



Trends in Information Literacy: A Comparative View

Imagine Easy Solutions, EasyBib.com
May 2014

About This Study

In 2012, EasyBib sent a survey out to librarian users to survey different aspects of the information literacy landscape. Through a series of multiple choice questions, librarians provided their insights on their:

- Information literacy instruction program
- Students' understanding of website credibility, information synthesis and access
- Current stance on plagiarism in their institution

This data was compiled and organized into an infographic, *Trends in Information Literacy*, which is available to view for free on the EasyBib blog at <http://content.easybib.com/>.

In May 2014, EasyBib conducted a similar survey to a larger audience in order to compare the statistics with the original 2012 data. The purpose of this second survey is to determine how information literacy trends (i.e., student understanding, library instruction, etc.) have shifted over the past two years. A second survey was concurrently placed on EasyBib.com to survey student perceptions of these same information literacy skills.

This report provides some initial, basic analysis of the data and what are the major trends and changes between 2012 and 2014.

Data Collection

Data was collected using two survey tools: Google Forms (for librarians and educators) and Qualaroo (for students).

The Google Forms survey was sent to EasyBib's mailing list of primarily high school and academic librarians and educators, and was promoted via social media. The survey consisted of eight multiple-choice questions. A total of 1,182 usable responses were collected over four days in May 2014.

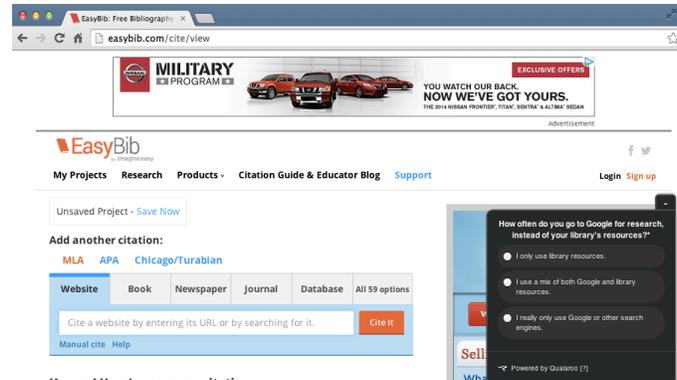


Figure 1: Example of pop-up survey on EasyBib.com.

To reach our student population, a pop-up survey was placed on EasyBib.com via Qualaroo from May 19 to 21, 2014, consisting of four multiple-choice questions (see Figure 1). A total of 10,471 responses were collected. Only four questions were asked to students in order to limit the interruption from creating citations.

Both surveys were completely voluntary and no identifiable information, including geographic location, were collected during this study, save one broad demographic question on each survey (the type of library and type of school attended).

Demographics

Educators

Both surveys were open to librarians, educators and students across the globe. Librarians/educators did not have to subscribe to use EasyBib to participate. In the interest of protecting privacy, no location data was collected. However, the survey included a question regarding which type of library in which the respondent works.

However, middle and elementary schools each represented 12% of respondents, as did two-year colleges/universities. “Other / N/A” respondents included public librarians and writing consultants, and constituted 2% of total responses. We were pleasantly surprised to see that so many elementary librarians responded to the survey.

What Type of Library Do You Work In?

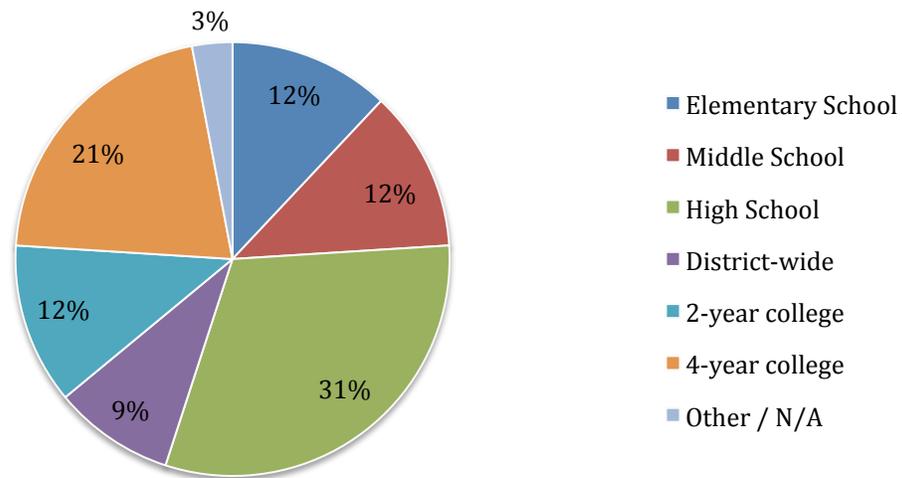


Figure 2: Responses to “Which type of library do you work in?”

