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Research Studies, Reports, and Surveys on the Web: Quality Resources for Internet-Focused Students

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Research Studies, Reports, and Surveys on the Web

Quality Resources for Internet-Focused Students

Students and the Internet

Surveys and reports have appeared in recent years showing students' strong attachment to the Internet. A Burst Media survey in July, 2007 of 439 traditional-aged college students found that 33 percent of them spent more than 10 hours per week online, and 19.6 percent spent more than 20 hours on the Internet. By contrast, just 16.6 percent spent more than 10 hours a week watching television.¹ The "ECAR Study of Undergraduate Students and Information Technology, 2007," based on online survey responses from 27,846 college students, also indicated strong usage of the Internet. This study found that 91.5 percent of students had access to high-speed Internet, and they used the Internet, on average, 18 hours a week.²

The 2006 OCLC report, "College Students' Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources," showed a strong student preference for using the Internet when doing research.

A total of 396 students were included in this survey, and it included a wide range of ages – from 15 to 57. Nearly 90 percent of the students indicated that they began their search on a particular topic with an Internet search engine, while only 2 percent began with a library web site or with an online database.³

Marc Prensky, in his insightful article, "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants," notes the degree to which the present generation of students is focused on technology and online activities. He states that "today's students ... represent the first generations to grow up with this new technology. They have spent their entire lives surrounded by and using computers, videogames, digital music players, video cams, cell phones, and all the other toys and tools of the digital age."⁴ These college students are digitally-minded in a way none have been previously, and this creates challenges for the research librarian.

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ABSTRACT

Librarians frequently complain that students prefer searching the Internet to searching academic databases when doing research. There certainly is good reason to think that students are more interested in searching Google than searching on a library site, as studies have confirmed. However, the response to this situation does not have to be an adversarial one. Librarians certainly want to guide the student to the quality print and online resources available specifically through the library; however, they also can guide the student to quality resources available freely on the web, such as online research studies, reports, and surveys.

It makes sense to reach students in their own online habitat, because they likely will be more open to library initiatives in that setting.

Reaching Students in the Internet Environment

One approach librarians have taken is to reach out to students on their own technological turf. Chat reference is an example of this approach. Meredith Farkas, in her article, "Going Where Patrons Are," argues that librarians should reach out to students at MySpace and Facebook sites, since this is where students spend a great deal of time.⁵ It makes sense to reach students in their own online habitat, because they likely will be more open to library initiatives in that setting.

Along the same lines, another way to reach students with quality academic resources is by introducing them to research studies, reports and surveys available on the web. While one can most easily locate these by visiting specific research sites, it is also possible to locate these through Google searches.⁶ A student wanting to find research information on distance education, for example, could simply enter "distance education survey" (without quotes) on Google, and one of the results on the first page is a significant 2007 survey of community college students, with charts and graphs included.⁷

As a general rule, one can search on Google by entering a particular topic and then add the word "research," "report," "poll," "survey," or "statistics." Which word one uses first is partly determined by the kind of information one is seeking, but usually you can get quality information by searching in this way. Of course, there still is the concern about selecting credible web sites, but the student likely will be more attentive when the discussion is taking place in an Internet search.

There also are a few giant sites for research information that students can search and be confident in the quality of results. One such site is Gary Thompson and Sean Conley's *College & Research Libraries* News Internet resources online article, "Guide to Public Opinion Poll Web Sites: Polling Data from Around the World."⁸ This single Internet article provides links to dozens of excellent polling sites, leading the student to a wealth of polling

and survey data. Also, the Pew Research Center site <http://pewresearch.org>, which also links to seven other subsidiary sites, is an excellent place to gather numerous reports or survey data.

While it is a challenge to reach students who seem so attached to the Internet and reluctant to use other kinds of resources, one approach is to work directly from the Internet to show them how to access good academic materials. Students may well be surprised and pleased to find the kinds of research, survey, and statistical information freely available on the web. †

ENDNOTES

1 "Survey: To Reach College Students, Brands Need to Use Internet," (July, 2007). Burst Media, Corp. Retrieved April 10, 2008, from http://www.burstmedia.com/assets/newsletter/items/2007_07_01.pdf

2 Judith Borreson Caruso and Gail Salaway, "Key Findings: The ECAR Study of Undergraduate Students and Information Technology, 2007," EDUCAUSE Center for Applied Research, September 2007, from <http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ers0706/ekf0706.pdf>

3 Cathy De Rosa, Joanne Cantrell, Janet Hawk, and Alane Wilson (2006). "College Student's Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources: A Report to the OCLC Membership," Dublin, Ohio: OCLC Online Computer Library Center. Retrieved June 8, 2008, from <http://www.oclc.org/reports/pdfs/studentperceptions.pdf>

4 Marc Prensky, "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants," (October, 2001). *On the Horizon – NCB University Press*. Retrieved June 8, 2008, from <http://www.marcprensky.com/writing/Prensky%20-%20Digital%20Natives,%20Digital%20Immigrants%20-%20Part1.pdf>

5 Meredith Farkas, (April, 2007) "Going Where Patrons Are," *American Libraries* 38 (4). Retrieved June 8, 2007, from Academic Search Complete database.

6 A handout listing three and one-half pages of good sites for surveys, studies, and reports is available through the ACL web site <http://www.acl.org> in the members-only section. It would be found in the section on 2007 ACL Presentation Handouts.

7 Fred Lokken, Lynda Womer, and Christine Mullins (April, 2008). "2007 Distance Education Results: Tracking the Impact of e-learning in Community Colleges," Instructional Technology Council. Retrieved June 8, 2008, from <http://4.79.18.250/file.php?file=/1/ITCAnnualSurveyMarch2008.pdf>

8 Gary Thompson and Sean Conley (October, 2006) "Guide to Public Opinion Poll Web Sites: Polling Data from Around the World," *C&RL News*, 67 (9). Retrieved June 8, 2007, from <http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlpubs/crlnews/backissues2006/october06/opinionpoll.cfm>