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# WWU Library Survey Series, Fall 1996-97 Staff and Administration

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The Office of Institutional Assessment and Testing • Western Washington University

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## WWU Library Survey Series, Fall 1996-97 Staff and Administration

Prepared by Carl Simpson and Linda Clark

### INTRODUCTION

At the request of the new University Librarian, Western's Office of Survey Research and Office of Institutional Assessment and Testing worked with the Library's faculty and staff to conduct a series of surveys focusing on library resources and services. These surveys were intended to provide a base of information to help guide an in-depth assessment and planning effort aimed at improving Western's library. During Fall quarter, surveys were conducted of faculty, administration/staff, returning undergraduates with more than 120 credits, returning graduate students, newly entering undergraduate and

graduate students, the library faculty and staff, and community library users.

This issue of *Focus* reports the findings of one of these surveys: the survey of Western administrators and staff. While WWU administrators and staff may make less use of Western's library than faculty or students, their use is significant (we find that over one-third use the Western libraries at least monthly) and their input to the planning process is important. Administrators and staff completed a brief survey concerning their own use and evaluation of library holdings, facilities and services. This report summarizes basic findings from the faculty survey.

### METHOD

*Staff received a relatively brief survey and up to two reminder letters. A total of 258 responded. Of 148 administrators and administrative exempt included in our sample, 98 (66.2%) responded. Of 265 classified staff in our sample, 160 (60.4%) responded—37 working in the instructional area and 123 in other areas. While most non-response typically results from work load, unavailability, etc., some may have resulted from lack of involvement with the library. That is, the two-fifths who did not respond may use the library less or have fewer opinions about it than those who did respond. Therefore, when we report findings such as use levels, our figures may be slightly higher than would be accurate for all staff. Even so, with a response rate over 60%, this bias will be small.*

*The 95% confidence error term for any given percentage finding reported here is between .05 and .06.<sup>1</sup> Where findings are based on fewer than the entire sample, the error term is larger.*

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## INTRODUCTORY NOTES

*One:* For convenience and brevity, this report will refer to administrators, administrative exempt staff and classified staff using the term “staff.” At one point in the report, these different groups will be discussed separately, but for the most part results are presented for all, under the title, staff.

*Two:* Although Western’s library system includes some satellite holdings, the largest being the music library, the great majority of use is of Wilson Library. For convenience of expression, this report adopts the convention of referring to “the Western library” while recognizing the existence of plural holdings.

*Three:* This report is intended to provide information as background to strategic planning efforts by the library staff, faculty, and administration of Western. This creates a natural division of labor between this report and the planning bodies that will use it: this report provides concrete empirical observations with little comment, and planning bodies will interpret these and other observations within the WWU context, as a basis for planning recommendations. With this in mind, this report is written with a minimum of interpretation or discussion.

## FINDINGS

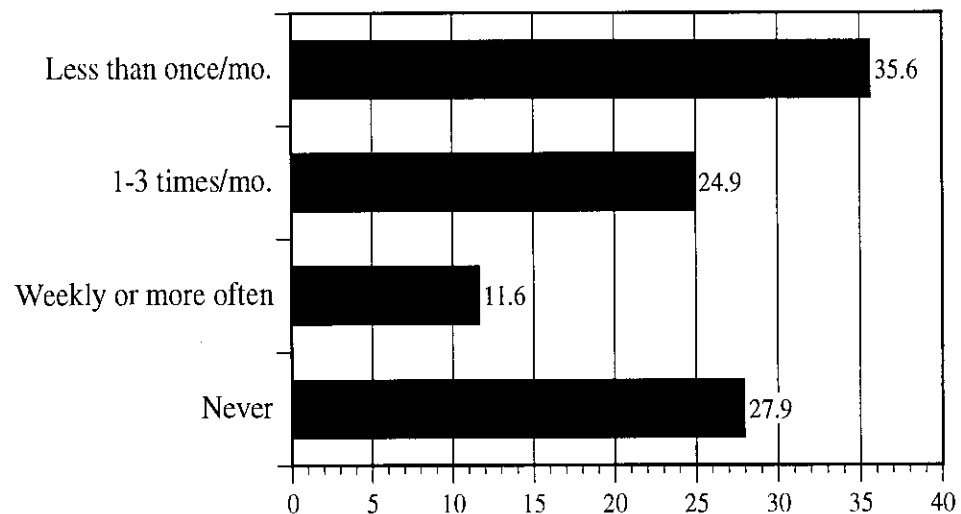
As would be expected, some staff, 27.9%, never use Western’s libraries. Perhaps less expected is the fact that 11.6% of staff say they use Western’s libraries at least weekly (see Figure 1). Thus, although two-thirds use the library less than once a month, enough staff use the library regularly to make input from staff a valuable part of the library planning process.

