

Monash Library Database Usage Survey

Simon Huggard, Systems Librarian, Monash University Library
Simon.Huggard@lib.monash.edu.au

Judy Hopley, Assistant Divisional Librarian, Monash University Library
Judy.Hopley@lib.monash.edu.au

David Groenewegen, Digital Resources Librarian, Monash University Library
David.Groenewegen@lib.monash.edu.au

David Horne, Subject Librarian, Business and Economics, Monash University Library
David.Horne@lib.monash.edu.au

Lisa Smith, Customer Services Librarian, Law Library, Monash University Library
Lisa.Smith@lib.monash.edu.au

George Leighfield, Customer Services Librarian, Hargrave-Andrew Library,
Monash University Library
George.Leighfield@lib.monash.edu.au

Abstract:

Monash University Library (MUL) subscribes to approximately 200 electronic databases covering the full range of disciplines taught and researched at Monash University. A survey of users of these databases was conducted during March and April, 2001. The aim of the survey was to gain an understanding about the ways that users discover and select databases and the experiences they have when using these resources.

Feedback from users was predominantly focussed on the following issues: the need for quicker and simpler links to the many and varied databases; the difficulty of selecting relevant databases; improved search interfaces; better and more immediate online help; fewer technical problems and a reduction in password checks

Introduction

This paper provides a preliminary report on the Monash University Library (MUL) Database Usage Survey from inception through implementation to analysis of results.

The research team working on the survey plan to publish a final report when a full statistical analysis of the data has been completed and cross-tabulated with other relevant data. The final report will also include a comprehensive analysis of the comments provided by survey respondents and recommendations for future action to ensure that improvements are implemented.

Background

The need for a survey of users was originally discussed by a working group of the MUL Online/Ondisc Sub-committee in the mid 1990's. The terms of reference for this committee include the responsibility for selection of major online databases and locally networked CD-ROM databases. Committee members considered that a survey would be the best method to obtain information that would both assist in decision-making and ensure that the library maximises its investment of funds and staff resources in the provision of electronic information. Work on a survey was delayed for a number of reasons including the introduction of a new library system, Voyager, and the subsequent development of a databases web page.

A research team was eventually formed early in 2000 to plan a survey. The group made a submission for funding to support a databases survey to the MUL Research Committee in March 2000. Following approval of this submission, the research team commenced detailed work on the survey. Members of the research team are listed in Appendix One.

Methods, techniques and dissemination of results

The research team determined that the following would result in the conduct of a successful survey and its use:

- determine the aims and desired outcomes of the survey;
- research the current literature about database usage surveys and electronic survey techniques;
- decide upon the scope, size and timing of the survey, including any other software-based data collection that may be needed;
- design the survey questionnaire;
- design the web form for hosting the survey;
- gain approval for the research from the Monash University Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans (SCERH);
- decide upon a method of linking the survey from various locations;
- establish methods to publicise the survey to users;
- design the data extraction and compilation methods;
- choose an appropriate professional organisation or individual to provide a comprehensive statistical analysis of the data;
- evaluate responses, analyse statistical data and make recommendations for improvements;
- write the report;

- present the report to the MUL Research Committee;
- distribute customised data to relevant library staff for action; and
- publish and promote the survey results to users and library staff.

Because research team members were working full time in various positions at different locations, it was not possible for them to work continuously on the survey. A decision was made to hold meetings only when necessary and for members to work independently on allocated tasks, communicating by email and telephone as required. This informal method of working meant that the time normally taken arranging regular meetings, setting agendas, travelling and taking of minutes was available for work on the survey. However, it also meant that as strict deadlines were not being enforced, other work pressures and temporary staffing changes occurring during the development and implementation stages of the survey slowed progress from time to time.

Aims

The research team members considered a number of topics that could usefully be covered in the survey. The aims of the survey were focussed on the following topics.

1. To achieve an understanding of how Monash University staff and students make choices about which library databases to use.
2. To determine the level of usage of the different access pathways, and the physical location of users when accessing databases.
3. To find out what sorts of factors make choosing a relevant database difficult, and what barriers there are to gaining access to a chosen database.
4. To find out what sources of help users consult if they have difficulty using a database.
5. To understand the experience of users when extracting material from databases.

Literature review

Major research projects, such as the Digital Libraries Initiative at the University of Illinois (Bishop *et al.*, 2000), the SuperJournal (Norman and Hibbott, 1999) and JUSTEIS (Armstrong *et al.*, 2001) projects, are examples of the efforts being made to properly understand how best to provide a service to information users in a fast evolving and complex online environment. Also underpinning such research is the imperative for libraries to justify huge funding investments in online information resources (Lippincott, 1998).

The literature points to a range of potential data collection methods. Some studies have employed transaction log analysis to measure users' online activity (Peters, 1998). Other means that have been employed in evaluating information access and use include interviews, postal or email questionnaires and focus groups. Often a combination of these approaches has been used, as in the case of the JUSTEIS, Digital Libraries Initiative and SuperJournal projects.

A self administered online survey of database use presented itself as the most cost effective and efficient means of collecting data from MUL database users, given the geographic diversity of the Monash community. As the survey specifically excluded those who had not previously used the database access pages, this ensured that the survey target population had access to the Internet.

Online surveys also avoid the costs and administration associated with a mail out, provide more immediate responses, and as the receipt of responses is automated, data entry errors are eliminated (Lazar and Preece, 1999). In contrast to transaction logging, a survey makes it possible to obtain opinions and feedback from participants based on their experience of the interface, a fundamental aim of the research being undertaken. Importantly, the research team included members with the necessary technical knowledge and skills to mount an online survey and collect the resulting data.

Kennedy (2000) and Kumar (1996) provided useful guidance in developing the survey format and questions. Early in the planning the team also consulted with Frances Morrissey, a former colleague doing similar research for a PhD, in relation to survey methodology.

The research team was mindful of the concern expressed by Hernon and Schwartz (2000), in commenting on the relatively recent and increasing use of Web-based surveys, that their design and use adhere to ethical guidelines and that promises made to survey participants are acted upon. Accordingly, approval for the project was received from the ethics committee (SCERH). The intention of the team is to fully report our findings to the library and its users, so that they can inform the planning of enhancements to new and existing services provided by the library.

Scope, size and timing of survey

The survey was designed to obtain information from primary clientele, that is, the staff and students of Monash University, although non-Monash users were also included. In order to obtain useful answers to the questions posed, it was necessary to target the survey to those users who were already familiar with MUL databases. Those using the databases for the first time were specifically requested not to fill in the survey. In an endeavour to expedite approval for the survey from SCERH it was necessary to guarantee respondent anonymity. As personal information on respondents could not be collected it was not possible to offer incentives such as prizes to encourage users to respond.

The research team agreed that in order to maximise the response rate, the survey should be conducted during one of the peak usage periods for library databases. Subsequently the survey ran during the months of March and April, 2001.

Survey design and questions

To ensure that the aims listed above were fulfilled considerable time was spent developing the survey questions and considering survey design. Research was undertaken on questionnaire and survey design and the group sought advice from staff experienced in conducting surveys to ensure that the databases survey would be satisfactory. Questions were revised a number of times during the development phase and a number of library staff participated in a trial of the survey. The final version of the survey forms Appendix Two of this paper.

Implementation and publicity

The survey was conducted from 22 March to 30 April, 2001. As it was a web based questionnaire it was decided to provide links to it from as many relevant places as possible. The survey form was put in the place of the normal MUL Databases page (see Appendix Three), and offered users the option of bypassing the form and moving directly to the normal page. Other links were available from the Voyager catalogue (see Appendix Four) and various MUL pages. Library staff, in particular subject librarians, were encouraged to publicise the survey to Monash staff and students and a global email message was sent to all Monash staff at the commencement of the survey period.

Survey response rate

A total of 1,745 users responded to the survey. This result was considered by the research team and others involved in survey work, to represent a good response rate.¹ Table Ten (see section headed *Survey Results*) provides a summary of survey respondents by designation. Monash University students were the largest group to respond, followed by Monash academic staff (the prime user groups targeted by the survey).