Students

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, almost 72 million students were enrolled in public or higher education institutions in 2013.¹ EasyBib’s unique visitor count—approximately 42 million users—represents over half of the student population in the United States.

Our technology does not permit us to parse data based on the respondent’s age. To better understand where our respondents were in their academic career, a question was placed at the end of the survey. Approximately 67% of the student sample answered the demographic question.

¹ National Center for Education Statistics, "Back to School Statistics," Fast Facts, 2013, accessed May 20, 2014, <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=372>.

School Category (Student Responses)

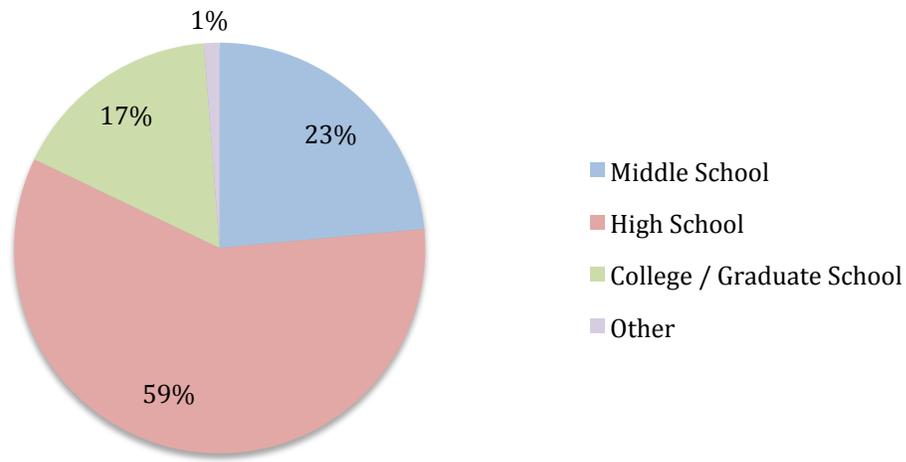


Figure 3: Student responses based on which type of school they attend.

The "Other" option featured a free-text response field, and responses included elementary school students, homeschooled students, journalists, editors and MOOC (Massive Online Open Course) students. There were also some nonsensical responses, such as "elephant," "sponge," "skydiver" and others that were not appropriate to include in this report.

Comparison: Librarians vs. Students

Studies show that students are often overly confident with their research skills upon entering college, which can hamper their academic career in higher education.² Our survey showed similar levels of confidence with certain information literacy skills.

The 2014 student survey placed on EasyBib asked three questions that were also included in the survey completed by librarians and educators. The purpose of

² Fiona Salisbury and Sharon Karasmanis, "Are They Ready? Exploring Student Information Literacy Skills in the Transition from Secondary to Tertiary Education," *Australian Academic & Research Libraries* 41, no. 1 (2011).

this was to see whether students and their instructors see eye-to-eye on how students understand major information literacy skills.

Students evaluated themselves, and librarians evaluated their students, on the following skills:

- Level of understanding of website credibility (Figure 4).
- Frequency of students using the Open Web (i.e., Google) versus authoritative library resources (Figure 5).
- To what degree students struggle with effectively using paraphrases and direct quotes in research (Figure 6).

Initial analysis shows that librarians are not as confident in their students with website credibility and using paraphrases effectively as students claim to be. That is, librarians feel that a minuscule percentage of their students have an advanced level of understanding of website evaluation and paraphrasing skills—2% and 3%, respectively.

36.1%
of students felt they had an advanced understanding of website evaluation.

