**Fondren Library Needs Assessment**

Joanna Russell Bliss

INFO 5400, Section 001

28 June 2021

APA Citation Format

The author has been employed at Fondren Library as a Research & User Experience Intern since August 2019.

## I. Introduction

### A. Previous Library Assessments

Informal assessment is gathered through several contact forms and spaces on the SMU Libraries website. A page asks for feedback on library services and the website (SMU Libraries, n.d.b). Faculty and instruction staff can request the purchase of resources through a purchase request form (SMU Libraries, n.d.c). And students, faculty and staff are encouraged to use the libraries' Ask Us service for research assistance, asking questions about library services, and more; these inquiries are reviewed every semester to discuss possible improvements to library services and communications (SMU Libraries, n.d.a).

The Access Services department collects statistical data on gate counts and monitors usage reports for circulation of both physical and electronic resources, as well as interlibrary loan (SMU Libraries, 2020). And the Information Literacy department tracks attendance in classes and workshops, as well as the number of reference transactions (including those through Ask Us) and reference consultations.

SMU subject librarians work with departmental faculty and the SMU Libraries Technical Services department to do academic program reviews every seven years, assessing the quality of resources available for that particular program and comparing holdings and subscriptions for SMU Libraries to aspirational institutions (S. Sanabria, personal communication, June 23, 2021). For example, after a recent review of earth science materials and reviewing the materials accessed at Johns Hopkins University and Washington University, the subject liaison recommended the purchase of more

monographs and another academic journal (Sullivan, 2019). These librarians also do similar reports when a new academic degree or program has been proposed, as when the Lyle School of Engineering proposed a new M.S. in data science (Jones, 2019).

Large formal assessments are done every ten years as part of the university's accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, most recently completed in 2011 (SMU Libraries, n.d.e). The libraries have been meeting internally and with campus-wide faculty and staff since January 2020 for the current assessment in progress (J. McMichael, personal communication, January 2020).

In addition, SMU Libraries has conducted two overarching assessments specific to the libraries in recent years. At the beginning of 2019, under a newly created Dean of Libraries, an internal committee developed a five-year strategic plan for SMU Libraries (SMU Libraries, 2019). This committee gathered extensive data from the SMU community, including

> 2,523 responses to the libraries survey, 30 faculty and student interviews, and eight meetings with other campus divisions and departments. Further needs assessment was conducted through evaluation of strategic plans from all SMU schools and colleges to understand how the SMU Libraries' multidisciplinary expertise can facilitate interdisciplinary research. (p. 3)

As the strategic plan was being finalized in the fall of 2019, another large-scale assessment began at Fondren Library, evaluating the possibility of creating a research hub with, and improved office space for, the Office of Information Technology (OIT), serving as "as a collective to facilitate radical transformation in the research lifecycle for

Ph.D. students and faculty," (brightspot, 2020, p. 4). This assessment built on the one

done for the strategic plan, considering the information gathered over the previous

months and doing additional user research with SMU faculty and students, along with

library staff, to understand patron needs for both research and learning on campus. The

final report notes that Fondren Library currently uses 54% of its space for collections,

more than double the 10-20% of space used for physical collections at competitive

libraries (p. 30). As the building considers reducing the space for physical resources,

this places more importance on the ability to access research electronically.

**B. Special Permissions & Stakeholders**

There are several potential stakeholders that should be involved in this assessment.

Permission for any such assessment should start with the Director of Fondren Library

and Associate Dean for SMU Libraries. Once she has approved the assessment,

assessors should identify subject librarians, faculty and staff, and the student population

that should be involved in order to get feedback from a statistically significant sample of

all patrons on campus. If deemed necessary by the Director of Fondren Library,

assessors should discuss the assessment with the Dean's Cabinet (at SMU Libraries),

SMU Libraries Executive Board, the Friends of the SMU Libraries Executive Board, and

the SMU Libraries Student Advisory Board, as well as the Faculty Senate and the SMU

Research department, in order to determine how to administer the assessment fairly

and responsibly.

## II. Getting Focused

### A. Focus

As Fondren Library considers removing physical resources from its building, electronic resources will be even more important for research for the SMU community. Fondren needs to consider whether its population is comfortable with and able to access electronic resources. The library is conducting a needs assessment to identify whether SMU students and faculty are currently able to access the resources they need electronically.

### B. Objective

Fondren Library is surveying its patrons to measure their ability to access electronic resources through SMU Libraries.

## III. Methods and Instruments

### A. Methodology

A survey would allow for both close- and open-ended questions to collect information about the experiences of SMU students and faculty when accessing electronic resources. It is particularly important to gather information about user experience over the last year as the previous 15 academic months under COVID have created an increased need for access to electronic resources. With current standards of social

distancing and many students and faculty away for the summer, a survey distributed via email would be the best way to reach patrons and gather their feedback remotely.

## B. Explanation of Assessment Instrument

The survey created has eleven questions, ten of which are multiple choice, allowing for statistical analysis of results. The final question is open ended, giving patrons a way to suggest improvements to the university's access to electronic resources.

The questions asked allow surveyors to understand:

1. Who is completing the survey and their affiliation on campus.
2. How frequently they access both physical and electronic resources on campus.
3. Whether they have difficulty accessing resources and, if they do, the type of issue they have.
4. What publishers or databases they access and if they have problems accessing any of those publishers or databases in particular.
5. What types of resources they are accessing electronically and how they are reading print e-resources.
6. What types of improvements users would suggest for the process of accessing electronic resources.

Please see Appendix A for a blank copy of the assessment.