A significant number of users, a total of 2,958, submitted blank survey forms. Although options were provided to both bypass and quit the survey via web page links, it appears that many users chose to submit a blank response in order to proceed past the form. It may also be the case that first time users missed the introductory note advising that the survey was not relevant for them.

In addition to the responses to the questions, feedback by way of comments has provided a great deal of useful information. It was obvious from the large number of respondents who provided comments that users welcomed the opportunity to provide feedback.

Key issues arising from the survey

A preliminary analysis of the survey results, including comments provided by respondents, indicated a number of common issues that need to be addressed. These include:

- access pathways need to be simplified;
- help material, including the Virtual Librarian², FAQs, technical help and pathways to help screens need to be re-examined;
- printed help guides need to be revised;
- additional methods of online 'live' help need to be investigated;
- license levels for databases need to be realigned according to usage patterns and user demand;
- database selection screens need to be re-written, to include descriptions that will assist users to choose relevant databases;
- technical access problems need to be fixed; and
- additional staff assistance is required.

The research team, in conjunction with the MUL Online/Ondisc Sub-committee will be considering these outcomes and framing recommendations to address these issues.

Preliminary Survey Results

The following results are presented as a preliminary report only, as a full statistical analysis of the data is presently being undertaken. The research team intends publishing a full report when the final analysis is completed, recommendations are determined and strategies for implementation are decided.

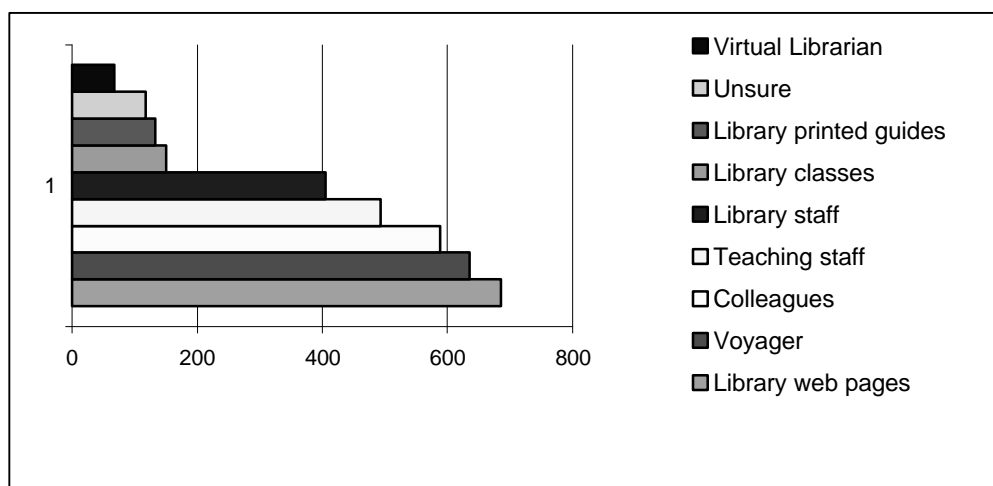
Information provided below should be considered in conjunction with the survey questions and the multiple-choice options presented to respondents (see Appendix Two)

Question 1. How do you usually find out which databases are provided by Monash University Library? (select all that apply)

Table 1: Finding out about MUL databases

Library web pages	686
Monash Library catalogue (Voyager)	635
Colleagues/other students	588
Monash Teaching staff	493
Library staff	405
Library classes	150
Library printed guides	133
Unsure	117
Virtual Librarian	67

Figure 1



Comments

- With 686 or 39% of respondents selecting library web pages and 635 (36%) selecting Voyager to find out about library databases, the large amount of library staff time put into developing web pages and the catalogue interface is justified and should continue.
- Word of mouth, either through colleagues, students and/or library staff also ranks highly. In order to ensure that information about library resources is correct, it will be

important that library staff increase efforts to publicise databases in as many forums as possible to Monash staff and students.

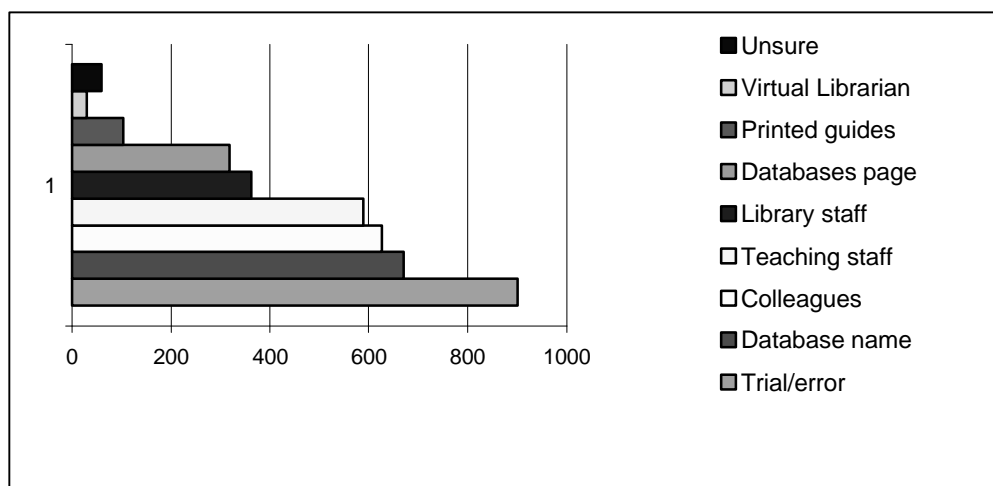
- Publicising databases via library classes, printed guides and the Virtual Librarian are less popular methods for users to find out about databases. A review of these staff intensive activities may be necessary.

Question 2. Of the available databases, how do you decide which one(s) to use? (select all that apply).

Table 2: Choosing databases

Trial and error	900
Database name	671
Colleagues/Other students	627
Monash teaching staff	589
Library staff	362
Databases page	318
Printed guides	103
Virtual Librarian	30
Unsure	59

Figure 2



Comments

- There has been discussion amongst library staff in regard to the subject categories used to organise the databases (as well as the level of alphabetical listing) and the level of detail about the subject coverage, dates and full text availability within them. Often the first information about a database presented to the user, is the technical information about getting into the databases from on and off campus and what to do if there are problems. This may not be good practice based upon the responses to the survey relating to resource selection.
- The apparent outcome of this question is that the arrangement of the databases on the databases page and content descriptions are not matching user needs. Even though trial and error forms the highest method of access (51%), this may not be a problem if

trial and error results in users trying a link that seems correct and relevant results are obtained. However, the fact that this number is so high and users selected this often, suggests that the 'error' part of trial and error is highly significant.

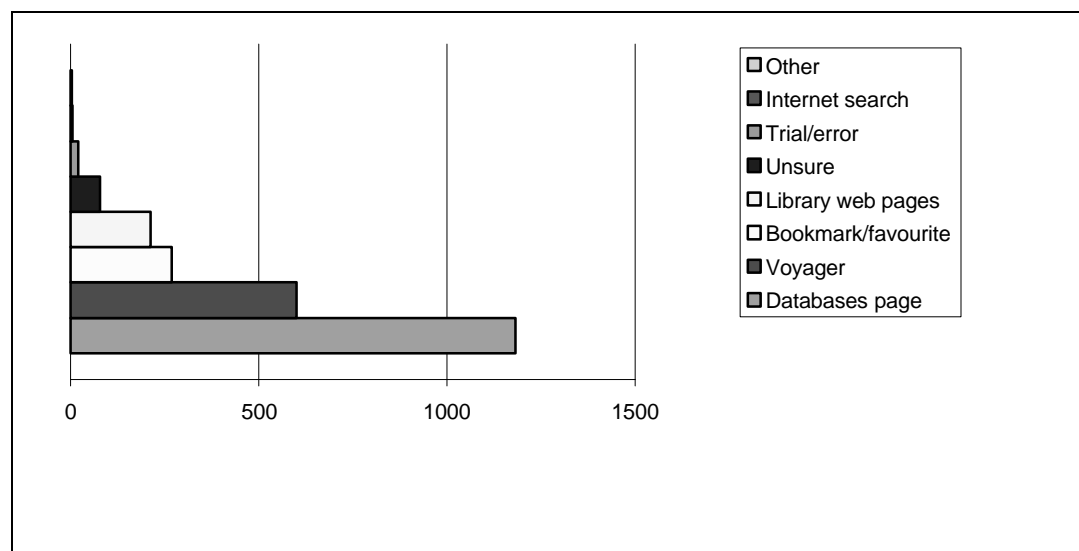
- The fact that the databases page itself is very low in the responses (18%), along with the rather high number who use just the name of the database (38%) suggests that there is something wrong in the organization, names and descriptions of databases on the library databases page.
- The percentages of respondents who used colleagues (35%) or teaching staff (33%) to recommend what to use, rather than library resources themselves (staff, Voyager, guides, Virtual Librarian) is a concern. This is also brought out in the general comments provided under Question 12. Of those who gave general comments (24%), forty-one (almost 10% of those providing comments) indicated that they required much better descriptions of content and relevance of databases on the databases page.

