

STUDY OVERVIEW

During the Spring 2008 semester, the Collections Department of the Boston College Library launched an in-depth, mixed method research initiative to study the current and future relationship between the university libraries and BC faculty. In the first phase, the Library launched a university-wide survey for tenure-track faculty. The purpose of the Faculty / Library Survey was to assess the faculty/librarian relationship via the faculty's perspective. This instrument sought to provide a first glimpse at the way in which faculty access the Libraries' collections, their satisfaction with current Library resources, what they felt were the most important priorities for the future of Library collections, and their thoughts about current and future communication with the Library.

Based on the results of the Faculty / Library Survey, the second phase of the study was initiated. This consisted of focus groups with faculty from a variety of schools and disciplines. The focus groups served three purposes. First, the survey data were used to inform our focus group questions; issues that emerged from the survey were discussed in more detail. Second, the librarians were able to ask more detailed questions about complex collection issues that could not be adequately answered in the survey format. And lastly, they provided direct communication between the Library and faculty; a major goal of this study was to improve the relationship between the Library and the University faculty by beginning a conversation to facilitate systematic communication between the two.

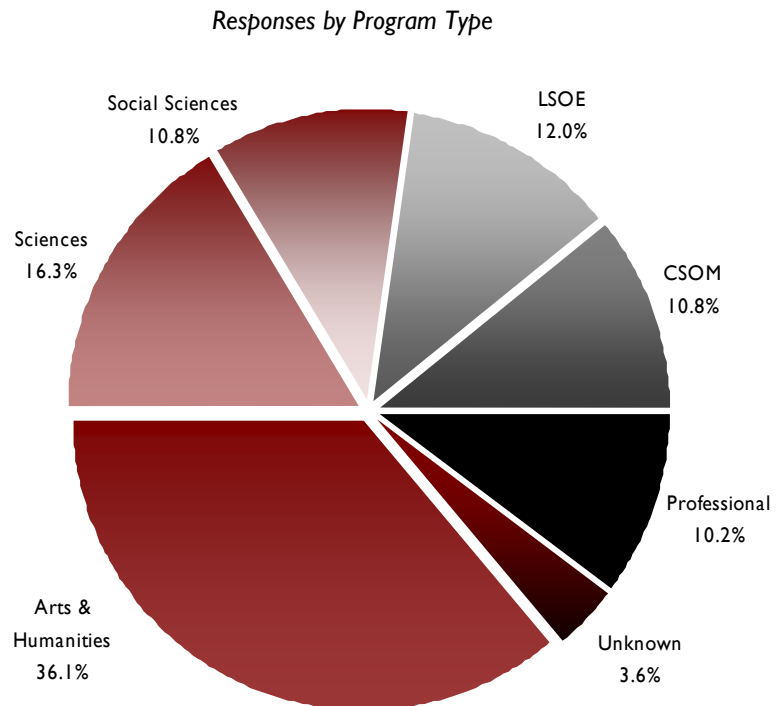
The summary that follows presents both the quantitative results from the Faculty / Library Survey and the qualitative results from the subsequent focus groups. Because each type of data complements the other, the data are presented by topic as opposed to by method; results from both the survey and the focus groups will be presented throughout each topical section.

PHASE I: FACULTY / LIBRARY SURVEY OVERVIEW

- Online survey administration during Spring 2008 Semester
- All tenure and tenure track faculty were invited to participate, resulting in 166 respondents (28.7% response rate)
- Topics addressed include: library access; satisfaction with resources; priorities for library collections; communication between the library and faculty

Where appropriate, results are analyzed by program type and by professorial rank. Below is a breakdown of the survey respondents:

- » The majority (64.5%) of respondents are affiliated with The College of Arts & Sciences (A&S). In order to account for differences between program types, A&S departments are broken into three categories: Arts & Humanities (A&H), Sciences, and Social Sciences.
- » For the purpose of this study and due to a small number of responses per school, the Connell School of Nursing (CSON), the Law School, and the Graduate School of Social Work (GSSW) are included in the Professional program type.
- » 81.3% of the respondents were tenured faculty, and the remainder were tenure-track faculty.
- » Over half (53.7%) identify their rank as either assistant or associate professor.



