

Why Some Students Continue to Value Individual Face-to-Face Research Consultations in a Technology-Rich World

Trina Magi and Patricia Mardeusz

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BACKGROUND

For decades, librarians have provided individual research consultations for students. At Bailey/Howe Library, the annual number of consultations has increased 39% between 2004/2005 and 2010/2011.

There is little information about why students continue to value face-to-face consultations, even with the availability of online research help.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1) How do students know to schedule a consultation?
- 2) What motivates students to schedule a consultation?
- 3) What kinds of assistance do librarians provide during consultations?
- 4) What do students find valuable about face-to-face interaction with librarians?

METHOD

Approach:

Exploratory, qualitative study

Target Population:

All undergraduate and graduate students who received individual consultations with either of the authors during spring semester 2011

Data Collection:

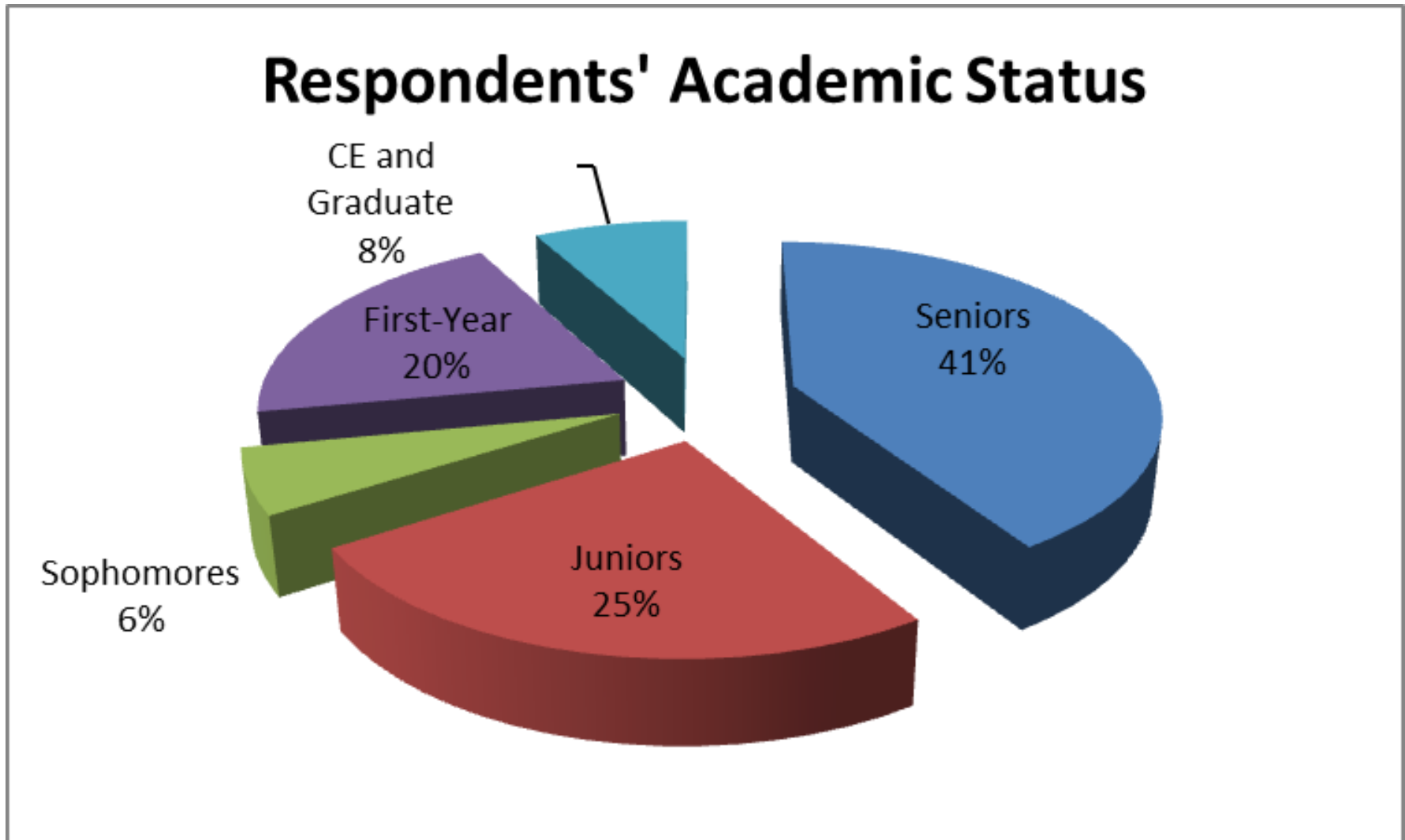
- Anonymous survey of mostly open-ended questions immediately after consultation
- Research logs in which librarians recorded topics and lengths of consultations

Data Analysis:

