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# Graduate Student Library Needs at Memorial University of Newfoundland: A Case Study

## Les besoins en matière de bibliothèque des étudiants diplômés de l'Université Memorial de Terre-Neuve : une étude de cas

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Article abstract

Libraries are important structures for graduate students in research-intensive universities, such as Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN). Given the complex needs of those students, it is crucial to have an updated glimpse into what works and does not work for students. The objectives of this survey were to investigate graduate students' awareness and use of library services and resources at MUN and to explore how important and adequate existing services and resources seemed to MUN graduate students. Fortunately, the survey findings showed favourably in terms of user satisfaction, with many of the library services and resources that were rated as very important also being rated as very satisfactory. Other findings indicated that respondents placed increased importance on access to comprehensive collections of eresources, which is not surprising given the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Also found was an increased need for writing resources and literature search strategies. Overall, a recurring theme for improvement was an increased promotion of our services and resources so that we can better reach our students. The insights gained from the survey will help us target this area of improvement and direct future development of graduate-student-focused services and resources.

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## Graduate Student Library Needs at Memorial University of Newfoundland: A Case Study

### Les besoins en matière de bibliothèque des étudiants diplômés de l'Université Memorial de Terre-Neuve : une étude de cas

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#### **Abstract / Résumé**

Libraries are important structures for graduate students in research-intensive universities, such as Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN). Given the complex needs of those students, it is crucial to have an updated glimpse into what works and does not work for students. The objectives of this survey were to investigate graduate students' awareness and use of library services and resources at MUN and to explore how important and adequate existing services and resources seemed to MUN graduate students. Fortunately, the survey findings showed favourably in terms of user satisfaction, with many of the library services and resources that were rated as very important also being rated as very satisfactory. Other findings indicated that respondents placed increased importance on access to comprehensive collections of e-resources, which is not surprising given the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Also found was an increased need for writing resources and literature search strategies. Overall, a recurring theme for improvement was an increased promotion of our services

and resources so that we can better reach our students. The insights gained from the survey will help us target this area of improvement and direct future development of graduate-student-focused services and resources.

Les bibliothèques constituent d'importantes structures pour les étudiants diplômés des universités axées sur la recherche telles l'Université Memorial de Terre-Neuve (MUN). Compte tenu des besoins complexes de ces étudiants, il est essentiel de bien comprendre ce qui fonctionne et ce qui ne fonctionne pas pour eux. Ce sondage avait comme objectifs d'examiner la connaissance et l'utilisation des services et des ressources à MUN par les étudiants diplômés et d'explorer comment importants et adéquats sont perçus les services et les ressources par ces mêmes étudiants. Heureusement, les résultats du sondage se sont révélés favorables en termes de la satisfaction des utilisateurs où plusieurs services et ressources de la bibliothèque jugés très importants ont été évalués comme étant très satisfaisants. D'autres résultats indiquent que les répondants accordent une importance accrue à l'accès à des collections de ressources numériques exhaustives, ce qui n'est pas surprenant compte tenu des conditions liées à la pandémie de la COVID-19. Le sondage a également montré un besoin croissant pour des ressources en écriture et pour des stratégies de recherche. Dans l'ensemble, un thème récurrent à améliorer consiste à promouvoir davantage nos services et ressources afin de mieux rejoindre nos étudiants. Les résultats de ce sondage nous aideront à cibler ce domaine d'amélioration et à orienter le développement futur de services et de ressources destinés aux étudiants diplômés.

### ***Keywords / Mots-clés***

academic libraries, graduate students, library resources, library services; bibliothèques universitaires, étudiants diplômés, ressources de la bibliothèque, services de la bibliothèque

### ***Introduction***

Graduate students are a diverse group of learners with diverse research needs. As researchers, these students could be doing a variety of activities at any given time, including finding and accessing information, writing reviews, writing grant proposals, managing data, and submitting their work to publishers and conferences (Vaughan et al., 2013). Resources and services to assist with these activities are commonly found within university libraries and are readily at students' disposal. Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN) offers more than 300 programs, including 100 graduate programs, and brings more than \$100 million in research funding per year (Memorial University, 2021). The Memorial University Libraries system is one of the largest in Atlantic Canada and includes seven library branches and specialized collections such as Archives and Special Collections and the Centre for Newfoundland Studies. Having a library system that competently meets the diverse needs of internationally recognized researchers is of the utmost importance for a university that has consistently been ranked one of the top 20 research universities in Canada (Research InfoSource Inc., 2021).

