



# Reference Transactions at the University of Kansas Libraries: An Analysis and Evaluation of Transcripts from 2008-2011

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Library Assessment Conference – Charlottesville, VA – October 29-31, 2012

## Introduction

In recent years, academic libraries have been increasingly considering effective ways to engage their users that keep pace with rapid technological developments. Reference staff in many of these libraries have been challenged to define, develop, and implement new methods for reaching those who seek research assistance. At the University of Kansas Libraries (KU Libraries), daily reference interactions have been collected since 2007 via the open source software known as LibStats at the two largest campus libraries: Anschutz and Watson Libraries. Together, these libraries contain the central collections in the sciences, humanities, and social sciences. This poster presents information that reveals trends about the patterns and modes of reference questions posed by users at these libraries, more specifically about the disciplines from which these questions emanate.

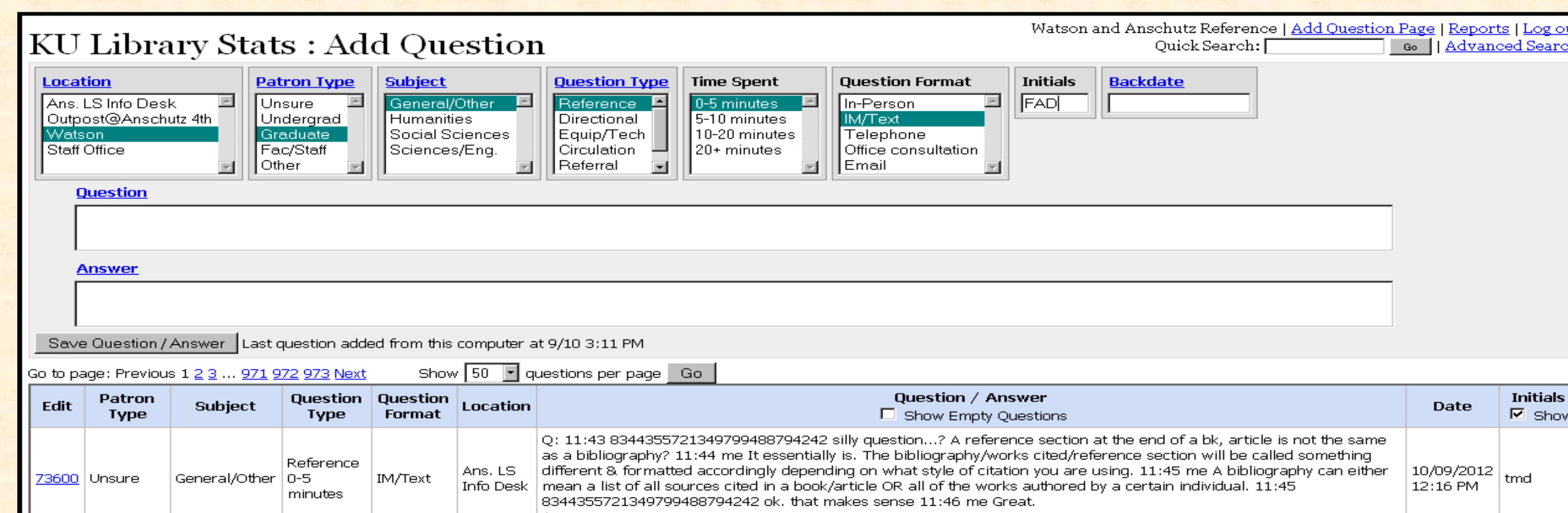
## Methodology

Using the transcripts (~38,000) recorded in LibStats from a four-year period (2008-2011), we reviewed a sampling of reference questions (~5,900 or 15%) and tagged them by subject and discipline. The subject code was developed using a taxonomy based on subject headings from the KU Libraries' website to organize licensed databases into broad categories, and by professional schools within the University. Usage patterns were also examined to determine the busiest months of the year in which reference services were used (previous work showed the largest user group was undergraduate students).

## Practical Implications

This study reflects on reference-related work within the context of other assessment activities currently underway at the University of Kansas.

