

Research Notes

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Online Access: User Reaction

INTRODUCTION

Since early 1970, professional library literature has published many articles on the closing of card catalogs, and the resulting switch to COM fiche or online catalogs. There have, however, been few articles describing users' reactions to these new types of catalogs. J. Sprechert cited the need for detailed studies of patron use of online systems,¹ and Ben-Ami Lipitz reported that there have been studies on the use of the card catalog, but not the online catalog.²

A recent article by Carole Weiss Moore³ describes a study on the use of online systems at four libraries, the results of which indicate that, in most instances, the users adapt to online systems with little or no difficulty. Such was definitely the experience of the University of Guelph Library, one of the four systems studied.

The University of Guelph Library has had an online circulation system since fall 1977.

The card catalog is located on the main floor of McLaughlin Library. Reader services are offered for separate reference collections in three subject divisions: a branch library for veterinary medicine, special collections for government publications, and archives and rare books. COM fiche catalogs

(main entry and shelflist) and serial and document catalogs are located in each public service division as a supplement to the card catalog. Terminals are located throughout the library to provide access to the online circulation system and its records.

The online circulation system provides public access to monographs and documents in the collection via call number, author, and title. It also supplies access to an individual's borrower record. By entering the system, a user is able to determine if an item is charged out and, if so, when it is due back in the library. The user is also able to place a hold on an item by wandling the bar code on his I.D. card.

A study of the online system was undertaken in an attempt to examine the attitude of students and faculty, and to provide data for further development.

METHODOLOGY

The study took the form of a printed questionnaire and was distributed at the public terminals during the 1980 fall semester. The purpose of the study was twofold: to determine if the online circulation system was providing user satisfaction; and to gather information for the design of an online cataloging module.

The terminal screen was self-instructional; therefore, no formal instruction was offered. Initial entry into the system

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can be made by choosing one of four approaches: call number, author, title, and borrower inquiry. Each instruction is followed by pressing the *send* button, and each screen of information provides instructions for the next step. No record of queries regarding the use of the online system was maintained.

The study questionnaire was designed to provide five basic types of information: (1) the status of users and the number of times they used the system; (2) the effectiveness of the instructions on the terminal screen; (3) the convenience of terminal locations; (4) the type of information required by the user; and finally, (5) general comments about the system. Completed questionnaires were collected each day by the public service staff. The rate of return on distributed questionnaires was 10 percent.

FINDINGS

As illustrated in table 1, the largest number of returns came from the seventh semester level. As expected, the number of times the system was used rose according to semester level of the user. One hundred percent of the eighth-semester-level students reported using the system eleven times or more. The slight drop at the graduate level, as indicated in table 1, could be due to the fact that many graduate students were new to the university, and thus not familiar with the system.

The majority (94.1 percent) of users found that instructions on the terminal screens were adequate. The largest number of negative replies came from library staff. (See table 2.)

Table 3 shows that of the total number of

online circulation users, 68.5 percent, required no assistance, while 31.5 percent asked for help from either library staff or a friend. The percentage requiring assistance appears to indicate that some form of instruction was necessary, and, as a result, classes on the use of the public inquiry system were offered.

Most users found the terminals conveniently located, with only 8.6 percent indicating dissatisfaction. The location of terminals near service points on every floor of the library appeared to be a good decision. (See table 4.)

Thirty-five percent of the users reported having to wait one or two minutes to use a terminal, 37.9 percent reported having to wait three to five minutes, and 16.3 percent had to wait six minutes or longer. Only 10.8 percent reported no wait time. Although careful studies had been made to determine terminal requirements before the system was implemented, an insufficient number of terminals had been provided.

Both tables 4 and 5 will be of value in determining the location and number of terminals required for the complete online cataloging system.

Table 6 confirms the suspicion that the online circulation system was used as a substitute for the card catalog. More than 40 percent reported looking for a specific subject, when, in fact, no subject approach is offered. In place of direct subject-heading access, users were finding that manipulation of the title access provided an acceptable substitute.