As a library user group, graduate students present unique challenges. Studies have demonstrated that graduate students are often left out of program and service design (such as library instructional programming) in favour of undergraduate students (Baruzzi & Calcagno, 2015; Monroe-Gulick & Petr, 2012). Yet studies have also found that graduate students are not always as proficient in their research skills as they perceive themselves to be (Beard, 2016; Delaney & Bates, 2018). They may, moreover, be reluctant to turn to librarians to seek support in their research process because they are not aware of such support (Smith et al., 2019). Students who do not take part in librarian-led training sessions often choose to turn to their supervisors, professors, and fellow students for assistance instead (Catalano, 2013; Delaney & Bates, 2018).

Prior to the current survey, the most comprehensive evaluation of graduate student library needs at MUN was in 2007. The LibQUAL+™ Survey (Association of Research Libraries, 2007), which polled undergraduate and graduate students and university faculty and staff, was conducted to gather user opinions on library staff, collections and access to them, and the physical library environment. Graduate student respondents indicated that they used online resources far more often than print collections and that they viewed the overall library quality as relatively high. Students in that survey also thought that the quality of some services fell below what they expected them to be—namely, access to full-text electronic resources, journals, and collections, as well as quiet on-site spaces. Additionally, a more recent, though less comprehensive, survey conducted at the Health Sciences Library at MUN (2019) polled users about their satisfaction with the services, collections, spaces, and technologies associated with that specific library. This survey similarly demonstrated significance of online resources. The majority of respondents found online databases, article indexes, and e-journals to be extremely satisfying resources.

Since both the 2007 and 2019 surveys, many things have changed for students, including increased access to and dependence on online services; this dependence has only become more prominent following recent COVID-19-related on-site closures. Given these changes and the findings of the previous surveys, we sought to re-evaluate graduate-student library needs at MUN, as well as their overall knowledge of the libraries, in order to provide us with insight into where our students are currently and what we can do for them moving forward.

## **Survey**

The survey was developed to assess graduate students' knowledge of services and resources offered through MUN libraries as well as their general library needs, specifically during their time as graduate students. Survey questions probed student knowledge and use of general services and resources (commonly offered throughout all library branches on MUN campuses) and specific services and resources (specific to individual library branches). The researchers assessed student library needs across several areas, including which services and resources are very important to them, what they need most for their research, what services they use most or would like to see offered, how they use library technologies and spaces, what library workshops they would like to see offered, and what the most important thing for a library to offer is.

Before distribution, the MUN Institutional Survey Oversight Committee approved the survey. Then, the researchers sought feedback on the survey from the university librarians and library staff. In total, six responses were received. Based on this feedback, the survey was revised and finalized. Data collection ran between September 21 and October 31, 2021. The main sources of recruitment were MUN School of Graduate Studies and Graduate Students' Union social media and email lists. Participants were also recruited through posters posted around the MUN St. John's campus and advertisements on the MUN Libraries webpage. The institutional survey tool *Qualtrics* ([www.qualtrics.com](http://www.qualtrics.com)) was used to collect the data. A follow-up survey focus group was formed to explore more in-depth responses to the survey questions. In particular, we asked students how the libraries met their needs as graduate students, what they thought was missing, and the importance of library resources to graduate students.