PHASE 2: FOCUS GROUPS OVERVIEW

- Conducted during Spring 2008 Semester
- Four focus groups of between five and eight participants
- Those who indicated on the Library / Faculty Survey that they would be interested in participating in a focus group were invited to attend
- Participants represented a variety of departments and programs, including, among others, Biology, Chemistry, Nursing, Economics, History, Theology, and Philosophy.
- Topics addressed include: single article access versus complete journal access; e-book versus print format; department-specific budget allocations; two-way communication for logistical issues as well as more complex issues

SUMMARY OF FACULTY THOUGHTS ON LIBRARY COLLECTIONS

ACCESSING LIBRARY COLLECTIONS

Remote computer access is the most popular and frequently utilized way in which to access the library collections. Visiting the library in person is still a popular way to access the library collections, but it seems to have been somewhat replaced by computer access. Other frequent ways in which faculty access the library collection resources include through research and/or graduate assistants, and through interlibrary loan if necessary.

SATISFACTION WITH LIBRARY COLLECTIONS

Faculty seem to be generally satisfied with the overall library collection resources at Boston College libraries. They also seem to recognize the difficulty libraries face in keeping up with collections. One faculty member articulated this, *“I am generally very happy with the collections in the BC libraries and with the responsiveness of the library staff with all of my requests.”* Another echoed, *“By and large, our collections are excellent. No collection can be absolutely complete.”* Concerns were expressed, however, about the reduction of certain journal and book acquisitions and how this might affect the Library’s future.

PRIORITIES FOR FUTURE COLLECTIONS

In general, faculty across all disciplines tended to feel that journals, print books, and online databases should be the top priorities for future BC library collections over the next two years. Electronic books (e-books) tended to be less of a priority for most survey respondents. The feeling that journals, print books, and online databases should remain a priority over e-books was also reflected in conversations with faculty participating in the focus groups.

Each of these themes is further explored below.

LIBRARY COLLECTIONS ACCESS

- » The most common way in which to access the library's resources is remotely by computer. Over half of respondents report accessing the library collections remotely on a daily basis, compared to less than 5% of respondents visiting one of the BC libraries in person on a daily basis.
- » Although respondents visit the library less often than they access remotely, more than one in three (37.9%) respondents do report going to the library at least weekly.
- » Another frequent method for faculty to gain access the library collections is through a research or graduate assistant. Over 50% of faculty responded that they use this mode of access on at least a monthly basis.

*How often do you use the following methods to access the collections in BC Libraries?
(% of respondents indicating "daily" or "weekly")*

Method of access	A&H (n=60)	Sciences (n=27)	Social Sci. (n=18)	CSOM (n=18)	LSOE (n=20)	PROF. (n=17)
Visit in person	68.3%	25.9%	83.3%	61.2%	25.0%	58.9%
Remotely through computer	96.7%	100.0%	100.0%	88.9%	80.0%	82.4%
By proxy (via research/grad assistant)	23.3%	25.9%	44.5%	38.9%	60.0%	47.1%

- » Respondents from the social science disciplines indicate visiting the library in person most often; 8 out of 10 (83.3%) respondents indicate visiting the library in person at least once a week.
- » Virtually all of the respondents from disciplines in the College of Arts & Sciences (A&H, Sciences & Social Sciences) indicate accessing the library collection remotely through their computer on at least a weekly basis.
- » Respondents from the Lynch School of Education (LSOE) access the library collections by proxy, via a research or graduate assistant, more frequently than those from other program types.