Table 7 indicates that 88.1 percent of those surveyed reported successful retrieval of information. Nearly 70 percent of the users re-

TABLE 1
STATUS OF USER AND NUMBER OF TIMES SYSTEM USED

Status of User	Number of Times System Used			Never	Row Total
	1 or 2	3-10	11 or More		
1st sem	13.0%	34.8%	47.8%	4.3%	11.3%
2d sem	0.0	66.7	33.3	0.0	1.5
3d sem	8.7	21.7	69.6	0.0	11.3
4th sem	0.0	22.2	66.7	11.1	4.4
5th sem	0.0	29.0	67.7	3.2	15.3
6th sem	0.0	11.8	88.2	0.0	8.4
7th sem	0.0	11.9	88.1	0.0	20.7
8th sem	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	6.9
Graduate	0.0	5.9	94.1	0.0	8.4
Faculty	28.6	0.0	57.1	14.3	3.4
Staff	0.0	14.3	85.7	0.0	6.9
Other	0.0	33.3	66.7	0.0	1.5
Column Total	3.4%	18.2%	76.4%	2.0%	100.0%

TABLE 2
"ARE INSTRUCTIONS CLEAR ENOUGH?"

Status of User	Yes	No	Row Total
1st sem	90.5%	9.5%	10.4%
2d sem	100.0	0.0	1.5
3d sem	91.7	8.3	11.9
4th sem	100.0	0.0	4.5
5th sem	87.1	12.9	15.3
6th sem	100.0	0.0	8.4
7th sem	97.6	2.4	20.8
8th sem	92.9	7.1	6.9
Graduate	100.0	0.0	8.4
Faculty	100.0	0.0	3.5
Staff	85.7	14.3	6.9
Other	100.0	0.0	1.5
Column Total	94.1%	5.9%	100.0%

TABLE 3
"WAS HELP REQUIRED AND IF SO, FROM WHOM?"

Status of User	Yes: Lib. Staff	Yes: Friend	No	Row Total
1st sem	31.8%	0.0%	68.2%	10.8%
2d sem	66.7	0.0	33.3	1.5
3d sem	33.3	16.7	50.0	11.8
4th sem	22.2	22.2	55.6	4.4
5th sem	12.9	16.1	71.0	15.3
6th sem	17.6	5.9	76.5	8.4
7th sem	21.4	4.8	73.8	20.7
8th sem	21.4	0.0	78.6	6.9
Graduate	35.3	0.0	64.7	8.4
Faculty	42.9	0.0	57.1	3.4
Staff	21.4	0.0	78.6	6.9
Other	0.0	0.0	100.0	1.5
Column Total	24.6%	6.9%	68.5%	100.0%

TABLE 4
"TERMINAL CONVENIENTLY LOCATED?"

Status of User	Yes	No	Row Total
1st sem	95.2%	4.8%	10.7%
2d sem	100.0	0.0	1.5
3d sem	87.5	12.5	12.2
4th sem	100.0	0.0	4.6
5th sem	87.1	12.9	15.7
6th sem	93.3	6.7	7.6
7th sem	90.2	9.8	20.8
8th sem	92.9	7.1	7.1
Graduate	100.0	0.0	7.6
Faculty	100.0	0.0	3.6
Staff	85.7	14.3	7.1
Other	66.7	33.3	1.5
Column Total	91.4%	8.6%	100.0%

requested information from the *borrower inquiry* function, thus relieving circulation division staff, who previously had to handle these requests on a personal basis.

Table 8 shows that the largest number of users (72.2 percent) found the terminal easier to use than the card catalog.

THE USERS COMMENT

Each respondent was asked for comments that might shed further light on user attitudes to the online circulation system. Several findings emerged: the library needs more terminals and a subject approach; otherwise, the system is a good one.