## **Findings**

### **Demographics**

A total of 216 students responded to the survey out of approximately four thousand people enrolled as graduate students at the university. Of the respondents, the majority were completing their studies full-time on-campus ( $n = 170$ ) as opposed to distance learners ( $n = 145$ ). Most respondents were completing a master's degree ( $n = 152$ ) and were in the first year of their program ( $n = 88$ ). The majority of respondents were completing their studies within the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences ( $n = 49$ ), followed by Science ( $n = 38$ ).

### **Knowledge and Use**

Students were asked whether they had heard of and used 13 general services, 10 specific services, 18 general resources, and 33 specific resources offered through MUN libraries (see Appendix A).

Of the general services, only 10 respondents had not heard of any of the services listed. Knowledge of individual services ranged from 21 respondents (Services for Users with Disabilities) to 164 (Home Access), with over half of the respondents having at least some familiarity with seven of the 13 services listed (Borrow and Renew Books, Course Resources, Document Delivery, Home Access, OneSearch, Study Rooms). Two of the 206 respondents who had heard of at least one service listed had not used any of the services. Actual use of the services ranged from four out of 206 respondents (Services for Users with Disabilities) to 140 (Home Access) with only three of the 13 services (Borrow and Renew Books, Home Access, OneSearch) being used by at least half of this sample.

Of the specific services, 99 respondents had not heard of any of the services listed. Knowledge of the individual services ranged from six respondents (Research Visibility Consultations) to 77 (Open Access and Copyright). Forty-five of the 117 respondents who had heard of at least one service listed had not used any of the services. Actual

use of the services ranged from one out of 117 respondents (Research Visibility Consultations) to 33 (Open Access and Copyright).

Of the general resources, only 10 respondents had not heard of any of the resources listed. Knowledge of these individual resources ranged from 26 respondents (Dataverse) to 187 (Ebooks) with over half of our respondents having at least some familiarity with six of the 18 resources listed (Audio and Video, Ebooks, Ejournals, Print Books, Print Journals, Theses and Dissertations). Six of the 206 respondents who had heard of at least one resource listed had not used any of the resources. Actual use of the resources ranged from six out of 206 respondents (Music Scores) to 165 (Ejournals) with only two of the 18 resources (Ebooks, Ejournals) being used by at least half of this sample.

Of the specific resources, 93 respondents did not hear of any of the resources listed. Knowledge of the individual resources ranged from two respondents (K. B. Roberts Historical Collection, Health Sciences Library) to 67 (Archives/Special Collection – Digital). Fifty of the 123 respondents who had heard of at least one resource listed had not used any of the resources. Actual use of the resources ranged from zero out of 123 respondents (GD Choral Sheet Music, NL Film and Music Collections) to 23 (Archives/Special Collection – Print).

Additionally, students were also asked about their use of physical spaces (see Appendix B) and workshops offered through the libraries. Sixty respondents indicated that they had not used any of the spaces provided by the library during their graduate program. Use of individual spaces ranged from four respondents (Group Projects Room, Research Data Centre) to 63 (Individual Study Rooms). In terms of workshops, an overwhelming majority of respondents ( $n = 170$ ) had never attended any that had been offered. Lastly, students were asked about their use of the MUN Libraries website. Only seven of the respondents had never used the website while 132 stated that they used the website more than 15 times during the semester. When asked what they used the website for, 131 respondents said that they use it for OneSearch. The second most likely reason for using the website was to access Subject-specific Databases ( $n = 101$ ).

## Needs

One way in which graduate student needs were assessed was through which services and resources were deemed to be very important to them as graduate students. Of the collective 74 services and resources that were presented to the respondents, only four were rated by more than half of the respondents as being very important to them as a graduate student. These include access to Ejournals ( $n = 147$ ), Home/Off-campus Access ( $n = 139$ ), a simple search function (OneSearch;  $n = 126$ ), and access to Ebooks ( $n = 126$ ). Other very important items include Borrowing and Renewing Books ( $n = 90$ ), Course Resources ( $n = 51$ ), Document Delivery ( $n = 57$ ), Study Rooms ( $n = 61$ ), Print Books ( $n = 62$ ), and Theses and Dissertations ( $n = 69$ ). The items rated to be the most useful in each category were OneSearch (general services;  $n = 71$ ), Literature Review Consultations (specific services;  $n = 50$ ), Ejournals (general resources;  $n = 124$ ), and Print Archives (specific resources;  $n = 44$ ). No item was rated as very

satisfactory by over half of the respondents; the most notable items that were rated very satisfactory, however, are Borrow and Renew Books ( $n = 74$ ); Home Access ( $n = 92$ ), OneSearch ( $n = 68$ ), Ebooks ( $n = 72$ ); and Ejournals ( $n = 91$ ).