Question 3. How do you get to the database you want to use? (select all that apply)

Table 3: Accessing databases

Library databases page	1182
Search the Monash Voyager catalogue	601
Bookmark/favourite	269
Library web pages arranged by subject or faculty	212
Unsure	78
Trial and error	20
Internet search	5
Other search software (<i>EndNote</i> and <i>SciFinder Scholar</i>)	3

Figure 3



Comments

- It is not unexpected that most people (67%) use the databases page for connection as this method of access has been heavily promoted to users since its inception two years ago, and is easily found via links from top-level library pages, including the Voyager

catalogue. The databases page is intended to be clear and simple in layout, a factor that may also encourage a high level of usage. Placement of the survey form in front of the standard databases page may also have biased the sample.

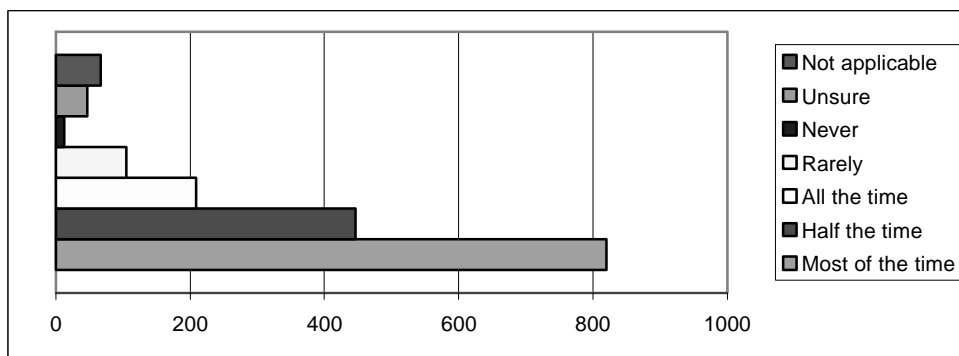
- The popularity of the databases page as an entry point has implications for plans to encourage users to search multiple databases from the University Portal pages. These pages are at a different location, and provide a range of information including direct course and enrolment-related information, and add-ons such as weather information, news headlines and library information.
- Searching the Voyager catalogue for databases is also a popular entry point (34%) and may account for some confusion as to what exactly constitutes a database. An example is *Elsevier's ScienceDirect* that can be searched like a database, but is mostly treated as a list of electronic journals. User methods of access may depend upon whether they are searching for relevant articles on a topic, or whether they already have a list of titles. If the first, it is probable that they will choose the databases page, if the latter, they may use Voyager to search for full text links.
- The challenge for the library is to decide whether to merge the databases page and the Voyager catalogue. Plans to use a cross-database searching tool from within the University Portal to search both Voyager as a target, and many of the library's databases, may confuse users who are presently clear about their preferred entry point. If, on the other hand, the cross-database searching tool is sophisticated and can provide better links to and within databases and journals, then confusion may not be an issue. Overall, if too much information is provided in large chunks of data from a variety of unknown sources, problems could occur.

Question 4. In your searches this year, did you find useful information?

Table 4: Finding useful information

Most of the time	820
Half the time	446
All the time	209
Rarely	105
Never	13
Unsure	47
Not applicable	67

Figure 4



Comments

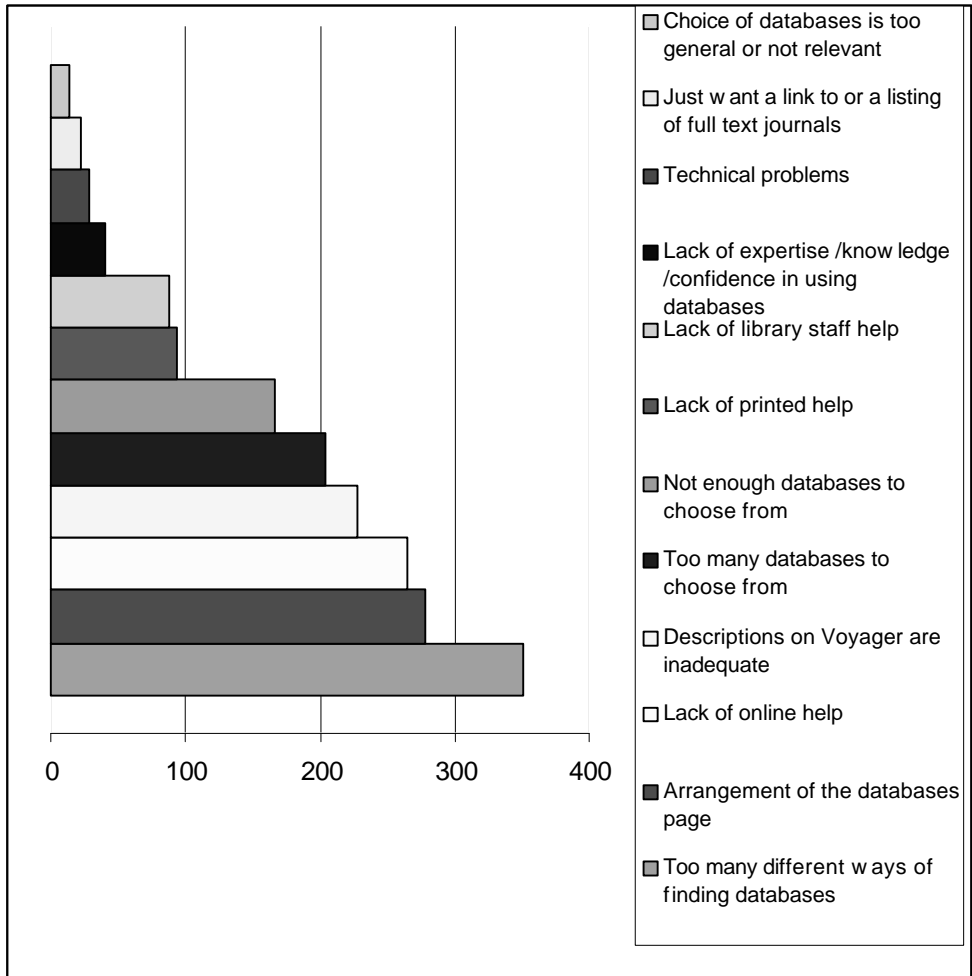
- It appears that most people are happy with the results they obtain: all of the time (209 or 12%) and most of the time (820 or 47%). Some level of frustration must be felt by those who only find what they want half the time (446 or 25%) and a rather high level by those who rarely (105 or 6%) or never (13 or 0.7%) find anything.
- It is not possible to know exactly what criteria users are applying in these judgements, but the issue which needs addressing is the fact that there are many users who are obviously having some level of difficulty.
- Approximately half of the respondents identified themselves as off-campus users. The library needs to consider other methods of providing direct access to qualified staff for this significant group of users.

Question 5. Which issues, if any, make it difficult for you to choose a relevant database? (tick all that apply).