Asking staff whether they “have ever” used Western’s library results in quite high use figures, despite the fact that for over one-fourth that use is rare enough or far enough in the past for them to say they currently use the library “never.” The majority of staff have borrowed materials from Western’s libraries (84.4%) and used the library’s computerized reference databases (61.1%). Nearly half have used the online catalog from outside the library (43.3%) and have

Library Survey, Fall 1996: Staff/Administrators

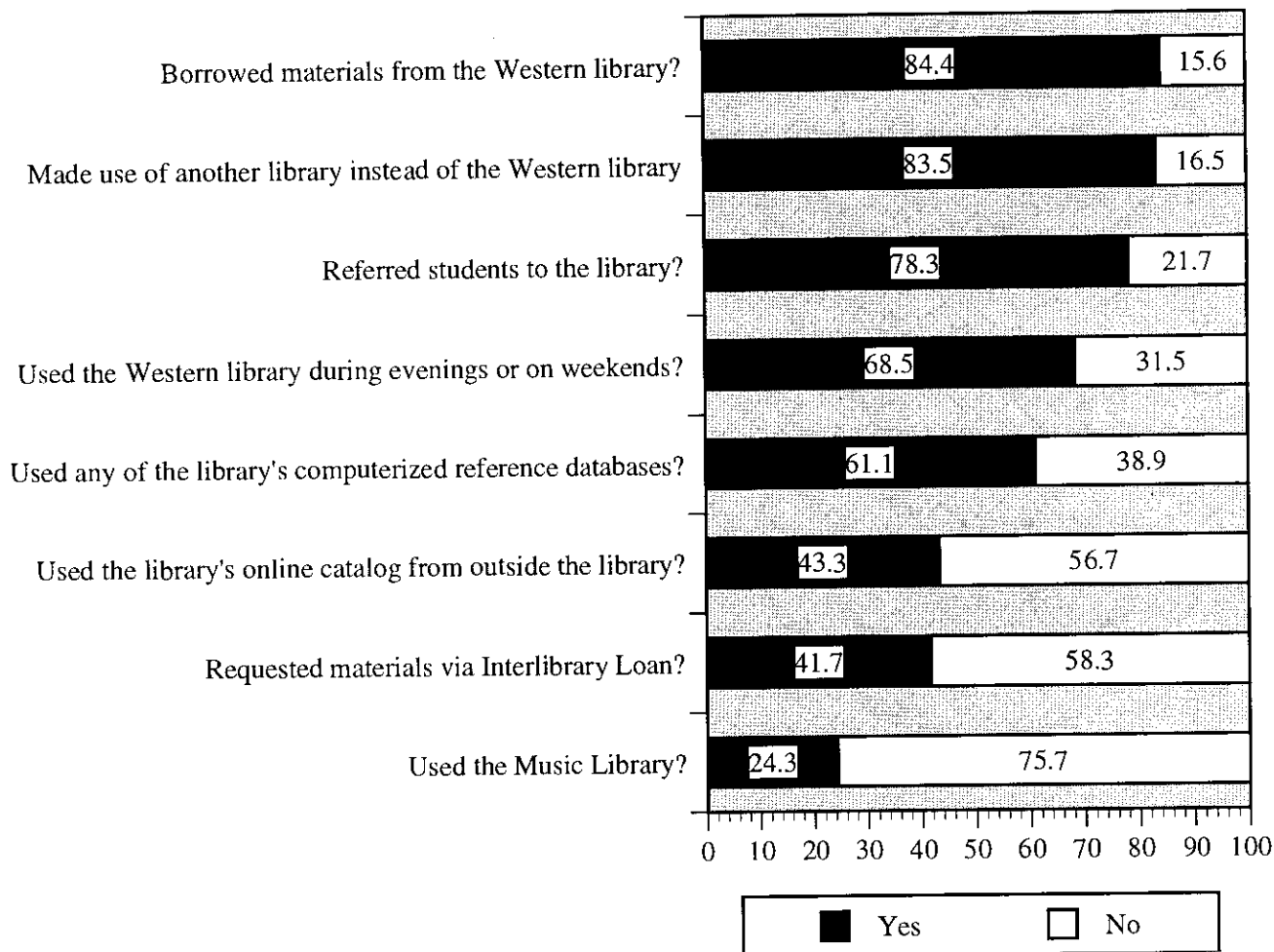
**On average, how often per quarter do Staff/Administrators use the Western Library? (n=233)**

**Figure 1**



**Have Staff/administrators ever...**

**Figure 2**



requested materials via Interlibrary Loan (41.7%). As important or perhaps even more important, 78.3% of staff say they have referred students to the library (see Figure 2).

Staff use of the library is often personal, rather than work-related, as illustrated by the fact that 68.5% say they have used the library during evening hours. Similarly, the great majority have “made use of another library instead of the Western library.” Most (68.3%) of the 196 who report they have used other libraries say they used the Bellingham Public Library. Another 22.8% refer to the University of Washington library. Another 7.8% refer to other university libraries, primarily the University of British Columbia library, with the remainder using various other public libraries.