2%
of librarians felt that their students were experts at evaluating websites.

Moreover, 36.1% of students said that they have an advanced level of understanding multiple aspects of website evaluation, with 14.2% conceding they have a limited understanding of evaluating websites, and do not practice evaluation when they do research.

There was only a 2.7% difference in responses from librarians and students who said they have an average understanding of website evaluation—47% of librarians, and 49.7% of students.

Continued...

Understanding of Website Credibility

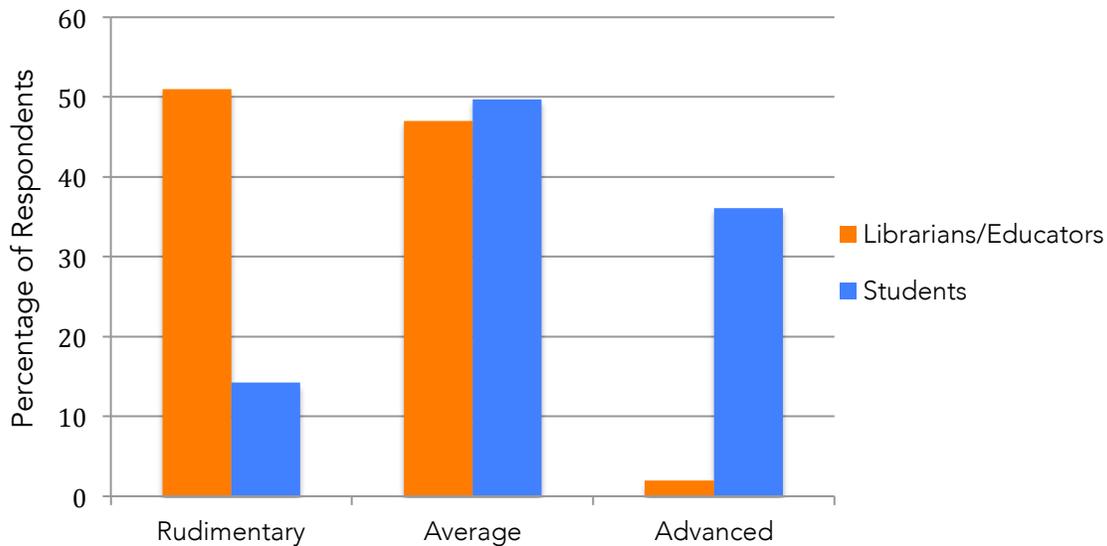


Figure 4: Comparison of librarians/educators and student responses to website credibility understanding.

In Figure 4, the extremes (rudimentary and advanced understandings) were skewed heavily, while an average understanding represented close to half of both populations polled.

Google & the Open Web

Academic reports—and many librarians’ own experiences—have shown that students use Google in course-related contexts the vast majority of the time.³ Figure 5 demonstrates that librarians’ views on how students use the Open Web and library resources generally line up with student responses.

Approximately 60% of librarian respondents felt that their students prefer to use the Open Web to do research for school assignments over library resources, such as databases, journals or other authoritative sources. Essentially the same percentage of students, 58.7%, said they primarily use Google or similar search engines exclusively for research assignments, without consulting library resources at all.

6 in 10
librarians felt their students prefer to use the Open Web over library resources.

³ Alison J. Head and Michael B. Eisenberg, *Truth Be Told: How College Students Evaluate and Use Information in the Digital Age*, report, November 1, 2010, Figure 3, accessed May 22, 2014, http://projectinfolit.org/images/pdfs/pil_fall2010_survey_fullreport1.pdf.

In Figure 5, it is particularly interesting to see how closely the librarian and student responses were aligned, yet the extremes in Figures 4 and 6 were inverted.