## IV. Planning

### A. Creating a Plan --Theory

Once permission has been granted by the Director of Fondren Library and Associate Dean for SMU Libraries and any other stakeholders that have been confirmed by the director, the researcher would contact the SMU Research department to discuss the best way to distribute the survey to faculty and students, and what the sample size should be given the faculty and student populations. Once the survey has been distributed, patrons would have one month to complete the survey. At the end of the month, the researcher would collect and analyze the data, and create a report with recommendations on whether and how access to electronic resources can be improved as we move toward removing physical resources and relying more on electronic resources for research.

### B. Actual Implementation -- Reality

After receiving approval from the supervisor for student workers, the researcher posted the link to the survey on an internal message board, asking student workers to complete the survey about their experiences accessing electronic resources at SMU. It was also posted on a separate message board for fellow interns at Fondren Library in order to collect their experiences with the resources, emailed to several instructors with whom the researcher has worked, and posted on a discussion in Canvas for fellow students at UNT in this class.

## V. Results and Recommendations

### A. Data Collected

**Demographics.**

The survey was created online with Google Forms for easy distribution and collection. Twelve respondents completed the survey: Six students, two faculty, three staff, and one dual faculty/staff member. While a small sample was collected, those that completed represented several areas of study on campus, with the majority (5) affiliated with the Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences, one student each at the Cox School of Business, Lyle School of Engineering and the Meadows School of the Arts, and three affiliated with campus support organizations like the Writing Center or SMU Libraries (one respondent did not answer this question).

**Use of physical and electronic resources.**

Questions three and four underscored the importance of electronic resources and what is used more for research on campus, physical or electronic resources. When asked how frequently respondents accessed physical resources on campus, half (6) said rarely, and another quarter (3) said never. But all respondents said they used electronic resources at least 2-3 times a month (sometimes), with two-thirds (8) responding they access electronic resources often, at least 2-3 times a week.

**Difficulty accessing electronic resources.**

None of the respondents answered that they had difficulty accessing electronic resources through SMU Libraries, but most (8) acknowledged that there were

occasionally difficulties, answering that they are "usually" able to access resources without difficulty; only four chose the response that said they could "always" access resources easily. Those that had the sporadic challenge accessing resources answered that the process of accessing the resources through logging in or downloading/reading the resource online were not as common – none marked the logging process as an issue, and only two chose "downloading or opening the resource" as their most common issue. The most popular selection here was that users had problems finding the resources they needed (6). And four respondents stated they never had issues accessing resources.

### Publishers and databases used when accessing electronic resources.

The patrons surveyed use many of the publishers and databases available to the SMU community. Even with one respondent not replying to question 7 about which resources are accessed, the data shows a wide range of electronic resource usage. (Note: For this question and the next about any issues accessing particular databases or publishers, those surveyed could select more than one answer to the question.)

The most common databases and publishers accessed by respondents were EBSCO (9 votes), JSTOR (7) and ProQuest (6). The least selected at only one vote each were CQ Press and O'Reilly (for electronic books). Others with multiple votes were Gale (4), Elsevier (3), Factiva and Oxford University Press (2 votes each), and Taylor and Francis (5), with 2 votes for "Other".

Compared to the wide selections for question 7, most respondents for question 8 (6) noted that they do not have problems accessing electronic resources, and two

abstained from the question entirely. The data for those users that did note some access issues did not reflect large problems with any one publisher; only 3 databases or publishers got one vote each for access issues: EBSCO, Factiva, and Gale, as well as two votes for "Other".

**What types of electronic resources are being accessed and how.**

All respondents acknowledged accessing academic articles and journals, with most (10 out of 12) also accessing electronic books. Almost half (5) also access streaming media (video or audio) as well. When reading those articles or books, two-thirds (8) prefer to download a PDF to their device over reading the material online.

**Feedback on possible improvements to accessing electronic resources.**

The survey did offer one open-ended question to collect suggestions for improvements. One of the faculty surveyed noted that sometimes finding resources in databases feels like "going on a scavenger hunt," but they noted this is usually the fault of the database rather than the design of the SMU Libraries website. Another asked whether it would be possible to download PDFs of electronic books to make note taking easier. And a third noted that research is limited by what the library has subscribed to, forcing the patron to also use resources at a separate library.

Please see Appendix B for the full results of the survey.

**B. Recommendations**

Total enrollment at SMU is 12,373 students, and instructional faculty on campus add up to 767 (SMU, n.d.; SMU, 2020). With a total student/faculty population of a little more than 13,000, a sample of 11 respondents is not nearly enough; a sample for that size population should be at least 375 (Turner, 2021). In addition, the distribution of the survey was limited to personal acquaintances on campus, limiting both who was being contacted and the anonymity of the sample. A full-scale needs assessment would need a much broader distribution for statistical relevance.

While the sample is limited and biased, the information collected did meet the stated objective of the survey: Measuring the ability of patrons to access electronic resources through SMU Libraries. Respondents confirmed that they access electronic resources more than physical ones, that they usually access resources without a problem, and they can access a variety of publishers and databases without any particular publishers or databases standing out with a large number of issues.

Some data collected indicated that it might be helpful to gather more information on the subject. For example, half of the respondents answered that their problem accessing electronic resources is most often finding what the users need. This suggests that further needs assessment about the website might be in order, collecting data on where improvements might help users find resources more easily. Other finding aids might also help patrons looking for resources, like online tutorials, or promoting the SMU Libraries research guide on search tips (SMU Libraries, n.d.d).

It was also curious that that the only response with more than one vote when considering what publishers or databases are problematic was "Other". Perhaps the survey needs to be revised with more databases and publishers, and, if so, which ones?