When asked why they used other libraries rather than Western’s, about half indicated that the other libraries have materials not found at WWU. This answer was given in virtually all cases where the other library used was located at a university. Other reasons refer primarily to convenience, both in the sense of location and in the sense of user-ease, hours, parking, and the like. (See Table 1.)

**Table 1. Reasons Why Staff/Administrators Make Use of Another Library Instead of the Western Library (n=173)**

	Percent*
Has current and extensive material not at WWU	51.0
Access, closer to home	15.6
Familiar, user friendly	12.2
Convenience	10.2
Children use, family use	6.8
Special collection (CD's, videos, films & music)	6.8
Parking available	4.8
Reserve books	2.7
Internet available	2.0
Library hours of operation	2.0
Recreational material	1.4
Dewey Decimal System	0.7
Habit	0.7
Lack of knowledge about WWU library	0.7

\*Percentages add to more than 100% because participants offered more than one response

### The Nature of Staff Use of the Library

Staff use the library for a variety of reasons. One is that staff are sometimes also students. About one-fifth use the library at least quarterly as part of classes they are taking. About half of these used the library at least 3-6 times per quarter during the Fall quarter of the survey (see Figure 3).

Library Survey, Fall 1996: Staff/Administrators

**How often do Staff/Administrators use the Western library for each reason listed below? (n=205)**

Figure 3

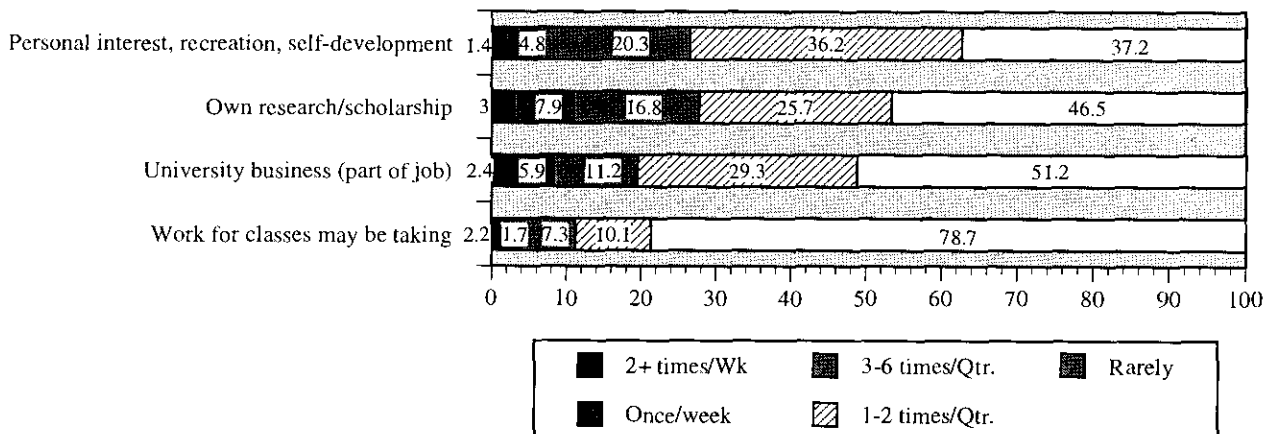


Figure 3 also shows the percent of our staff sample who use the library as part of their university job, for their own scholarship, and for personal recreation, with 48.8%, 53.5%, and 62.8%, respectively, making at least occasional use of the library for each of these reasons. The great majority of all use for these purposes is once or twice per quarter. In addition, however, about one-tenth of staff use the library at least weekly for each of these reasons.

