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Use of library and information science journals by Master's students in their dissertations: experiences at the University of Wales Aberystwyth

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Abstract

Purpose - Reports on research undertaken into the use made of library and information science (LIS) journals in dissertations written by students undertaking the Master's course in Information and Library Studies at the University of Wales Aberystwyth.

Design - Analysis of the citations of 100 (post 2000) dissertations submitted gives an indication of the range of material used in dissertations. In addition, responses to questionnaires from students provide information about how relevant papers are found from LIS journals.

Findings - Journals with a practical bias were more cited than research-oriented journals. Lists of the most "popular" journal titles are included.

Value - The research provides a "snapshot" of the use made of LIS journals by Master's students in their dissertations.

Keywords Journal usage, Library and information science journals, Library and information science education, Master's dissertations, UK

Paper type Research paper

Background to the Department of Information Studies, University of Wales Aberystwyth (DIS/UWA)

DIS/UWA has evolved from as the College of Librarianship Wales (CLW) founded in Aberystwyth in 1964. CLW was initially conceived as an institution to "produce bilingual librarians - i.e., equally fluent in English and Welsh" and, it was thought, would comprise about 30 or so students (New, 1978). However, within three years CLW became the largest library school in the UK with over 400 students and 40 or so full-time academic teaching staff with a strong international character (Hogg, 1969). By 1973 CLW possessed a range of appropriate buildings, including a purpose-built "library of librarianship". In 1989 CLW ceased to exist as a "monotechnic" college and became a department of the University of Wales Aberystwyth (UWA).

DIS/UWA is the only library and information studies (LIS) department in Wales and is therefore very important for training and developing skills for the Welsh library community. For instance, staff from DIS/UWA were involved in the training of public librarians in Wales (in both Welsh and English) as part of the UK's People's Network project (Tedd, 2003). DIS/UWA offers a range of Master's courses covering LIS, records management, archive administration and health information management for full-time and distance learning students as well as undergraduate courses. As far as LIS Master's students are concerned, for instance, they have come from over 40 countries, from Barbados to Singapore and from Iceland to Mauritius. In 2006 there

was a total student population in DIS/UWA of almost 1,000, the vast majority of which were distance learners. After successfully completing their assessments in specific modules, “taught Master’s” students prepare a dissertation of some 15,000 words on an appropriate topic. A more detailed overview of LIS education in Aberystwyth in general is provided by Tedd (2005) and of the distance learning Master’s courses by Preston (2005).

This paper is based on an analysis of the references in a selection of dissertations which were submitted since 2000 by LIS Master’s students, and also of data obtained from LIS Master’s students in 2006 on their information gathering habits with respect to articles in LIS journals.

Library and information science journals at UWA: brief overview

The “library of librarianship” of the 1970s, now called the Thomas Parry Library (TPL), is part of Information Services within UWA (<http://www.inf.aber.ac.uk/tpl/>). When CLW was formed there was an active collection development policy that resulted in the acquisition of many LIS journals and other materials published since the late nineteenth century. A listing of the LIS periodicals held in TPL in 2004 resulted in a total of 3,000 titles, with about 600 titles being then current subscriptions. Access to the holdings of periodicals is available, with links through to the e-version if it exists, from the UWA library catalogue, based on Endeavor Information Systems’ Voyager library management software (<http://voyager.aber.ac.uk>). In addition the Information Services at UWA, as in many other university libraries, provides a link from its web page on Electronic Information Resources to e-journals (<http://www.aber.ac.uk/is/ejournals/index.php>). At Aberystwyth this is called JoEy (Journals Electronically) and an extract of the list of the almost 150 e-journals in the area of “librarianship” is shown in Figure 1.

Take in Figure 1 Extract of JoEy listing of e-journals in Librarianship available at DIS/UWA

All students, whether full-time or distance learning, are able to access the e-journals from all over the world using their UWA password as authentication. A brief introduction to this is shown in Figure 2 along with the menu of options of e-information sources to which users at UWA have access.

