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Format Preferences of Performing Arts Students: A Multi-institution Study

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A B S T R A C T

The article describes a follow-up to Clark's 2012 examination of performing arts students' format preferences; it also explored their preferred sources for course-related information. This mixed-methods study was implemented at three institutions and included an online Qualtrics survey and focus groups. Results indicated a continued shift toward digital resources, with strong preferences for obtaining electronic journals and reference materials through the library. Print scores and books remained popular; however, students appeared more open to electronic options when compared to the 2012 results. Freely available online video and audio continued to enjoy popularity. Students want the libraries to acquire a mix of both physical and electronic resources, and they favor print books and scores.

Introduction

Music, theatre, and dance students require a variety of information resources, including scores, audio, video, reference content, journals, and books. Students today have many options for accessing their course-related materials: they might consult a book on reserve in the library, stream audio from YouTube or Spotify on their phone, or download a PDF of an article onto their laptop. The availability of free, freemium, and paid internet content has grown exponentially, largely due to ease of access and use, and while it has broadened student choice, it has also increased the chance students will bypass library related resources of higher quality. This presents both challenges and opportunities to librarians as information resource providers and educators.

This study expands on Clark's 2012 survey examining the format preferences of performing arts students (Clark, 2013). The present inquiry used the online survey software Qualtrics. This allowed participants to complete surveys on computers, smart phones, or other such mobile devices, and enabled the authors to employ logic and carry-over questions to obtain more precise data. In addition, the survey pool was enlarged from one institution to three institutions; this made the results more generalizable and ensured an adequate sample size for music, theatre, and dance. To better understand the quantitative survey data, authors conducted focus groups that centered on discussion of the reasons behind student preferences and behaviors.

The goal was to answer the following questions: 1) What types of resources do students in the performing arts need for their coursework? 2) What formats do students use, and how often do they access said formats? 3) What are student sentiments and satisfaction levels with

library resources? 4) What resources do students want the library to spend funds on? and 5) What are students preferred formats and means of access?

Literature review

Since the advent of electronic journals and books, numerous articles have documented users' academic resource format preferences. The widespread adoption of electronic journals across virtually all disciplines is well established (Dybert, 2005; Montgomery, 2003; Prabha, 2007), yet user attitudes and behaviors toward e-books appear more complex. While faculty and students seem to prefer print books, their use of e-books is significant and often depends on the nature of the need for information (Levine-Clark, 2007; Lincoln, 2013; Mawindo & Hoskins, 2008; Mizrachi, 2016; Weijing, Van Ballegoie, & Robertson, 2018). Lincoln found that theology students embraced e-books more readily than faculty (Lincoln, 2013, p. 44). Grosch and Pickett observed that students grew increasingly more apt to choose digital access as they progress throughout their academic careers (Grosch, 2012; Pickett, 2016). Users preferred e-books when searching for brief, specific information and appreciated the accessibility and portability that digital access affords. They desired print books for deep reading, while learning new or complex material, or when they required high quality images (Mizrachi, 2015; Shelburne, 2009). Responses to Levine-Clark's survey at the University of Denver revealed that, while humanities scholars favored print, they were willing to use e-books. This was especially true when no print counterpart was available (Levine-Clark, 2007).

Research involving book and journal format preferences in the

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performing arts has revealed similar findings: students prefer electronic access to journals and print access to books (Clark, 2013; Knop, 2015). Studies specifically relating to dance or theatre format preferences are scarce; however, those conducted by Mayer, Goodwin, Medaille, and Robinson suggest that the needs and preferences of those disciplines are much the same. Dance and theatre scholars demonstrated a preference for e-journals and print books, yet practitioners (including students) often lacked time to go to the library. As a result, they desired more and higher quality electronic resources (Goodwin, 2010; Mayer, 2015; Medaille, 2010; Robinson, 2016).

Performing arts students make heavy use of music scores and audio-visual materials, and these are becoming increasingly available in digital formats. In a 2008 study at Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Kulik observed the growing use of electronic scores, and cited savings in time and money as reasons for this trend (Kulik, 2010). In contrast, Clark found a preference for print access to scores (Clark, 2013). A majority of Knop's Florida State University survey participants "always prefer to use print scores when possible," but a quarter of those respondents said they might prefer *either* depending on the circumstances (Knop, 2015, p. 87-88). In her 2011 survey of music students at the University of Illinois, Dougan noted that students frequently use non-library digital score sources (Dougan, 2012). She observed in a later study that choices between print and digital scores appeared to be related to students' degree of experience as well as the type of score sought (Dougan, 2015).

