

La Trobe University Library

Materials Availability Survey 2007

Executive summary

With the shift to online and multi campus teaching, the Library has significantly expanded its online resources, currently providing online access to 29,000 journal titles and over 10,000 e-books. The size of these electronic collections and their availability 24 x 7 from on and off all campuses, make them an increasing vital part of the Library service.

To obtain information about online access to/availability of materials, as well as print materials the Materials Availability (Did you find it) survey was run in 2007 as a significantly revised, online only survey. In a sense, this was a research endeavour as such a survey had only been run for print materials and in print previously, and the online form and administration required extensive redesign, and methodological and analytical rethinking.

During semester 1 2007 a big effort went into revising the questions and designing a web based survey and a database to be used to check responses. As in the previous surveys, the focus was on reasons for user failure; thus Library staff had to check and code the "No not found or downloaded" user responses.

The survey ran 6-31st of August 2007, a total of four weeks. All users at all campuses and off campus could respond to the survey, and indeed the 3 iPod prizes were a significant drawcard for user participation. The survey questions and layout were significantly different to the CAUL survey in most aspects. In the new survey, questions about the ability to access and download electronic materials, and the reasons for electronic failure dominated the questionnaire.

There were 1063 respondents from all campuses, and they included undergraduates (73%), postgraduates (15%), academics (3%) and 9% others (General staff, TAFE, other university affiliation, etc). Respondents were mainly looking for books or book chapters 51.9 %, or journal articles 34.2%, with AV (6.1%) and other materials eg WebCT/LMS materials (7.7%) recording much lower figures.

While the overall availability was 91.2%, this varied from campus to campus (66%-97%), with the lowest availability recorded for Shepparton and Bendigo, and the greatest at Mildura and Bundoora. This variation may be related to the slightly variant methodology/sample size at each of the campuses¹.

¹ Note the 2005 figures for print availability of 81%, with a range of 77-86%. The differing methodology does not support a direct comparison. It can be argued that many failures in finding print material will not be registered simply because people won't be prepared to go back to a computer to register the failure particularly if they have to queue and input all the details. It could be argued that the high success rate in the current survey is primarily a result of this phenomenon.

The ninety four not available items (8.8%) fell in to the following main categories:

Collection shortfalls

- Item not listed in the catalogue 22.5%;
- Print item on loan 15%;
- Item in library catalogue but not at the home campus of the user 12.5%,

Shelving issues

- Print items not on shelf 15%;

User error

- On shelf but user did not locate successfully 13.8%;
- User fails to understand the catalogue entry 10%.

From these survey results it is clear that very few reported failures were related to electronic access problems.

The survey results indicate that Library has a good success rate in providing users with what they are looking for at the time of their visits; and that this level of success has been gradually improving over the past 10 years. When looking at the small numbers of failures, these seem to be because the item was not acquired (either at all, or in sufficient numbers), or the user could not locate materials on the shelves, or was unable/willing to wait for an intercampus loan.

While the survey form and administration will require additional “tweaking”, it should be run again to continue to provide bench mark data on the Library’s success and failure in providing the user access to materials at the time of their visits.

Recommendations:

1. *A watching brief be kept on developments in measuring electronic materials availability, to take advantage of any new and appropriate developments in this area.*
2. *The results be referred to individual campuses for any particular action (for example, purchasing of material identified as required but not in the collection; purchase of multiple copies if required etc).*
3. *Publish brief survey results on the public web and full results on the staff web site.*
4. *Consider further research to investigate some of the questions to arise from this project, eg,*
 - a. *Undergraduate research behaviour in traditional versus problem based and online learning environments;*
 - b. *Use of recommended & prescribed readings versus substitutes, and consequent perceptions of success in their library encounter;*
 - c. *the shelf searching success of more experienced academic or postgraduate users versus undergraduates;*
 - d. *Academic and postgraduate versus undergraduate perceptions/expectations of materials availability;*
 - e. *Better understand the frequency of use and role of “other” materials – eg websites, WebCT/LMS pages, streaming video.*
5. *Unless there are substantial developments in area, repeat the online only survey in 2009 with methodological changes to include, but not be limited to:*
 - a. *Cross campus videoconference training to ensure all campus follow a consistent promotional approach;*
 - b. *Run the survey for 2 weeks;*
 - c. *Use a larger clickable logo and place it on additional web pages;*
 - d. *Require the users to provide details of the resource required even if found;*
 - e. *Consider the order of the questions in the survey;*
 - f. *Simplify the user reasons for failure/error.*