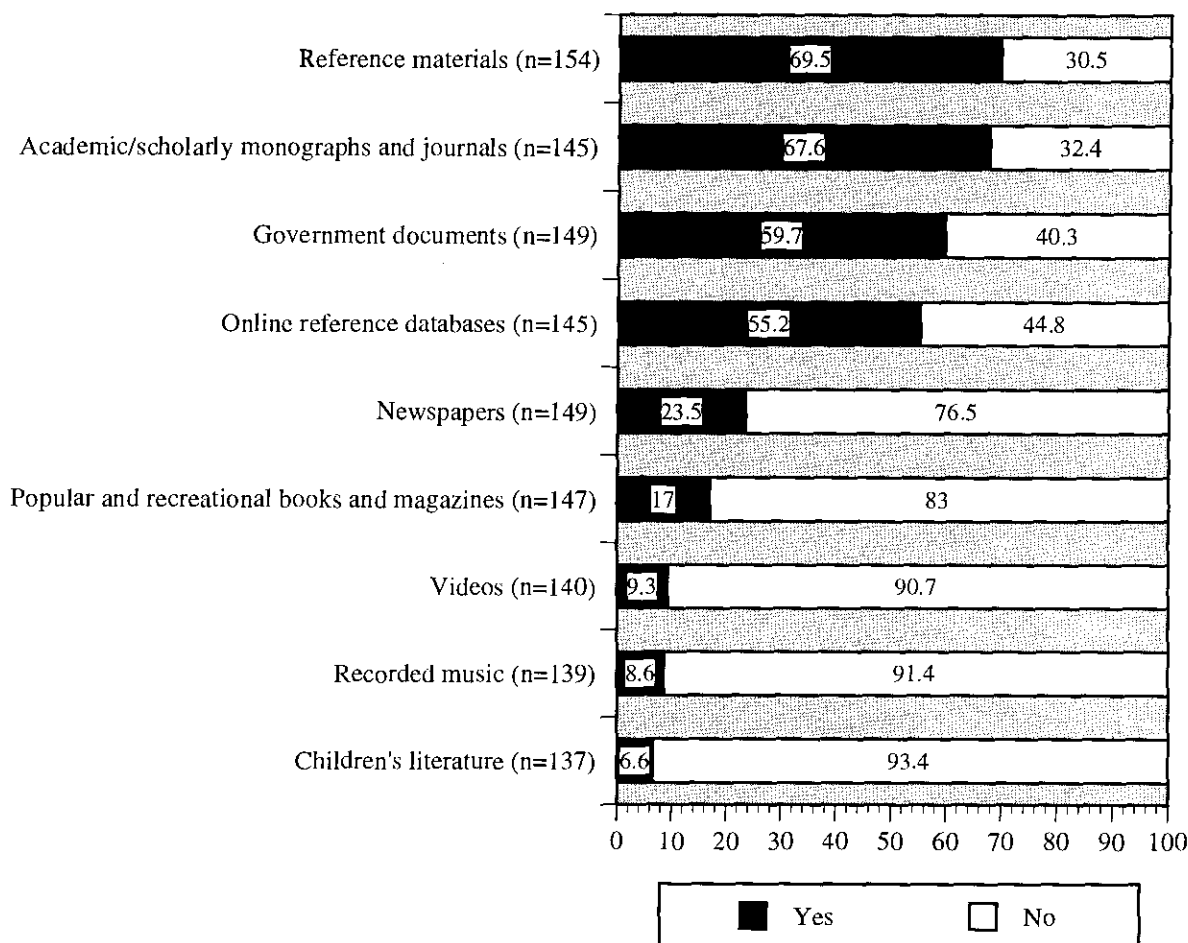
There is considerable overlap among persons who use the library frequently for courses and for personal scholarship and among those who use it frequently for their jobs and for personal scholarship. Also, those who use the library frequently for any purpose are also more likely to use it for personal recreation. Thus, the 10-12% who make most frequent use of the library tend to do so for a variety of reasons.

We asked those staff who say they currently use the library at least "less than once per month" (see Figure 1) whether Western's library is their "primary resource" for various types of materials. Findings are displayed in Figure 4. Some respondents gave no response to each question, presumably because they made no use of that type of material, with the result that the percentages shown in Figure 4 are based on 137-154 staff responses.

Library Survey, Fall 1996: Staff/Administrators

**Is the Western library the primary resource for Staff/Administrators re: each of the following library materials?**

**Figure 4**



The primary uses of Western's library are clearly academic. For two-thirds, Western is the primary resource for "academic/scholarly monographs and journals" (67.5%) and for "reference materials" (69.5%). Rates are nearly this high for "government documents" (59.7%) and "online reference databases" (55.2%). On the other hand, fewer than one-fourth say Western is their primary resource for "newspapers" (23.5%) and "popular and recreational books and magazines" (17.0%), and less than one-tenth for "videos" (9.3%), "recorded music" (8.6%) and "children's literature" (6.6%).