Take in Figure 2 Menu of e-information sources available to users at UWA

Although JoEy is useful in gaining access to a particular journal title (and hence a particular paper in a particular issue if available) students need to use other tools to search the LIS literature for information of potential relevance to their dissertation topic. The A-Z option in Figure 2 provides links to further sources and services including:

a) Bibliographic databases – which enable searching of metadata, including subject keywords, abstract, etc., of a published paper but which typically do not give access to the full text of the paper. Examples include:

- Library and Information Science Abstracts (LISA) which covers some 440 LIS journals from 68 countries in 20 languages from Cambridge Scientific Abstracts.
- Library, Information Science and Technology Abstracts (LISTA), from Ebsco, which covers some 600 LIS journals, also from many countries and in different languages.
- Web of Knowledge (WoK), from Thomson/ISI (Institute for Scientific Information) which provides access to a range of citation databases (Cawkell and Garfield, 2001). LIS journals are covered by the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) of WoK. SSCI contains the bibliographic details of papers in 54 LIS journals as well as details of the articles cited in papers in those journals. The citations within SSCI and its related databases are used by ISI to produce a range of statistical measures, including the impact factor, of journals.

b) Full-text services – which provide access to the full text of articles published in journals. One example is JSTOR (<http://www.jstor.org>), an interdisciplinary archive of the content of some 600 journals. In addition the open access movement provides access to the full text of many articles – either through open access journals or via institutional repositories. The Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), maintained at Lund University in Sweden (<http://www.doaj.org/>), includes some 60 journals in LIS – the vast majority of which are in English, but some other languages are represented including Arabic, Bulgarian, French, German, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, and Spanish. Copies (often referred to as eprints) of the full text of articles published in journals are increasingly being made available by authors through institutional or subject-based repositories; e-lis (<http://eprints.rclis.org/>) is an example of an open access collection of articles in the LIS field. Articles in such repositories can be “harvested” (using the Open Archives Initiative (OAI) harvesting protocol) and then searched using services such as OAIster (Shreeves *et al.*, 2005).

c) Publisher-based services – such as the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) and Emerald, which allow free searching of their databases and then charge for downloading the full text of required papers. Emerald (<http://www.emeraldinsight.com>) is a British publisher which, inter alia, publishes about 30 LIS journals, including a number acquired in 2002 that had previously been published by Aslib.

d) Search services - such as Google Scholar which enables users to “search across many disciplines and sources: peer-reviewed papers, theses, books, abstracts and articles, from academic publishers, professional societies, preprint repositories, universities and other scholarly organizations” (<http://scholar.google.com/intl/en/scholar/about.html>).

e) Other sources and services - such as the ZETOC alerting service from the British Library which provides an electronic Table of Contents service to some 20,000 journal titles as well as an alerting service (by e-mail or RSS feed) for contents of recently published specified journals (<http://zetoc.mimas.ac.uk/>).

Aim and method

The aim of this research was to investigate the use made of LIS journals in the dissertations written by Master's students within DIS/UWA. The majority of the students currently registered for our Master's courses are studying the course by distance learning methods and work in libraries, information centres, archive offices, health environments and so on, throughout the world whilst undertaking the course. Each student attends a study school in Aberystwyth once a year for two years and also attends a specialist research study school in order to prepare for writing a dissertation.

An initial analysis of 50 dissertations was carried out in 2004 and reported at the World Library and Information Congress (Tedd, 2004). A further analysis of 50 more dissertations was carried out in 2006. In both cases dissertations were limited to those submitted after 2000. For each dissertation a tally was made of the:

- total number of items in the bibliography;
- number of items that were from LIS journals;
- number of individual LIS journals cited.

This information was input into a Microsoft Excel database for analysis. In addition, a list was compiled of all the LIS journals cited within the dissertations inspected and the holdings of these journals at the TPL was also investigated. A tally was also made of the total number of citations to each journal, as well as the number of dissertations citing material from each journal.

