

Serial Use by Social Science Faculty: A Survey

The 226 faculty members in the social sciences at the University of Illinois who responded to a survey of their use of serials provided information regarding their serial needs and patterns of use, as well as the usefulness of specified services. Implications of the findings for improving library service in spite of budgetary constraints are discussed. One finding indicates that faculty use the library's serial collection as a supplemental rather than primary source, and this may invalidate the "core collection" theory.

SERVICE TO THE FACULTY, undeniably a high priority of the academic research library, has traditionally been seen as closely related to the size of the collection. The assumption has been that faculty needs are satisfied by a large collection, by special borrowing privileges, and by the provision of carrels or studies in the library. Historically, academic librarians have believed that faculty members were expert bibliographers who knew how to use the card catalog and were at home in the book stacks.¹ Reference services, when given, have often been designed to help the faculty members find material for themselves.

Although through the years authors like Rothstein have argued for the provision of actual information to the scholarly community,² academic librarians have continued to believe that such service is neither needed nor desired. To the extent that the humanist scholar is seen as the prototype faculty member, the librarians' view of the faculty's need for service is correct.³ The evidence suggests that the typical social science faculty member is different from this prototype.

Nelson's survey revealed that social scientists were less aware of library services and more critical of librarians' performance than

were the humanists.⁴ Line, who conducted a comprehensive study of information requirements of social scientists in Great Britain, has suggested that information needs of social scientists are hard to satisfy because the social sciences are less stable, lack clear boundaries, and use imprecise terminology.⁵ Certainly library catalogs are better suited to the humanist since the terminology of the humanities is more traditional and better defined.⁶ New fields, such as futuristics or social policy, continually emerge in the social sciences, and disciplines overlap in such a way as to make the subject matter dependent for classification more on the author's area of expertise than on the content. Scientific fields have found ways to supplement library services through the development of sophisticated bibliographic tools and reprint networks, but the social sciences have not.

The social science faculty has not felt well served in the past, and the financial crisis of the 1970s may contribute further to this feeling.⁷ The combination of reduced budgets and inflation, both of which have been forcing libraries to formulate new and restrictive acquisition policies, will certainly decrease the number and variety of materials purchased in the social sciences.⁸

Serials have been especially affected by inflation. Brown, in his report on serial prices for 1977, is almost cheerful about an inflation rate of 9.2 percent, which is the second lowest increase in seven years.⁹ Be-

Patricia Stenstrom and Ruth B. McBride are serials catalogers and assistant professors of library administration at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

cause of the potentially long-term and continuing commitment involved in serial subscriptions, academic libraries have been forced to reduce the number of new serials purchased and have engaged in large-scale cancellation projects.¹⁰

For reasons mentioned earlier as well as what seems to be poor communication between the library and the social science faculty, serial needs of the social science group are hard to assess. If the library is buying fewer serials, how can it be sure it is buying the ones that this faculty group needs most? How can it compensate for collection deficiencies? Does a large collection by itself provide the serial-related service that the social scientist would like?

Recent library literature has concentrated on quantitative formulas to be used in the selection of serials. Some of these articles, like that by Perk and Van Pulis,¹¹ emphasize circulation as a selection guide, but circulation is a measure of the use of what one has rather than of the need for what one might have. In any case, considering that faculty comprise a minority of the academic library users, circulation is a poor test of faculty use.¹² Other articles describe more elaborate quantitative measures, but, as the article by Johnson and Trueswell illustrates, such formulas reveal titles that should not be canceled rather than those that should.¹³ Such formulas give no assistance in the selection of new serials, nor do they deal with important questions of quality and accessibility. They certainly do not attempt to identify or evaluate users' needs for serial-related services. In order to do these things, the authors believe, a more comprehensive approach is needed.

With this in mind, in the fall of 1977 the authors undertook a survey of the faculty in selected social science areas in the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The survey was a preliminary step in a projected multifaceted study of faculty serial use. The survey was designed to enhance communication between the library and the social science faculty. It was also designed to provide specific practical recommendations for the improvement of service. Line's study at Bath University provided a valuable background for the survey.¹⁴ Although some of the 1977 findings are applicable at the local

level only, many are similar enough to those reported by Line to suggest considerable commonality among social science researchers in their patterns of information use. The findings and the methodology should be useful to other academic research libraries interested in improving services to social science researchers.

METHODOLOGY

The library system at the University of Illinois consists of thirty-four departmental libraries (including the undergraduate library) plus the general library book stacks and reference area. Twelve of these libraries (including the education and social science library) are located in the general library building, while the remainder are scattered throughout the campus area as much as one mile away. There are more than 90,000 titles in the library's serial collection. The serials acquisition budget for 1977/78 was \$1,221,495; the anticipated budget for serials for 1978/79 is \$1,365,840.

The population surveyed consisted of the entire faculty of thirteen social science departments, a group served primarily by the education and social science library. Nine of these departments were in the College of Education: educational administration, secondary education, educational policy, educational psychology, elementary education, special education, vocational education, a child development institute, and one "other" category that included persons from administrative units too small to be considered separately. The other five departments were anthropology, political science, psychology, social work, and sociology.