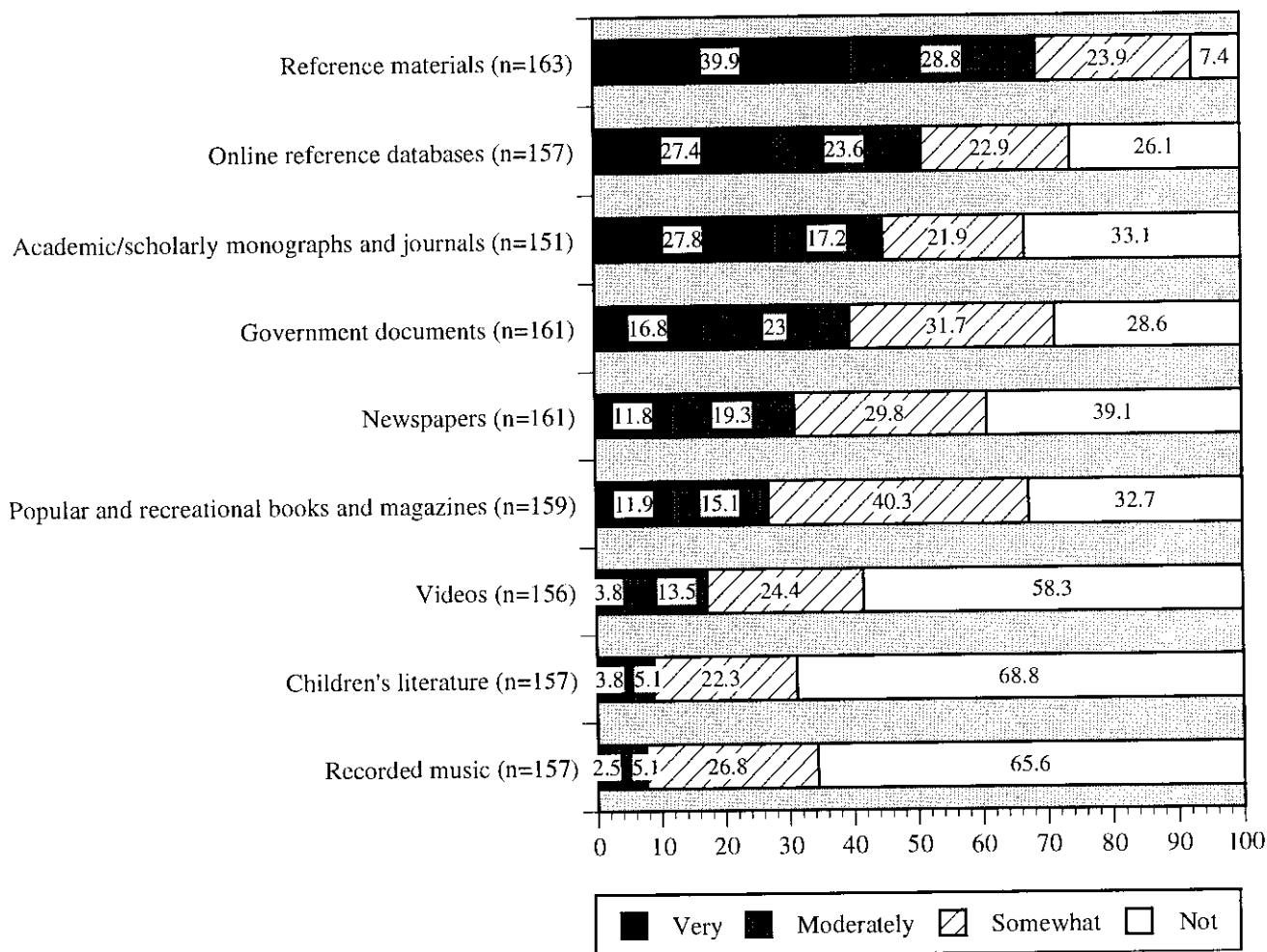
### Evaluations of Western Library Holdings

We also asked all those who use the library at least occasionally to assess "how valuable... library materials are to you." This question was applied to the same list of holdings as reported in Figure 4, and was asked regardless of whether or not the individual used Western as their primary resource for each type of material. The number responding varied between 151 and 163. Ratings are displayed in Figure 5.

Library Survey, Fall 1996: Staff/Administrators

How valuable are each of the following library materials?

Figure 5



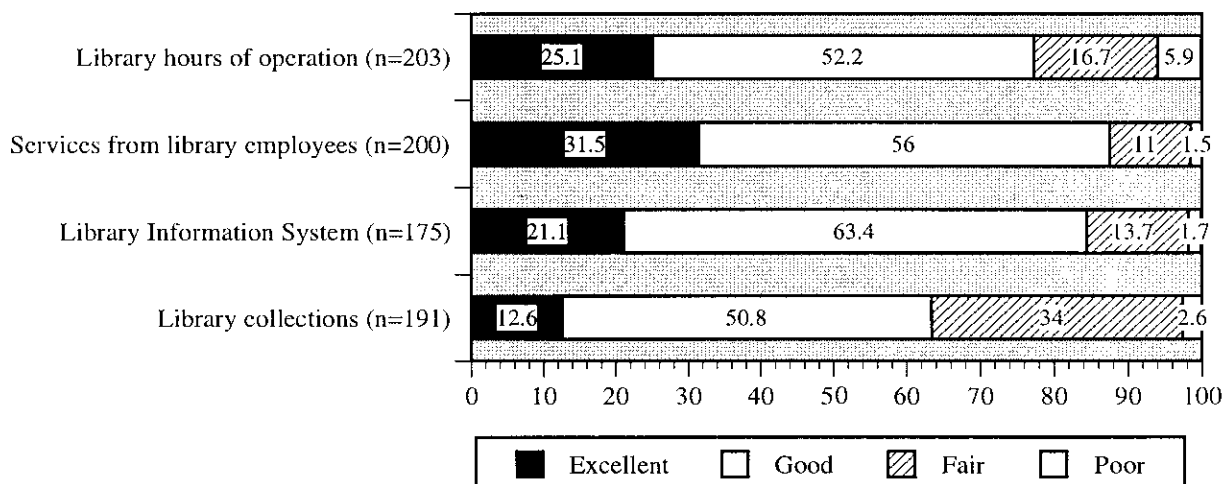
As would be expected, ratings as to the value of Western's holdings in various areas correspond closely to the rate at which holdings are respondents' primary resource in each area. If I see facilities as of little value, I will tend not to use them; if I do not happen to use facilities, they are by definition of little value to me. Also, ratings are highest for the most academic uses. Two-thirds (68.7%) rate reference materials as "very" or "moderately" valuable. About half rate online reference databases (51.0%) and scholarly monographs and journals (45.0%) as "very" or "moderately" valuable. The least frequent ratings of "very" or "moderately" valuable are given to the least conventionally academic areas: recorded music (7.6%), children's literature (8.9%), and videos (17.3%). Government documents and popular books and magazines fall in-between with 39.8% and 27.0%, respectively. For planning efforts, it is perhaps of greater interest how many rate various holdings as "not valuable" than how many give positive ratings. Quite naturally, holdings in the least academic areas are rated as not valuable by many (half to two-thirds). In addition, academic holdings aside from reference materials all receive relatively high "not valuable" responses: 33.1% for scholarly monographs and journals, 26.1% for online reference databases, and 28.6% for government documents. Only 7.4% gave that rating for reference materials.