- ~50% of questions General/Reference (i.e., catalog search for known items)
- ~50% of questions subject specific or complex (i.e., librarians vs. generalists)
- Humanities and Social Sciences are largest users of reference services (47%, 35% respectively vs. Sciences 17%)
- Usage trends are stable over four years (with exception of 2010)
- Data show effects of Learning Studio creation in 2010 and IM software change to LibraryH3lp in 2009 with increased numbers of reference questions
- No change in telephone usage (related to no change in technology)

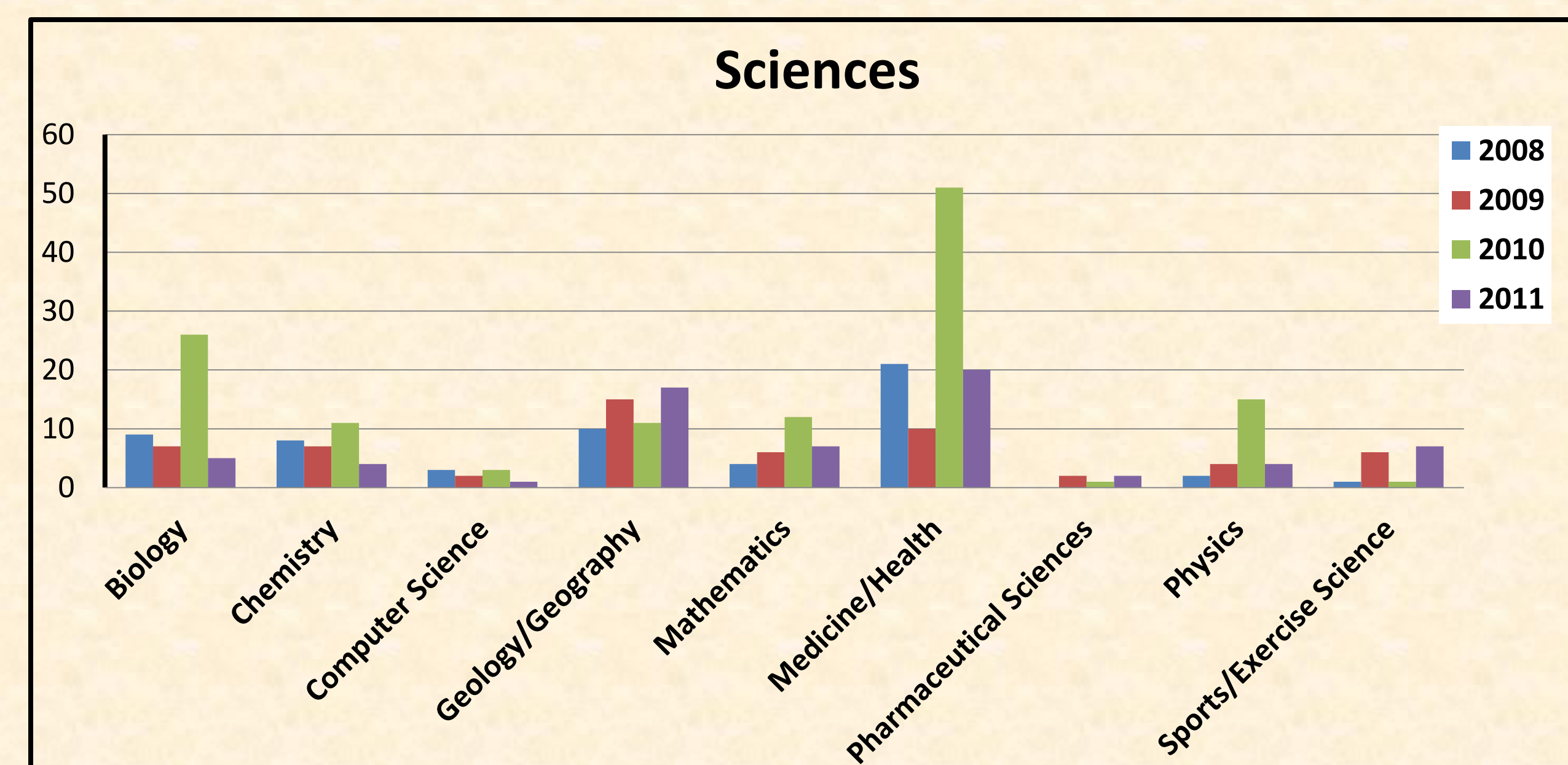
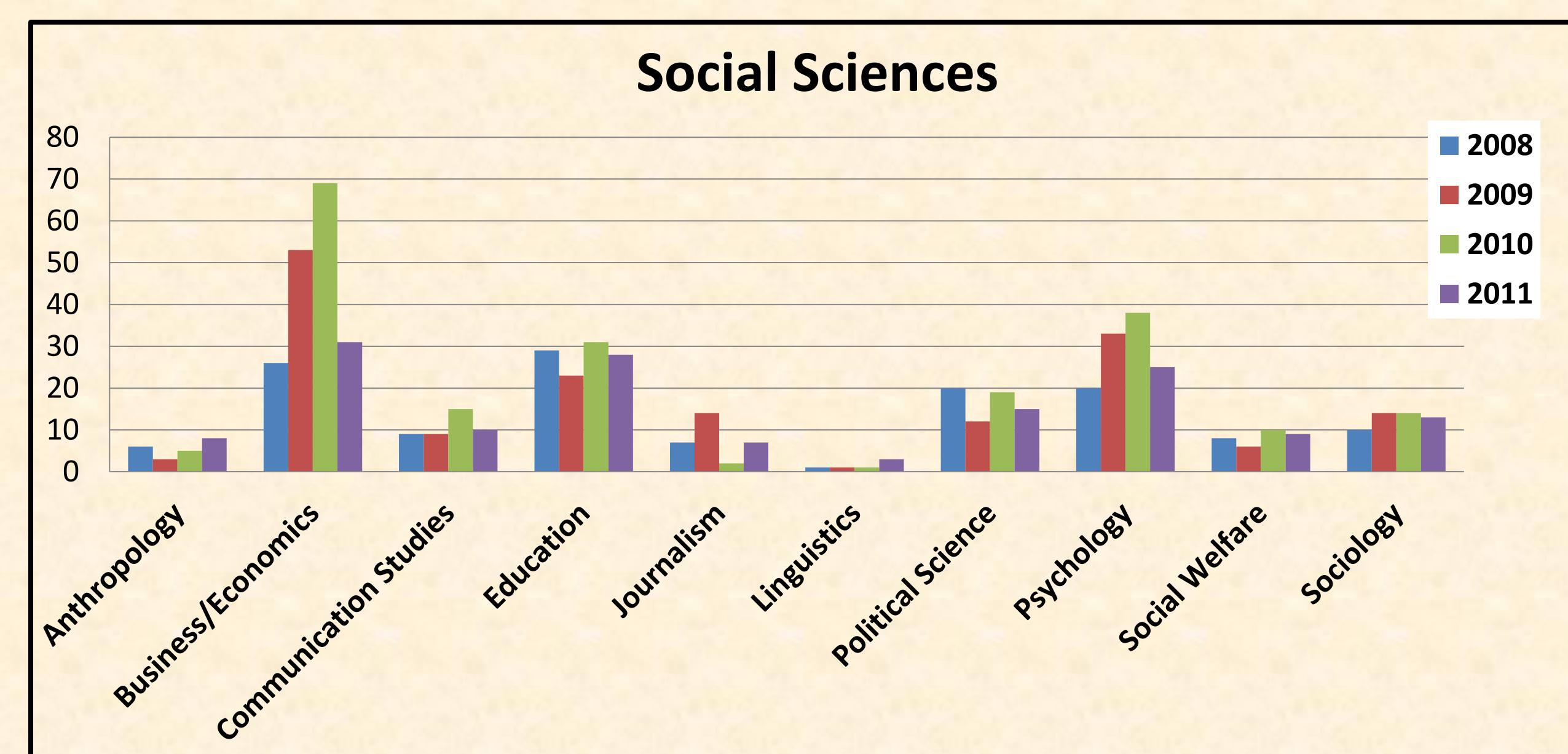
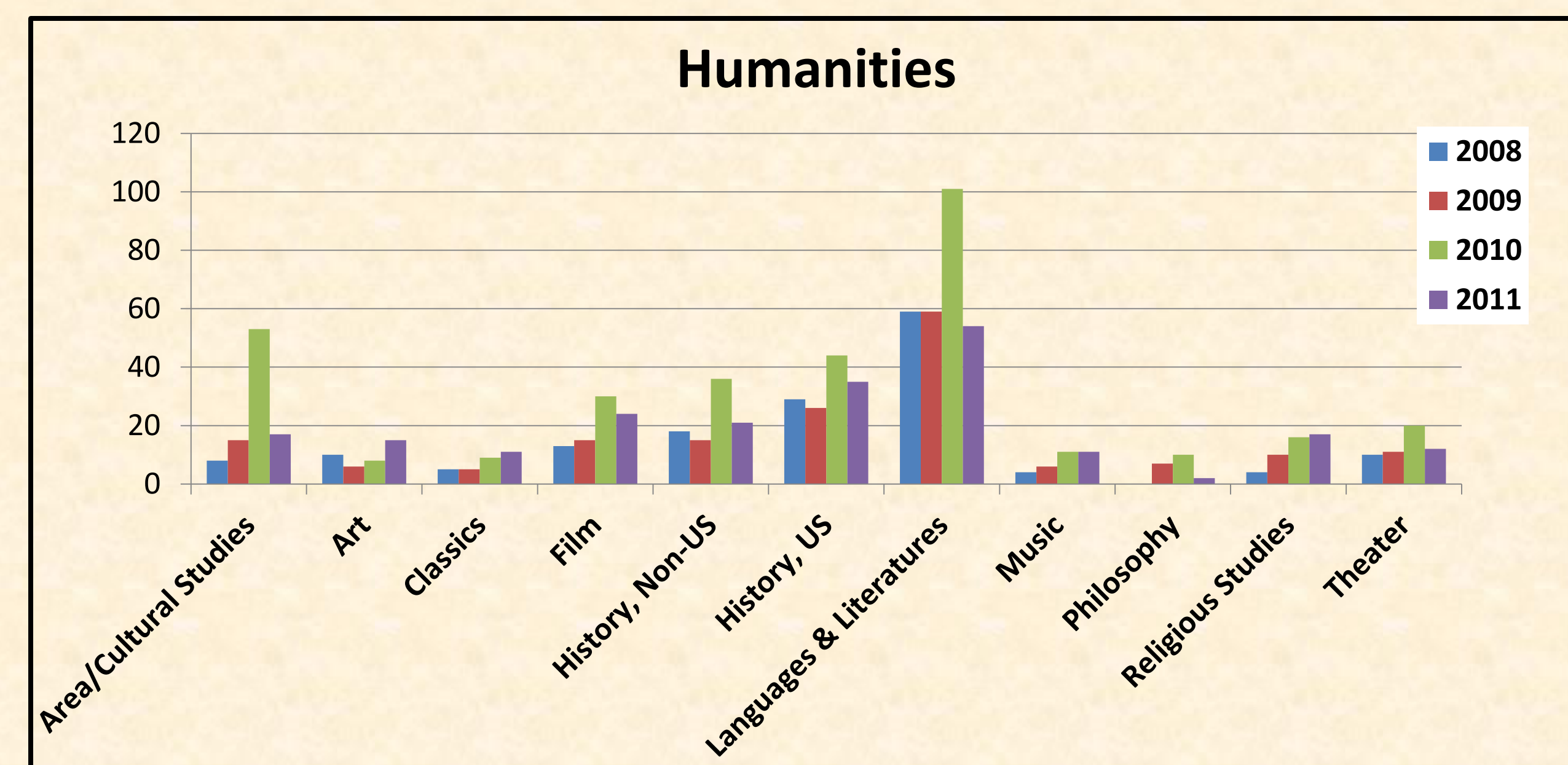
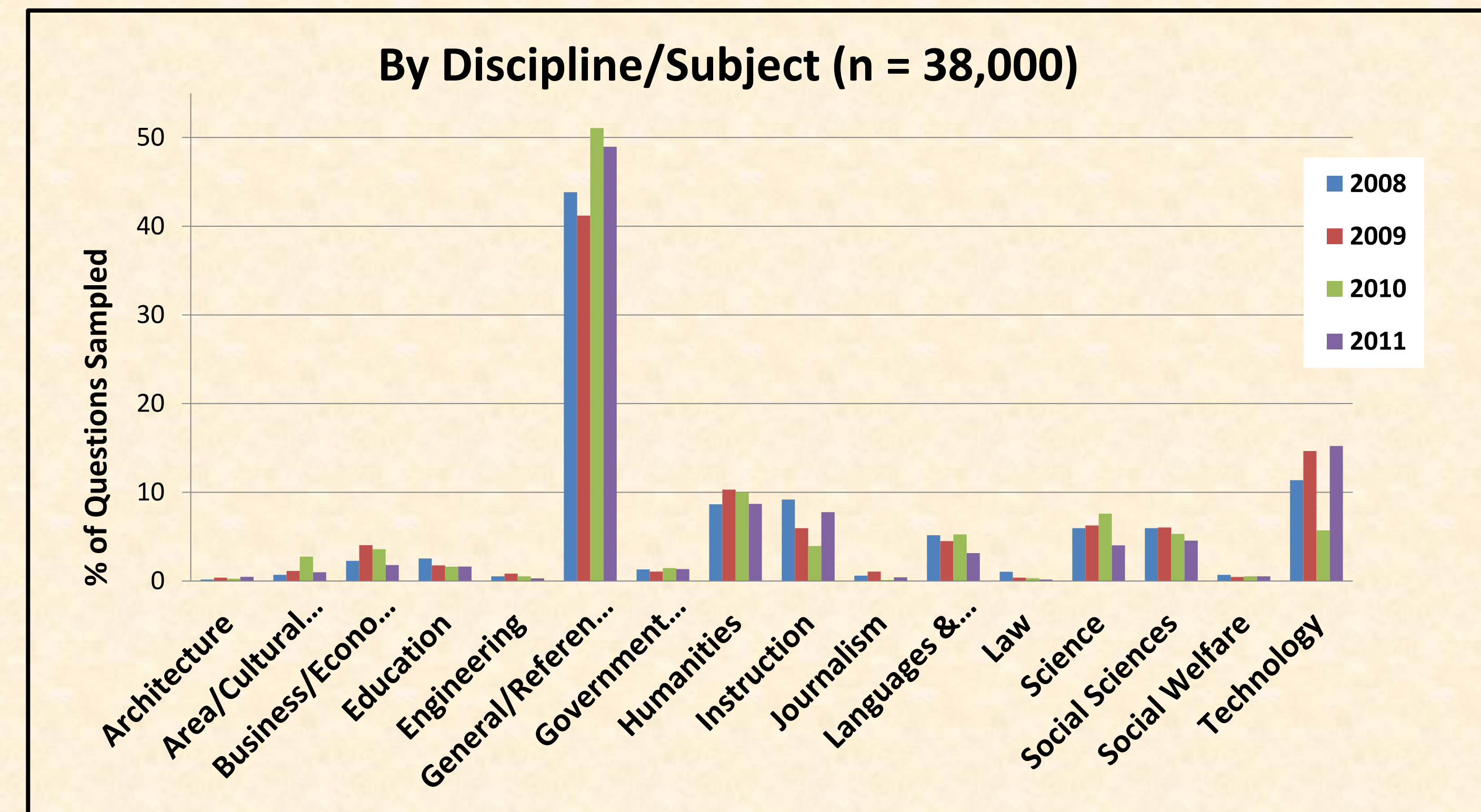