When asked specifically what was most needed to help them with their research, respondents overwhelmingly stated that it was better access to resources such as journals and articles ( $n = 67$ ) followed by more workshops ( $n = 15$ ). Availability ( $n = 70$ ) and cost ( $n = 29$ ) were also identified as the biggest barriers to accessing what they needed for their research. Respondents were also asked about which services they would like to see offered through the library that were not currently available. Most wanted to see online bookshelves for easy access to pinned resources ( $n = 120$ ), thesis toolkits ( $n = 96$ ), research alerts ( $n = 75$ ), and guides on how to conduct reviews for journals ( $n = 58$ ). Specifically referring to which workshops they would like to see offered, most respondents said they wanted to see ones covering thesis formatting ( $n = 114$ ), writing research proposals ( $n = 106$ ), and writing critical literature reviews ( $n = 101$ ). Lastly, when asked what was most important for a library to offer, students overwhelmingly stated that a better collection of resources was needed ( $n = 72$ ), followed by online access ( $n = 25$ ), access to physical spaces ( $n = 23$ ), and help from librarians ( $n = 30$ ).

## **Focus Group**

Findings from the focus group mostly reflected those from the survey. The students emphasized the importance of comprehensive library collections, reiterated a lack of knowledge about library workshops and information sessions, and provided suggestions on how to improve outreach about these services. These students were also generally positive regarding their interactions with the librarians and the convenience and ease of use for OneSearch.

## **Conclusion**

The goal of this study was to provide an in-depth look at where graduate students at Memorial University are in terms of their library knowledge and needs. In terms of knowledge, the survey demonstrated that while some services and resources were well known to graduate students, some were not—with as many as 212 of the 214 respondents having not heard of at least one item listed. This shows that there is room for improvement in how these services and resources could be better promoted to graduate students. For example, the barriers consistently mentioned by respondents included paywalls and a lack of journal subscriptions. At the same time, our survey indicated an underutilization of the Document Delivery service for resources that are not available locally. While respondents rated Document Delivery as a very important and satisfactory service across all library branches, more respondents had heard of the service than used it. With better promotion of library services, the gap in student use could be addressed.

Similar to what Smith et al. (2019) noted, respondents to the current survey expressed a strong preference and need for a “one-stop” information resource about library services,

support, and events instead of multiple options to find out about opportunities to engage in educational activities at the library. Memorial University graduate students find out about current library news and events via Newslite (a centralized university-wide email service) followed by the library website and seldom use social media. Engaging via the channels of communication that graduate students indicated work for them will help with that promotion.

In terms of student needs, the survey unsurprisingly demonstrated that graduate students need high-quality and plentiful access to online resources. These types of resources were consistently marked as very important, often the most important thing to respondents as graduate students. Fortunately, respondents rated many of the online-related services we provide as very satisfactory, which is an improvement over the findings of the 2007 LibQual+ Survey. Despite this satisfaction, it is important to keep this need in mind going forward so that the MUN Libraries continue offering high-quality services.

Respondents also demonstrated a need for a one-stop, general search bar—such as the OneSearch feature—over discipline-specific databases. This fits with previous findings that graduate students widely use Google and Google Scholar as they begin their research to complement the library catalogue search and even as a comprehensive searching tool itself (Harlow & Hill, 2020; Moore & Singley, 2019; Sloan & McPhee, 2013; Wu & Chen, 2014). Important to note, however, is that respondents also showed a need for research support with locating relevant materials and database search help. Paired with extensive use of OneSearch, this need indicates a possibility for early intervention using library instruction on the features and limitations of library discovery environments and search engines. We need to make sure that graduate students are navigating these search environments and accessing materials expertly and efficiently.