While the answers to the final question cannot be codified, they can also point to further needs assessment of our patrons. Would it be beneficial to create research guides specific to databases and publishers? Is it feasible to have PDFs available to download of the electronic books we offer access to? And how expensive would it be to add access to databases on demand?

## VI. Lessons Learned

The most difficult part of the needs assessment process for this assignment was the short time frame. Most assessments take at least a month, if not several; I had about three days to create my questions, distribute them, and analyze the data. That looming deadline made deciding on a focus challenging, as I wanted to select something pragmatic. But I also knew the longer I debated, the less time I would have to collect my data. The biggest element that would make this process easier is more time, but given the limits of the summer session, I doubt it would be possible.

Once I had the focus in mind, the questions came relatively quickly. And the fact that these surveys can be distributed electronically, both by posting in public forums and emailing to colleagues, made the process far easier than I am sure it used to be, although a true needs assessment would need to be broader and vetted by more stakeholders than in this situation, which would also add time to the process.

My biggest surprise was how eager my friends and colleagues were to help me collect data. I'd emailed three writing instructors that I've worked with on campus, and all three completed the survey quickly. Another three respondents were fellow interns, who understand the need for collecting data and know me well. This leaves six respondents who were students either at SMU or UNT, and I know at least a few were student workers at SMU, as they replied before I'd posted to the message board for our class in Canvas. Given that I have primarily worked from home over the last year, I have met very few of the student workers at Fondren Library in person, so I was particularly gratified that they had taken the time to complete the survey. It was a reminder that we are all students and researchers when it comes to academia, part of one big scholarly community.

# References

brightspot. (2020). *SMU Libraries research studio space and offerings*. Unpublished

    internal company report. Retrieved June 24, 2021.

Jones, S. (2019). *SMU Libraries assessment - Data engineering*. Unpublished internal

    company report. Retrieved June 24, 2021.

SMU Libraries. (2019). *SMU Libraries strategic plan, 2019-2024*. Southern Methodist

    University. https://www.smu.edu/-/media/Site/Libraries/about/

    strategicplan.pdf?la=en

SMU Libraries. (2020). *SMU Libraries assessment*. Unpublished internal statistics on

    library usage. Retrieved June 24, 2021.

SMU Libraries. (n.d.a). *Ask Us virtual help.* Southern Methodist University.

    https://www.smu.edu/libraries/fondren/ask

SMU Libraries. (n.d.b). *Make a suggestion/send feedback*. Southern Methodist

    University. https://blog.smu.edu/culsuggest/make-a-suggestion-send-feedback/

SMU Libraries. (n.d.c). *Purchase request*. Southern Methodist University.

    https://www.smu.edu/libraries/about/collections/purchase

SMU Libraries. (n.d.d). *Research guide: Search strategies.* Southern Methodist

    University. https://guides.smu.edu/searchstrategies

SMU Libraries. (n.d.e). *SACS institutional effectiveness*. Southern Methodist University.

    https://www.smu.edu/libraries/staffresources/sacs

Southern Methodist University. (2020). *Instructional faculty by tenure status, rank and*

    *gender.* [https://www.smu.edu/-/media/Site/ir/Trends/2020/Faculty/](https://www.smu.edu/-/media/Site/ir/Trends/2020/Faculty/)

    [Ten_Rank_Gen_2020-2021.pdf?la=en](https://www.smu.edu/-/media/Site/ir/Trends/2020/Faculty/Ten_Rank_Gen_2020-2021.pdf?la=en)

Southern Methodist University. (n.d.). *Campus profile.*

    [https://www.smu.edu/AboutSMU/Facts/CampusProfile](https://www.smu.edu/AboutSMU/Facts/CampusProfile)

Sullivan, J. (2019). *SMU Libraries assessment - Earth sciences*. Unpublished internal