## Why? To help KU Libraries answer increasing complex questions regarding how faculty and staff time should best be relegated within reference services

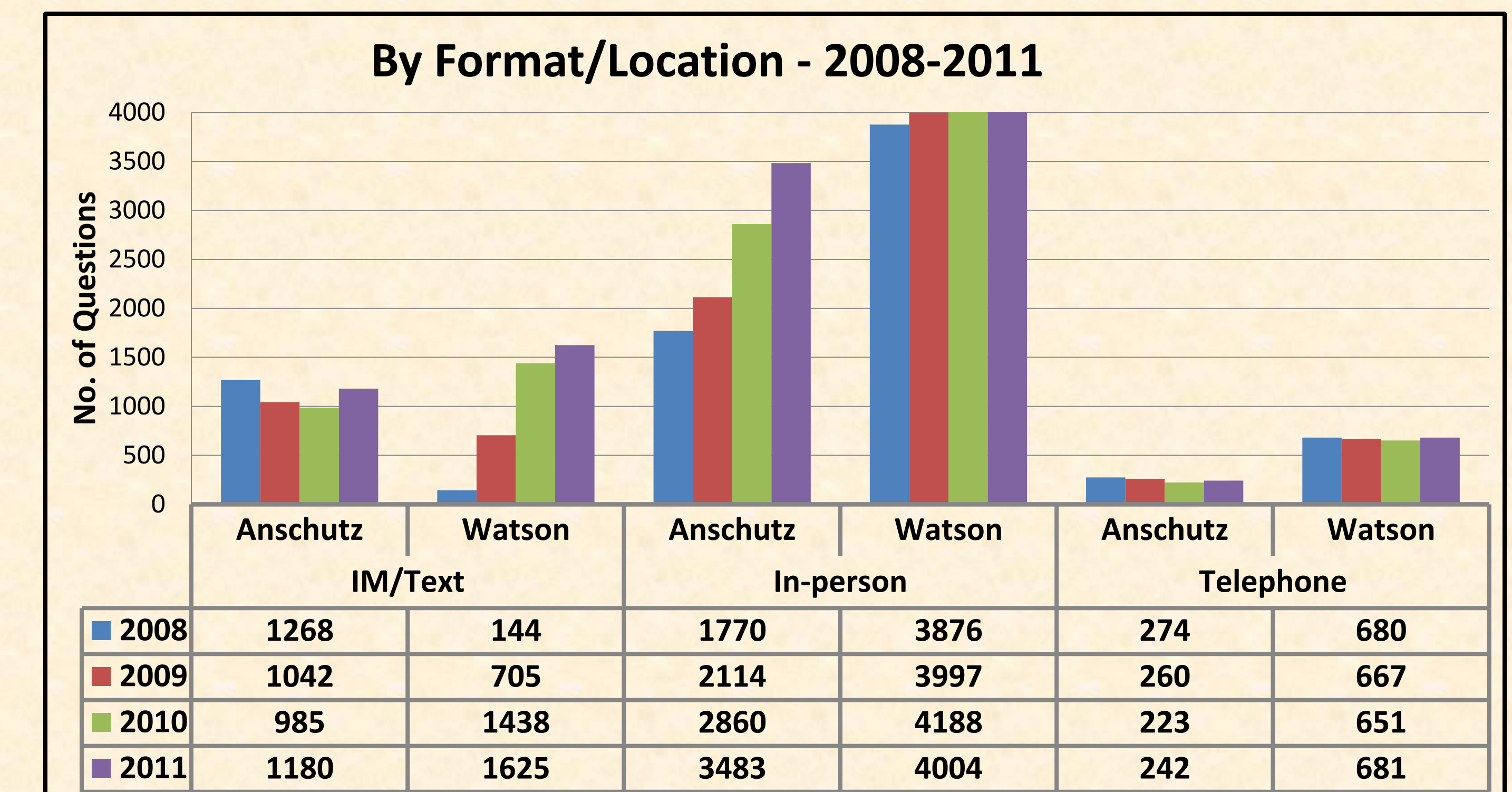
This research was undertaken to learn several things about KU Libraries reference services, including the following:

