

INTRODUCTION

Current studies on student learning often analyze whether formal library instruction sessions offered by the library have been successful, or discuss what level of library literacy students have already achieved. Many of these studies pay less attention to the variant pathways – often informal – that students are actually taking to acquire these skills. ***Student Pathways to Library Learning*** aims to fill this gap.

This project is centered on a qualitative study that asked three focus groups of undergraduate Humanities and Social Sciences students to talk about the paths they took to learn about library resources and services, and who they have gone to in the past to assist them.

Knowing the direction students take when doing library research, and why, will help librarians to further advance the dissemination of information literacy skills through avenues that are more meaningful to students.

METHODOLOGY

Ethics: U of S Behavioural Research Ethics Board approval (August, 2011); Consent Forms signed by all participants

Participants: 14 undergraduate students in their 2nd to 4th year of a Humanities or Social Sciences Degree

Variables: Year of study; Discipline; Previous use of library resources or services.

Recruitment: Colour posters were hung in the Murray Library & other targeted locations on campus; Bookmarks were distributed at the library checkout desk & on study tables.

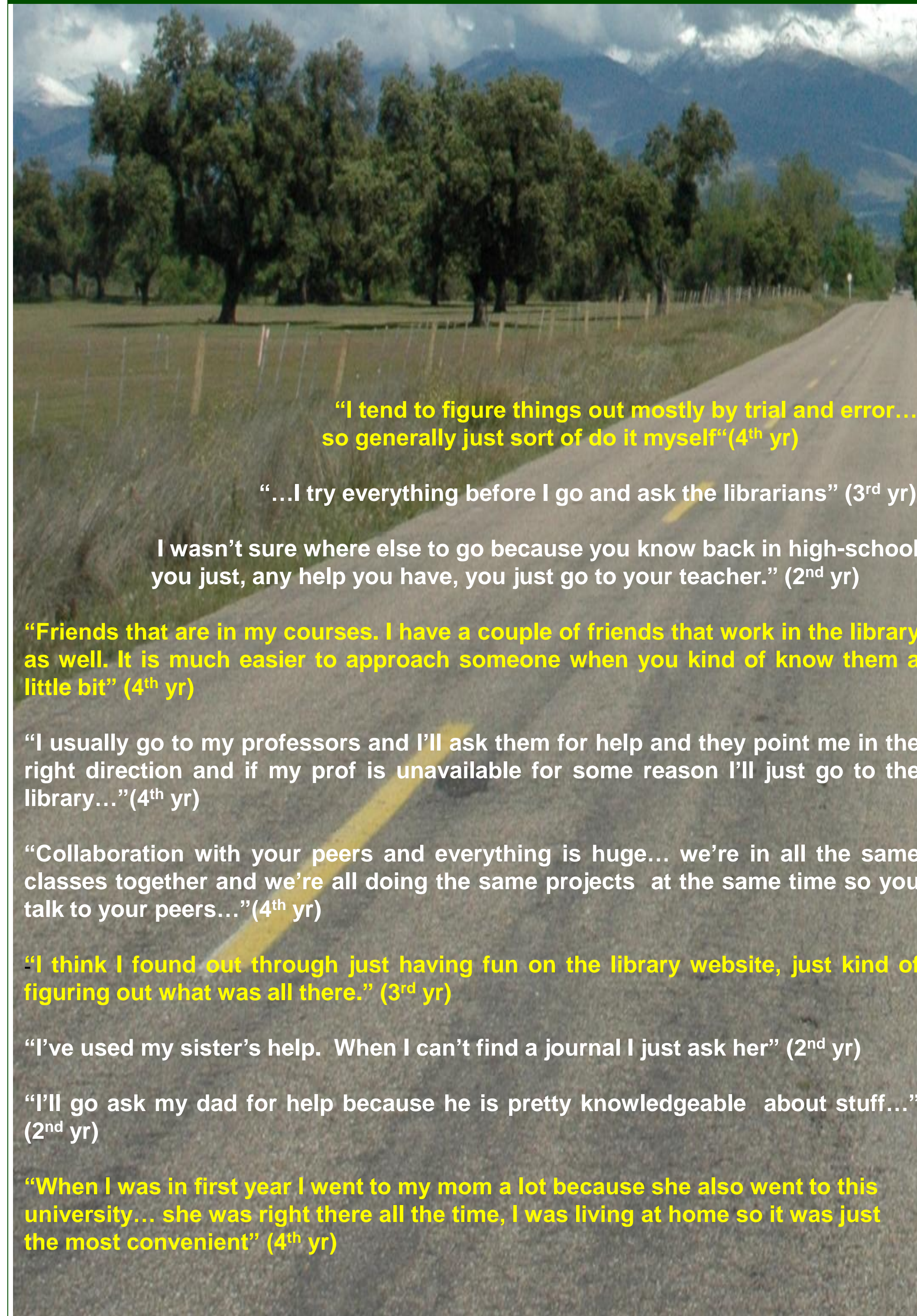
Instrument: Three Focus group sessions were recorded and notes were taken throughout each session; Recordings were transcribed; Analysis was done using a manual coding system

Appreciation: A pizza snack and a \$15 Starbucks card were provided as a token of appreciation for each participant's time.



The focus group setting allowed students to thoroughly communicate their experiences. The highly-personal and often varied approaches students take to learn to use the library were easily conveyed via the in-depth format of this qualitative method.

IN THE STUDENTS' OWN WORDS



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FINDINGS

The pathways students are taking to learn to use library resources and services:

➤ **Self-directed/Trial & Error:** Participants often suggested that they considered that figuring things out on their own was an important part of the learning process. Over time this approach builds confidence in their abilities to do research and find relevant sources.

➤ **Professors:** Students relied heavily on their professors to answer their questions about information seeking and library research due to their subject expertise and the students' familiarity with them.

➤ **Family members and peers:** These people are often a source of assistance for students likely because they meet all of the determining factors (noted below): familiarity/relationship; convenience; and perceived experience or knowledge.

➤ **Library staff:** Assistance from library staff (librarians in particular) was neither the first nor the most frequent route that the participants took in learning to do research. However, they were always happy with the help they did receive.

➤ **Library instruction sessions:** These were deemed most useful when they were oriented around a specific class and offered at an early stage in the participant's university education.

Most important factors determining the choice of these pathways:

- familiarity or established relationship
- convenience
- expertise & knowledge

IMPLICATIONS

Information literacy & library research instruction needs to be **integrated** into the curriculum and librarians **embedded** into courses to be meaningful for students and meet the determining factors they use when selecting who they seek assistance from.

Informal, peer, and self-directed learning are fundamental for many students. Libraries needs to be innovative in their services to enhance opportunities for students to learn in this fashion.

Assistance needs to be multidimensional and easily accessible for the **convenience** students desire when learning about library resources and services.