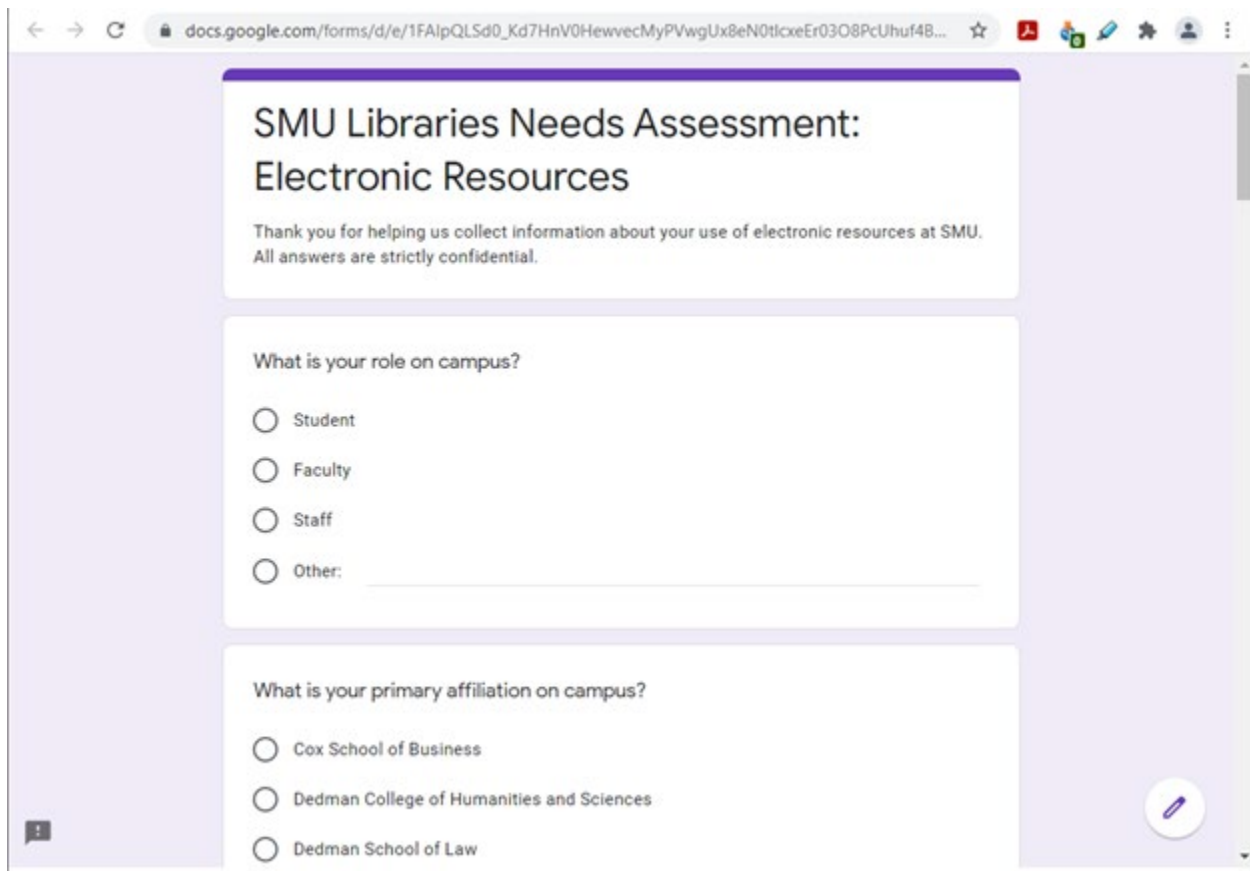    company report. Retrieved June 24, 2021.

Turner, P. (2021). *Research methods, INFO 4080/5080: Supplementary materials*

    [Class handout]. Department of Information Science, University of North Texas.

**Appendix A. Assessment Instrument**

This survey was created in Google Forms. It can be viewed online here:

https://forms.gle/BYyPAncU7HwvmyCWA.



1.     What is your role on campus?

       a.     Student

       b.     Faculty

       c.     Staff

       d.     Other

2. What is your primary affiliation on campus?

   a. Cox School of Business

   b. Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences

   c. Dedman School of Law

   d. Lyle School of Engineering

   e. Meadows School of the Arts

   f. Perkins School of Theology

   g. Simmons School of Education and Human Development

   h. SMU Guildhall (Master of Interactive Technology program)

   i. Campus administration or student support (SMU Libraries, the Writing

   Center, etc.)

   j. Have not yet declared a major or field of study.

3. How frequently do you access physical resources through SMU Libraries?

   a. Often (2-3 times a week)

   b. Sometimes (2-3 times a month)

   c. Rarely (2-3 times a semester)

   d. Never

4.      How frequently do you access electronic resources through SMU Libraries?

      a.      Often (2-3 times a week)

      b.      Sometimes (2-3 times a month)

      c.      Rarely (2-3 times a semester)

      d.      Never

5.      What is your experience when accessing electronic resources through SMU

      Libraries?

      a.      I am always able to access what I want easily.

      b.      I am usually able to access what I want easily.

      c.      I have difficulty accessing what I want easily and often have to ask for

            help.

      d.      I do not access electronic resources.

6.      If you have difficulty, what is most frequently the problem?

      a.      Finding what I need.

      b.      Logging in through Duo.

      c.      Downloading or opening the resource.

      d.      I do not have problems with electronic resources.

      e.      I do not access electronic resources.

7.     Through which of these publishers or databases do you often access electronic

       resources? Select all that apply.

       a.     CQ Press

       b.     EBSCO

       c.     Elsevier

       d.     Factiva

       e.     Gale

       f.     JSTOR

       g.     O'Reilly

       h.     Oxford University Press

       i.     ProQuest

       j.     Taylor and Francis

       k.     Other

       l.     I do not access electronic resources.

8.     If you have problems accessing electronic resources through a particular

       publisher or database, which of the following is it? Select all that apply.
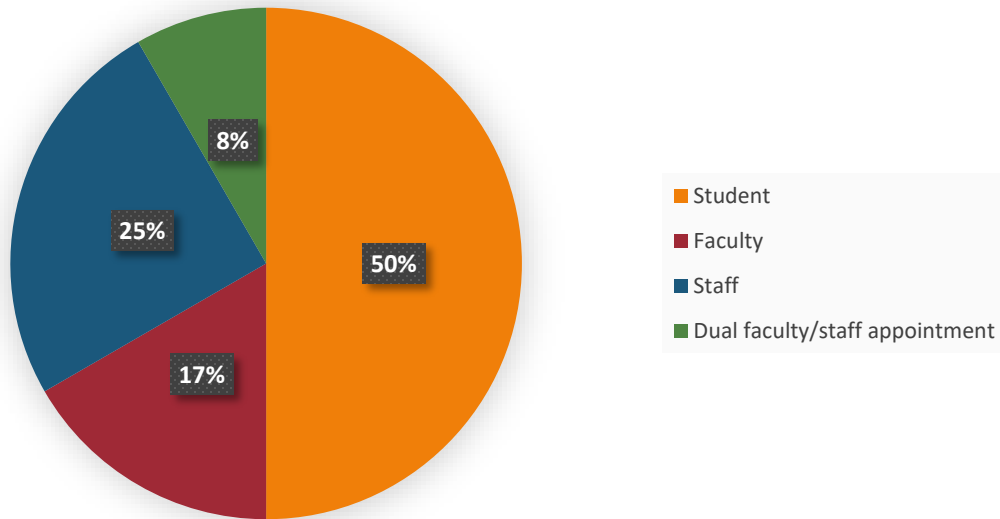
       a.     CQ Press

       b.     EBSCO

c.   Elsevier

d.   Factiva

e.   Gale

f.   JSTOR

g.   O'Reilly

h.   Oxford University Press

i.   ProQuest

j.   Taylor and Francis

k.   Other

l.   I do not access electronic resources.

m.   I do not have problems with accessing electronic resources.

