Disciplinary Differences and Undergraduates’ Information-Seeking Behavior

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Motivation

• Previous works focused on faculty, graduate students
• Look at undergraduates
  • Differences because information-seeking behaviors are not developed yet?
  • Similarities because professors instill discipline-specific seeking habits?
Biglan’s Typology

- Hard
- Paradigm Development
- Soft
- Pure
- Practicality
- Applied
- Life
- Object of Study
- Non-Life
Biglan’s Typology, Continued

- Used as a framework in numerous examinations of the differences between various academic fields
- This is the first use of the typology in information and library science research
Research Question

Using Biglan’s Typology as a framework, will differences in information-seeking behavior be evident between different academic disciplines, as manifested by undergraduates in that field?
The Data

- Data drawn from 1996 College Student Experiences Questionnaire (collected by Indiana University)

- Covers 5175 students from 38 4-year institutions. Only majors in fields covered by Biglan’s typology were considered for this study -- no Biologists :(
Subject Break-down

- Physical Sciences: 24%
- Engineering: 8%
- Humanities: 6%
- Business: 9%
- Social Sciences: 29%
- Education: 25%

- Freshman: 22%
- Sophomore: 22%
- Junior: 32%
- Senior: 24%
Questions

• Information-seeking behavior assessed from self-reported measures of library usage
Analysis

• t-tests for each of three typology dimensions
Findings: Hard vs. Soft

- Used library to read/study
- ***Used online catalog
- ***Asked librarian for help
- ***Read in reserve/reference section
- ***Used indexes
- ***Developed bibliography
- Browsed stacks
- ***Checked citations
- Read basic references
- ***Checked out books
Findings: Pure vs. Applied

- Used library to read/study
- Used online catalog
- Asked librarian for help
- Read in reserve/reference section
- Used indexes
- Developed bibliography
- Browsed stacks
- Checked citations
- Read basic references
- Checked out books
Findings: Life vs. Non-Life

- Used library to read/study
- **Used online catalog
- ***Asked librarian for help
- ***Read in reserve/reference section
- ***Used indexes
- ***Developed bibliography
- Browsed stacks
- **Checked citations
- Read basic references
- Checked out books
Results

- Majors in soft, pure, life disciplines engaged in more information-seeking activities than hard, applied, non-life majors

- Biglan’s Typology can be a useful framework in ILS research
Considerations

- This study looked at undergrads, not researchers established in their field -- maybe undergrads don’t know what the important resources in their field are yet.
- Lots of freshmen in sample -- not advanced in their field, still doing basic stuff.
- Also looks at “current” or “anticipated” major, not necessarily what the student graduates with.
Discuss

• Averages all hover around 2, which translates to “occasionally”

• Did hard, applied, non-life majors not seek information? Problem with this study is that it couches information-seeking behavior in terms of physical library use.

• How about different combinations, such as e.g. hard, pure, non-life majors? Author suggests tailoring library services to each “tier” of disciplines
Comments

• **Good**
  • Large sample size, many universities

• **Bad**
  • Limited to physical library services
  • “Paradigm” and “Practicality” axes of the typology not equally represented
  • Interesting to see results if limited to upperclassmen, or students doing “research” (as opposed to e.g. finding information for a report)