

**Graduate Focus Groups
Scott & Steacie Libraries
Questions
Fall 2007**

Question 1: What do you find most valuable in terms of the Libraries' services to support your research as a graduate student?

WHAT WE WANT TO KNOW

- Icebreaker question
- Primary goal is to give us a sense of their experience and opinion of the Libraries from the outset. This is likely to help us understand their responses to questions which follow more clearly.

TO AVOID

- lengthy discussions about the collections of the libraries – if they do that get them back to services

Question 2: When you are given a topic for research, please describe the research process you typically undertake to address the task at hand? In your answer please try to describe both the activities you undertake, as well as particular kinds of information you typically consult or rely on.

WHAT WE WANT TO KNOW

- What kinds of research tasks do they typically work on?
- How they conduct research in terms of what activities or steps they undertake
- What are the main kinds of tools or information resources they are mentioning? And do they seem to rely especially on online sources vis-à-vis print resources?
- The extent to which library resources are mentioned vis a vis other information sources?
- Are there particular library resources or tools they seem to like or rely on?
- The extent to which library services feature in the research process they describe

[If they don't mention the libraries after some time prompt by asking them whether or not they ever use library resources (try to get some sense of which of our resources and services they use)]

Question 3: What, if anything, do your professors or supervisors typically do for you in terms of providing guidance or support for approaching graduate research projects or tasks?

WHAT WE WANT TO KNOW

- Are professors giving guidance or does it seem that they expect students to know how to proceed?
- Are professors mentioning the libraries when they give guidance and which resources or services are they especially emphasizing?

- What are student views in terms of the usefulness or appropriateness of faculty guidance provided – this could provide insights in terms of future target areas for librarian/faculty collaboration

TO AVOID: complaints about particular professors/subject areas

Question 4: What kind of challenges to you experience when doing research either using library or non-library resources?

WHAT WE WANT TO KNOW

- Are there problems with particular stages or steps in the research process e.g. defining their topic, identifying relevant information sources, using information search tools, evaluating information etc.?
- Do they have trouble identifying sources of help?
- Do they seem to be unaware of existing library services and resources?
- Do they come up against any other obstacles when doing research e.g. time constraints, inconvenient scheduling of library workshops, other challenges?

AVOID: lengthy discussions about shortcomings of the collection or detailed discussions of space or particular databases and interfaces

Question 5: Please describe your experiences, if any, of the Scott Library/Steacie Science & Engineering Library's reference or research consultation services in supporting your research

(Facilitator should explain to students what we mean by reference services)

- Are students aware of these services?
- Do they seem to prefer a specific mode of delivery e.g. in-person, chat, e-mail or other?
- Do they seem to be aware of liaison librarians?
- Do they seem to be aware of consultation services?
- Are there services that they seem to especially value?
- Are there services where improvements are deemed necessary?

Question 6: Please describe your experiences, if any, of the Scott Library's/Steacie Science & Engineering Library's instructional offerings or services.

(Facilitator should elaborate a little on what we mean by instructional services e.g. drop-in workshops or course related library instruction)

WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW

- Are many students aware of instructional services?
- How did they learn about them?
- Which ones are they especially aware of e.g. drop-in workshops versus in-class instruction?
- Have many of them attended an instructional session?

- Where students have had instruction, what aspects of instruction were effective in their viewpoint and what aspects were not so effective?
- How else are they learning research skills?

Question 7: Can you please describe for us how effective you find the Library's web site in guiding you through the research process? In particular, is it a resource you tend to use for this purpose, and if so, are there guides or instructional tools you use or would like to comment on?

WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW

- Do they find our web site easy to use when seeking web-based support with research tasks? Or are there areas of the web site that are confusing?
- What sources do they find helpful?
- Do they seem to indicate a preference for getting instruction online versus in other ways?
- Are there areas where web-based assistance/guides could be stronger?

Question 8: Can you think of anything the Libraries can do to offer you more opportunities to help you with research? In particular, please mention areas where you think most help is needed, and where the Libraries might play a role here.

WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW

- Where students feel they need most help with learning how best to do research
- Whether many feel the Libraries could be doing more to support their research
- What specific forms this additional assistance might take – in particular are there particular themes or subject areas where we could be giving more help?
- Whether students seem to think we need to do more advertising or promotion of relevant library services

[Facilitator should prompt them to talk about their opinions regarding in-person versus online forms of support for research if they don't bring it up themselves and should make sure to solicit ideas around promotion of services]

TO AVOID: dwelling on enhancements to the collection or specific databases, comments re facilities and hours. Need to focus on reference and instructional services.

Question 9: Are there any other things you would like to add before we finish our discussion?