9.   What types of resources are you accessing electronically? Select all that apply.

a.   Academic articles and journals

b.   Electronic books

c.   Streaming media (video and audio)

d.   None of the above.

10.   When reading articles or electronic books, how do you prefer to read them?

a.   Download a PDF.

      b.     Read online.

      c.     I don't access any print resources electronically.

11.    If there were anything you would suggest to improve access to electronic resources, what would it be?
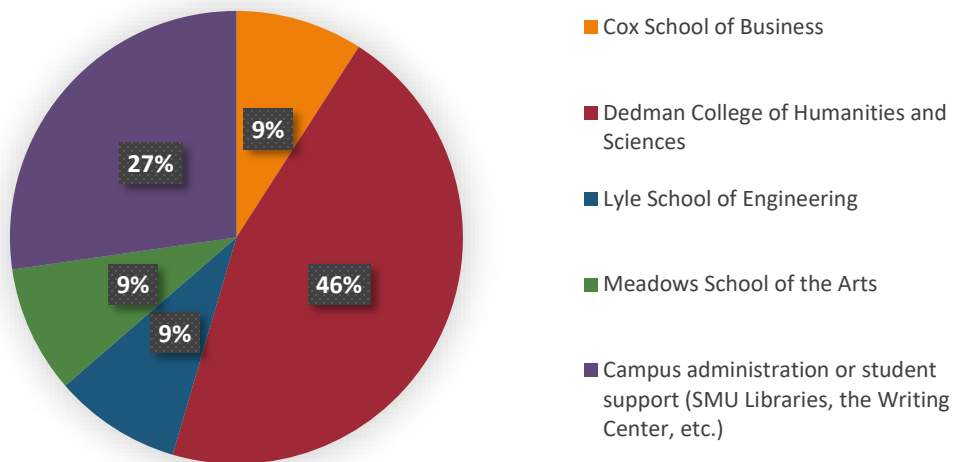
**Appendix B. Results**

The following data represents the twelve patrons in the SMU community and beyond that completed the survey.

## 1. What is your role on campus?



- Student — 50%
- Faculty — 17%
- Staff — 25%
- Dual faculty/staff appointment — 8%

## 2. What is your primary affiliation on campus?*



- Cox School of Business — 9%
- Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences — 46%
- Lyle School of Engineering — 9%
- Meadows School of the Arts — 9%
- Campus administration or student support (SMU Libraries, the Writing Center, etc.) — 27%
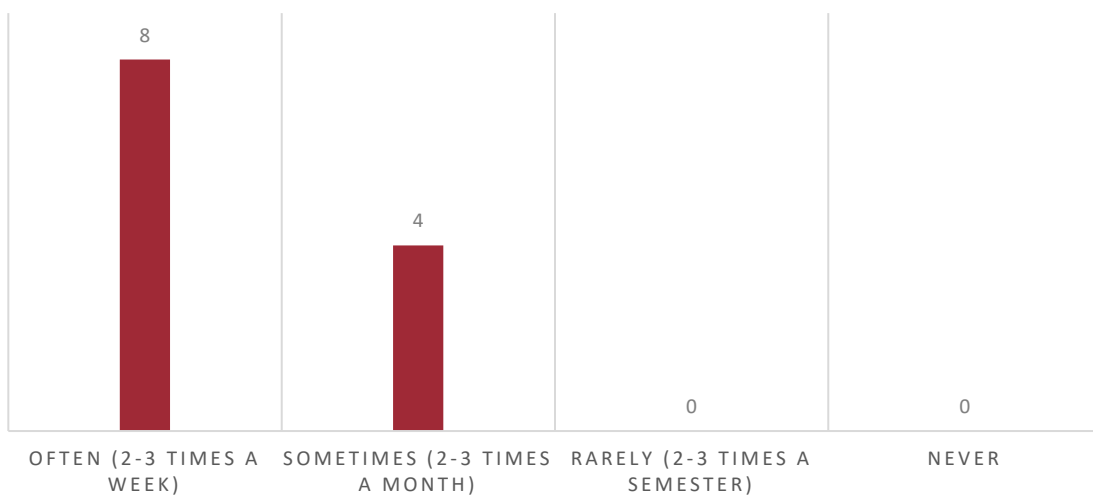
*Out of 11 responses; one respondent abstained from this question.