Thirty-three Master's students starting to prepare their dissertations in 2006 were asked to list between 5-10 LIS journal titles that they had found useful for their studies and to indicate how they found out about potentially relevant articles.

Analysis of dissertations

Dissertation topics and country of origin of students

As might be expected the topics covered by Master's students in their dissertations are very varied and the following list just gives a feel for this:

- Managing change at the Lebanese American University: an assessment of the role of leadership and the participative process.
- Family history research in public libraries with special reference to Bath Central Library.
- Human resource management in public libraries with reference to Ireland.
- Portrayal of librarians in newspapers 1960-2000.
- The need for a mobile library service in the Bahamas.
- Developing information literacy in front-line staff at the University of Swansea.
- Public library service for teenagers in Hong Kong.
- Document delivery in the online age: a study of hospital authority libraries.
- An investigation into the current provision of music collections and services in public libraries.
- Provision and management of library facilities for the disabled user.
- Problems of retrieving Chinese language materials in electronic catalogues.

Although the majority of the dissertations (59) investigated were written by students from the UK many other countries were represented: Antigua (1), Australia (1), Austria (1), Bahamas (2), Germany (2), Greece (1), Hong Kong (10), Ireland (10), Israel (1), Jamaica (1), Lebanon (6), Malta (1), Netherlands (1), Trinidad and Tobago (1) and the US (2).

Citations – general counts

The citations given in the bibliographies referred to a variety of types of sources - books, reports, newspapers, websites - as well as to articles published in LIS and other journals. In analysing the citations for the 100 dissertations the following was found.

The total number of references in each bibliography ranged from 16-352, with an average of 74 and with 23 dissertations having 100 or more references, as shown graphically in Figure 3.

Take in Figure 3 Total number of references in the bibliography of each dissertation

The number of references to papers in LIS journals in each dissertation ranged from 1-113, with an average of 23, as shown graphically in Figure 4.

Take in Figure 4. Number of references in LIS journals in each dissertation

The number of individual LIS journals referred to within each dissertation ranged from 1-44, with an average of 12, as shown graphically in Figure 5.

Take in Figure 5 Number of individual LIS journal titles in each dissertation

LIS journals cited

The total number of different LIS journals covered by the 100 dissertations was 263 and could be categorised as:

- a) International, refereed, high quality journals, such as those covered by the SSCI. Examples include: *Aslib Proceedings, Electronic Library, Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology (JASIST), Journal of Documentation, Journal of Information Science (JIS), Journal of Librarianship and Information Science (JOLIS), Information Technology and Libraries, Program: electronic library and information systems.*
- b) National or regional (may or may not be refereed) journals. Examples include: *American Libraries, Asian Libraries, Australian Academic and Research Libraries, Canadian Journal of Information and Library Science, Cape Librarian, Illinois Libraries, New Zealand Libraries, Scandinavian Public Library Quarterly, Scottish Libraries, Singapore Libraries, South African Journal of Librarianship and Information Science.*

- c) Journals covering a specific type of library. Examples include: *Art Libraries Journal*, *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association*, *College and Research Libraries*, *Education Libraries Journal*, *Health Libraries Review*, *Law Library Journal*, *Rural Libraries*, *School Library Journal*.
- d) Journals covering a specific function within the library. Examples include: *Cataloging and Classification Quarterly*, *Collection Management*, *Interlending and Document Supply*, *Journal of Library Administration*, *Library Acquisitions: Practice and Theory*, *Serials Review*.
- e) Journals linked to the Library Association, or similar professional body, of a particular country. Examples include: *Feliciter* (Canadian Library Association), *Jamaican Library Association Bulletin*, *Journal of the Hong Kong Library Association*, *Journal of the Medical Library Association*, *Library and Information Update* (formerly *Library Association Record* (UK)).
- f) Newsletters of special groups. Examples include:
- *Brio* – newsletter of the UK branch of the International Association of Music Libraries, Archives and Documentation Centres: UK and Ireland Branch.
 - *Relay* – the journal of the University, College and Research Group of the UK’s Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP).
 - *SCONUL Focus* (formerly *SCONUL Newsletter*) of the Society of College, National and University Libraries (SCONUL).
 - *Servicepoint* – the journal of the Branch and Mobile Libraries Group of CILIP.
 - *Youth Library Review* – publication of the Youth Libraries Group of CILIP.