We also asked for evaluations of four broad areas of library holdings and operations. This question was addressed to everyone, regardless of library use, asking respondents to base their evaluations on "your own use of the library and impressions you have gained from others..." That is, the question was in part reputational. Findings are displayed in Figure 6. Satisfaction with the services provided by library employees is high, with 87.5% rating either "excellent" or "good." Satisfaction is also high for the library information system (84.7% at least "good") and quite high for hours of operation (77.3% at least "good"). Satisfaction with library collections is lower, with 63.7% rating at least "good," but 34.0% rating only "fair." In no case are there more than a handful of "poor" ratings.

Library Survey, Fall 1996: Staff/Administrators

**Evaluation of the library on each dimension listed:**

**Figure 6**



Finally, a completely reputational question was asked: "What is your perception of the overall reputation of Western's library among students, faculty and fellow employees?" Answer categories were broad: "positive," "mixed/neutral," "negative" and "don't know." One fifth (20.1%) felt they did



not have enough impressions to answer the question. Responses by others, shown in Figure 7, were quite positive, with three-fifths saying "positive," one third saying "mixed/neutral" and only 4.4% saying "negative."

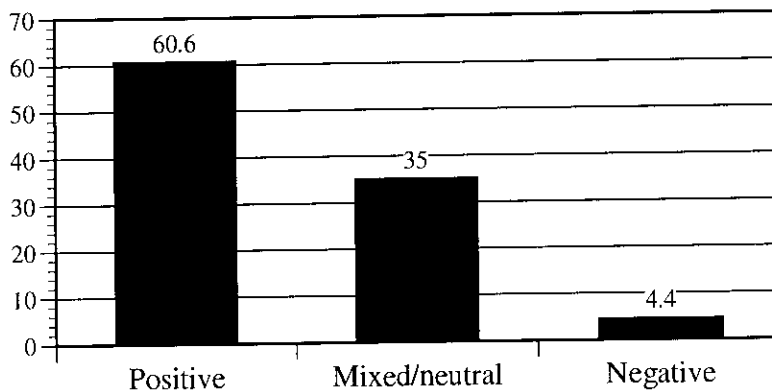
Library Survey, Fall 1996: Staff/Administrators

### Staff Access to the Library

Some uses of Western's library are facilitated by access to computer networks. We therefore asked staff if they have access to computers at home and at work and, if so, how often they used either to connect to Western's library information system, to the Internet/world wide web and for all other purposes. Responses make clear that lack of computer access is problematic for very few staff.

**What do Staff/Administrators perceive to be the overall reputation of Western's library among students, faculty, and fellow employees? (n=203)**

Figure 7



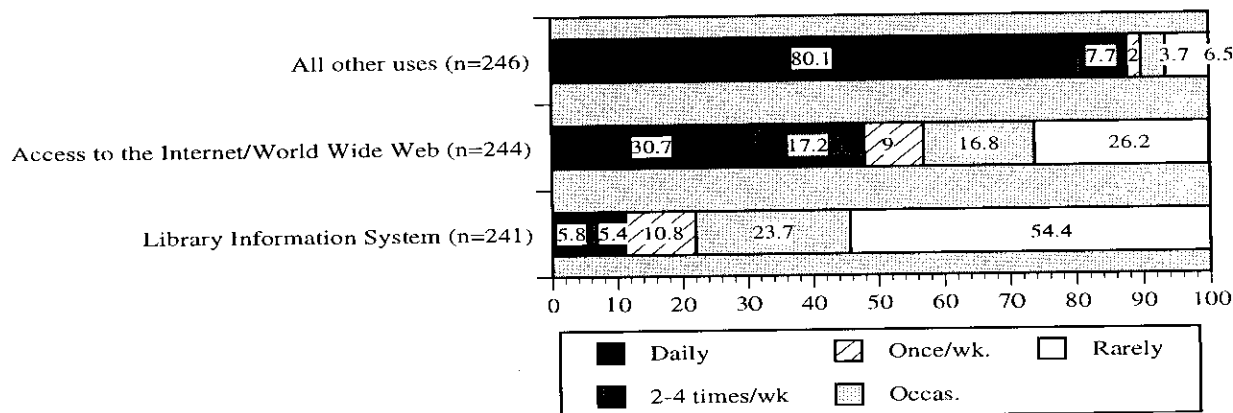
Three-fourths (73.2%) of staff say they "own or have access to a computer in your residence" and nearly all (92.6%) "have access to a computer in your office." All but two of the handful responding that they do not have access to a computer at work are classified staff assigned to posts outside the instructional arena.

