across all age groups and among college students.

It is interesting that despite college students' higher use and awareness of libraries and their electronic resources, books are still the main brand associated with libraries.

In addition to being familiar, trusted and high-quality, strong brands must be relevant. Relevance is the degree to which people believe a brand meets their needs. In the survey, we tested for relevancy and lifestyle fit. Sixty-four percent of college students said that search engines perfectly fit their lifestyle. Thirty percent said online libraries are a perfect fit. Eleven percent said libraries do not fit their lifestyle. That library resources and librarians add value to information search was not disputed by respondents, but the data suggest that the relevancy and lifestyle fit of that value are in question.

In a world where the sources of information and the tools of discovery continue to proliferate and increase in relevance to online information consumers, the brand differentiation of the library is still books. The library has not been successful in leveraging its brand to incorporate growing investments in electronic resources and library Web-based services. Can the brand be expanded or updated to be more relevant, to be more than books?

Libraries must work collectively to "rejuvenate" the brand. It is not simply about educating students about the library and its physical and electronic resources. Trying to educate consumers whose habits and lifestyles are changing and have changed seldom works. It doesn't work for companies and it probably won't work for libraries. Rejuvenating the "Library" brand depends on the abilities of the members of the broad library community to redesign library services so that the rich resources—print and digital—they steward on behalf of their communities are available, accessible and used. Rejuvenating the brand depends on reconstructing the experience of using the library. While the need for localized points of distribution for content that is no longer available in just physical form is likely to become less relevant, the need for libraries to be gathering places within the community or university has not decreased. The data are clear. When prompted, information consumers see libraries' role in the community *as a place to learn, as a place to read, as a place to make information freely available, as a place to support literacy, as a place to provide research support, as a place to provide free computer/ Internet access* and more. These library services are relevant and differentiated.

Libraries will continue to share an expanding infosphere with an increasing number of content producers, providers and consumers. Information consumers will continue to self-serve from a growing information smorgasbord. The challenge for libraries is to clearly define and market their relevant place in that infosphere—their services and collections both physical and virtual.

It is time to rejuvenate the "Library" brand.

Continue to support education and literacy among the community. When supporting the backbone of the community (education and literacy) don't be afraid to try new things and new methods.

19-year-old undergraduate from United States

Source: *Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources*, OCLC, 2005, question 1240, "If you could provide one piece of advice to your library, what would it be?"