By far the majority of the journals cited were English-language journals - the exceptions were:

- *Biblioteche Oggi* – from Italy
- *Bibliotheksdienst* – from Germany
- *Buch und Bibliothek* – from Germany
- *Y Ddolen* – from Wales

Most “popular” journals cited

Table I gives the number of references from the most popular 16 LIS journals cited in the 50 dissertations analysed in 2004 and then the 50 in 2006 as well as the total. Journals, such as *Library and Information Update* (formerly the *Library Association Record*), which have changed name during the period have had their scores amalgamated.

Take in Table I. Number of references to specific LIS journal titles

However the order of journals is slightly different when based on the number of dissertations which include a specific journal title (Table II).

Take in Table II. Number of dissertations including references to specific LIS journal titles

The largest number of citations in a dissertation to any one journal was 41. This was to items published in the *Library Association Record* in a dissertation on “Building the British Library: an analysis of attitudes”. This dissertation was also the one with the highest number of items in its bibliography (352).

Access to the LIS journals for student dissertations

Of the 263 journals noted, the TPL had print holdings for most titles and enabled electronic access to more recent (mid-late 1990s typically) editions of almost 150 titles through JoEy. Some of the LIS journals used by students for their dissertations were only available electronically such as:

- *Ariadne* (<http://www.ariadne.ac.uk>)
- *Bulletin of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* (<http://www.asis.org/Bulletin/index.html>)
- *CLIR (Council on Library and Information Resources) Issues* (<http://www.clir.org/pubs/issues/issues.html>)
- *D-Lib Magazine* (<http://www.dlib.org>)
- *Electronic Journal of Academic and Special Librarianship* (<http://southernlibrarianship.icaap.org/>)
- *Free Pint* (<http://www.freepint.co.uk>)
- *First Monday* (<http://www.firstmonday.org/>)
- *Information Research: an international electronic journal* (<http://informationr.net/ir/>)
- *RLG DigiNews* (<http://www.rlg.org/preserv/diginews/>)

Some students need access to historical material for their dissertations and then access to archives of LIS journals becomes important. Within the TPL archives exist for most of the subscribed journals. Examples of titles used by students in their dissertations for which extensive archives are available in TPL include:

- *American Libraries* 1939-
- *An Leabharlann* 1930-
- *Aslib Proceedings* 1949-
- *Australian Library Journal* 1951-
- *Journal of Documentation* 1945-
- *Law Library Journal* 1908-
- *The Librarian and Book World: an independent professional journal for the professional man* 1911-1961
- *Library Journal* 1876-
- *Library Quarterly* 1931-
- *Library Review* 1927-

As with many journal publications the journals in LIS used within the dissertations have:

- changed name over time, for example, *American Documentation* (1950-1969) became the *Journal of the American Society of Information Science* (1970-2000) and then *JASIST* in 2001;
- changed publishers, for example, *Aslib Proceedings*, *Journal of Documentation*, and *Program: electronic library and information systems* moved, in 2002, from being published by Aslib to being published by Emerald;
- ceased publication, for example, *Emergency Librarian* (1990-1998) and *Librarian Career Development* (1993-1996).

Given such changes it is necessary that some libraries are able to provide access to the print and electronic archive of these journals for future student research.