Access to outside library resources:

Interlibrary loan also seems to be an important method faculty use to access library collections; 8 out of 10 respondents report using ILL services at least once a semester. One respondent said, "*The Interlibrary Loan department deserves a lot of praise*"; many others echoed this sentiment. Respondents commented on the direct responsiveness of the librarians and their willingness to locate and provide access to outside resources; "*The librarians are consistently able to get a hold of journal articles that library doesn't own and email them to me, often within a few hours – impressive! The library has extraordinarily efficient and helpful staff.*"

SATISFACTION WITH LIBRARY COLLECTIONS

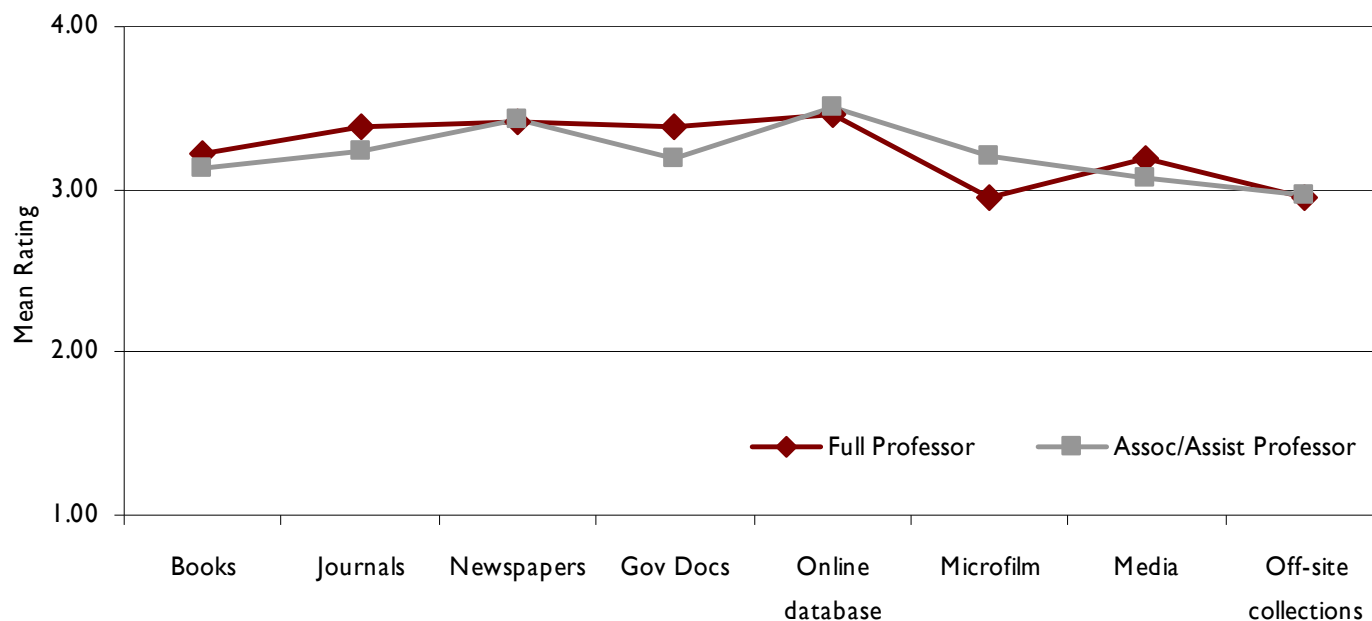
*Satisfaction with current library collection resources by program type
(% responding “Very satisfied” or “Somewhat satisfied”)*

	A&H (n=60)	Sciences (n=27)	Social Sci. (n=18)	CSOM (n=18)	LSEO (n=20)	PROF. (n=17)
Books	73.3%	86.9%	87.5%	93.8%	95.0%	93.4%
Journals	84.4%	81.4%	88.9%	100.0%	90.0%	88.3%
Newspapers	92.6%	100.0%	83.4%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Government Documents	60.0%	66.6%	100.0%	90.0%	100.0%	85.7%
Online databases	94.5%	91.7%	81.3%	88.2%	85.0%	100.0%
Microfilm/microfiche	78.6%	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Media (DVD, Video, CD)	78.0%	88.9%	81.9%	80.0%	84.6%	87.5%
Off-site collections (Kenny-Cottle, NEDL)	68.8%	50.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

