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Evaluation of library help publications

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Purpose

- **Investigate user needs, preferences and behaviour regarding help**

- **Recommend**
  - what help they want
  - how they want it presented
  - where they want to access it

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Help publications & services

Self help			Personal help
paper	web	tutorial	
Subject	Subject	Subject	Info desk
Pathfinder	Resource	How to..	Phone
Catalogue	Catalogue	Citing & referencing	Email
Database	EndNote	EndNote	Online chat
	Glossary		Classes

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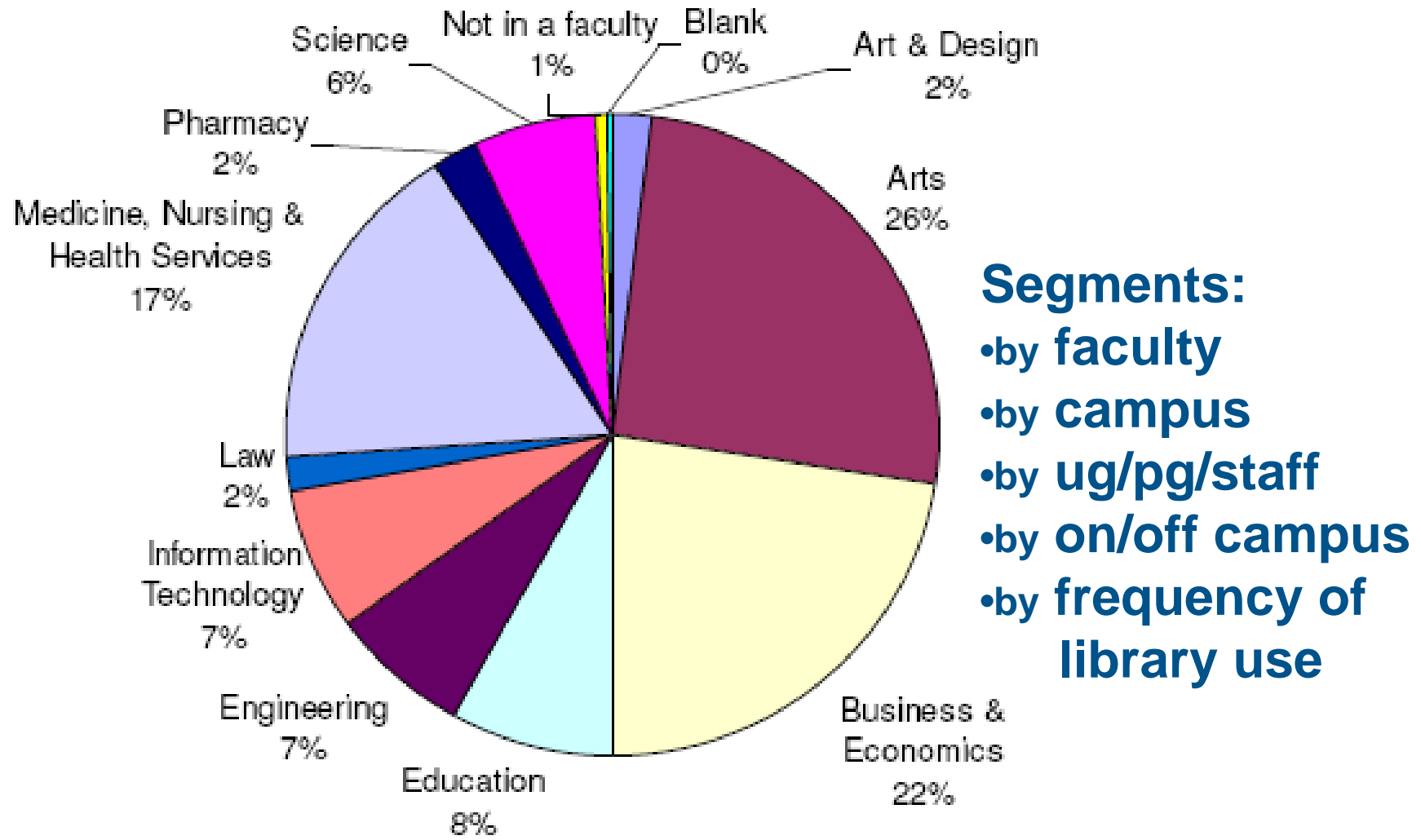
Method

Qualitative

– 15 interviews

    postgrads, staff, researchers

– 5 focus groups

    4x undergrads, 1x library staff

    10 participants per group

Quantitative

– online survey

    1800+ respondents

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Figure 1: Student Response Breakdown by Managing Faculty

Survey questions

- **specific help aids - awareness, usage, usefulness, ease of use, likely future use**
- **help seeking behaviour/preferences**
  - on/off campus
  - alternatives to personal help
  - paper handouts/printing online pages
- **problems encountered**
- **open ended questions – free text comments**

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User behaviour – persevere/trial and error

Preference for 'trial and error'

Action when experiencing difficulties

- 1st preference when off-campus
- 2nd preference when on-campus
  (second only to: 'Go to Information Desk')

Using help

- 1 in 5 never use online help
- 1 in 3 never use paper help guides

"We're used to trial and error with Google and all that so we're used to it. You just work your way through it somehow. You'll get there."