Table 5: Problems choosing relevant databases

Descriptions on the databases page are inadequate	476
None	436
Too many different ways of finding databases	351
Arrangement of the databases page	278
Lack of online help	264
Descriptions on Voyager are inadequate	227
Too many databases to choose from	203
Not enough databases to choose from	166
Lack of printed help	94
Lack of library staff help	87
Lack of expertise/knowledge/confidence in using databases	40
Technical problems	28
Just want a link to or a listing of full text journals	23
Choice of databases is too general or not relevant	14

Figure 5



Comments

The number of responses to each alternative above decreases consistently from the top to the bottom of the list, suggesting the possibility of a “donkey” vote. The final report will provide a statistical analysis of these results. Meanwhile the following trends are noted:

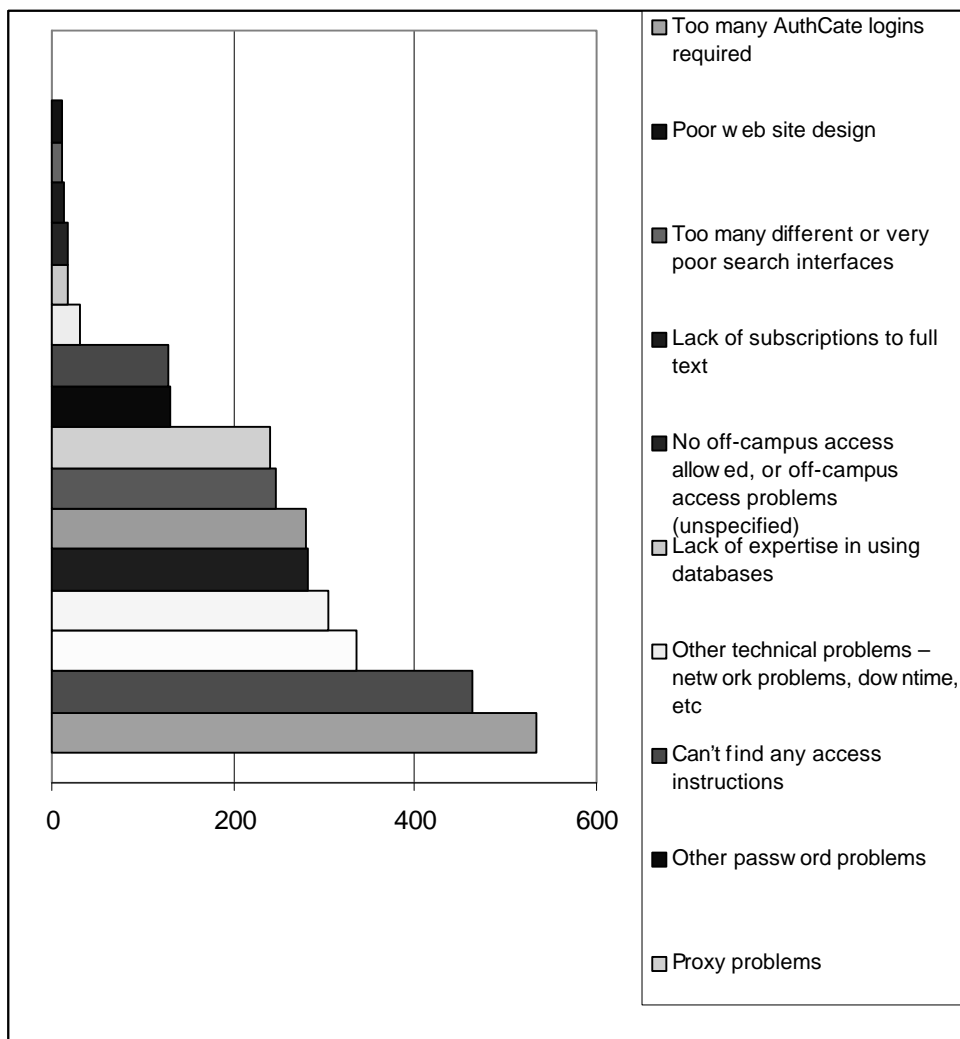
- The highest response rate to the options provided, 25%, found the descriptions on the databases pages inadequate. Comments provided by respondents also confirmed this view. A number of respondents indicated that the arrangement of the databases page was confusing or too complicated.
- It should be noted that 24% of respondents indicated that they did not have any issues in regard to choosing a database. This figure needs to be considered in the context of other responses, such as faculty affiliation, to find out if there is a trend relating to subject area being taught and the level of specific and relevant databases being provided.
- Lack of library staff help and inadequate printed and online help are areas that need addressing. It may be that providing more qualified library staff who can provide immediate and accurate help will be useful, and when direct assistance from librarians is not available, clear, helpful printed material and/or online help is essential. Constant revision of printed material is required in order to ensure that it is up-to-date and relevant.

Question 6. What issues make it difficult for you to access a database? (tick all that apply).

Table 6: Problems accessing databases

Connection speed	533
Being logged off/timed out during a session	464
None	336
Search screens are too confusing	305
AuthCate ³ problems	282
Access instructions are not clear	281
Access refused due to user limit being exceeded	248
Proxy problems	240
Other password problems	130
Can't find any access instructions	128
Other technical problems – network problems, downtime, etc	31
Lack of expertise in using databases	18
No off-campus access allowed, or off-campus access problems (unspecified)	17
Lack of subscriptions to full text	14
Too many different or very poor search interfaces	11
Poor web site design	11
Too many AuthCate logins required	3

Figure 6



Comments

The number of responses to each alternative above decreases consistently from the top to the bottom of the list, suggesting the possibility of a “donkey” vote. The final report will provide a statistical analysis of these results. Meanwhile the following trends are noted:

- Technical problems, particularly, but not exclusively, for off-campus users, were noted by a number of respondents. This is an obvious area of concern and library staff are aware of the issues and problems that can arise.
- Not all technical issues can be solved by the library or the university, as they often relate to the user’s choice of Internet Service Provider, their own computer competence, or to problems with their PC. However, it is understood by the library that the access paths to many databases are complicated and take some time to learn. This is often associated with the strict authentication methods required when providing access on a public web site to expensive and complex information resources. The library aims to provide access to purchased information resources to all authorised Monash users, regardless of location and with no distinction or difference in service level between locations. This aim is often difficult to fulfill

when information providers place complex restrictions on their databases. They may also provide authentication mechanisms that are designed for the commercial sector or individuals and not for shared information resources for a very large and widely spread community of users.

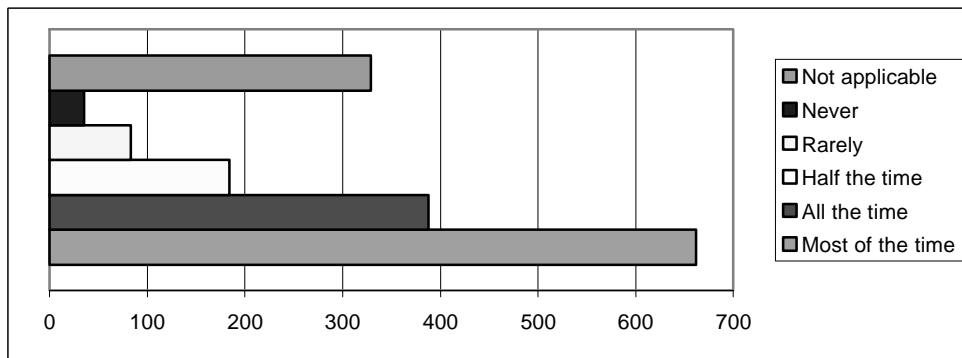
- Many of the technical difficulties chosen, such as proxy problems and connection speed, are outside the direct control of the library. When these problems involve internal connections, library staff will continue to make representations to Monash University Information Technology Services (ITS) to provide solutions. Problems with external connections are more difficult to address and solutions will need to be sought.
- Issues that can be addressed by the library, for example, timeout and user limits, will be reviewed in light of the survey results.
- Instructions regarding AuthCate passwords need revision given the relatively high number of respondents who marked this option.
- There is a clear indication from the library's experiences in dealing with users that they do not want to know why databases are so difficult to access, instead they want quick and easy access to electronic information. This is also the aim of the library, and staff are continuously reviewing options in an endeavour to achieve a seamless service.
- The high level of responses indicating that search interfaces are poorly designed or confusing (17.5%) is an area of concern that should be overcome when the Library Portal is introduced in 2002.
- The response to the option of access being refused due to the user limit being reached (14.2%), is also a problem that needs to be addressed. At the present time the library is investigating access refusal statistics for a number of databases in order to determine the optimum simultaneous user level. Further investigation of the survey responses in relation to faculty affiliation will be needed, in order to identify specific databases where additional simultaneous user licences may be required.