Questionnaires were sent to 320 faculty, with a return of 226 (a response rate of 71 percent), with 69 percent usable. The political science and sociology departments had the highest response rate, 76 percent and 77 percent respectively. Secondary education and educational policy had the lowest rates, 52 percent and 56 percent respectively. The pretested questionnaire consisted of twenty-one questions in four broad categories dealing with the faculty's use of serials. Patterns of use, usefulness of specified services, and miscellaneous information regarding the needs of the respondents

were among the areas explored in the survey.

The questionnaire and procedures for making this study were developed in consultation with the Survey Research Laboratory at the University of Illinois. The laboratory also keypunched the data and provided for its analysis according to the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences.¹⁵ Summary statistics were created through the SPSS subprogram FREQUENCIES, using all of the available statistical analyses. Contingency table analysis of the data, using six variables, was done according to SPSS subprogram CROSSTABS. The six variables were department, rank (standard academic rank), age, nature of specialization, general library use, and departmental library use. Chi-square test of statistical significance was computed for all variables.

FINDINGS

Because the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has a departmental library structure, many of the questions on use were divided into two parts. One part asked about the use of the general library book stacks and the other part asked about the use of departmental libraries. Departmental libraries consistently showed a higher pattern of use, and the summary of use in general is based on answers to questions about departmental libraries. Even so, relative trends are the same in both the general library book stacks and departmental libraries.

Approximately 93 percent (204) of the respondents reported that they had used "serial literature of a general professional or informative nature, or for some definite research or scholarly purpose" during the previous academic year. The rest of the findings, with the exception of those relating to new services, are based on the answers of this 93 percent. Examination of the responses of the remaining 7 percent indicates that their "no" answers were due largely either to misinterpretation of the question or the time frame of the question.

Only 7 percent reported "almost never" using the serial collection during the previous academic year. On the other hand, 25 percent used the collection "about once a

week or almost every day." The mean use was "once every two to three weeks." Age was a significant variable. Those faculty born after 1940 used the serial collection more frequently than older faculty.

In response to the question, "Which best describes the last time you used the serial collection of the library?" the reason chosen about twice as often as any other answer was "looking for a specific article" (47 percent). "Looking for information in your subject area" was a distant second (24 percent), with "keeping up with the literature" (19 percent) close behind. Browsing accounted for only 3 percent of use. The remaining 7 percent was either a combination of responses or other unspecified alternatives.

Of those who had used serial literature during the previous academic year, 97 percent read journals regularly. The number regularly read ranged from one to twenty. The median number read was eight. Eighty-eight percent subscribed to one or more of these journals. One faculty member reported subscribing to twenty, but the median number of subscriptions was four. Sixty-seven percent also read at least one journal in the library. In this instance as well, one faculty member reported reading twenty, but the median number read in the library was two. Only about 50 percent of those born before 1930 regularly read journals in the library. Younger faculty read more journals in the library.

In addition to asking the faculty how many journals they read and where they got them, the questionnaire also asked for lists of the journals that they read. Analysis of these lists leads to the conclusion that many of the journals subscribed to are either those commonly appearing on so-called core collection lists or highly specialized journals reflecting the faculty members' very specific interests. Most faculty seem to use the library to supplement their personal collections.

The faculty relied heavily on bibliographies and footnotes in journals and books to find references to specific articles (50 percent to 70 percent) (see table 1). Fewer than 30 percent used subject bibliographies or abstracting journals to locate such references with any frequency. In this question as in another similar question, "consulting

TABLE 1
FACULTY SEARCH FOR SPECIFIC ARTICLES

	Usually	Occasionally	Rarely or Never
When you come to the library to find a specific article, how often do you find reference to the article by consulting:			
a. Bibliographies/footnotes in journals?	69.4%	23.7%	7.3%
b. Bibliographies/footnotes in books?	51.3	39	9.6
c. Subject bibliographies?	17	38	45
d. Abstracting journals?	12.6	37.4	50
e. Colleagues?	13.6	55.9	30.5
f. Librarians or library staff?	2.4	13.1	84.5
g. Other (Please specify)	14.8	18.5	66.7

librarians" was chosen by only a very small percentage (less than 5 percent).

The question, "On the occasion when a reference for which you are searching is not part of the library collection, do you . . .?" elicited responses by the faculty as shown in table 2. Two of these choices were affected significantly by variables. Those born between 1930 and 1940 were more likely to request purchase than any other age group. Psychologists and faculty with biological specializations were most likely to request reprints. Reprints were also popular with faculty in social work and elementary education.

Finally, in response to the question "How helpful to you would it be . . .?" nearly 80 percent of the faculty thought it would be very helpful to somewhat helpful to have a regularly issued list of new journal titles in their area of study. More than 87 percent thought a regularly issued printout of tables of contents of selected journals ("current contents") would be helpful. Slightly more than 56 percent indicated that it would be

helpful to have trained library staff actually search for references or for serials, and nearly 85 percent thought facilities for on-line citation searching would be helpful.

