

How do people discover new things in the library?

Interviews with library users

In order to encourage patrons to use more of what the library has to offer, we interviewed them to learn about the context around their library use.

We asked questions like “How do you feel about the library?” “What is the research process like?” and “How do you discover new things at the library?”

The answers they gave provide useful background information to better promote new library resources and services.

Attitudes and Behaviors

Sometimes I go to the website thinking I need to get something done and I'll end up browsing a bunch of links. I tend to do that on weekends, but also at in-between times.



Annie, a 4th year undergrad

By the time I try something new out, it has usually crossed my consciousness in some other way. My preceptor suggested I try one of the new interlibrary loan services. So when I saw your news story about it I already had a vague idea of what it was about.



Bill, a graduate student

I'm interested in the digital humanities in general, even though that's a fuzzy concept for a lot of people. I've written a few papers on video games. Game studies is something I'm really interested in, but I'm also interested in media literacy.



Tyler, a 3rd year undergrad

I'd like to read articles about someone who is really interesting and a bad ass in a field that generally ties into my interests. For me, it's not really interesting unless they're doing really interesting stuff in the field.



Aaron, a science researcher

I do philosophy of religion, but I don't really consider what I do research in any sense. I work with books and texts but that's really it. It's more like playing with other people's concepts.



Sarah, a humanities researcher

There's something radically political about making access to information universal, in spite of companies and in spite of government. I see something radically left about being part of libraries.



Joy, a graduate student

THE MICRO-BREAK

When people sit down to work on their computers, before beginning “real work”, they will often take a small break to check their social media, email, or the news. Many of the people we spoke with reserved some time to “dork around online” at certain times of the day.

For the people who come to the library's homepage, library news stories are often an excuse to take a short break online.

LEARNING THE LIBRARY A BIT AT A TIME

Researchers in the humanities and social sciences develop individualistic approaches to research. When it comes to learning to use new databases or new library services, they tend to do it in a very ad-hoc way.

When they do try something new, they build on their existing knowledge of the way the research process and the library works.

GENERALLY INTERESTING THINGS

Although researchers often specialize in very esoteric topics, the people we spoke with enjoy being part of a larger community of researchers, and they are very interested in what people outside of their areas of specialization are up to.

Students and beginning researchers often cultivate these general interests and pick a specialization from them.

BAD-ASSES IN THE FIELD

When it comes to reading news stories about people, researchers are very interested in reading stories by and about the top people in different fields.

If a researcher were to read a news story about a librarian, it should demonstrate the librarian's expertise in their field.

MAKING NEW CONNECTIONS

In the humanities and social sciences, creating new associations and exploring ideas from different perspectives is often an important part of the work.

Although someone like a science researcher will often read news articles about the humanities, certain types of research projects have built-in incentives to explore neighboring topics when they come up.

WHAT MAKES LIBRARIES UNIQUE?

People think of libraries as a kind of neutral zone: a kind of place that is ideologically very different from private corporations, from the media, or even from the university departments the library serves.