Analysis of student questionnaires

From the brief questionnaire completed by 33 Master's students starting to think about their dissertations the following was found. The literature search is a key starting point for any research process and students were asked about the sources they used to identify relevant material for their dissertation topics. Although access to individual LIS journal titles is comparatively easy, finding out exactly which papers within the journals might contain relevant material for their dissertation can be challenging. From the 33 questionnaires analysed LISA was the most popular source for a literature search (with 17 students indicating this), followed by Emerald with 15 students. Other sources mentioned included (in alphabetic order): Ebsco, Google, Google Scholar, Ingenta, JSTOR, LISTA, OCLC FirstSearch, WoK and ZETOC.

The number of different LIS journals identified by the 33 respondents as key sources was 44, all of which were included in the master list of 263 LIS titles cited in the dissertations analysed. The journal most respondents by far (14) noted as being a key source was *Ariadne* which is described as a "Web magazine for information professionals in archives, libraries and museums in all sectors. Since its inception in January 1996 it has attempted to keep the busy practitioner abreast of current digital library initiatives as well as technological developments further afield." (<http://www.ariadne.ac.uk/information/#about>). Journals which were mentioned by three to five respondents included:

- *Aslib Proceedings*
- *Electronic Library*
- *Journal of Documentation*
- *Journal of Academic Librarianship*
- *JIS*
- *JOLIS*
- *Library and Information Update*
- *Library Hi Tech*
- *Library Management*
- *School Librarian*

The remaining titles were cited just once or twice. General comments from the students showed that JoEy was found to be an excellent resource.

Discussion and conclusions

This research is obviously limited – both by the topics covered by dissertations selected for the study and by the fairly limited number of responses from students on their information gathering habits. There is plenty of scope for further study. One rather unexpected result was that most students cited, on average, material from only 12 different LIS journals. Journals with a practical bias seemed to be much more used than those more research-oriented journals with high impact factors. Indeed none of the “top five” journals given in the latest (2005) ISI Impact Factor study:

- *MIS Quarterly*
- *Journal of the American Medical Informatics Association*
- *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology*
- *Information Systems Research*
- *Scientometrics*

appeared in any of the lists of “popular” journals given above. One reason for this could be that most of the Master’s students are working in “real-life” library and information services and tend to choose dissertation topics with a practical element that could provide the necessary research-based evidence for a move to a new system or service. With developments in electronic publishing, more and more material is becoming available on the Web and in many instances students cited web-published papers/reports/presentations in their dissertations, i.e., not material published in a recognisable LIS journal. This was a conclusion also reached by a study of undergraduate dissertations at the Information Science Department at Loughborough University (Oppenheim and Smith, 2001). It is also interesting to note that the electronic only journal *Ariadne* has featured in all the “popular” lists as well as being the most “popular” by far of the students. Smith (2004) also found *Ariadne* to be one of three LIS e-journals with relatively high ISI citation counts and links from other websites. *Ariadne* was originally a print and web publication funded as part of the UK’s Electronic Library (eLib) Programme and an evaluation in 1999 noted its value for LIS students and professionals (Barker and Tedd, 1999).

This study has shown that there is a wide range of LIS journals available worldwide and the titles which were being cited by students in their dissertations tended to have a more practical than research basis.

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Figure 2. Menu of e-information sources available to users at UWA