Question 7.a.i. When you are using databases are you able to print the material you want?

Table 7.a.i: Printing from databases

Most of the time	650
All the time	339
Half the time	236
Rarely	109
Never	42
Not applicable	314

Figure 7.a.i



Comments

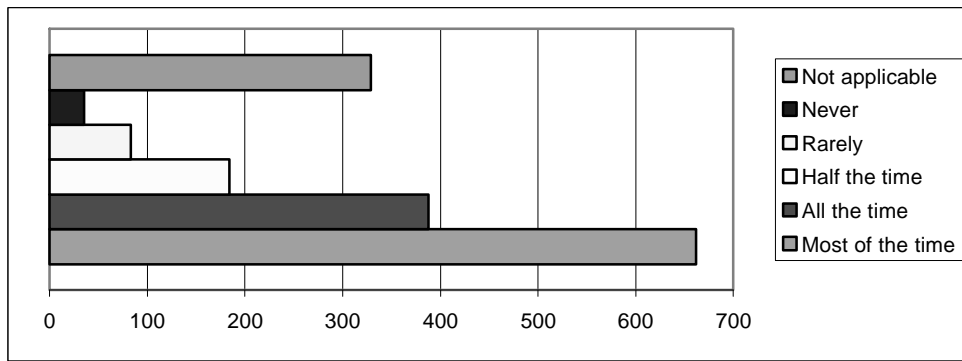
- The majority of users responded that they were able to print what they wanted most of the time (37%) or all of the time (19%).
- A number of respondents (22%) advised that they could only print results half of the time or less. This may be partially explained by the introduction of a new networked printing service introduced at Monash libraries just prior to the survey. Although the new service was an improvement on the past practice that required users to download information to floppy disk and print the results as a file, there were initially a number of problems with networked printing.
- Further printing problems can arise with various databases where they are not totally compatible with the *Netscape* browser, the Monash University standard for on-campus access.

Question 7.a.ii. When you are using databases are you able to save the material you want?

Table 7.a.ii: Saving from databases

Most of the time	662
All the time	388
Half the time	184
Rarely	83
Never	35
Not applicable	329

Figure 7.a.ii



Comments

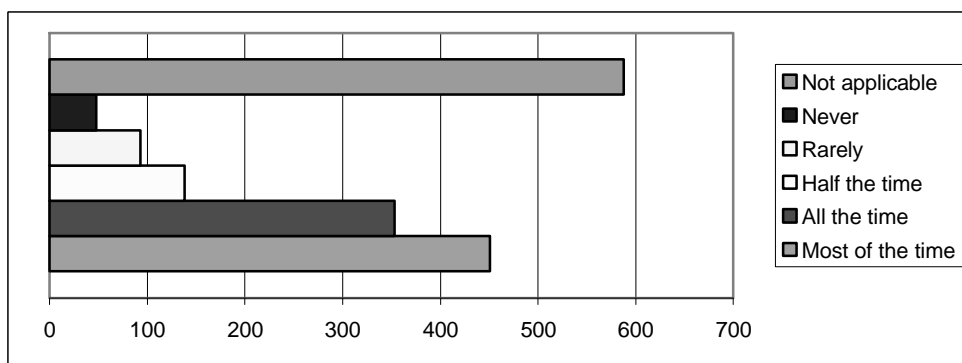
- Most respondents (60%) indicated that they could save material most of the time. For the 17% of users who indicated less success with saving, a review of instructions provided for each database would probably be useful.

Question 7.a.iii. When you are using databases are you able to email the material you want?

Table 7.a.iii: Emailing from databases

Most of the time	451
All the time	353
Half the time	138
Rarely	93
Never	48
Not applicable	588

Figure 7.a.iii



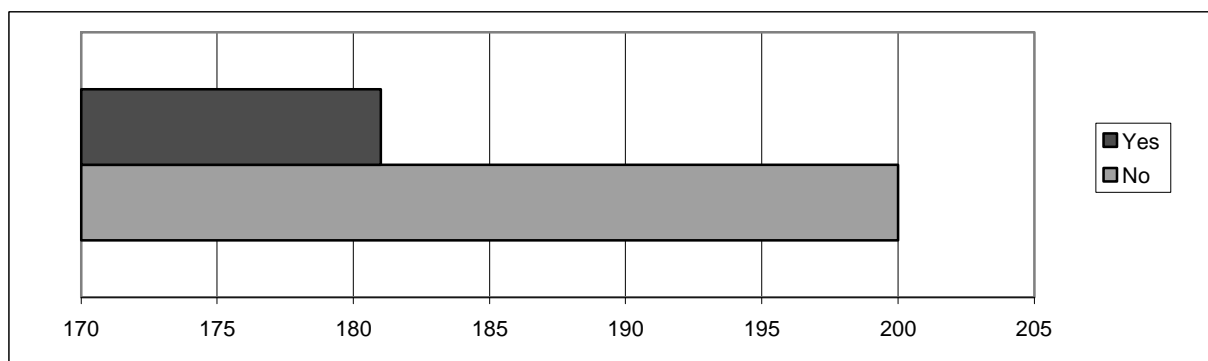
Comments

- The results to this part of Question 7 are similar to the preceding parts relating to printing and saving in that most respondents were successful all or most of the time.

Clearer instructions in regard to email options would probably assist those who indicated that they are less successful.

Question 7b. Are there any databases you have had particular problems with when you have tried to print, save or email?

Figure 7b Problems outputting from particular databases



Comments

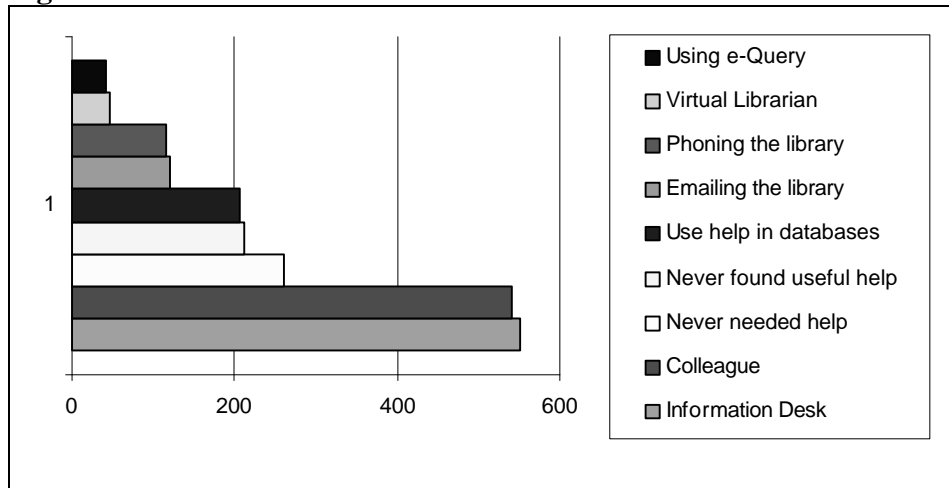
- Approximately 50% of respondents indicated that they had no problems with printing, saving and/or emailing from particular databases. For the remaining 50% who did experience problems it appears that the use of databases can be difficult. Once again, the solution could be to ensure that there are enough qualified staff available for consultation and advice and that printed and online help is improved.
- The numbers of problems for each database need to be considered in conjunction with their relative levels of use. The *Ovid* interface is the most heavily used of all the interfaces offered by MUL, so it is not surprising that most problems were recorded for this service.
- Library staff are aware of particular problems with output for a number of databases, for example, non-PDF formats, large text files and the increasing complexity of file types. Even in the proposed new environment of a single search and retrieval interface from the Library Portal, issues of downloading will require clear instructions and help for users.