- Greatest areas of discipline/subject inquiries at general reference desks
- Nature of the complexity of questions being posed to us as reference specialists
- Determine which subject resources are being utilized to answer questions
- Insight into staffing patterns at general reference desks, and how to best delegate faculty and staff time within reference services

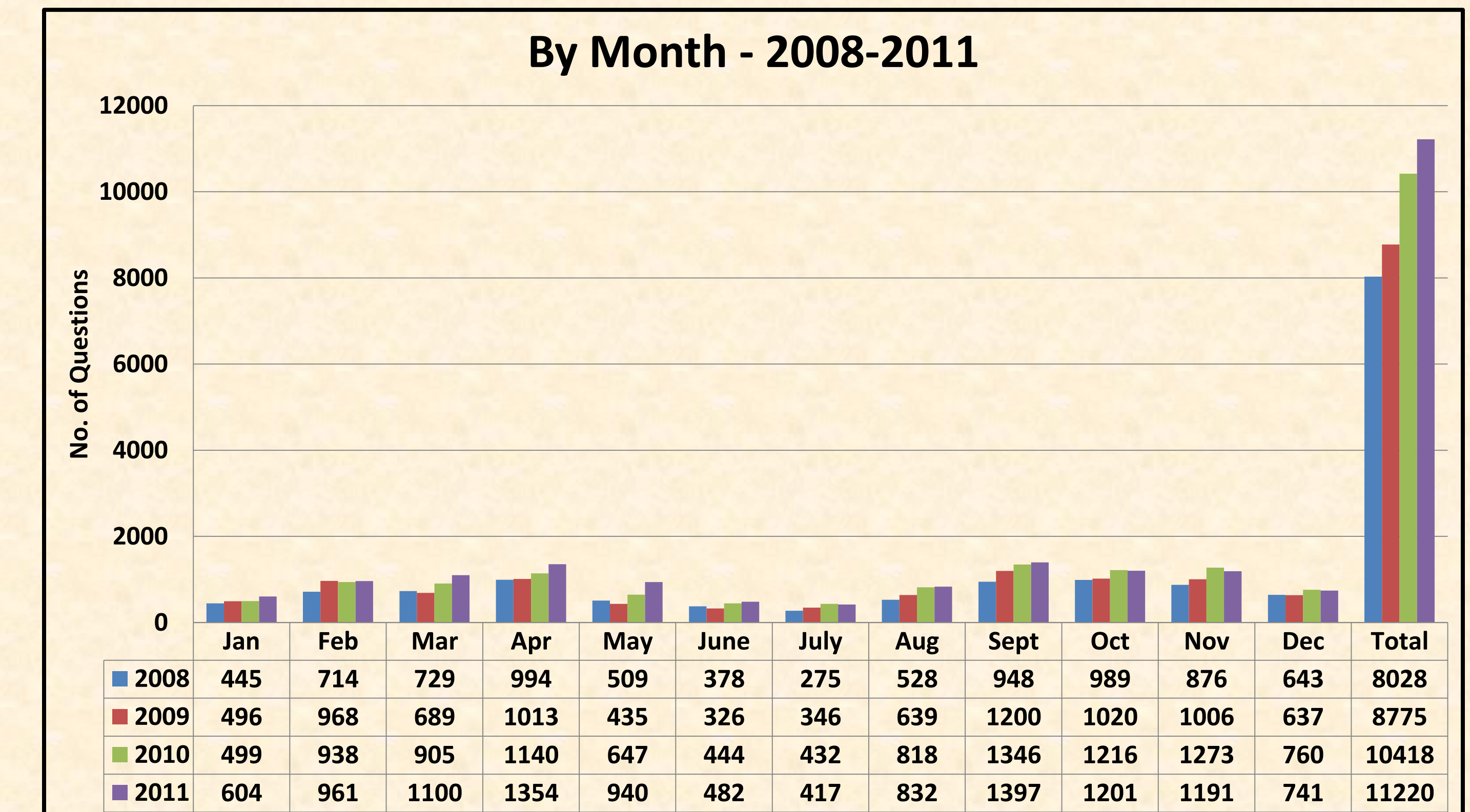
## What? To discover the subjects of research inquiries



## Where? To discover if locations are experiencing significantly different volumes, modes of communication



## When? To discover the times when research assistance is being sought



## Findings

- The number of reference questions increased by 40% over the period from 2008-2011
- In-person reference questions:
  - Watson Library showed a 3.3% increase (relatively stable over past four years)
  - Anschutz Library showed a 96% increase (due to Learning Studio)
- Instant messaging (IM) trending up, but leveled off in the last year
- Telephone inquiries stable over past four years
- Largest number of questions (in order of decreasing numbers) were General/Reference, Technology, followed by Humanities, Instruction, Science, & Social Sciences
- Fall Semesters began busier than Spring, but end of Spring numbers were up in recent years (likely due to course and assignment activities)
  - Busiest months in Fall are September, October, & November
  - Busiest months in Spring are March, April, & May
- Watson Library had highest number of reference questions, but Anschutz Library had highest overall building use (based on gate counts)
- Data collected being used to inform staffing and training for desks
- Further refinement of LibStats data collection (July 2012) now includes discipline tagging, based on earlier analysis of transcripts