A final important need shown was for more workshops and resources focused on developing academic writing skills for theses, research proposals, and critical literature reviews. This emphasis on writing might be explained by the fact that many of the respondents were in the first year of their program in Humanities and Social Sciences. These disciplines traditionally prioritize writing skills and competencies. Graduate students beginning their studies may feel that their prior training was not sufficient for writing their theses and comprehensive examinations. This further shows room for improvement in how services are promoted, as there is the Writing Centre to assist with writing, though increased collaboration between the librarians and the Writing Centre could help as well. Interestingly, respondents expressed less interest in topics commonly thought of as relevant to graduate students, such as research visibility, creation of academic profiles, and data visualization support.

Overall, this survey has highlighted for us many of the things that are useful to Memorial University graduate students as well as what can be improved upon. It has also provided a much-needed updated insight into graduate-student library needs at MUN. We are happy to see the overall usefulness and satisfaction with library services as well



as with librarians and library staff whose support is integral to student research pursuits at MUN.

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## ***Appendix A: List of Services and Resources***

### **Services (General)**

Borrow and Renew Books, Course Resources/Reserves, Document Delivery from Other Libraries, Home (Off-Campus) Access, Library Instruction and Consultation, Printing and Use of Technology, Recommend a Purchase, Research Help in Person (Drop In or By Appointment), Research Help via Email or Chat, Search Library Catalogue and Databases/OneSearch (Online), Services for Users with Disabilities, Software Support, Use/Booking of Study Rooms and Spaces

### **Services (Specific)**

Ask a Newfoundland and Labrador Question Email Reference Service, Assistance Selecting and Using Citation Management Software, Information Literacy Instruction, Literature Review Consultations, Open Access and Copyright, Research Data Management Planning, Research Visibility Consultations, Scholarly Publishing Basics, Scoping and Systematic Review Consultations, Subject Specific Consultations

### **Resources (General)**

Audio/Video/DVD, Dataverse, E-Books, E-Journals, Film and Video Streaming, Government Documents, Instructional Videos, Maps, MUN Libraries YouTube, Microforms, Music Scores, Newspapers, Print Books, Print Journals, Rare Books, Research Guides, Research Repository, Theses and Dissertations

### **Resources (Specific)**

Archives/Special Collect-Print, Archives/Special Collect-Dig, Board Games, Can Federal Government Pub, Children's Literature Collection, Cookbooks and Gardening, CB Pulp and Paper Aer. Photos, Digital Archives Initiative, Discography of NL Database, Educational Test/Measurements, Fac. Medicine Archive, Finding Aids, GD Choral Sheet Music, Graphic Novel Collection, K. B. Roberts Historical, K-12 Curriculum Resources, Map Collections, Media Collection, Memorial Music Recitals, NL Film and Music Collections, NL Government Publications, NL Newspapers on Microfilm, Northern Cod Fish. Bibliography, Recordings, Rossi Files, Ship's Drawings, Special Exhibition Catalogues, Statistics Canada Data, Streaming Music and Video, The Labrador Institute, The Maritime History Research, The Periodical Article Bibliography of NL, Vertical/Subject/Pamphlet Files

## ***Appendix B: List of Physical Spaces***

### **Physical Spaces**

Archives and Special Collections Reading Room, Collaborative Workspace, Computer Classrooms, Current Journal Display Room, First Space Art Gallery, Group Projects Room, Group Study Rooms, Individual Study Rooms, Map Room, Memorial University's Branch Research Data Centre, Microforms Room, Presentation Area, Reading Room, The Centre for Newfoundland Studies Reading Room, The Commons Classroom, The Commons Makerspace, The Digital Media Centre, The Teaching and Learning Commons, The Writing Centre