Question 8. If you have a problem when using a database, which of the following do you find most helpful? (tick all that apply)

Table 8: Obtaining help

Librarian at Information Desk	550
Friend/colleague	541
Never needed any help	261
Never found any useful help	211
Using the help in the databases	207
Phoning the library	116
Emailing the library	121
Virtual Librarian	47
Using e-Query ⁴	42

Figure 8



Comments

The number of responses to each alternative above decreases consistently from the top to the bottom of the list, suggesting the possibility of a “donkey” vote. The final report will provide a statistical analysis of these results. Meanwhile the following trends are noted:

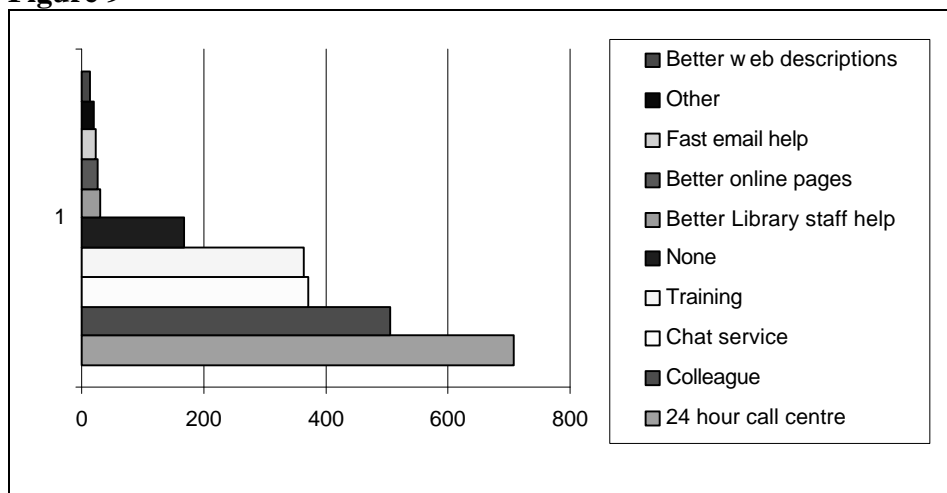
- It is noteworthy that respondents find almost equally helpful a ‘friend/colleague’ or a ‘librarian at an information desk’ when seeking help in using a database. This may raise issues of approachability, convenience or specialist knowledge for the library.
- There is a markedly higher nomination of ‘in person’ rather than ‘remote’ help, which may indicate a preference for the former or may be indicative of convenience and ease of asking for help ‘in person’ rather than via telephone or email. In the case of email requests for help, there is also the factor that there will most likely be a delay in response.
- It is interesting that of the ‘remote help’ services offered to users, respondents regarded phone and email as almost equally ‘helpful’, and that both the Virtual Librarian and e-Query received such low figures. The Virtual Librarian has received quite a high level of promotion by the library, but its online tutorials polled poorly when compared with the high response to other online ‘help in the database’.
- Further consideration may need to be given to the high and almost equal levels of respondents who either do not require help or find none useful.
- The results for this question raise issues in relation to the high number of remote database users indicated in Question 11, in particular in relation to the most appropriate and effective form of help for such users. This also needs to be considered in relation to the ‘potential help services’ offered in Question 9.

Question 9. Which of the following potential help services do you think you would find helpful? (tick all that apply).

Table 9: Potential help services

24 hour general call centre	708
Asking a friend/colleague	504
Online chat service	371
More training sessions	363
None	166
Better or more library staff help	30
Better online help pages/troubleshooting/FAQ	26
Fast email help/discussion groups/news group	24
Other	21
Better web page descriptions of databases	12

Figure 9



Comments

The number of responses to each alternative above decreases consistently from the top to the bottom of the list, suggesting the possibility of a “donkey” vote. The final report will provide a statistical analysis of these results. Meanwhile the following trends are noted:

- Personal and immediate contact with somebody able to deal with the many and varied problems that databases present is desired by many respondents. The specified type for such contact varies and it is unclear whether the selection of face-to-face interaction, or voice-to-voice interaction is influenced by the location of the respondent.
- The level of responses to Question 9 relating to training was quite high (20%). Some of this figure includes those who mentioned training under ‘other’ feedback. This feedback mostly discussed how useful training sessions were, and the problems getting to them in the first few weeks of semester. Others also discussed a need for having training specifically tailored to subject areas and some mentioned a need for training on how to access databases remotely.

- The high number of users (40%) selecting a 24 hour general call centre was interesting. At the time of the survey, the library was only providing a telephone service (MULTELS) during normal working hours Monday to Friday (9am to 6pm). Since the survey, this has been extended to 9pm on weekday evenings and to 1-5pm on weekends. The library also has an email service that is staffed over the same range of hours, but only guarantees replies within the following 24 hours, or longer if the message needs to be forwarded on to another person for expert help (the user receives an immediate message informing them if this has occurred).
- It is apparent from the survey that the database pages need to be better designed to provide information about technical problems, either via providing clearer troubleshooting instructions and FAQs, or with better links to a 'live' person, via chat, quicker email support or a 24 hour call centre.
- A number of respondents mentioned the problem of one phone line and the usefulness of a chat service to help overcome this issue. The importance of having well trained, knowledgeable staff available to help solve problems was also noted.
- The high level (28%) of responses relating to 'asking a friend or colleague' for help raises the question of whether library staff help is inadequate, or whether an option for choosing 'library staff help' should have been included in this question. Only 30 respondents (1.7% overall and 32% of respondents providing 'other' ideas) mentioned that they wanted better library staff help or more library staff to help them. This figure requires some cross-referencing with other responses such as location of the user to see if location in a computer laboratory, staff office or at home may be significant factors.
- The low level (9.5%) of respondents who indicated that there are no other services they would find helpful may be of concern. Whether these are users who never need help or those who do not find any 'help' useful, is a question for the research team to ponder.

Question 10. Are you a Monash student, Monash academic staff member, Monash general staff member, other/visitor? If you are from Monash, in which faculties do you study/work? (tick all that apply)

Table 10: Respondents by designation and domain

Monash Students	1309				
Monash Academic Staff	242				
Monash General Staff	61				
Unknown	83				
Other/visitors	50				

Faculty	Students	Academic Staff	General Staff	Total	%
Arts	263	36	7	306	17%
Art and Design	10	1	1	12	1%
Business and Economics	533	49	3	585	32%
Education	46	10	2	58	3%
Engineering	46	25	3	74	4%
Information Technology	108	10	5	123	7%
Law	50	8	1	59	3%
Medicine	173	88	8	269	15%
Pharmacy	9	9	0	18	1%
Science	239	30	7	276	15%
Other	14	6	26	46	3%
Total	1491	272	63	1826	100%

Comments

- The overall number of survey respondents was high and compared favourably with other library-wide surveys, especially when the specialised nature of this survey is taken into account.
- Proportionally, the number of respondents in each category and faculty reflects the general size of these groups, and in this regard, appears to provide a relevant sample across the university.
- It is noteworthy that many students and some staff work across more than one faculty or disciplinary area. This has implications for subject delineation of databases and provision of access via subject groupings. It may also add to the complexity of database selection for some users.

Question 11. From which of the following locations are you most likely to access a library database? (Choose only one).

Table 11: Location when accessing databases

Off campus	842
Library on campus	351
Office on campus	304
Student PC Lab on campus	122
Other	42

Comments

- The high number of off-campus users was not surprising given the emphasis the library places on remote access to databases and the increasing global presence of Monash University. It also confirms related figures, such as declining door count figures that suggest an overall decrease in on-campus presence and the use of resources within physical library sites. This result confirms the appropriateness of the emphasis on remote delivery of both services and support.
- Where on-campus use is concerned, the high proportion of library compared with student computer laboratory use is noteworthy. This may provide useful input to future library design and level of provision of PCs for student use.

Question 12. Do you have any other comments, suggestions or feedback you would like to make about the library's databases services?

