Chapter 14

Undergraduate Students Information Behavior in the Changing Technological Era:
An Investigating of Sultan Qaboos University, Oman

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ABSTRACT

There has been a great deal of research conducted to investigate the information-seeking behavior of difference group of users. A search of current literature, however, reveals few studies dealing with information-seeking strategies of undergraduates in the electronic era. This chapter presents the results of a preliminary study of information-seeking among 675 undergraduates at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU). The study was designed to 1) explore undergraduates' information-seeking behavior with e-resources; 2) identify the role of faculty members and librarians in assisting undergraduates to attain search skills; and 3) discover the differences between undergraduates in terms of their age, gender, academic year, and college. The study results indicated that only 3% of undergraduates use the electronic services and databases subscribed to by the SQU main library. In addition, the results showed that 57.7% of the undergraduate students at SQU used the Google search engine for their initial search. There is a statistical difference between undergraduate students in terms of their age and use of e-resources. Finally, this study found the role of faculty members and librarians in assisting undergraduates to learn search strategies is almost absent.

INTRODUCTION

It is a universal phenomenal that students throughout all their educational stages need information. They need it to support their classes, their assignments, projects, and their research aims (Case, 2002). According to Halder et al. (2010) that, during the last decade, information has become essential due to vast developments in the World Wide Web (WWW) and in information and communication technologies (ICT), a tremendous population explosion, and the increased complexities of organizations. Information has become a key in various fields including education, psychology, information management, and library science (Majid & Kassim, 2000; Nicholas et al., 2010; Solomon, 2005).

Students are encouraged to become information literate, life-long learners in order to deal with the challenges of the fast-paced society, knowledge explosion, technological advancement, culture of information revolution, and new academic and vocational opportunities. Because of the importance of information seeking behavior for students, institutions of higher education in Oman need to facilitate a culture of information seeking and to improve the employment of resource support, such as library and documentation services. With knowledge changing rapidly and the ready access to technology, students must upgrade their knowledge and skills in order to cope with an overflow of knowledge (Eskola, 1998; Griffiths & Brophy, 2002). Also, there are global changes in the educational system that have required researchers to study in earnest undergraduate information needs and their information-seeking behavior. These changes have also affected the educational system in Oman. Some of these changes deal with the role of the student, either as an information recipient or an information producer. There is also a strong push to make information technologies like the Internet available and accessible to uni-

versity and school students (Nesset, 2008). The form of information resources has also changed, from printed to electronic materials. To make their collections available around the world, libraries subscribe to electronic databases, but without student use of these databases, libraries will not succeed. To help students use the electronic collection properly, the libraries and information centers have to know their users and what their information needs are, as well as how they use databases (by determining their search strategies). Faculty members can help libraries and information centers by training undergraduate students in specific search strategies.

STUDY BACKGROUND

Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) in Oman is the only public university which includes 17,070 students. It has nine colleges: Agricultural & Marine Sciences, Arts & Social Sciences, Economic & Political Science, Education, Engineering, Law, Medicine & Health Science, Science, and the College of Nursing. It has research and academic programs in most of the major hard sciences, engineering, and the humanities and social sciences. Close to 15,645 undergraduates were enrolled in the 2011/2012 academic year, aged 18-22. They are identified by their academic class, which is designated by their department and their specialization.

Because of the importance of undergraduate information-seeking behavior, it is necessary to study the students' information needs and their information-seeking behavior, so as to help the information center and campus library better serve them with information compatible to their needs. Because SQU educates through technology, it requires the students to use different resources for their projects and homework--in particular the electronic (E) resources. Using e-resources

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