- » Of those who had an opinion, respondents seem fairly satisfied with almost all areas of collections. The only area in which more than half of the respondents indicate being dissatisfied is those respondents in the Sciences when rating their satisfaction with microfilm and microfiche. Otherwise, all program types rate collection resources favorably, with at least 65% of respondents from each program type being “very satisfied” or “somewhat satisfied”.
- » For those who were dissatisfied and chose to comment further on their dissatisfaction with individual library resources, respondents often mentioned the inability of the library to keep up with book collections, journals, online databases, and other such resources. Many seemed particularly discouraged with the decrease in book orderings, cautioning that other areas in the library (such as online databases) should not cut into the book budget. One respondent stated, “*I would rather have more books bought even if it means getting more obscure articles from ILL.*”
- » Many teaching professors mentioned a lack of resources for their teaching needs. One respondent wrote, “*While I do not expect the BC library to meet all my research demands, it should certainly meet my teaching needs. The decline in book ordering is making it difficult to do even that.*” This also came up in the focus group discussions; “*Books recommended by professors for a project are not in the library. These books are not required for the course, but it’s impacting the students’ experience.*”

SATISFACTION WITH LIBRARY COLLECTIONS (by professorial rank)

Satisfaction with current library collections by Full and Associate/Assistant Professor



(Scale: 1= Very dissatisfied; 2= Somewhat dissatisfied; 3= Somewhat satisfied; 4= Very satisfied)

- » Interestingly, when analyzing satisfaction with library resources by tenure status and rank, there are no statistically significant differences between full professors and assistant/associate professors.
- » However, when respondents chose to comment further on their dissatisfaction some commented on the need for the library to improve its collections to become more than just an adequate research library. This also emerged as a major theme in the focus group discussions. It was discussed in the context of producing high quality scholarly research and publishing expectations in order to get tenure promotions. One faculty member stated, *“You’re asking me to publish papers in the same journal as those people from Harvard and you’re expecting the same quality of scholarship to get tenure here, to get promotion here, as you do at Harvard or Stanford or NYU or MIT ... that means we have to have the quality support for research that a top quality library provides. The library has been systematically starved and I ask why is that happening?”*

PRIORITIES FOR FUTURE COLLECTIONS

What should the top priorities for the BC library collections over the next two years?
(% responding “Very important” or “Important”)

	Journals	Print Books	Electronic books	Online databases
Arts & Humanities (n=60)	80.0%	93.3%	41.6%	76.7%
Sciences (n=27)	85.2%	59.2%	37.0%	85.1%
Social Sciences (n=18)	88.9%	72.2%	50.0%	77.8%
CSOM (n=18)	83.3%	61.1%	50.0%	94.5%
LSOE (n=20)	80.0%	55.0%	70.0%	100.0%
Professional (n=17)	100.0%	70.6%	58.8%	88.2%