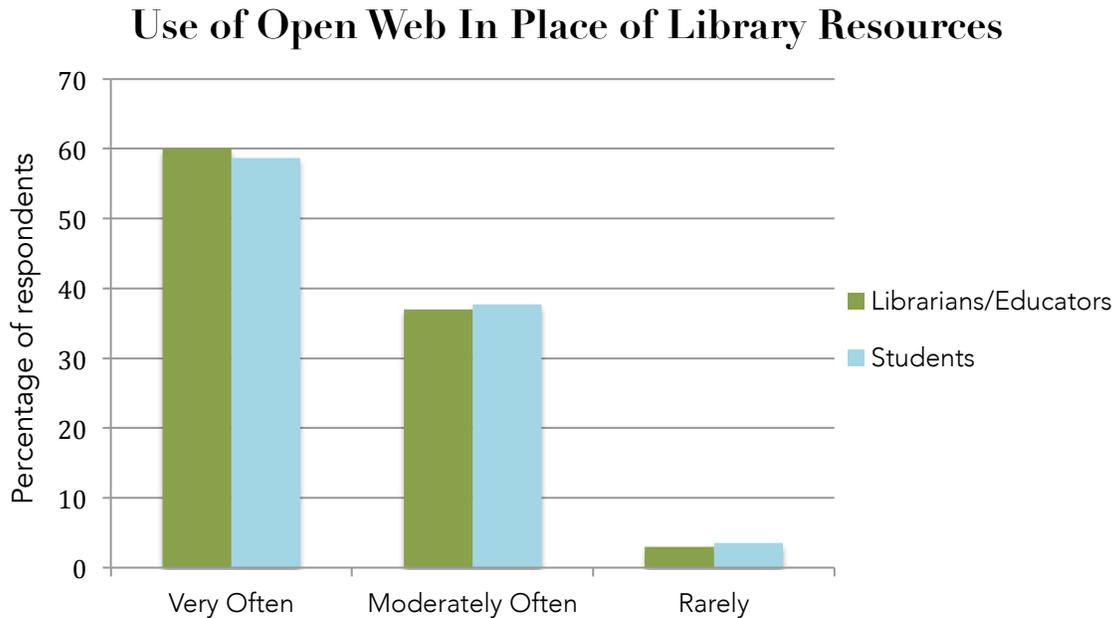


Figure 5: Comparison of librarians/educators and student responses to frequency of Open Web use.

According to ACRL, understanding how to properly write paraphrases and use direct quotes in research is a fundamental information literacy skill.⁴ As with the website credibility question, students were more confident with their information synthesis skills than librarians/educators believe them to be.

Continued...

⁴ACRL, "Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education," Guidelines & Standards, 2013, Sec. 4.1.c, accessed May 23, 2014, <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/informationliteracycompetency>.

Struggling with Paraphrasing/Direct Quotes

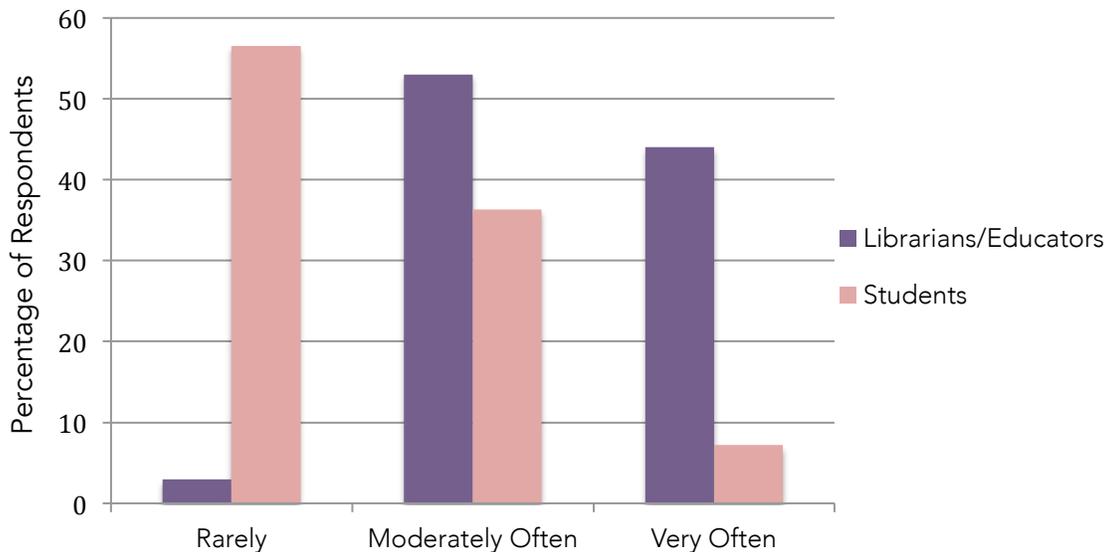


Figure 6: Comparison of librarians/educators and student responses to frequency of struggling with paraphrasing and direct quotes.