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User behaviour – time poor

Time poor

– they want the help now
– searching through a website for help is too time-consuming
– help is too wordy, too general, not specific to their needs
– overwhelming preference for personal help services

"There probably is more, maybe a lot more, on the site than we know about but if you generally get what you want there's no need to go there."

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User behaviour – outcome oriented

Outcome oriented

1. don't want to be sidetracked into another process

2. want to stay with the process on hand … will use trial and error if necessary rather than take a detour, or seek direct help

3. true even when there are no time pressures

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User behaviour – satisfied with own methods

Users are comfortable with current methods

They realise there may be better ways
but are happy to muddle through
rather than seek help

*"You develop your own search strategies over the years
and you stay with those, but I suspect there are more
efficient ways of doing things if I really went into it."*

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User behaviour – paper handouts

We encountered no-one in our groups and interviews who had used these materials that they themselves had accessed.

We encountered some who had been given such materials in a library tutorials or information session who "thought" they still had it somewhere, or were given one by a librarian as an adjunct to personal help when they'd sought it.

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User behaviour – online

74% *"I am fairly confident searching online on the library website to find articles, books etc for my studies"*

70% *"I would like to be able to search online more efficiently"*

56% *"Getting started online is OK, it's finding what you want when you're into it that's the problem"*

53% *"There are surely more efficient ways of searching online than I use but usually get what I want so I'm OK as I am"*

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Selected findings – awareness / likely use

- **High level of unawareness of library provided help**

- **Rough correlation between awareness and use**

- **Rough correlation between use and perceived usefulness**

- ***However…*** **once made aware, likelihood of future use varies**

Selected findings – potential total use

Currently use + currently unaware but would use

- **Highest**

  InfoDesk 64% *currently use 63%*

  Online subject guides 60% *currently use 45%*

  Citing & referencing tutorial 56% *currently use 37%*

  Online resource guides 53% *currently use 32%*

- **Lowest**

  Online chat 19% *currently use 10%*

  Phone help 24% *currently use 16%*

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Selected findings – help preferences

On campus

1. **Persevere/trial and error 34%** *in top five* **69%**

2. **Go to library information desk 29%** *in top five* **72%**

3. **Ask a friend/colleague 23%** *in top five* **67%**

4. **Use online library help pages 14%** *in top five* **62%**

Off campus

1. **Persevere/trial and error 39%** *in top five* **68%**

2. **Use online library help pages 23%** *in top five* **65%**

3. **Ask a friend/colleague 17%** *in top five* **56%**

4. **Use email help 12%** *in top five* **54%**

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Selected findings – problems with help

online

30%-29%

- Too many links to go through
- Help is too general, not specific enough

22%-18%

- Never use online help
- Using it takes too long
- Too hard to find help on the website

15%-12%

- It just doesn't help
- Not easy to follow
- Too wordy/too long/too much information
- Don't have problems/difficulties

5%

- Wording is too complicated

paper

37%

- Never use printed help handouts

17%

- Don't have problems/difficulties

15%

- Help is too general, not specific enough

13%

- Takes too long to read through

10%- 8%

- Too wordy/too long/too much information
- Using it takes too long
- Not easy to follow

5%

- It just doesn't help
- Wording is too complicated

Librarians' issues

- **spoon feeding VERSES learning for themselves.**

- **library must fit in with faculty demands VERSES library can make demands of faculties.**

- **not receiving feedback on how useful help aids are to users.**

- **providing extended help to an individual VERSES providing some assistance to all.**

- **handouts are used to support face-to-face help.**

Actions – personal help

- **Email – transferred to ask.monash**
- **Online chat – rename, expand and promote**
- **Telephone – extend hours, reduce queues**
- **All help service staff have**
  - consistent level of training,
  - access to common documentation,
  - exhibit consistent behaviours and values

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Actions – printed guides

- **Cease paper handouts where similar online content exists**
  (subject guides, pathfinders, catalogue, etc)

- **Review vendor database help - use where possible**

Actions – finding and accessing help

- **Present help as an integrated suite**
  - Simple (visual) approach to finding help
  - Provide search facilities for finding help
  - Reduce variety of terms to label publications
- **Identify key pages/sites - provide links to relevant help publications and services**
- **Include ALL help services**
  - **self help, personal, information literacy**

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Actions – content and design of publications

Users want help that:

- answers their specific question
- is short, sharp and to the point
- and they want it immediately available

Suggestions:

- Help topics as FAQs through ask.monash
- Remove old Virtual Librarian tutorials
  - > Transfer subject tutorials to MUSO (WebCT)
  - > Redevelop 'How tos' as brief guides, FAQs or new interactive tutorials

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Actions – marketing and promotion

- **Promotion is integral to help products - particularly self help products**
- **Needs to overcome entrenched user behaviours**
  - preference for 'trial and error'
  - time poor
  - outcome oriented
- **Marketing should promote the benefits of investing extra time and effort to seek and use help**
- **Best done by targeting to specific audiences**

Further work

- **Revisit data to segment by other factors**
  - faculty
  - campus
  - type (ug, pg, staff)
  - mode of study (on/off campus)
  - frequency of library use

- **Usability study of specific publications**
  - select those with greatest impact

- **Establish ongoing quality cycle**
  plan > act > evaluate > improve

Lessons

- **External consultant VERSES internal study**
- **Paid VERSES grace and favour**
- **Several stages VERSES one hit**
- **Deadlines and the academic year**
- **Project manager**
- **Project team**

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Did we achieve
what we set out to do?

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Discussion