Literature suggests a growing preference for streaming online audio and video. In his ten-year study at the University of Louisville, Procell reported a steady decline in circulation of physical media items. The same period showed an increase in use of online streaming media databases (Procell, 2012). Cox observed that students responded favorably to the 24-hour access that streaming services allow (Cox, 2005). Reporting on undergraduate access to audio-visual materials in Hong Kong, Lai acknowledged that while students increasingly relied on YouTube, they still used the library's multimedia collection for academic assignments (Lai, 2013). Clark and Evans found that over half of music majors used YouTube and free audio streaming services for their course listening (Clark & Evans, 2015). Dougan has reported extensively on students' use of YouTube. She suggested that faculty use of YouTube in and out of class legitimizes student use, and that YouTube's accessibility, immediacy, and breadth of content make it an attractive alternative to library curated options (Dougan, 2016). Further, Dougan noted that library collections were hampered by "visibility, usability, and accessibility issues" and stressed the importance of teaching students to critically evaluate content (Dougan, 2016; 507).

Background/setting

The authors conducted this mixed methods study at their respective institutions: Kent State University, Rutgers University, and Butler University. Each author is the subject liaison for their university's music, theatre, and dance programs, and each plays a pivotal role in choosing how their library funds are spent. The institutions and their similar (yet diverse) circumstances allow the results to be more accurately generalizable than Clark's 2012 inquiry.

Kent State University is the second largest public university in Ohio, with approximately 29,000 students. Most of the performing arts students in residence are undergraduates. The School of Music has about 125 undergraduates and 65 graduate students. At the time of the study, the undergraduate-to-graduate ratio was more pronounced in the School of Theatre and Dance, with around 273 undergraduates and 16 graduate students enrolled during Fall 2017. The Performing Arts Library, which contains most of the university's library materials in these disciplines, is located in the same building as both Schools.

Located just north of downtown Indianapolis, Butler University is a liberal arts-based, private not-for-profit university with just under 5000 students. Full-time undergraduate enrollment in the Jordan College of the Arts totaled 367 (25 art+ design, 59 arts administration, 113

dance, 141 music, and 29 theatre students). It also offers a masters-level graduate music program. There were 36 students enrolled at the time of the study. Library services and collections for the Jordan College of the Arts as well as the office of the Performing & Fine Arts Librarian are housed in Irwin Library, the campus's main library.

Rutgers-New Brunswick had around 42,000 students, with 800 in the Mason Gross School of the Arts (250 undergraduates and 250 graduates in music, 110 undergraduates and 40 graduates in theatre, and 132 undergraduates and 18 graduates in dance). The School offers bachelors and masters degrees in these three disciplines, along with a PhD and DMA in music. The Blanche and Irving Laurie Performing Arts Library is located near the buildings housing the departments; it holds the collections for all three performing arts disciplines.

Methodology

The Institutional Review Boards at each university approved this study. The authors used a number of recruitment techniques, which included presenting the research study to performing arts classes. Incentives varied between institutions: Rutgers offered no incentives, while both Kent State and Butler allowed survey respondents to enter a drawing for gift cards. Butler focus group members enjoyed free pizza, and Kent State students in their focus group received a bookstore gift card.

Using Clark's previous student format preference study as a starting place, the authors created a Qualtrics survey with a number of logic operators. Students were asked whether they either had used, or anticipated using, various types of content (i.e. audio, video, journal, reference) in their studies (for complete survey see Appendix 1). If respondents indicated in the affirmative, they then received inquiries about frequency of use for the various formats as well as preferred method of access. This survey logic resulted in limiting responses to only those who were either currently using, or who anticipated using, a specific content type. Authors discarded incomplete surveys and exported the results to SPSS 25. Data were exported into Microsoft Excel for analysis.

In addition, each author conducted at least one focus group with their performing arts students (who may or may not have taken the survey). The group's purpose, absent in Clark's original study, was to obtain insights into the decision-making process and allow participants to explain why they behaved as they did. The authors developed the focus group questions in conjunction with the survey, and they were conducted both during and after the survey window. Kent State had one focus group with eight, Rutgers had ten, and Butler conducted two focus groups, each with six students. Authors transcribed their respective focus group(s) content in Microsoft Word. The primary investigator then read over the transcripts and selected the most insightful, representative, quotes for this article. As the survey tool did not allow for free text responses, all quotes presented came from the focus groups.

Results and discussion

Demographics

Participant demographics lend insight to the results. Two hundred and eighteen Kent State students participated (46% of enrolled performing arts students), along with 124 individuals from Butler University (31% of their students) and 131 from Rutgers University (16% of Mason Gross of the Arts students; see Table 1). A majority (235) identified as studying music. It is interesting to note that, while music students were widely spread among the three universities, most of the dance students (87%, $n = 47$) studied at Butler University. The remaining 13% were from Kent State University. Kent State had the majority of theatre students (81%, $n = 99$).

Most students who indicated "other" areas of study were in the arts

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