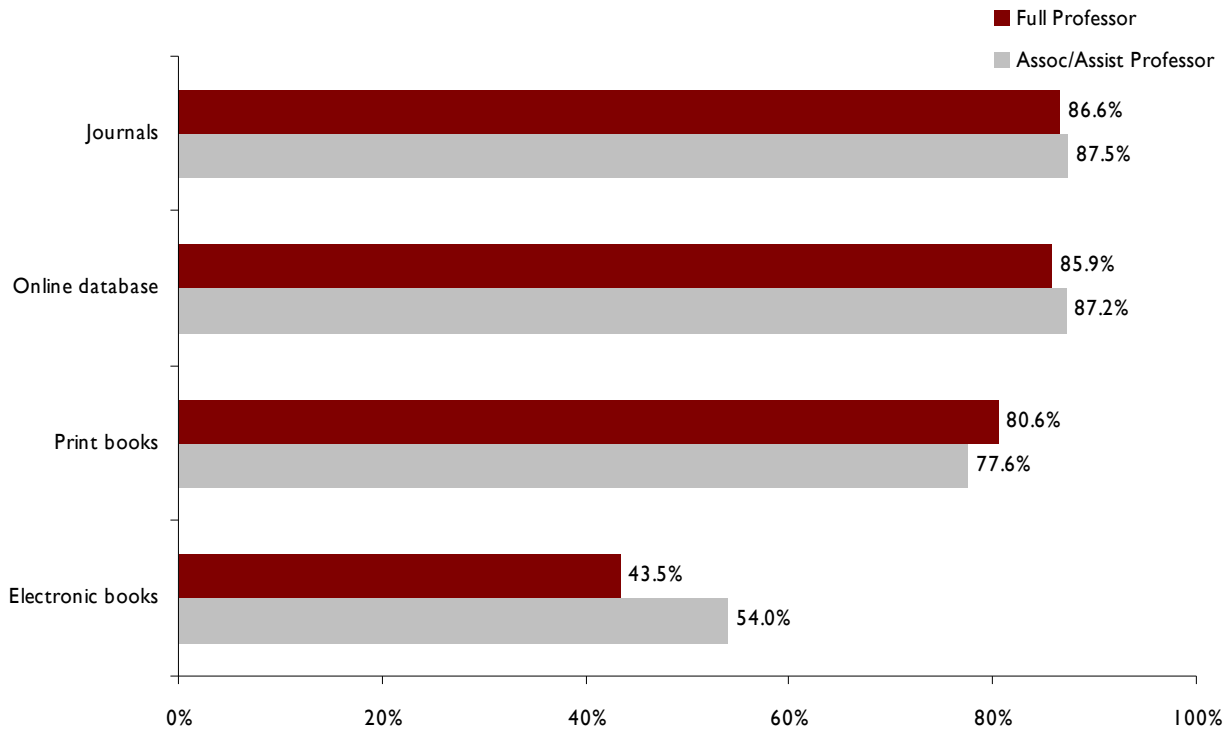
- » While journals, print books, and online databases are considered by most faculty to be the priorities for collections over the next two years, the top priority for each program type differed.
- Arts & Humanities is the only program type to rank print books as the highest priority over the next two years.
 - The Sciences, Social Sciences, and Professional (GSSW, CSON, Law School) program types rank journals as the highest priority for library collections.
 - Carroll School of Management and Lynch School of Education respondents rank online databases as their top priority for future library collections.
 - Electronic books do not rank as a top priority for any of the six program types.

Issue Highlight: E-Books vs. Print-books

- » Interestingly, when asked about future library priorities, respondents in all program types except for LSOE ranked electronic books as the lowest priority for the next two years. This was further explored in the focus group sessions. When asked about e-books, one faculty member said definitively “no” to the idea of moving in the direction of e-books. Many of the faculty in the room immediately agreed with him. Most felt that electronic format is favorable for journals, but not for books. Others did acknowledge that it was a discipline specific question. For example, the discussion of changing from print monographs to electronic monographs was discussed in the focus groups. Biology professors reported that their discipline rarely uses monographs, and therefore a shift to e-books would not significantly affect them. However, those in the history department reported that monographs are extremely important for their particular discipline. The history faculty felt strongly that monographs need to be printed out, and are not conducive to electronic viewing.
- » With regard to e-books’ usefulness for teaching, the responses were mixed; one faculty member said that students really liked the ability to read electronically as well as the quality of the visual presentation. Another faculty member expressed the opposite experience and felt that her students did not like having to read from a screen. One clear benefit that most agreed upon was the instant access that e-books provide; students can access the readings from their dorm rooms. Faculty participants felt this increased class participation.

PRIORITIES FOR FUTURE COLLECTIONS (by professorial rank)

What should be the top priorities for the BC Libraries Collections over the next two years?
(% responding “very important” or “important”)



- » Similar to professorial rank comparisons for satisfaction with library collection resources, when comparing responses by full and associate/assistant professor, responses remain fairly consistent. However, a few differences are evident:
- Full professors place more importance on the priority of print books; associate/assistant professors place more importance on all other priorities including journals, online databases and electronic books.
 - The largest gap between the two rankings is in the importance placed on the priority of electronic books, with more than half (54.0%) of associate/assistant professors considering e-books “very important” or “important”, compared with 43.5% of full professors.

SUMMARY OF MAJOR POLICY THEMES

COMMUNICATION

Most faculty report that the communication between their department and their department-librarian is strong, but that for larger policy level issues, communication between the library and faculty has been virtually non-existent. Many articulated the need for a Faculty Advisory Board for important policy level issues. While faculty are aware that the library is under major budgetary constraints, they feel there needs to be faculty input in the decisions that are driven by these budgetary constraints.