SUMMARY

This study was designed to investigate the serials use patterns of the University of Illinois social science faculty and to survey their needs with regard to serial materials and services. Improvement of communication between the library and the social scientists was a secondary but important goal. Most of the social science faculty (93 percent) responding to the questionnaire use serial literature, and almost all of those (97 percent) read journals regularly. Of these, 88 percent subscribed to one or more journals, but 67 percent also read at least one journal in the library.

Only 7 percent of the faculty had not used the library's serial collection the previous academic year. On the other hand, average use of the library by the faculty was only once every two to three weeks. The

TABLE 2
FACULTY ACTION WHEN ITEM REQUESTED IS NOT IN COLLECTION

	Usually	Occasionally	Rarely or Never
On the occasion when a reference for which you are searching is not part of the library collection, do you . . .			
1. Request that it be purchased?	8.3%	26.1%	65.6%
2. Initiate an interlibrary loan?	17.6	25.8	56.6
3. Secure reprint from author?	14.6	40.8	44.6
4. Borrow from colleagues?	27.7	48.8	23.5
5. Consult library collections other than those at the University of Illinois?	3.3	13.7	83
6. Purchase?	7.6	38	54.4
7. Abandon the search?	9.3	58.3	31.9

faculty usually go to the library to find a specific article. They find references to their articles in the footnotes and bibliographies of monographs and serials. When they do not find a journal, their favorite option is to borrow from colleagues. More than half almost never request that the item be purchased or borrowed on interlibrary loan.

Faculty were enthusiastic about suggested bibliographic services: listing of titles of new journals, current contents, librarians' assistance in searching, and on-line searching. More than half of the respondents thought that all of these services would be helpful. Finally, none of the six variables used (age, rank, department, nature of specialization, general library use, and departmental library use) consistently affected the responses in a significant way.

Since this survey was undertaken to provide guidance at the local level, the authors have made a series of recommendations to the education and social sciences librarian and to the university librarian. These recommendations have been distributed to the social science faculty in the form of a report. The recommendations include implementation of a current awareness service, availability in the education and social sciences library of on-line searching, publicizing of interlibrary loan as well as evaluation of its procedures, and general efforts to improve communication.

A follow-up study is planned during the next academic year to determine the effects of the improved and additional services.

CONCLUSION

It is useful to concentrate on those findings in the survey that have an implication for library service to the social science faculty. It is apparent that the majority of faculty surveyed use the library as a supplementary rather than as a primary source of serial information. Therefore, the core collection theory may be fallacious because it appears that faculty subscribe to the most often used journals and look to the library only for the less often used materials. They are most likely to go to the library when searching for a specific article for which they already have a reference. However, if they do not find the article in the library collection, they are unlikely to re-

quest purchase or to use interlibrary loan, although the library normally identifies gaps in its holdings from these requests.

One can conjecture about the passivity of the faculty to existing library services. Lancaster has commented on the failure of librarians to teach users about available services.¹⁶ Faculty may not understand that the library wants requests for new serials, or they may not know the procedure for making such requests. Also, complaints by librarians about the current budgetary crisis may discourage faculty from making requests for purchase. Interlibrary loan may be too slow to meet the needs of the faculty who want immediate access to information.

However, if the social science faculty are passive in their response to the library, it is not because their information needs are met. The question suggesting additional bibliographic or current awareness services elicited a very positive response. More than half of the respondents thought having library staff search for references would be helpful. This contrasts with findings reported in this survey and elsewhere that librarians are rarely consulted to satisfy information needs. This suggests that the faculty is unaware that this service might be given, rather than a lack of respect for the expertise of librarians.

In the introduction we asked a series of questions about serial services to the faculty. While the questionnaire did not completely answer these questions, some conclusions can be made. If the library is buying fewer serials, how can it be sure that it is buying the ones needed by the faculty? It cannot be sure under present conditions. Much greater interaction between librarians and social science faculty is needed. Despite budget stringency, faculty should be encouraged to request new serials. Only in this way will the library be aware of faculty interest. The process of communication must be a continuing one, since disciplines change, new fields emerge, and faculty information requirements change.

How can the library compensate for collection deficiencies? The collection can be supplemented by the improvement of already existing services and publicizing of them. For example, further exploration is needed into the failure of interlibrary loan

to provide additional services. Why is it so slow? Are its procedures too complicated? Are its policies too restrictive? If resource sharing is the hope of the future, then not only the end results but the mechanics as well must be carefully reviewed and evaluated.

Does a large collection in itself provide the serial services the faculty needs? Obviously it does not. Services that help the fac-

ulty keep up with the literature and make better use of the existing collection are desirable.

In general, the conclusion must be that while circulation and other measures provide some help in analyzing the usefulness of particular serials, librarians must become more involved in helping faculty satisfy bibliographic needs before they can evaluate competently the usefulness of serials.

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