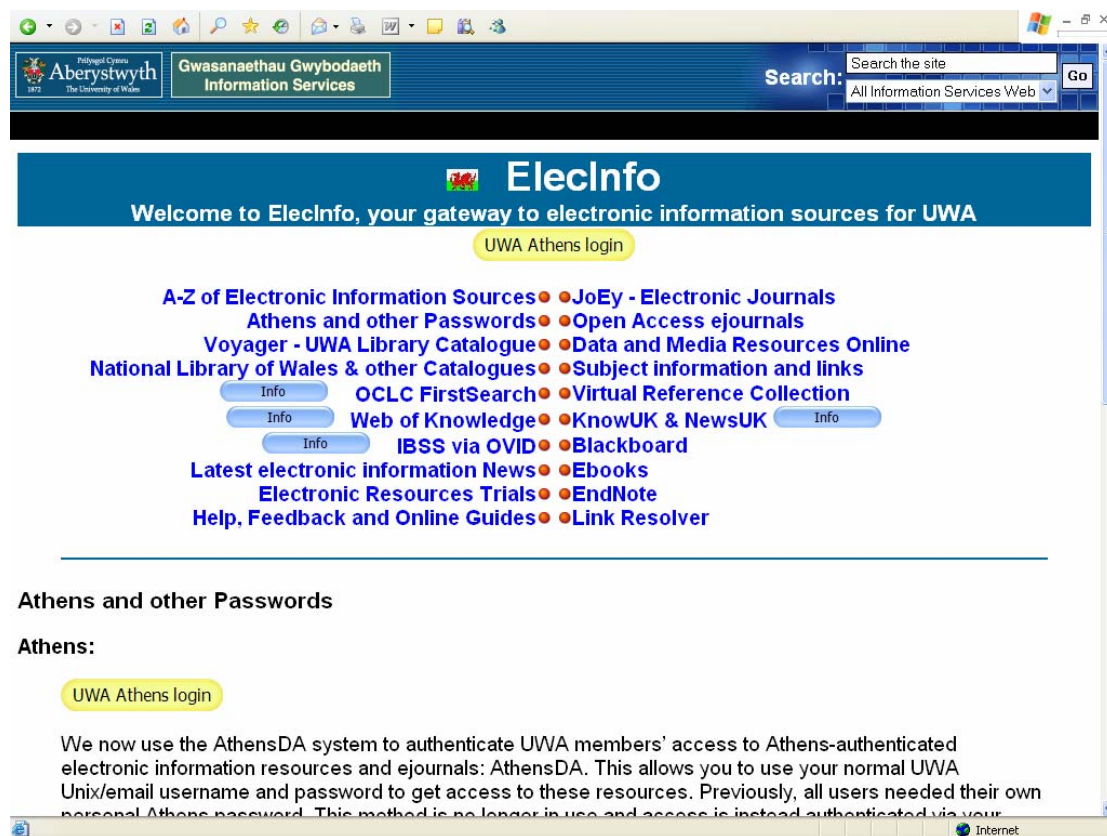


Figure 3. Total number of references in the bibliography of each dissertation

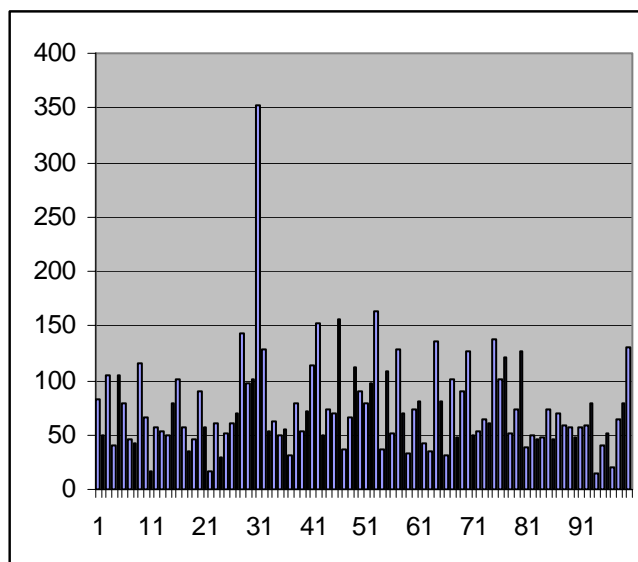


Figure 4. Number of references in LIS journals in each dissertation

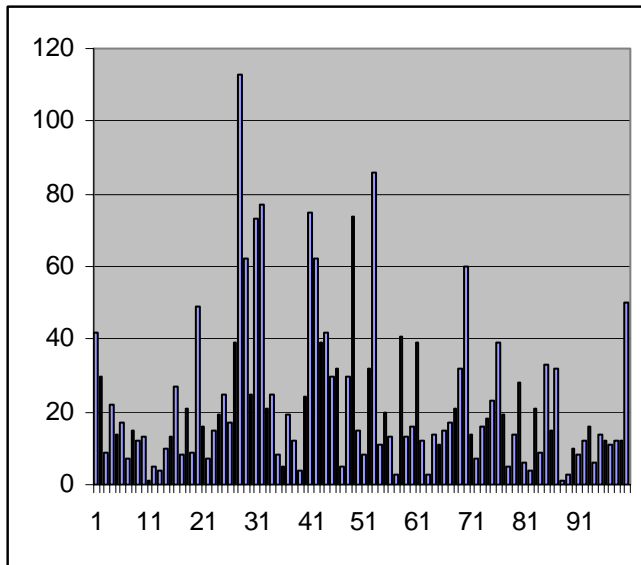


Figure 5. Number of individual LIS journal titles in each dissertation

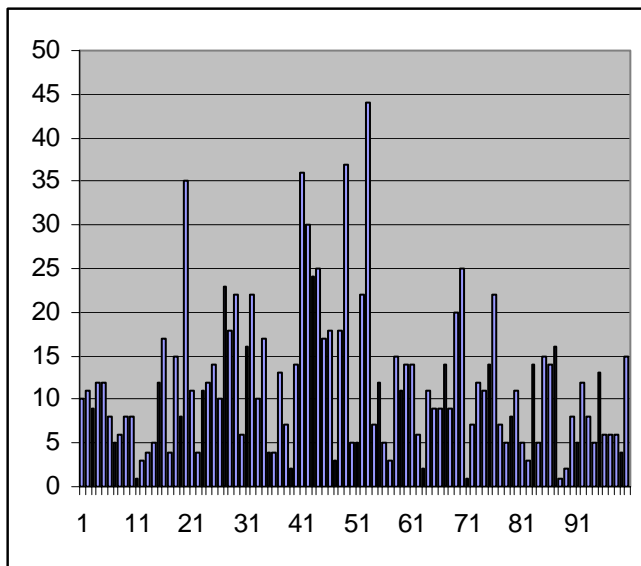


Table I. Number of references to specific LIS journal titles

Journal	2004	2006	Total
<i>Library and Information Update</i>	104	80	184
<i>Library Management</i>	49	45	94
<i>Library Trends</i>	43	20	63
<i>Library Review</i>	33	23	56
<i>Public Library Journal</i>	21	24	45
<i>New Library World</i>	26	19	45
<i>JOLIS</i>	25	18	43
<i>Library Journal</i>	31	12	43
<i>Computers in Libraries</i>	24	18	42
<i>Ariadne</i>	22	18	40
<i>Information Outlook</i>	32	7	39
<i>Journal of Academic Librarianship</i>	26	10	36
<i>JIS</i>	26	8	34
<i>Program: electronic information and library systems</i>	19	15	34
<i>Special Libraries</i>	32	1	33
<i>American Libraries</i>	26	6	32

Table 2. Number of dissertations including references to specific LIS journal titles

Journal	2004	2006	Total
<i>Library and Information Update</i>	17	31	48
<i>Library Management</i>	20	16	36
<i>Library Review</i>	12	16	28
<i>JOLIS</i>	15	12	27
<i>Library Trends</i>	14	11	25
<i>Library Journal</i>	14	10	24
<i>Ariadne</i>	10	11	23
<i>New Library World</i>	13	10	23
<i>Electronic Library</i>	12	6	18
<i>Journal of Academic Librarianship</i>	10	8	18
<i>Aslib Proceedings</i>	7	10	17
<i>JIS</i>	11	6	17
<i>Program: electronic library and information systems</i>	10	7	17
<i>Public Library Journal</i>	9	8	17
<i>American Libraries</i>	12	4	16
<i>College and Research Libraries</i>	11	5	16