

INFORMATION HORIZONS OF FIRST-YEAR MEDICAL STUDENTS

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PURPOSE OF STUDY

This study reports on the preference and use of information resources by first-year medical students at the University of Missouri School of Medicine. It was part of a larger study that was conducted to understand their search competencies, Problem-Based Learning study approaches, and characteristics of online information seeking behavior.

We report the findings by using the concept of "Information Horizons."¹ Information horizons may consist of a variety of information resources whose use is determined socially and individually and may be conceptualized as densely populated solution spaces.¹

MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

PARTICIPANTS

- Twelve 1st year medical students from MU School of Medicine (10 females, 2 males)
- All participants completed the first eight weeks of the first PBL block of the Fall semester 2011

MATERIALS

Six clinical scenarios prepared by two subject matter experts. The complexity level of these scenarios corresponded to the level of students' academic preparation by the time of data collection.

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

- Took place between October-December, 2011
- Participants were presented with a clinical scenario and asked to conduct online information searches.

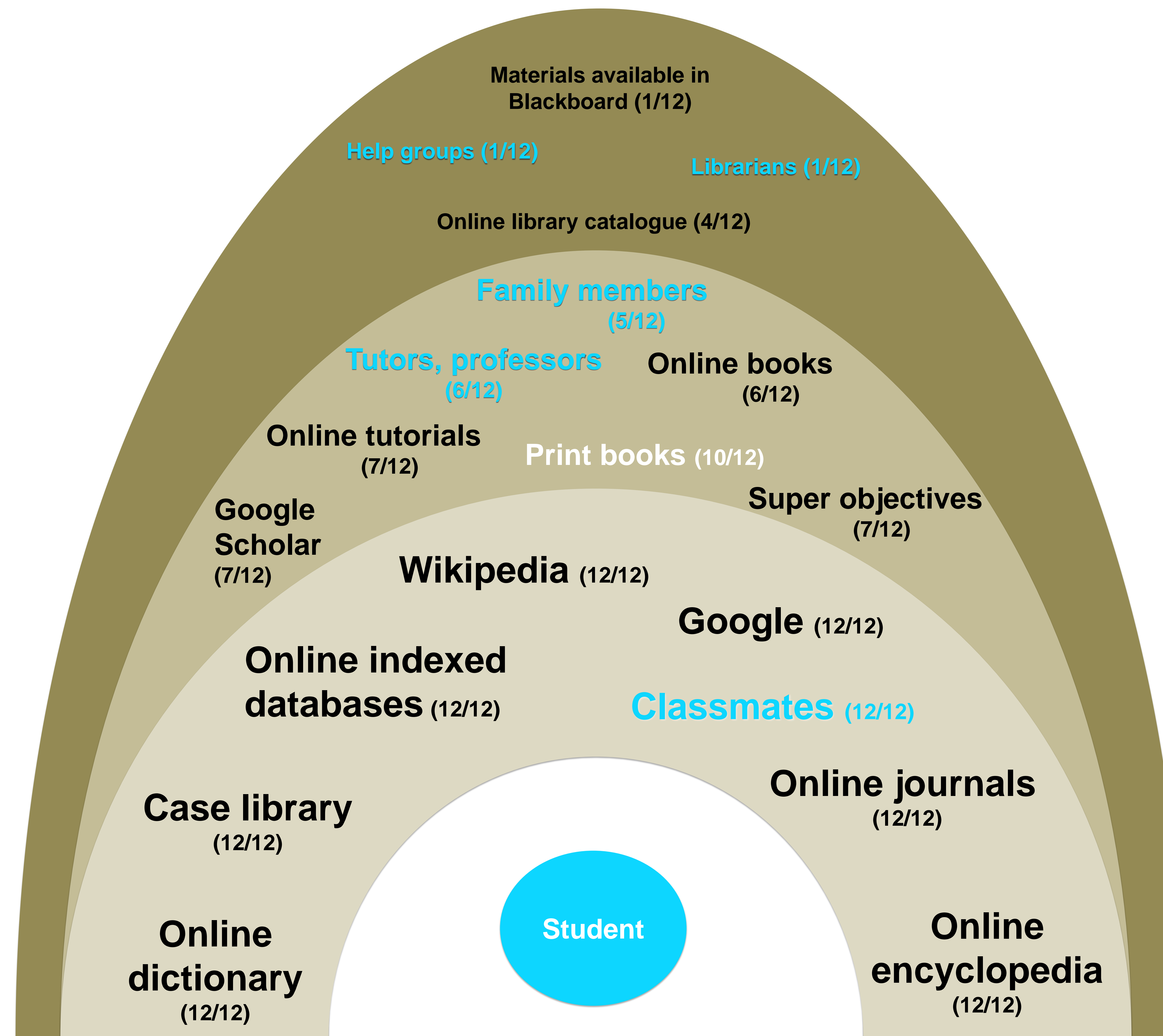
DATA COLLECTION METHODS

- A pre-test questionnaire adapted from the Research Practices Survey²
- Remote observations of students performing searches
- Retrospective think-aloud interviews

References

1. D. Sonnenwald. Evolving Perspectives of Human Information Behavior: Contexts, Situations, Social Networks and Information Horizons. In: Wilson, T. & Allen, D. (Eds.) (1999). *Exploring the Contexts of Information Behavior* (pp. 176-190). London: Taylor Graham.
2. National Institute for Technology and Liberal Education (2008). Research practices survey. Available at http://s3.amazonaws.com/nitle_db/attachments/218/ResearchPracticesSurveySampleInstrument.pdf

FINDINGS*



* Information horizons are represented by three layers: the most close, intermediate, and the most remote from the student. Information resources on the most close layer of information horizon are used most frequently and on the most remote layer – less frequently. Color-coding of words represents groupings of information resources by type, e.g., blue – social, white – print, black – electronic. Number in parenthesis represents the frequency of reported resource use.

CONCLUSION

- The most frequently used type of information resources was electronic (e.g., online indexed databases, case library, etc.).
- Among them along with credible information resources there were questionable information sources, e.g., Wikipedia.
- Study participants frequently sought help of other students.
- Print information resources were used less frequently compared to electronic resources.
- Advice by librarians and online library catalogue of the Health Sciences Library were especially underutilized.

• Based on the findings it is important to increase presence of domain experts in student learning and promote student awareness of pre-appraised resources available in the shared spaces.

LIMITATIONS

All obtained results are not generalizable and are characteristic to this study only. Sample size, data collection methods, duration of performed searches, nature of clinical scenarios, and approaches to data analysis could have resulted in a number of limitations. For a more complete picture of medical students' preferences for information resources further investigation is needed.

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