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Information-Seeking Behavior of Law
Faculty at Central Law College, Salem

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Introduction

The increase in the amount, type, and format of information available on the Web has affected information-seeking behavior (Fidel, et al., 1999). Current information is important to everyone. The philosophical emphasis on direct, experiential acquisition of knowledge in the material, physical plane of existence is an important component of information seeking. Individuals have personal reasons for seeking certain forms of information (Leckie, Pettigrew, and Sylvain, 1996). Abels (2004) observes that from 1998-2000, both use of the Internet and expenditures for monographs increased.

The library is the most widely-used source of information available to literate societies. Librarians must be aware of the kind of information being sought and how it can be obtained. Because of the rapidly escalating cost of purchasing and archiving print journals and electronic media, the library has the duty to provide and maintain efficient services.

Related Studies

The literature of information seeking behavior of faculty is wide-ranging. Significant and interesting studies include Suriya, Sangeetha and Nambi (2004), Sethi (1990), Prasad (1998), Shokeen and Kushik (2002), Bane and Melheim (1995), Al-Shanbari and Meadows (1995), Reid (1995), Abdullah (1995), Challener (1999), Reneker (1992), and Bandara (1993). Further reading is included in the References section of this article.

Most studies of information-seeking behavior have been done in developed countries, with much less data having been gathered on the developing world. No study has been undertaken in Tamil Nadu on the information seeking behavior of law faculty. This study investigates the information-seeking behavior of law faculty at the Central Law College, Salem.

Methodology

The study used a questionnaire, which was less time-consuming and economical for a scattered population. The population of the study consisted of the 64 full-time academic staff working in the Central Law College, Salem. Guest faculty are included in the population.

The survey instrument had two sections. Section 1 collected personal information such as gender, academic rank, highest qualification, and teaching experience. Section 2, comprising 10 questions, collected data on the information-seeking behavior of the respondents. Questions in this section focused on the following areas: information sources used by the respondents, use of Central Law College library, adequacy of library collections, library use and computing skills of respondents, and the

use of IT-based library sources and services. In order to ensure reliability and effectiveness of the instrument, the questionnaire was pilot tested on ten final year students. The pre-testing exercise was undertaken to identify any problems that potential respondents might face in understanding questions posed to them. Results of the pilot study showed that respondents were able to understand the questions and their responses were interpretable.

In order to save time and ensure better response rate, the questionnaires were personally distributed to the academic staff in their offices in May 2008. Fifty-six (87.5 percent) filled-in questionnaires were returned within two weeks of distribution.

Results and Discussion

Respondents

Of the 56 respondents, 5 (8.92) were Professors, 7 (12.5%) Senior Lecturers, 19 (33.92%) Lecturers, and 25 (44.61%) Guest Lecturers. Forty-seven (83.92 %) of the respondents hold a master's degree.

The largest number of respondents, nineteen (33.92%), have been teaching for five years or less. Seven (12.5%) have between 6 and 10 years of teaching experience, and 13 (23.21 %) have between 11 and 20 years. Seventeen (30.35 %) respondents have 21 or more years of teaching experience. Twenty-nine (51.78 %) of the respondents were male and 27 (48.21 %) were female.

Library Skills

Respondents were asked to provide a self-assessment of their library skills. It was assumed that these skills might have a bearing on the ways respondents use the library to acquire the needed information. Those respondents with better skills were expected to use library resources and facilities more effectively. Most respondents rated themselves "very good" or "good," and none reported "poor" skills.

Table 1: Library Skills

Skill Level	Number	Percentage
Excellent	5	8.92
Very Good	21	37.5
Good	13	23.21
Fair	17	30.35
Poor	-	-

Computing Skills

In a self-assessment of computing skills, nearly half rated themselves "very good," while 14 percent considered their computing skills "poor."

Table 2: Computing Skills

Skill Level	Number	Percentage
Excellent	2	3.57
Very Good	11	19.64
Good	27	48.21
Fair	10	17.85
Poor	6	10.71

Information Seeking Behavior

This section includes data on the time spent by respondents on different activities, including reading and literature searching, library use, perception of the importance of various information sources for teaching and research, and the use of IT-based sources and facilities.

Time Spent on Various Activities

There is a range of teaching loads represented, but 80 percent of the respondents report spending 15 percent on research and publication and administration respectively.