Table 12: Summary of key areas of comment, suggestion and feedback

Library's database services are good/great/excellent/beneficial	60
Experience technical or access problems	54
Need better descriptions of content of databases	41
Require more full text	38
Access should be less complicated	36
Need a better search interface	30
Require better or more off-campus access to databases	25
Require more electronic journals or newspapers online	24
Need more relevant databases to my area of research or study	22
Better or more training classes are needed	17
Need an electronic journals listing	7
More simultaneous user licences are needed	7
Require call centre/chat/out of hours help line	6
Printed guide on how to use/access databases is needed	6
Printing problems are a factor	6
Need more PCs in libraries or on-campus	5
Need better online instructions/help/FAQ	5
Single search interface needed	5
Better help from or more library staff are needed	5
Better publicity about databases is needed	5
Hard to find if Monash has print holdings of journals	5
Have problems with PCs in libraries or on-campus	4
Too many databases to choose from	3

Comments

- A number of respondents took the opportunity to provide comments, many providing detailed feedback. Most issues raised have already been noted in the various points in the *Comments* section of preceding questions.

- The topics included in Table 12 provide a summary of the main issues raised by users and will provide a basis for the research team to formulate recommendations for improvements to the provision of library databases.

Question 13. Are you aware of any databases that the library does not currently subscribe to, but that we should consider?

A number of suggestions for new databases were made and will be considered by the MUL Online/Ondisc Sub-committee.

Conclusion

The survey has provided information about how users access library databases and the various problems they encounter. In addition, it has given users an opportunity to provide feedback and make suggestions for improvements. When the detailed data analysis is available, the research team will be in a position to review the results and make recommendations that will ensure, wherever possible, that improvements are implemented. Informing database users about the outcomes of the survey and ensuring that they are kept up-to-date with enhancements and improvements will be a high priority task for the research team.

Another survey will need to be undertaken to ensure that the library is responding to user needs in a continuously changing online environment. The format and questions of the survey administered in 2001 will need to be reviewed by the research team to identify improvements that will ensure that data collected in the future will be meaningful, useful and comparable.

Notes

1. Monash University has approximately 2,500 academic staff and 46,000 students: 37,500 on-campus; 8,400 off-campus (figures for 2001).
2. The Virtual Librarian is an online information literacy service developed by MUL.
3. Monash University login.
4. e-Query is MUL's email reference service.

Bibliography

Armstrong, C., Fenton, R., Lonsdale, R., Stoker, D., Thomas, R., Urquhart, C. (2001), "A study of the use of electronic information systems by higher education students in the UK", *Program*, vol. 35, no. 3, pp.241-262

Bishop A. P. (1998), "Measuring access, use, and success in digital libraries", *Journal of Electronic Publishing*, vol. 4, no. 2.
Accessible at <http://www.press.umich.edu/jep/04-02/bishop.html>

Bishop, A. P., Neumann, L. J., Star, S.L., Merkel, C., Ignacio, E., Sandusky, R. J. (2000), "Digital libraries: Situating use in changing information infrastructure", *Journal of the American Society for Information Science*, Vol. 51, no. 4, pp. 394-413

Gaddis, S. E. (1998), "How to design online surveys", *Training & Development*, June, pp. 67-71

Hernon, P. (2000), "Editorial: Survey research: Time for some changes", *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, vol. 26, no. 2, pp. 83-84

Hernon, P. & Schwartz, C. (2000), "Editorial: Survey research: A time for introspection", *Library & Information Science Research*, vol. 22, no. 2, pp.117-121

Kennedy, J. M. (2000), *Questions About Surveys: What You Wanted to Know and Perhaps Didn't Want to Know*, Paper presented to the American Library Association Annual Meeting, Chicago IL, 6-12 July 2000

Kumar, R. (1996), *Research Methodology: A Step by Step Guide for Beginners*, Addison Wesley Longman, Melbourne

Lazar, J. & Preece, J. (1999), "Designing and implementing Web-based surveys", *Journal of Computer Information Systems*, Summer, pp. 63-67

Lippincott, J. (1998), "Assessing the academic networked environment", *ARL*, 197, pp 14-16

Norman, F. & Hibbott, Y. (1999), "The SuperJournal project: The value of electronic journals to biomedical users", *Health Libraries Review*, 16, pp. 256-276

Peters, T. (1998), "Remotely familiar: using computerized monitoring to study remote use", *Library Trends*, vol. 47, no. 1, pp. 7-20

Websites

ARL Project Description (ARL E-metrics Project) <http://www.ii.fsu.edu/Projects/ARL/>
SuperJournal Project <http://www.superjournal.ac.uk/sj/>
JUSTEIS Project Home Page <http://www.dil.aber.ac.uk/dils/research/justeis/jisctop.htm>

Appendix One: Research team members

The following MUL staff were members of the research team responsible for conducting the Database Usage Survey. All were members of the MUL Online/Ondisc Sub-committee.

David Groenewegen, Digital Resources Librarian

Judy Hopley, Assistant Divisional Librarian, Berwick-Caulfield-Peninsula

David Horne, Subject Librarian, Business and Economics

Simon Huggard, Systems Librarian

George Leighfield, Customer Services Librarian, Hargrave-Andrew Library

Lisa Smith, Customer Services Librarian, Law Library

Gary Weston, Senior Liaison Librarian, MUL, Gippsland undertook a preliminary analysis of the data collected. Some of his work is included in this paper. Research team members acknowledge his contribution.

Appendix Two: MUL Databases Usage Survey Form

Library database use survey 2001

Help us by filling in this survey

This survey has been designed for users of Monash University Library databases. The results of this survey will be used to improve and enhance access to the Library's online services. If you have used Monash databases before, please take a few minutes to fill in this brief survey. All responses are completely confidential and anonymous.

If:

- this is the first time you have used one of Monash's databases
- OR you have filled in this survey form before
- OR you do not wish to fill in this survey

please do not fill in this form and instead [proceed directly to the databases page](#).

For more information about this survey, please contact [Simon Huggard](#), Systems Librarian. The results of this survey will be posted at <http://www/lib.monash.edu.au/databases/results.html>.

1. How do you usually find out which databases are provided by Monash University Library? (select all that apply)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> colleagues/other students | <input type="checkbox"/> library staff |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Monash teaching staff | <input type="checkbox"/> library classes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> library web pages | <input type="checkbox"/> Virtual Librarian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> library printed guides | <input type="checkbox"/> Monash Voyager Catalogue |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> not sure |

2. Of the available databases, how do you decide which one(s) to use? (select all that apply)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> recommendations of colleagues/other students | <input type="checkbox"/> recommendations of library staff |
| <input type="checkbox"/> recommendations of Monash teaching staff | <input type="checkbox"/> library databases page |
| <input type="checkbox"/> trial and error | <input type="checkbox"/> Virtual Librarian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> based on the name of the database | <input type="checkbox"/> Monash Voyager Catalogue |
| <input type="checkbox"/> library printed guides | <input type="checkbox"/> not sure |

3. How do you get to the database you want to use? (select all that apply)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> search the Monash Voyager catalogue | <input type="checkbox"/> bookmark/favourite |
| <input type="checkbox"/> library databases page | <input type="checkbox"/> not sure |
| <input type="checkbox"/> library subject resources pages | <input type="checkbox"/> other (please specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> library faculty resources pages | <input type="text"/> |

4. In your searches **this year** did you find useful information:

- All the time Most of the time About half the time Rarely
 Never Not sure Not applicable

5. What issues, if any, make it difficult for you to choose a relevant database? (tick all that apply)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> none | <input type="checkbox"/> lack of library staff help |
| <input type="checkbox"/> arrangement of the databases page | <input type="checkbox"/> lack of online help |
| <input type="checkbox"/> descriptions on databases page are inadequate | <input type="checkbox"/> lack of printed help |
| <input type="checkbox"/> descriptions on Voyager are inadequate | <input type="checkbox"/> not enough databases to choose from |
| <input type="checkbox"/> too many different ways of finding databases | <input type="checkbox"/> too many databases to choose from |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> other (please specify) |

6. What issues make it difficult for you to access a database? (tick all that apply)

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> none | <input type="checkbox"/> connection speed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> search screens are too confusing | <input type="checkbox"/> being logged off/timed out during a session |
| <input type="checkbox"/> access instructions are not clear | <input type="checkbox"/> AuthCate problems |
| <input type="checkbox"/> can't find any access instructions | <input type="checkbox"/> other password problems |
| <input type="checkbox"/> proxy problems | <input type="checkbox"/> access refused due to user limit being exceeded |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> other (please specify) |

7.

a. When you are using databases:

i. Are you able to print the material you want?

