

# **Library Assessment Survey**

**Center for Survey Research  
State University of New York at Stony Brook**

**A Report Prepared for the  
Stony Brook Libraries**

**March, 2002**

## **Library Assessment Survey**

### **Executive Summary**

#### **Library Usage**

*The Stony Brook Libraries are used by most faculty, however there are significant differences in the patterns of usage across academic areas.* Faculty within the Humanities disciplines report much more frequent use of Library facilities, material housed in the Library, and services such as Interlibrary Loan, than do faculty in the Natural and Social Sciences. Faculty in the Sciences rely more heavily upon online resources, and visit the Library buildings less frequently.

- Overall, 94% of respondents report using the Library buildings at least once each semester. Of these, 47% visit at least once a week, 37% at least once a month, and 10% at least once a semester. Faculty in the Humanities report visiting the Library far more often than those in the Sciences and Social Sciences. Comparing across disciplines, 74% of faculty within the Humanities report weekly visits, compared with 39% of those in the Social Sciences, and 43% of those in the Sciences.
- When asked to compare the importance of materials physically housed in the library with those found online, 42% of respondents rely more on material that physically resides in the library, 31% on digitally stored material, and 25% rely on both equally. Consistent with responses to the previous question, comparison across disciplines indicate that faculty in the Humanities rely much more heavily on material housed within the Library than do those in the Natural Sciences and Social Sciences. 74% of respondents in the Humanities rely more heavily on resources housed in the Library, while 6% rely more heavily on digitally stored material. 54% of faculty in the Social Sciences report relying more heavily on material housed in the Library, and 33% on digitally stored material. Of respondents in the Natural Sciences, only 30% rely more heavily on resources housed within the Library, whereas 39% rely more heavily on digitally stored materials.
- STARS is accessed on a regular basis by 87% of respondents, with 51% reporting weekly usage, 26% monthly, and 10% using it at least once each semester. 74% of respondents within the Humanities report weekly use of STARS, compared with 60% in the Social Sciences and 43% in the Sciences.
- 85% of respondents report using the Library's online resources. Weekly access of online resources is reported by 70% of faculty within the Sciences, by 60% with the Social Sciences, and by 33% within the Humanities. Respondents from the Humanities are more likely to access these resources from both their offices and the Library building, whereas those in the Sciences and Social Sciences rely more on office access. Half of the respondents also access online resources from their homes.
- With regard to services provided by the Library, Interlibrary Loan is considered to be very important for 60% of respondents, somewhat important for 21%, and either not very important or not important at all for 18%. For faculty within the Humanities disciplines, 96% of respondents find the service either very or somewhat important, compared with

81% in the Social Sciences, and 75% in the Sciences . Materials are put on Reserve each semester by 41% of respondents, at least once a year by 20%, and less than that, or never, by 37%, and this did not vary significantly across disciplines.

- Half of the respondents who use the Libraries report visiting the Main (Melville) building most often. Taken by academic disciplines, 89% of faculty in the Humanities and 87% in Social Sciences use the Main Library most often. In the Sciences 27% of respondents report using the Main Library, 32% of report using the Math/Physics/Astronomy Library most often, and 36% use either the Marine Sciences, Chemistry, Computer Science or Health Sciences Library.
- 48% of faculty report that they use libraries other than those at Stony Brook. In approximately half of these cases, the reasons for using other libraries is a geographic one: either another Library is closer to home, or the respondent is traveling. The other half of visits to another library are generally due to the need for specialized materials. Faculty in the Humanities and Social Sciences are more likely to visit other libraries, and their reasons are much more frequently related to obtaining materials only available in certain libraries.
- Two-thirds of respondents report using other online resources not provided by the Library and this did not vary significantly across disciplines.
- When asked several hypothetical questions based upon the scenario that there were no library buildings but only online services, approximately 80% of faculty felt that this would have a negative effect on their research, their teaching, and their students' success.

### **Assessment of Library**

*Overall, respondents rated the library as good but not excellent.* Again, significant differences occurred between the disciplines, with Social Science faculty less satisfied with the Library than those in the Sciences and Humanities.

- Overall, 21% of respondents assessed the Library as excellent, 52% good, 19% fair, and 6% poor. This rating was lowest within the Social Sciences, where only 8% rated the Libraries as excellent, 40% good, 39% fair, and 10% poor.
- When asked to compare Stony Brook's library to the library at the University where they received their Ph.D., only about one third of respondents thought that Stony Brook was either better than or as good as their Alma Mater. For over half of the faculty, Stony Brook compared unfavorably, with 29% reporting somewhat worse, and 27% much worse. Again, Social Science faculty held the most negative views, with 44% of respondents expressing the opinion that Stony Brook's Library was much worse.
- Faculty are less than fully satisfied with the Library's resources. Approximately 76% of respondents had suggestions for improvements, with 34% reporting inadequate journal resources, and 30% reporting that the book collection is inadequate. These suggestions did not vary significantly across disciplines.