SINGLE-ARTICLE ACCESS

There was both positive and negative feedback about using single-article access over full journal ownership. For many, it is a question of how quickly they can get access to the article. For many others it is important to be able to browse through the entire journal.

BUDGET ALLOCATION

Many faculty members suggested that the university librarian should be required to fundraise as a part of his/her job description; increasing funds to the library could alleviate many decisions driven by budget constraints such as journal cancellations and lack of new book orders.

FUTURE OF THE LIBRARY

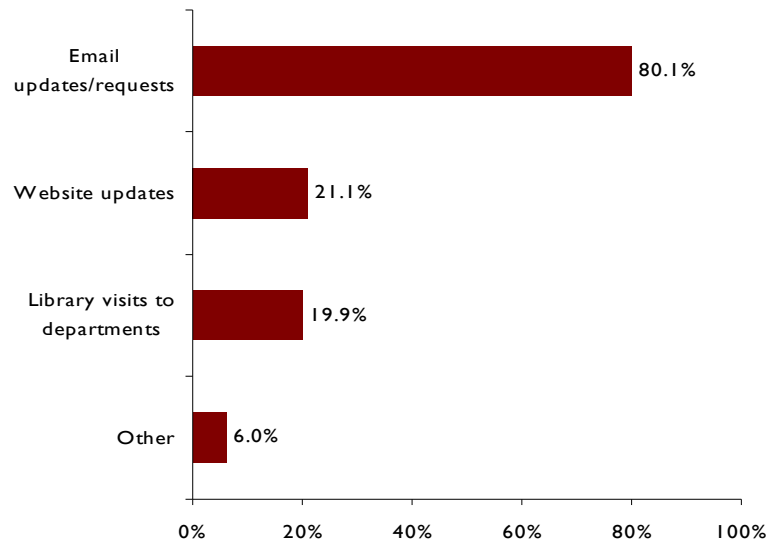
Many feel that the future of the library depends largely on the relationship between faculty and the university librarian for policy level decision-making. The general consensus is that faculty feel the library has fallen behind in comparison to other research universities in recent years. Many faculty feel that if they are expected to publish at the same level as other top research universities, they need the resources in order to be able to do so. Unfortunately, faculty do not feel they have adequate library resources in our current state.

Each of these themes is further explored below.

COMMUNICATION BETWEEN LIBRARY AND FACULTY

- » Respondents indicate that email updates and requests are the best way to maintain communication and input from faculty members.
- » However, 1 in 5 respondents (19.9%) indicate that library visits to individual departments are a good means of communication between the faculty and the library.
- » Noteworthy is that of those who indicate “other”, almost half state that a faculty/library committee is the best way in which to facilitate communication.

How can the library best communicate with you and obtain your input regarding the future development of BC Library Collections?



Communication between the BC libraries and faculty seems to be a major point of frustration for faculty members. This issue was further explored in the focus groups, and one of the most prevalent findings was that communication needs to be fostered at all levels of the university. The general sentiment is that at the departmental level communication is good, but at the university level and the administration level, communication has been lacking.

Two focus groups participants articulated this point:

“We communicate real well at the individual [departmental] level, [librarians] do a great job, but that’s not communicating library strategy or broader decision making, and that needs to come from a higher level to a higher level so that things don’t come as a surprise. It isn’t the [librarian’s] job, and when there are tough decisions that is a really awkward position for a librarian to be in. Communicating tough library decisions, they didn’t make the decisions; they’re carrying them out and willing to work with the faculty. Conveying difficult decisions needs to come from the university librarian role to the department chairs and the deans.”

“We do have good bibliographers in our own areas who are in touch with us about our specific collections, ... but the purpose of the larger [faculty] committee would be to deal with big policy issues relating to the entire library. It would have been really helpful to have our input into library policy-making but also as a way of disseminating information back to our departments. The library tries to communicate but hasn’t always had the right vehicle.”