## 3. How frequently do you access physical resources through SMU Libraries?
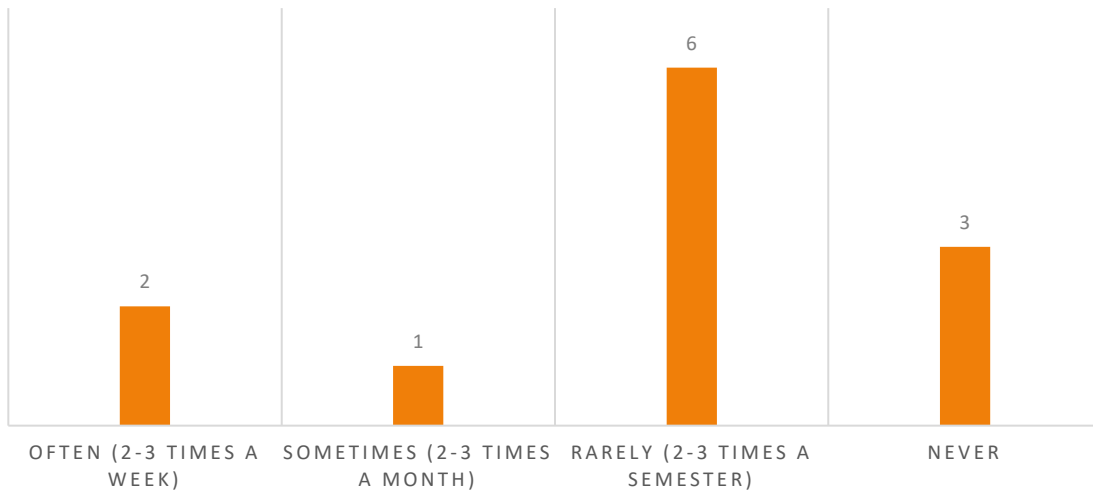
| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | 1 | 6 | 3 |
| OFTEN (2-3 TIMES A WEEK) | SOMETIMES (2-3 TIMES A MONTH) | RARELY (2-3 TIMES A SEMESTER) | NEVER |

## 4. How frequently do you access electronic resources through SMU Libraries?

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 8 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| OFTEN (2-3 TIMES A WEEK) | SOMETIMES (2-3 TIMES A MONTH) | RARELY (2-3 TIMES A SEMESTER) | NEVER |

## 5. What is your experience when accessing electronic resources through SMU Libraries?

| | 8 | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 4 | | | |
| | | 0 | 0 |
| I AM ALWAYS ABLE TO ACCESS WHAT I WANT EASILY. | I AM USUALLY ABLE TO ACCESS WHAT I WANT EASILY. | I HAVE DIFFICULTY ACCESSING WHAT I WANT EASILY AND OFTEN HAVE TO ASK FOR HELP. | I DO NOT ACCESS ELECTRONIC RESOURCES. |

## 6. If you have difficulty, what is most frequently the problem?

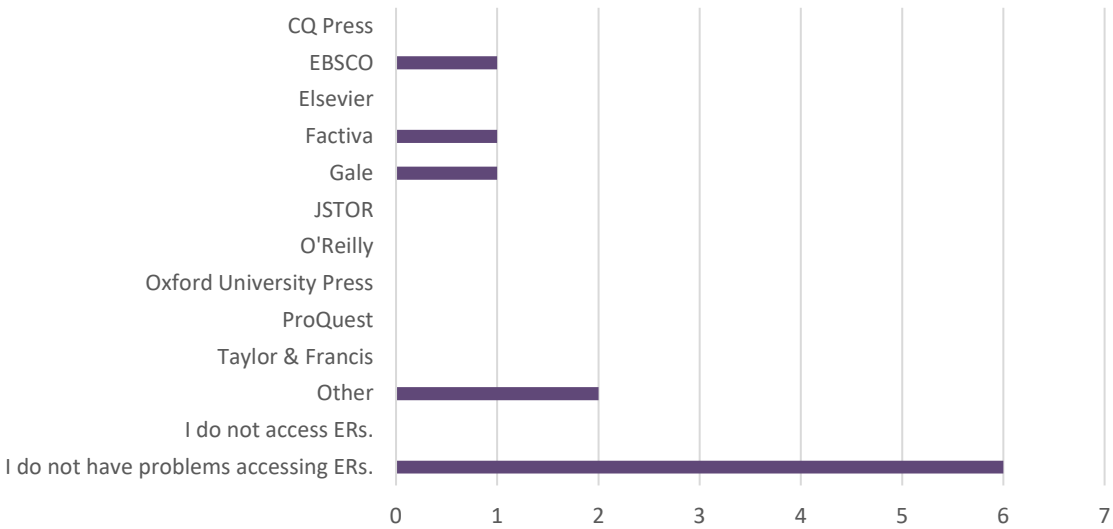| 6 | | | 4 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 0 | 2 | | 0 |
| FINDING WHAT I NEED. | LOGGING IN THROUGH DUO. | DOWNLOADING OR OPENING THE RESOURCE. | I DO NOT HAVE PROBLEMS WITH ACCESSING ELECTRONIC RESOURCES. | I DO NOT ACCESS ELECTRONIC RESOURCES. |