This is not the first time we have compiled and compared data from librarians and students. A similar study was conducted in 2013, focusing on perceptions of the library, Wikipedia, and plagiarism. A summary of this study can be found on School Library Journal’s website, referenced in the bibliography of this report.

Comparison: 2012 data vs. 2014 data

From comparing our surveys from 2012 and 2014, we discovered that meaningful change is possible in such a short period of time—for better and worse.

Major findings include:

- Librarians who felt their students overwhelmingly use the Open Web in place of library resources dropped almost 25%.
- Information literacy instruction combining both one-shot instruction and full courses increased, while the number of librarians who only teach one-shot sessions decreased.
- Librarians who feel faculty have an important influence on developing student research and critical thinking skills increased by over 40%.

Question: I find students using the Open Web for research projects, instead of library databases.

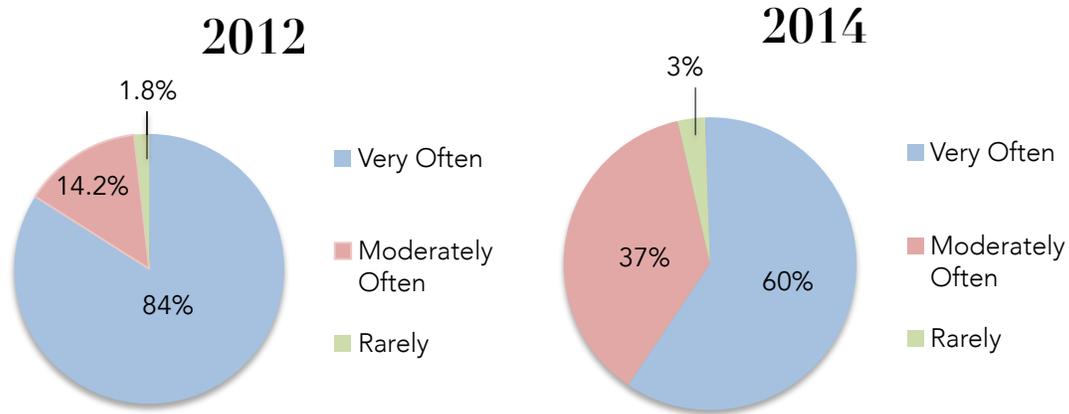


Figure 7: Frequency of students using the Open Web instead of library resources.

These pie charts show a positive shift in students using a mix of both Open Web and library resources in research—a 22.8% increase. As seen in Figure 5, the responses from librarians closely matched the student responses. There was a slight increase, as well, with students who rarely use the Open Web instead of library resources.

The data suggests that students are gaining a better understanding of library resources and, more importantly, using them in their research assignments.

Many library media specialists and academic librarians struggle with implementing a rigid information literacy curriculum into their school or institution. Budgetary and time constraints make it a challenge and it can be difficult to garner interest from faculty.

Our data shows that there have been some interesting adjustments in how librarians are tackling teaching critical thinking and research skills.

Continued...

Question: Which best describes the information literacy instruction program at your institution?