SINGLE ARTICLE ACCESS VS. JOURNAL OWNERSHIP

Single journal article access vs. complete journal ownership received mixed results. While 40% of survey respondents indicate that single journal article access is acceptable, others seem wary of the trend. Eleven percent (11%) indicate that it is not acceptable, and that the library should have complete issues of journals in its collections. Many survey respondents (43%) indicate that it depends on the situation; that they sometimes need the complete journal issues, and in other cases just need the journal article.

Again, because there are stipulations placed on the acceptance of this method of journal access, communication with faculty seems to be key. One faculty member articulated; *“Faculty input is essential for determining and implementing this policy.”* One focus group participant summed up many faculty’s concerns with this issue:

“I think the real critical element is that it has to be under good communication in terms of what we keep and what we let go of. In my own field in Western History for instance every state in the west that has a little historical society that puts out a state history journal, I don’t need the library to have all of those. Occasionally I need something from the annals of Wyoming and I’m willing to wait a couple of days to get it. But if The Western Historical Quarterly, a major journal in the field, gets cancelled as it was a few years ago this is a huge problem. And it happened in the middle of teaching a Western History class. In my area there are three really significant national journals and we have to have access to those especially for browsing, and especially if you want to go back. I often have graduate students who have to look back at old journals, they need to have access to those to be able to do that. The other ones we can live without, but we aren’t going to really know that unless there is communication between the library and faculty.”

Support for Single-article access:

- » *“I virtually never need access to an entire journal. Electronic access to individual articles has considerably improved in the last year or so.”*
- » *“I have been very satisfied with the single-article document delivery I’ve gotten from BC libraries. With this good service, I see no problem in this efficiency.”*
- » *“I really like being able to access the stuff electronically. I haven’t been to the library to look at a journal in years and I must access hundreds and hundreds of articles a year, and it keeps getting better. I like that and I am perfectly content to get single copies of articles. I do find it useful to look at the table of contents but the journal has its own website, the databases allow you to search by journal and I don’t find that a problem. Only thing I wish was better, I almost never print the things either I’m quite happy to read them online and to distribute them to my students electronically, but it is being able to mark them.”*

SINGLE ARTICLE ACCESS VS. JOURNAL OWNERSHIP: Stipulations

The following themes emerged as stipulations placed on single-article access to journals:

Need complete issue for important journals in each field:

- » *“There are about two dozen journals that I keep up with on a regular basis. I am often content to read articles online although there is nothing quite like being able to browse for an afternoon. But if the library did not have a subscription to a journal I read regularly I would not know if that journal had published an article/review I wanted/needed to read.”*
- » *“The journals that I use regularly, I really do use the entire journal including looking through the articles each month to see the new articles. The more peripheral journals for my field, single journal access is fine.”*
- » *“My field (and I imagine, all fields) has certain key journals, and I think the library should have complete issues of them.”*

Need access to the Table of Contents:

- » *“As long as we can access an entire table of contents and have the option of ordering every article, then I don’t see any reason not to feature mostly individual article access.”*
- » *“As long as we can access an entire table of contents and have the option of ordering every article, then I don’t see any reason not to feature mostly individual article access. Most of the time this is sufficient.”*
- » *“If single article access comes with no capabilities to link to complete issue table of contents, then it is unacceptable: special topic issues are frequent in my field, and important to discover.”*

Need for instant access:

- » *“It would depend on time involved – if I could get any number of specific articles in a very short period of time, no problem. Assuming this would allow us access to more journals.”*

Scholarly/Research issues:

- » *“It is helpful for faculty and students in choosing a journal for submission of an article to be able to look at all of the articles in a journal to see how the manuscript being submitted fits with those that are published.”*
- » *“I am divided on this question. In fact, usually, I only need access to an article. However, I think it is important for research libraries to continue to support scholarly publishing – of journals, and of scholarly books. The question should perhaps be less what each particular person uses (or could get by with) than what is necessary to support the larger intellectual culture that a research library should foster.”*
- » *“Complete issues are crucial for two reasons. First, sometimes you don’t know what you are looking for until you find it. Serendipity is an important research tool and that is impossible without browsing. Secondly, as a scholar it is necessary to get a sense of the “state of the field”. That means having a sense of the complete range of articles being published and research being done. Targeted searches for specific items is not an adequate substitute.”*