### **Use of Library for Research & Teaching**

*The Stony Brook Libraries, including both physical and online resources, are considered by faculty to be more central to research than to teaching. Despite the importance attributed by faculty to both online and physical resources in their own research, these resources are less central to undergraduate education and appear to be somewhat underutilized within the classroom.*

- The Stony Brook Libraries, including both physical and online resources, are considered to be very important to the work and research of 85% of respondents, somewhat important to 9%, and not important to 5%. The libraries are seen as somewhat less central to teaching, however. In assessing the importance to their teaching and successful student performance in their classes, 63% felt that the Libraries are very important, 25% somewhat important, and 10% not very important or not important at all.
- 74% of respondents consider STARS and the Library's online resources to be very important to their research. These resources are considered somewhat important by 12%, and not important by 12%. While similar attitudes emerged for their graduate students' education, respondents were more divided when asked about the importance of these resources to the work expected of undergraduates; only 30% felt these resources were very important, 30% somewhat important, and 33% not very important or important at all to undergraduate class assignments. For faculty in the Sciences, where 70% of respondents report using online resources and databases at least once a week, undergraduate use of such resources was considered a lower priority with 54% of science faculty rating these resources as either very or somewhat important to their undergraduates, 20% as not very important, and 18% as not important at all.
- As further evidence of the library's greater perceived importance to research than teaching, only about one-third of respondents reported requiring undergraduate students to use the Library databases. 25% of respondents reported that they or their classes had ever received instruction in the use of Library online databases or resources.

### **Study Procedures**

The study was based on a telephone survey of West Campus tenured and tenure-track faculty. The survey questions were drafted by E. Christian Filstrup, Director of Libraries, Paul Wiener, Audio-Visual Librarian, and Leonie Huddy, Director of the Center for Survey Research. The study was designed to assess faculty usage and satisfaction with various resources and services of the Stony Brook University Libraries. The survey was conducted by the Center for Survey Research, State University of New York at Stony Brook between January 30, 2002 and March 5, 2002. Faculty were called at their office telephone numbers during daytime business hours and early evening hours. Up to 17 attempts were made to reach all respondents, and in cases where the sample included wrong numbers, attempts were made to locate the faculty member through campus directories and the department.

### Sample

A random sample of 493 faculty was drawn from the total population of 635. Faculty members' department affiliations were grouped into four discipline categories: Humanities, Social Sciences, (Natural) Sciences and Other (see Table 2 below for breakdown of categories). Included within the "Other" category were 8 administrative faculty, 8 Physical Education faculty, and 1 case in which department information was missing from the data and could not be obtained. Out of the 493 faculty selected, 50 were not eligible because they were on sabbatical, on leave or away from campus for the semester, no longer with the University, or not tenured/tenure track. In 17 cases the telephone numbers given were incorrect, non-working, or out of order, and new numbers could not be obtained. This left a total of 426 valid numbers.

Completed interviews were conducted with 301 respondents, resulting in an overall response rate of 71%. The response rate for the Sciences was 81%, for Social Sciences 58%, and for the Humanities 58%. While refusal rates did not vary significantly over the disciplines, response rates did vary due to the fact that faculty in the Humanities and Social Sciences were more difficult to reach in their offices than were those in the Sciences. (These individuals are classified as non-contacts in the table below). For a breakdown of the response rates and disposition categories, please see Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Response Rates by Discipline**

<i>Disposition Category</i>	<i>Sciences</i>	<i>Social Sciences</i>	<i>Humanities</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Completes</i>	81% (187)	59% (52)	58% (54)	67% (8)	71% (301)
<i>Refusals</i>	4% (9)	1% (1)	2% (2)	0% (0)	3% (12)
<i>Non-Contacts</i>	16% (36)	40% (36)	40% (37)	33% (4)	27% (113)
<i>Total</i>	100% (232)	100% (89)	100% (93)	100% (12)	100% (426)

*Note:* Entries are the percentage of faculty in each category. The number of faculty in each category is listed in parentheses.

### Questionnaire

The questionnaire included fewer than 50 questions that probed a range of issues concerning the faculty use of the Library's facilities and resources. The interview began with a series of questions about faculty visits to the Stony Brook Libraries and libraries other than Stony Brook. There was a set of questions regarding usage of the STARS online catalog and online databases, including how often respondents use the systems and from what location, and what databases they use most often, and the importance of these resources to both teaching and research.

A set of questions related to the importance of various library services, including Interlibrary loan, Reserves, Listservs and E-mail. Following that, respondents were asked a series of hypothetical questions to assess the importance of the Library Buildings compared with access to on-line resources. The next set of questions asked respondents to rate the Library, and compare it to the Library at the University where their Ph.D. was obtained. The final questions related to satisfaction with the assistance provided by the Library, whether respondents had tried to contact Library staff with problems or suggestions, and whether they felt that their requests or suggestions had resulted in a change of Library resources or services.

**Table 2: Departments in Each Discipline Category**

**Social Sciences:**

Anthropology  
Economics  
History  
Linguistics  
Political Science  
Psychology  
Social Sciences  
Sociology

**Humanities:**

Africana Studies  
Art  
Comparative Studies  
English  
European Languages  
Hispanic Languages  
Music  
Philosophy  
Theater  
Women's Studies  
Writing Program

**Other:**

Dean For Enrollment  
Management  
Physical Education  
Physical Education Activity

**Natural Sciences:**

Applied Mathematics And Statis  
Biochemistry  
Biomedical Engineering Program  
Chemistry  
Computer Science  
Ecology And Evolution  
Electrical Engineering  
Geosciences  
Harriman School For Mgmt & Pol  
Inst. For Terrest/Planet Atmos  
Inst.For Theoretical Physics  
Institute For Mathematical Sci  
Marine Environmental Studies  
Marine Sciences Center  
Materials Science & Engineerng  
Mathematics  
Mechanical Engineering  
Mineral Physics Institute  
Neurobiology And Behavior  
Physics & Astronomy  
Technology & Society  
Undergraduate Programs In Biol  
Waste Management Institute