TABLE 5
WAIT TIME TO USE TERMINAL

Status of User	0 Min.	1-2 Min.	3-5 Min.	6 + Min.	Row Total
1st sem	18.2%	40.9%	27.3%	13.6%	10.8%
2d sem	0.0	33.3	66.7	0.0	1.5
3d sem	12.5	37.5	33.3	16.7	11.8
4th sem	0.0	44.4	33.3	22.2	4.4
5th sem	6.5	32.3	41.9	19.4	15.3
6th sem	11.8	47.1	29.4	11.8	8.4
7th sem	7.1	33.3	45.2	14.3	20.7
8th sem	0.0	21.4	57.1	21.4	6.9
Graduate	17.6	17.6	47.1	17.6	8.4
Faculty	28.6	57.1	0.0	14.3	3.4
Staff	21.4	42.9	14.3	21.4	6.9
Other	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	1.5
Column Total	10.8%	35.0%	37.9%	16.3%	100.0%

TABLE 6
TYPE OF INFORMATION REQUESTED

Status of User	Borrower Inq.	Call No.	Author	Title	Subject	Other	Row Total
1st sem	8.5%	8.6%	10.9%	9.9%	9.9%	0.0%	10.9%
2d sem	1.4	1.4	0.0	1.3	1.2	0.0	1.5
3d sem	9.9	10.8	7.6	11.9	14.8	0.0	11.9
4th sem	4.3	3.6	4.2	4.6	7.4	16.7	4.5
5th sem	17.7	17.3	13.4	16.6	21.0	16.7	15.3
6th sem	9.9	7.9	11.8	10.6	7.4	8.3	8.4
7th sem	23.4	20.1	22.7	19.9	21.0	41.7	20.8
8th sem	7.8	9.4	8.4	7.3	7.4	8.3	6.9
Graduate	9.9	9.4	10.9	9.3	6.2	0.0	8.4
Faculty	2.1	2.9	1.7	2.0	0.0	8.3	3.5
Staff	5.0	7.9	8.4	5.3	3.7	0.0	6.4
Other	0.0	0.7	0.0	1.3	0.0	0.0	1.5
Column Total	69.8%	68.8%	58.9%	74.8%	40.1%	5.9%	100.0%

TABLE 7
RETRIEVAL OF INFORMATION

Status of User	Yes	No Author	No Title	No Subs.	Other	Row Total
1st sem	11.7%	0.0%	7.1%	0.0%	0.0%	10.3%
2d sem	1.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	20.0	1.5
3d sem	10.5	15.4	14.3	17.2	20.0	11.9
4th sem	4.7	0.0	7.1	3.4	0.0	4.6
5th sem	16.4	15.4	14.3	17.2	20.0	14.9
6th sem	8.2	7.7	7.1	10.3	20.0	8.8
7th sem	20.5	15.4	7.1	24.1	20.0	20.6
8th sem	7.0	7.7	7.1	6.9	0.0	6.7
Graduate	8.8	15.4	14.3	6.9	0.0	8.8
Faculty	3.5	7.7	7.1	3.4	0.0	3.6
Staff	6.4	7.7	7.1	10.3	0.0	6.7
Other	1.2	7.7	7.1	0.0	0.0	1.5
Column Total	88.1%	6.7%	7.2%	14.9%	2.6%	100.0%

CONCLUDING REMARKS

It is apparent that the attitude of the user to the online circulation system at the University of Guelph, is, with few exceptions, positive. It is also obvious that orientation

will be needed on the use of the online system as the online cataloging module is made available. Not one user mentioned eyestrain as a disadvantage of having to read CRT screens, a point raised frequently by those who are skeptical of online systems. R. Gay

TABLE 8
COMPARE EASE OF USE—TERMINAL AND CARD CATALOG

Status of User	Easier Terminal	Easier Catalog	Same	Row Total
1st sem	78.9%	5.3%	15.8%	10.6%
2d sem	33.3	0.0	66.7	1.7
3d sem	50.0	31.8	18.2	12.2
4th sem	75.0	0.0	25.0	4.4
5th sem	67.9	10.7	21.4	15.6
6th sem	87.5	6.3	6.3	8.9
7th sem	86.5	2.7	10.8	20.6
8th sem	66.7	16.7	16.7	6.7
Graduate	75.0	6.3	18.8	8.9
Faculty	50.0	33.3	16.7	3.3
Staff	72.7	0.0	27.3	6.1
Other	50.0	50.0	0.0	1.1
Column Total	72.2%	10.6%	17.2%	100.0%

in the *American Scholar* mentions the "strain of reading banks of information through the unsteady light of the console screen."⁴ She does concede that at "Ohio State, however, readers preferred using the terminal to the card catalogue."⁵ This is most certainly the case at the University of Guelph.

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