Online databases and students: Why don't they use them?

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Abstract

The library at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (FHSS) offers access to several online databases for over 1,400 undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate students and almost 200 members of teaching staff. FHSS library enables access to online databases through the Center for online databases (funded by the Croatian Ministry for Science, Education and Sport) and through institutional subscription. In order to facilitate and promote the use of online databases, the library offers training for users in online database use, both in groups and individually.

On one hand, the subscription to online databases are becoming more and more expensive and the library budget is being cut. On the other hand, the students are not using the databases as much as librarians (and teachers) would expect. In order to understand how students perceive and use the online databases and why they are not using these quality resources more, in 2013 a number of studies were undertaken. In this paper authors will present only the results obtained in a quantitative study (survey). The students at the Department of Information Science at FHSS conducted a small study as a part of their research assignment for the Human Information Behavior course. The goal of this research was to answer the following research questions: How do students perceive and use online databases? and What makes the use of online databases difficult for students?. The research set off from two basic hypotheses. The first one was that students consider articles found in online databases to be equally good and relevant as those they find through free web sources, such as Google. The second hypothesis was that students don't use databases because they are inaccessible to them, both physically and intellectually. Physical inaccessibility includes being unable to access online databases from home, considering that a infrastructure in the library (more computers) (N=96, 46,0%) would encourage them to use online databases more. Although (N=55, 26,6%) of students don't think there is a difference between sources found in online databases and the sources on the Internet, respondents consider using peer reviewed articles in their academic work useful because they will get better grades (N=58, 28,0%) and teachers will appreciate them more (N=43, 20,9%).

Since databases are highly important source of quality and peer reviewed articles/books, librarians at FHSS should continue promoting and facilitating online database use among students by offering them training and facilitating both intellectual and physical access to them. Hopefully, they will also be able to secure continued funding for the subscriptions.
Keywords: online databases, students, social science and humanities, perceptions and uses, barriers, survey, Croatia

REFERENCES

Curriculum Vitae
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