Table 3: Time Spent on Various Activities

Time	Teaching	Student Welfare	Research and Publication	Administration	Reading and Lit Searching	Other Activities
%	N=56	N=56	N=45	N=37	N=56	N=15
1-15	6 (10.71%)	51 (91.07%)	37 (82.2%)	31 (83.78%)	47 (83.92%)	9 (60 %)
16-30	16 (28.57%)	5 (8.92%)	8 (17.7%)	4 (10.81%)	6 (10.71%)	6 (40%)
31-45	29 (51.78%)	-	-	2 (5.40%)	3 (5.35%)	-
45 above	5 (8.92%)	-	-	-	-	-

Information Channels Used

Respondents were asked to indicate which information channels they consult first. More than three-quarters "always" consult their personal collections first.

Table 4: Use of Information Channels

Information Channel	No.	Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Never
College Library	56	27 (48.21%)	23 (41.07%)	6 (10.71%)	-
Personal Collection	53	41 (77.35%)	10 (18.86%)	2 (3.77%)	-
Book Stores	54	7 (12.96%)	24 (44.44%)	21 (38.88%)	2 (3.7%)
Colleagues	49	17 (34.69%)	22 (44.89)	10 (20.40%)	-
Consult Knowledgeable person in the field	47	9 (19.14%)	13 (27.65%)	24 (51.06%)	1 (2.1%)

Library Visits

Nearly half of respondents visit the library at least three times a week, with another 20 percent visiting daily.

Table 5: Frequency of Library Visits

Visit Frequency	Number	Percentage
Daily	11	19.64
Weekly Three Times	27	48.21
Once in a Week	7	12.5
Once in a Month	9	16.07
Several times a year	2	3.57
Never	-	-

Purpose for Seeking Information

Preparing lectures is the most important reason for seeking information.

Table 6: Purpose for Seeking Information

Purpose	Number	Percentage
Preparing lectures	45	80.35
Updating knowledge	5	8.92
Research	2	3.57
PhD study	3	5.35
Entertainment	1	1.78

Resources for Teaching

Textbooks and law reports are the most important resources for teaching.

Table 7: Resources for Teaching

Information Sources	Number	Percentage
Books	27	48.21
Law Reports	15	26.78
Statutes	5	8.92
Research Articles	3	5.35
Legal Digest	3	5.35
Thesis and Research Reports	2	3.57
Pamphlets	-	-
Encyclopedia	1	1.78

IT-Based Sources and Facilities

More than 40 percent of respondents use the OPAC, and more than 20 percent use CD-ROM databases.

Table 8: IT-Based Sources and Facilities

IT-Based Sources and Facilities	Number	Percentage
Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC)	23	41.07
CD-ROM databases and products	12	21.42
Online local and international databases	3	5.35
Audio Visual and multimedia collections	1	1.78

Search Engines

Google is the search engine preferred by nearly half the respondents.

Table 9: Search Engines

Search Engines	Number	Percentage
Google	27	48.21
Yahoo	11	19.64
MSN	7	12.5

Library Effectiveness

Respondents were asked to provide their overall assessment of the effectiveness of Central Law College Library in meeting their information needs. More than 80 percent considered the library “Effective” or “Very Effective.”

Table 10: Library Effectiveness

Effectiveness Level	Number	Percentage
Very Effective	12	21.42
Effective	34	60.71
Somewhat effective	10	17.85
Ineffective	-	-

Conclusion

The study revealed that the respondents use IT-based library sources and facilities less frequently compared with printed sources. It might be due to the lack of awareness about their availability, improper selection of materials, or unfamiliarity with these products. Similarly, it is also noted that email is the most popular Internet application, whereas other Internet-based services and applications are only used by a limited number of respondents. This is a matter of concern, as presently, electronic information sources and the Internet are considered extremely important tools for effective teaching and research. Therefore, the Central Law College library might like to review its electronic information resources.

Library staff or reference librarians could use their time better by focusing on assisting users. Reference librarians should help users improve their skills and to find the information they need. Librarians should also assist users in learning the use of IT-based resources. The library must provide adequate equipment and technology for reference librarians so that they can offer these services

The study investigated the information needs and information seeking behaviour of law faculty members at the Central Law College, Salem. Respondents use a variety of information sources for teaching and research. Books and law reports are considered most important. It is interesting to note that, although respondents perceived the library as effective in meeting their information needs, they prefer to consult their personal collections first.

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