Computer use is also very high among this sample, as shown in Figure 8. Fully 80.1% say they use computers at home or the office "daily" for "all other uses." Only one-tenth use computers less than once a week. Connection to the Internet is also frequent, with 30.7% making "daily" use and over half (57%) making at least weekly use. As would be expected, connection to the library information system is less frequent than other uses. Although 22.0% connect at least weekly, the majority (54.4%) respond that they "rarely" use their computers for that purpose.<sup>2</sup>

Library Survey, Fall 1996: Staff/Administrators

**How often do staff/administrators use a computer, either at home or at the office, for each of the following:**

Figure 8

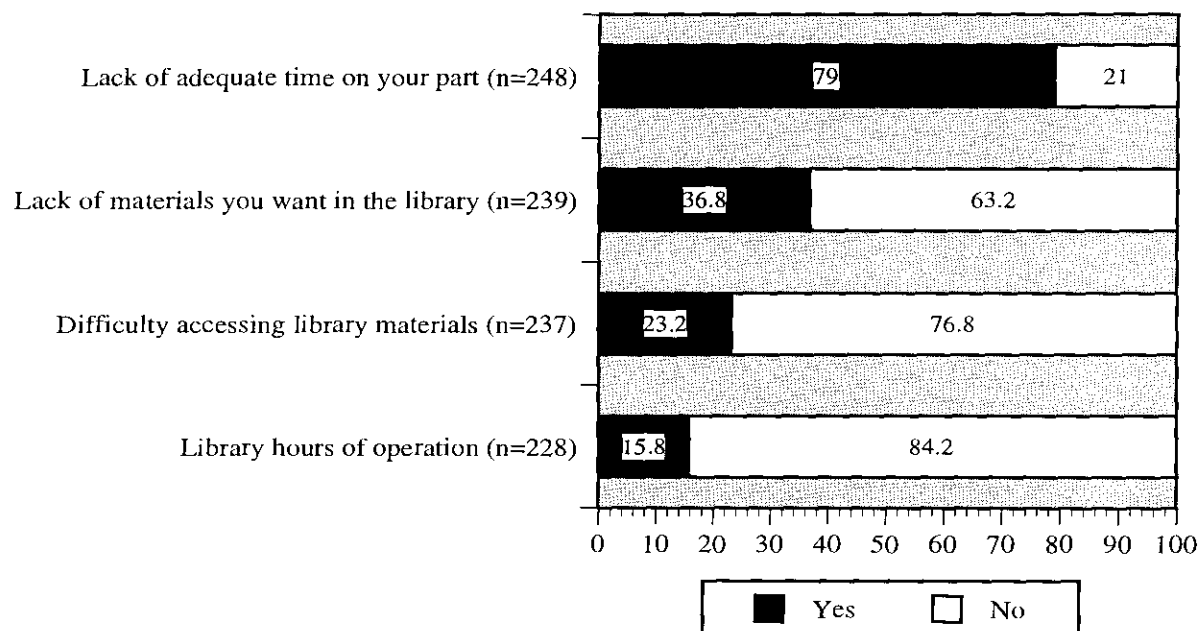


When we asked whether various factors “prevent you from making as much use of the library as you would like” we find only 13.9% implying that they use the library as much as they wish by responding “no” to all the options listed as possible detractors. On the other hand, we find 15.8% responding that at least three of the four options do prevent desired use (see Figure 9).

Library Survey, Fall 1996: Staff/Administrators

**Do any of the following prevent staff/administrators from making as much use of the library as they would like?**

Figure 9



By far the factor most often blamed for reducing library use is “lack of adequate time on your part,” a response given by 79.0%. In addition, more than one-third (36.8%) say “lack of materials you want in the library” prevents them from using the library as much as they would like. Another fourth (23.2%) blame “difficulty accessing library materials,” while only 15.8% say “library hours of operation” hinder them.