**7. Through which of these publishers or databases do you often access electronic resources? Select all that apply.***
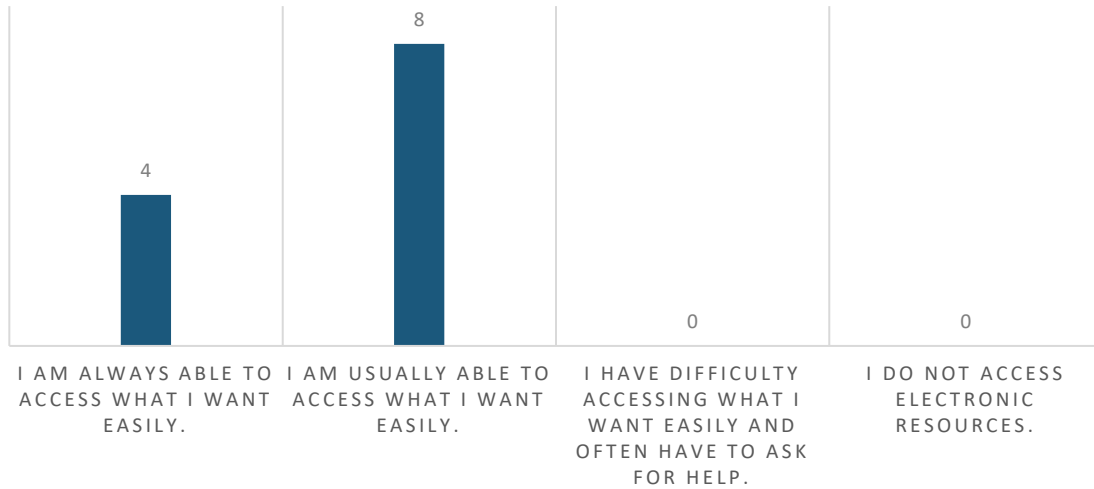
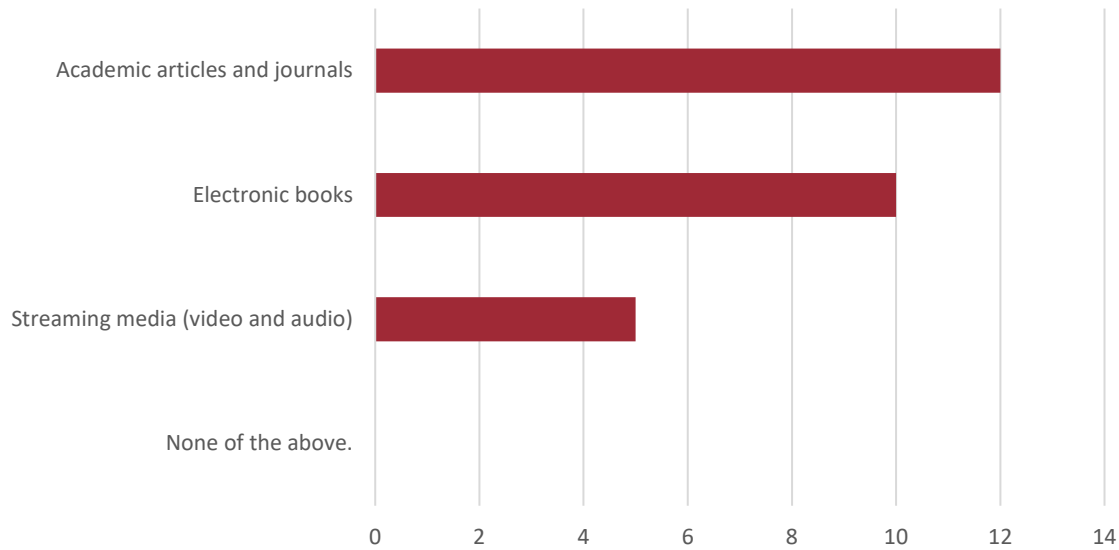| Publisher/Database | Count |
|---|---|
| CQ Press | 1 |
| EBSCO | 9 |
| Elsevier | 3 |
| Factiva | 2 |
| Gale | 4 |
| JSTOR | 7 |
| O'Reilly | 1 |
| Oxford University Press | 2 |
| ProQuest | 6 |
| Taylor & Francis | 5 |
| Other | 2 |
| I do not access ERs. | 0 |
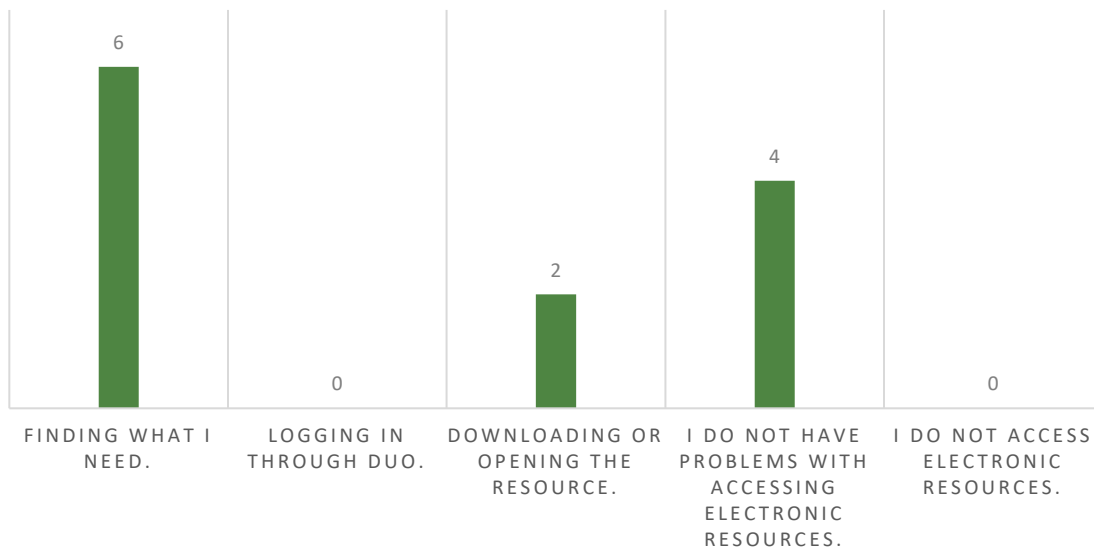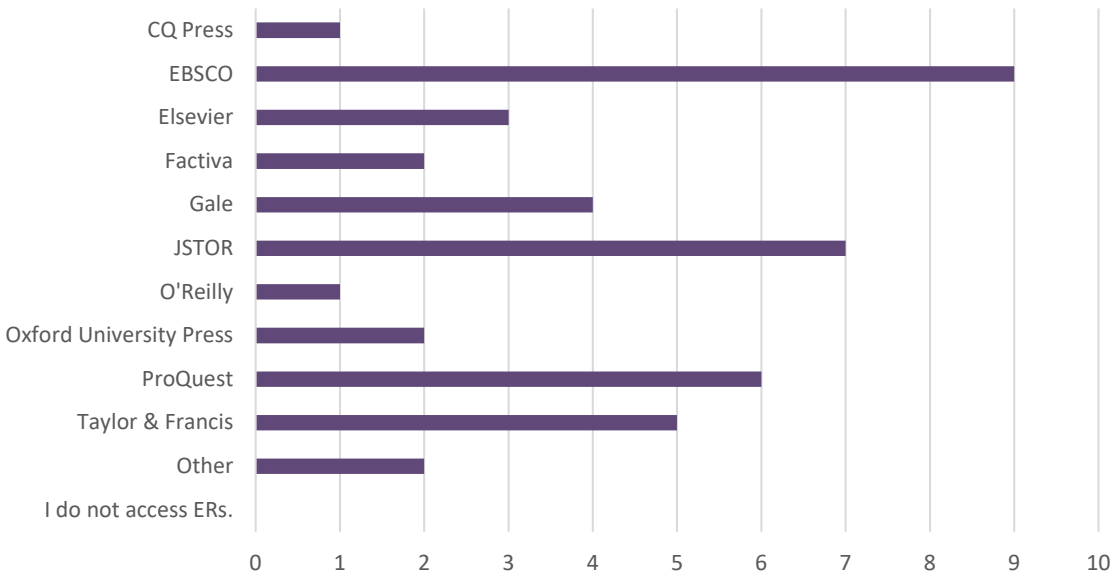
*Out of 11 responses; one respondent abstained from this question.