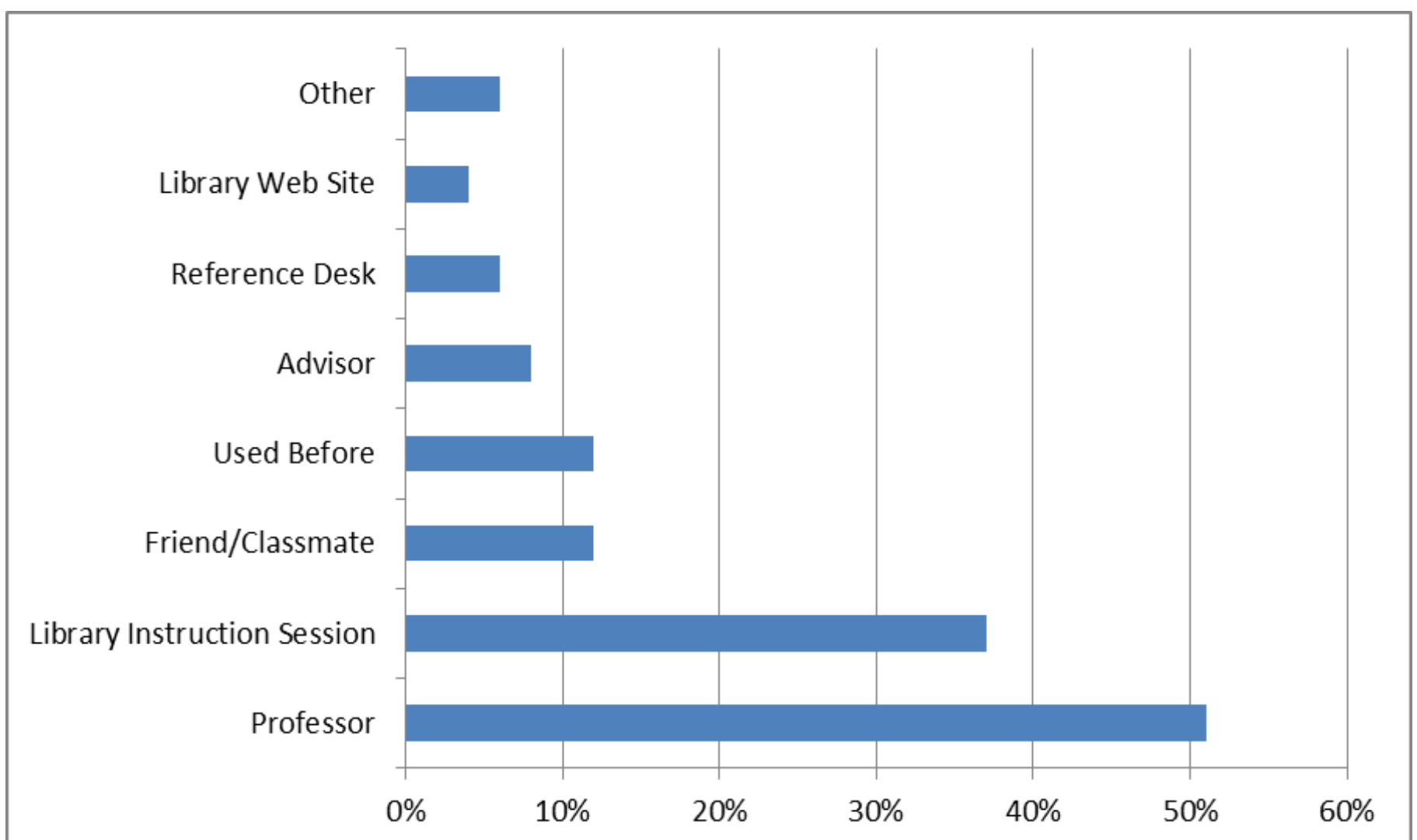
- Descriptive statistics and frequency distributions
- Content analysis of student responses to open-ended questions

RESPONDENT PROFILE

- 52 students responded (out of 53)
- 16 majors from six colleges represented



HOW STUDENTS LEARNED ABOUT SERVICE



FINDINGS

1. Students of all skill levels sought help for diverse reasons.
2. Students received many types of help from librarians:
 - a. Choosing databases and books
 - b. Identifying keywords and using search interfaces
 - c. Interpreting assignments
 - d. Brainstorming about how to approach projects
 - e. Discussing possible topics
 - f. Sharing subject knowledge
 - g. Evaluating results for relevance
 - h. Synthesizing disparate pieces of information
 - i. Providing advice about how to stay organized
3. Students valued:
 - a. Having access to expertise and subject knowledge of librarians
 - b. Watching librarian work through a problem, in order to learn and replicate the research process
 - c. The opportunity for dialogue, collaboration, and exchange of non-verbal information
 - d. Affective benefits—consultations helped relieve students' anxiety and made them feel encouraged, focused, and inspired
4. Consultations increased students' confidence about credibility of sources.
5. Compared to e-mail or chat reference, many students described consultations as a more quick, easy, and efficient way to get help.
6. 88% of students would “definitely” use service again; 92% would “definitely” recommend service.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed the depth and richness of consultations and the reasons some students find them valuable. To help students deeply engage with their research projects and develop a wide range of information literacy competencies, reference librarians should make research consultations an important component in their mix of reference and instruction services.