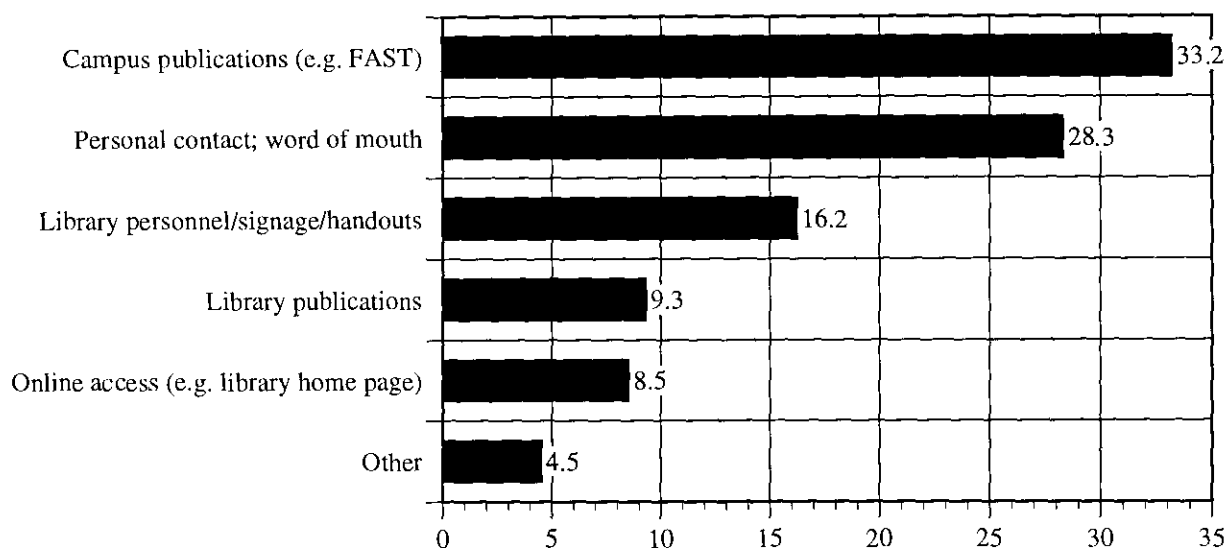
Finally, we also asked staff about another type of access—access to information about the library. Asked “Which of the following is your best source of information about the Western library?” one-third (33.2%) point to “campus publications (e.g., FAST)” while one-fourth (28.3%) reference “personal contact; word of mouth” (see Figure 10). Another 16.2% reference information gained the heavy computer use reported by this sample, only 8.5% reference “online access (e.g., library home page).

**Comparisons by Staff and Administrative Position**

Because classified staff and administrative positions differ in many ways, we include in this report a brief analysis of whether their reported use of the library or their perceptions of the library differ. Comparing classified staff, administrative exempt, and administrators, we find the following similarities and differences.<sup>3</sup>

**For Staff/Administrators, what is the best source of information about the Western library? (n=247)**

Figure 10



- Administrators use the library considerably more often than staff. Fifty-eight percent of administrators, 46% of administrative exempt, and 28% of classified staff use the library once per month or more often.
- Library use is much more often a part of the job for administrators than for classified staff: 95% of administrators report such use, compared to 62% of administrative exempt and 35% of classified staff.
- Three-fourths of administrators and about half of administrative exempt and staff use Western's library for their own research/scholarship.
- There is no difference across groups in recreational uses of the library except that classified staff are slightly more likely to use the library at least weekly for such purposes.
- Classified staff are considerably more likely to use the library as students in classes they are taking: 24% vs. 12% for administrative exempt and no administrators.
- Evaluations of the library are remarkably similar across job classification. No significant differences emerge, except that administrators and administrative exempt are slightly more often critical of the library hours and marginally more satisfied with services from library employees.
- All classifications are equally likely to say their use of the library is hindered by lack of time. Administrators and administrative exempt are, however, considerably more likely than classified staff to say their use is reduced by lack of materials they want in Western's library (54% vs. 31%) and somewhat more likely to reference hours of operation (22% vs. 11%).

## Use level and Evaluation

The final question addressed in this report is whether those who use the library most and, therefore, have greatest knowledge of it are more or less satisfied with it. The answer depends on the type of use and the type of satisfaction we ask about. Overall frequency of use is unrelated to satisfaction with collections, LIS, or services, but high users are less satisfied with hours of operation. Satisfaction with staff services, which is high among all respondents, is unrelated to use or to use for any particular reason. Level of use for own scholarship is related to satisfaction with only one aspect of the library, the LIS; those making most use of the library for research are significantly less satisfied. Satisfaction with university collections is significantly lower for those who use the library more often as part of their work or for classes they are taking. Satisfaction is marginally lower for those using the library for their own research, and unrelated to personal recreational use.

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<sup>1</sup> Error term is based on sample size adjusted for finite population.

<sup>2</sup> Because "rarely" was the lowest response on the answer scale, that response includes respondents who never as well as rarely use their computers in each way shown in Figure 8.

<sup>3</sup> These figures are subject to considerable error, since the samples of administrators and administrative exempt are particularly small. These samples do, however, represent more than one-third of all personnel in these categories.

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