Financial issues:

- » *“I think it is good for students and faculty to have entire runs of journals, but single article access is workable if it is much more advantageous financially.”*
- » *“I know it is expensive, but I would counsel against the radical strategy of totally stopping the reception of complete, paper journal issues.”*

BUDGET ALLOCATION AND CONSTRAINTS

The financial constraints that face library collections may best be summarized by presenting the introduction used for the focus group sessions: In recent years, library collection decisions have become increasingly complex. With advances in technology, the library is able to offer a variety of formats in which to present material. However, along with these formatting options have come major budgetary considerations. The library has to make difficult decisions regarding collections in light of these budgetary constraints. For example, the library's annual budget increase for the past thirteen years has been 3.89%; journal price increases at an average of 6-7%. The library believes that a higher annual increase is needed in order to improve the library's ability to meet BC's research needs. The library also recognizes the value of faculty involvement in the decision-making process, and hopes that these focus groups can be a first step in working together to advocate for the library and its collections.

Many survey and focus groups participants seem to understand the burden that the collections librarians alluded to; one survey respondent wrote, *"It seems to me that you all are trying to do a really good job in the face of difficult financial complications."* Another faculty member who was aware of the budgetary constraints talked about the dire consequences of these monetary constraints in one of the focus groups; *"We have lost so much ground in the past decade that it's hard to imagine regaining that ground ... it's a real concern, that lost ground: we can't support the existing programs. We are still falling behind our peer institutions. The average annual increase with them is 6.23% and it's 3.89% for us."*

Faculty Suggestions

Faculty also provided many useful and concrete suggestions for how to deal with these budgetary constraints and subsequent budget cuts in a manner that is more friendly to academic departments.

- One faculty member suggested that for each new academic program, the program directors and the librarians work together to develop a Library Impact Statement which outlines what it is going to cost the library to support this program.
- Instead of simply canceling journal collections without consulting the department, every three years, faculty members in each department are given a list and asked to mark off the top 20 journals they need access to, and those they feel can be cancelled. One faculty member articulated the frustration of not being consulted before journal cancellations; *"There needs to be a connection. Journals were moved off the shelves, but no one said a word to us and people got very unhappy with this. Send a list of all the history journals and say look we are very sorry we can only support X thousands of dollars. And the history department can sit down and wrestle with this, okay that's what we can have, here is our choice."*
- Many faculty members also suggested that the library provide faculty with the actual cost of each journal, and allow faculty and departments to assess if the journal is in fact worth the monetary cost.

FUTURE OF THE LIBRARY: FACULTY/LIBRARY COMMITTEE

The overarching theme that emerged from this study is the need for communication between the librarians and faculty members. It seems that communication at the departmental levels is at least satisfactory. However, the major breakdown between the faculty and the library's relationship seems to be due to the lack of communication at higher levels of the university. To remedy this, by far the most often mentioned strategy was the implementation of a faculty / library committee. This was articulated throughout the survey and the focus groups, with comments such as:

- » *“My ambitious hope would be that a library committee could review the collection and, informed by budgetary concerns, prioritize desirable purchases.”*
- » *“Collaboration with faculty is essential. All top research libraries work closely with the faculty. The book budget needs to keep up with the requirements of our research fields and BC's goals of being a research university.”*
- » *“Why not have a designated faculty liaison committee representing different disciplinary areas?”*
- » *“A standing library and faculty advisor is essential and it would have to reflect different divisions and different schools. But there has been resistance towards this.”*

Overall, the survey and focus group data demonstrate that the faculty are generally satisfied with the Library and its collections. However, the faculty participants indicated that if they are expected to publish at the level of other top-notch universities, there is a strong need for greater investment and access to Library resources. In general, faculty strongly feel that the Library should be better aligned with its faculty members, and that faculty and librarians need to work together to ensure that the Library is currently, and continues to remain, one of the top priorities of the University.