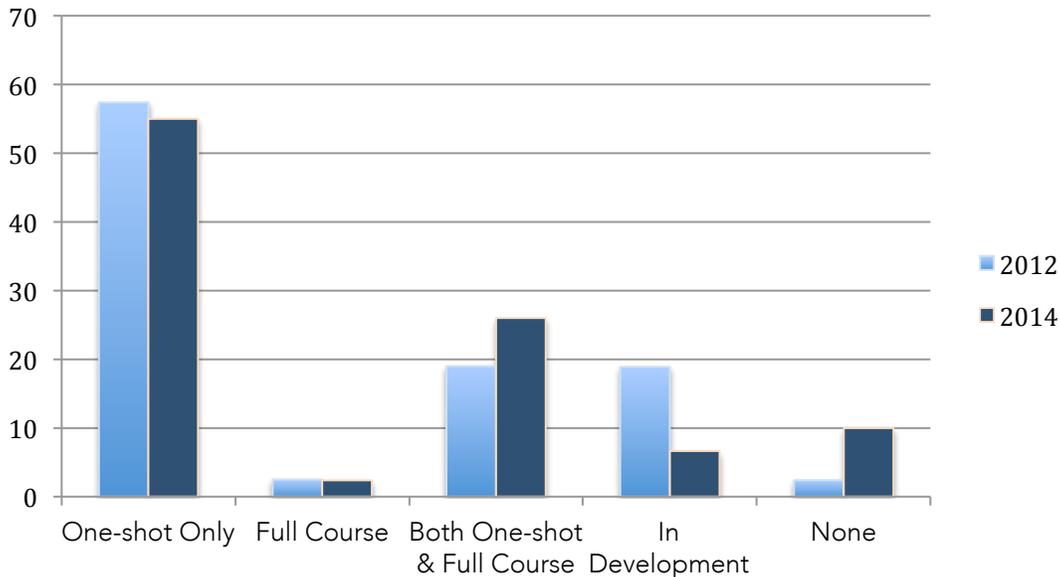


Figure 8: Comparison of library instruction programs between 2012 and 2014.

While one-shot instruction remains the most popular instruction method for librarians, there was a slight decrease (2.4%). There was also a noticeable increase (7%) in a combination of both one-shot sessions and full information literacy courses (i.e., meeting multiple times over the course of a semester and teaching more refined information literacy skills).

Unfortunately, there was a 7.6% increase in institutions that have no information literacy instruction whatsoever. This could be due to the larger and more diverse population polled in 2014 than in 2012, or the continued library budget and job cuts.⁵

In 2012, the overwhelming majority of librarians felt they played an extremely important role in information literacy instruction and teaching students critical thinking and research skills (95.9%). Comparing the data with 2014, there has been a sharp shift in favoring collaboration with faculty.

⁵ "Libraries In Crisis," The Huffington Post, 2014, accessed May 23, 2014, <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/news/libraries-in-crisis/>.

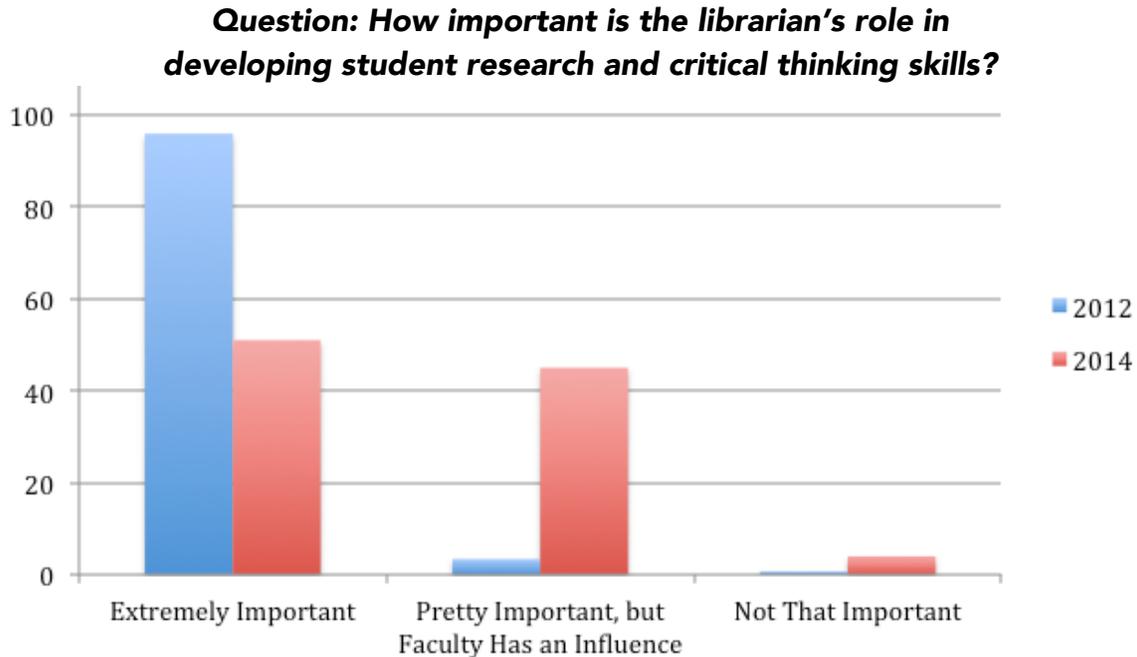


Figure 9: Comparison librarian's role in IL instruction between 2012 and 2014.