- All the time Most of the time About half the time
 Rarely Never Not applicable

ii. Are you able to save the material you want?

- All the time Most of the time About half the time
 Rarely Never Not applicable

iii. Are you able to email the material you want?

- All the time Most of the time About half the time
 Rarely Never Not applicable

b. Are there any databases you have had particular problems with when you have tried to print, save or email?

8. If you have a problem when using a database, which of the following do you find most helpful? (tick all that apply)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> asking a friend/colleague | <input type="checkbox"/> using e-Query |
| <input type="checkbox"/> asking a librarian at the information desk | <input type="checkbox"/> using the help in the database |
| <input type="checkbox"/> phoning the library | <input type="checkbox"/> never needed any help |
| <input type="checkbox"/> emailing the library | <input type="checkbox"/> never found any useful help |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Virtual Librarian | |

9. Which of the following potential help services do you think you would find helpful? (tick all that apply)

- asking a friend/colleague 24 hour general call centre
 more training sessions other (please specify)
 online chat service
 none

10. Are you a:

- Monash Student
- Monash Academic Staff Member
- Monash General Staff Member
- Other/visitor

If you are from Monash in which faculties do you study/work (tick all that apply)

- Art and Design | Arts | Business and Economics | Education | Engineering |
 Information Technology | Law | Medicine | Pharmacy | Science |
 Other (e.g. Administration)

11. From which of the following locations are you MOST likely to access a Library database (choose only one):

- a library on campus my office on campus student PC Lab on campus
 other off campus

12. Do you have any other comments, suggestions or feedback you would like to make about the Library's database services?

13. Are you aware of any databases that the Library does not currently subscribe to, but that we should consider?


Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

Send inquiries and comments to [e-Query](#)

Last updated 1 February, 2001. - Today is 2 February, 2001. 10:00 AM

Copyright © 1994-2000 Monash University Caution ▶

[HELP?](#)

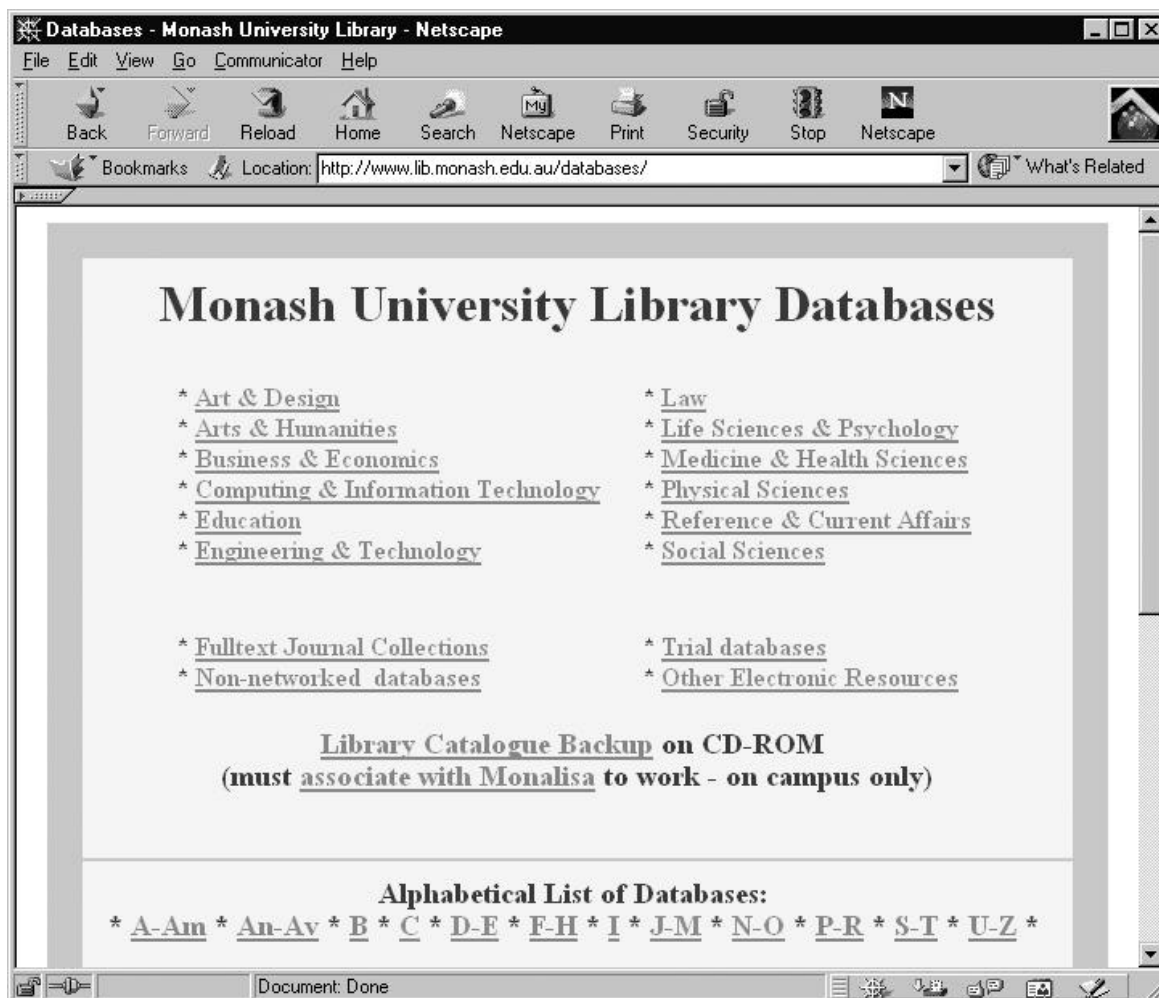
[CONTACTS](#) 

[SITEMAP](#) 

[STAFF DIRECTORY](#) 

[SEARCH](#) 

Appendix Three: MUL Databases page



Appendix Four: Voyager Catalogue home page

The screenshot shows a Netscape browser window titled "Monash Voyager Catalogue - Netscape". The address bar displays "http://library.monash.edu.au/". The page content includes a navigation menu with links for "LIBRARY HOME", "LIBRARY HOURS", "LOANS", "LOCATIONS", and "CONTACT US". Below this is a search and utility bar with buttons for "Advanced Search", "Basic Search", "Course Reserve", "Patron Information", "Logon", and "Help". The main text area contains several sections: a general introduction to the catalogue, a note about e-journals and databases requiring AuthCate details, a "News" section mentioning an EndNote connection file change, and a "Voyager downtime" section stating that routine backups occur every Sunday from 3am to 7am. At the bottom, there are links for "DATABASES", "LIBRARY CATALOGUES", "MORE REQUESTS", "PAST EXAM PAPERS", and "MY MONASH", along with contact information for e-Query and the Monash University logo.

Monash Voyager Catalogue
LIBRARY HOME > LIBRARY HOURS > LOANS > LOCATIONS > CONTACT US >

Advanced Search Basic Search Course Reserve Patron Information Logon Help

This catalogue includes material held in Monash University Library's Australian sites and Monash items held in the hospital collections.

For material held in the overseas libraries use:
> Voyager (South Africa)
> THOL (Malaysia)

Voyager downtime:
Routine backup occurs every Sunday 3am-7am. During this time Voyager may be unavailable.

To use e-journals and databases from off-campus enter your AuthCate details now. You don't need to do this if you are on a Monash campus or using the Monash modem service.

News:
The EndNote connection file to Voyager has changed. Please download the new version.

DATABASES > LIBRARY CATALOGUES > MORE REQUESTS > PAST EXAM PAPERS > MY MONASH >

Send inquiries and comments to [e-Query](#)
© 2001 Monash University

MONASH
UNIVERSITY