**8. If you have problems accessing electronic resources through a particular publisher or database, which of the following is it? Select all that apply.***

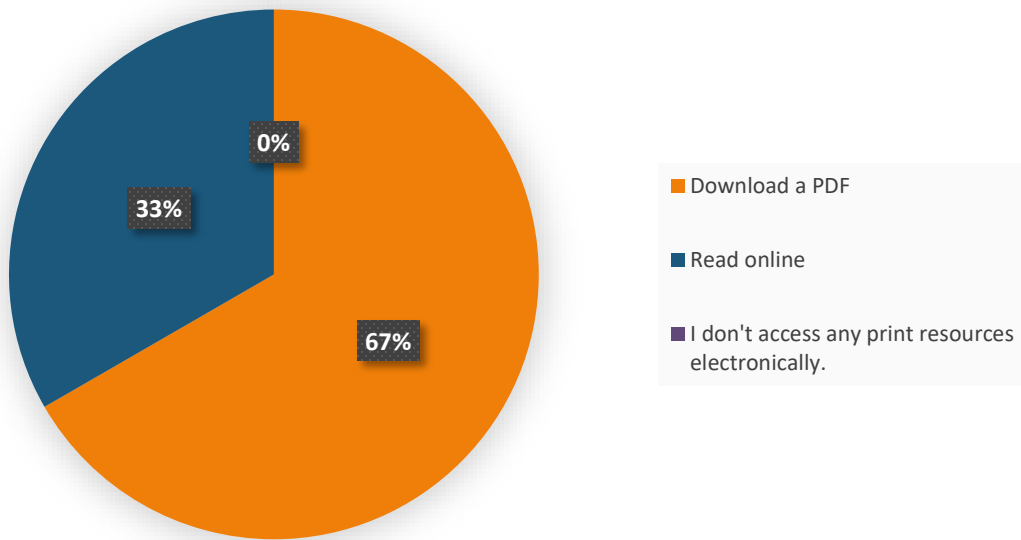| Publisher/Database | Count |
|---|---|
| CQ Press | 0 |
| EBSCO | 1 |
| Elsevier | 0 |
| Factiva | 1 |
| Gale | 1 |
| JSTOR | 0 |
| O'Reilly | 0 |
| Oxford University Press | 0 |
| ProQuest | 0 |
| Taylor & Francis | 0 |
| Other | 2 |
| I do not access ERs. | 0 |
| I do not have problems accessing ERs. | 6 |

*Out of 10 responses; two respondents abstained from this question.

## 9. What types of resources are you accessing electronically? Select all that apply.

| Resource | Count |
|---|---|
| Academic articles and journals | 12 |
| Electronic books | 10 |
| Streaming media (video and audio) | 5 |
| None of the above. | 0 |

## 10. When reading articles or electronic books, how do you prefer to read them?

- Download a PDF — 67%
- Read online — 33%
- I don't access any print resources electronically. — 0%

**11. If there were anything you would suggest to improve**

**access to electronic resources, what would it be?***

- I use JSTOR almost exclusively because it seems to me to be the most intuitive. Accessing other databases sometimes feels like going on a scavenger hunt for a link that will take me to the actual article. I don't believe this is the SMU library system's fault, though, but something native to those databases.

- Have electronic books offer pdf so that I can print them off for note-taking.

- I understand that it can easily get expensive, and that sometimes libraries buy access to databases through their vendors which also have access to a specific set of databases, but I'd like to see more databases added in! Sometimes, I'm researching a niche topic that I need to access through another school's electronic database.

*Out of 3 responses; nine respondents abstained from this question.