There has been much discussion in the library space about how collaborating with faculty is an effective method to teach information literacy and research skills.⁶ We could assume that the increase is due to direct collaboration, however, other factors may influence this trend as well, such as state or national standards that require more research in the classroom.

A major topic in this report is website credibility evaluation. An alarming statistic found from analyzing data between 2012 and 2014 is a 29.3% increase in students having a rudimentary understanding of website evaluation. Despite data showing that librarians feel students are now using the Open Web for research less than they did in 2012, when students are on the Open Web, their evaluation skills are more lackluster.

⁶ Keith Curry Lance, Marcia J. Rodney, and Bill Schwarz, "Collaboration Works--When It Happens!," *Teacher Librarian* 37, no. 5 (June 2010), accessed May 23, 2014, Academic Complete.

Conclusion

Initial analysis suggests that librarians are taking a proactive role to integrate information literacy throughout the curriculum, through collaborating more with faculty and increasing offerings of both one-shot and full courses.

In regard to student understanding of paraphrasing and website evaluation, librarian and student opinions differ greatly. However, both groups share the same opinions when it comes to which resources students prefer to use during research—the Open Web and/or library databases.

There is much deeper analysis and data to comb through in the coming months to better understand how librarians are changing their information literacy instruction within their educational communities, and what students really think when it comes to critical thinking and research skills.

We will continue to analyze the data in the coming months. Refer to <http://content.easybib.com> to discover new findings and resources.

Bibliography

- ACRL. "Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education." Guidelines & Standards. 2013. Accessed May 23, 2014. <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/informationliteracycompetency>.
- Bayliss, Sarah. "Students Wary of Wikipedia But Still Use for Research, Study Finds." *School Library Journal*. October 1, 2013. Accessed May 23, 2014. <http://www.slj.com/2013/10/research/easybib-survey-students-wary-of-wikipedia-but-still-use-for-research/>.
- Head, Alison J., and Michael B. Eisenberg. *Truth Be Told: How College Students Evaluate and Use Information in the Digital Age*. Report. November 1, 2010. Accessed May 22, 2014. http://projectinfolit.org/images/pdfs/pil_fall2010_survey_fullreport1.pdf.
- Lance, Keith Curry, Marcia J. Rodney, and Bill Schwarz. "Collaboration Works-- When It Happens!" *Teacher Librarian* 37, no. 5 (June 2010): 30-36. Accessed May 23, 2014. Academic Complete.
- "Libraries In Crisis." *The Huffington Post*. 2014. Accessed May 23, 2014. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/news/libraries-in-crisis/>.
- National Center for Education Statistics. "Back to School Statistics." *Fast Facts*. 2013. Accessed May 20, 2014. <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=372>.
- Salisbury, Fiona, and Sharon Karasmanis. "Are They Ready? Exploring Student Information Literacy Skills in the Transition from Secondary to Tertiary Education." *Australian Academic & Research Libraries* 41, no. 1 (2011): 43-58.

About Us

EasyBib is the most popular online citation and research management platform, with over 42 million annual users. Over 1,400 universities and schools subscribe to its premium services, EasyBib Academic Edition and EasyBib School Edition.

Imagine Easy Solutions is a small company with big ideas. *EasyBib*, its first product, is an information literacy platform providing research, note taking and citation tools. *ResearchReady*, its newest product, helps students learn fundamental, effective and ethical 21st century research and critical thinking skills. Imagine Easy Solutions was founded in 2001 and is headquartered in New York City.

For questions or comments, please contact Emily Gover at emily.gover@imagineeasy.com.

