



# Studying Students to Enhance Library Services at Rutgers University

An Ethnographic Research Project

State of the Libraries, November 12, 2009

Ka-Neng Au

Jeanne Boyle

Sam McDonald

## Lots of Kudos (1,071), Some with a Twist

- Rutgers libraries rock!
- This website is much more helpful than the one at my previous university. Thank you!
- The library website is very user friendly. It is easy to use and not very difficult to figure out for first time users. It's amazing how many sources available for the students to use. There has not been a paper, project, or presentation that I have not used the library for.
- It seems that the site has all the features I need, all that is needed is a better layout and menu tree that is less confusing and more simplified, thus easier to navigate.

How we got the idea and what's all about

# INTRODUCTION

# Libraries Experiment with Ethnography

- University of Rochester
  - Studied faculty, undergraduates, doctoral students
  - Used interviews, photographs, drawings, maps, discussions
  - Included facilities, reference desk, websites, academic activities outside the library, location
- Colorado State University
  - Studied information seeking behavior of doctoral students
  - Used online survey and interviews that included observation
  - To design and create a web-based search and information discovery tool that will interface with research resources, Internet-based tools, and repository tools in order to facilitate, support, and improve graduate student research

eth·nog·ra·phy

Pronunciation: \eth- 'nä-grə-fē\

Function: noun

Etymology: French ethnographie, from ethno- + -graphie  
-graphy

Date: 1834

: the study and systematic recording of human cultures ;  
also : a descriptive work produced from such research

Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary

# How is an ethnographic study different?

## Usability

- Evaluates a product by testing it on users
- Users try to complete typical tasks while observers watch, listen, and take notes
- Tests the site NOT the users
- Gathers performance and preference measures
- Answers “what” and “how”

## Ethnography

- Studies behaviors of a living culture or subculture
- Researcher does fieldwork via observation, interview, and other methods
- Reports contain thick description and interpretation
- Gathers quantitative and qualitative data
- Answers “why”

## Our Goals

- Focus on the user
  - To investigate the research behaviors of RU undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty
- Focus on the website
  - To highlight how library and information resources are used, and, in particular, the library's website

## Tasks

- Update our website
  - Find out how our users use it
  - Find out what changes would help them most
- At the same time
  - What else can we learn?
  - What else can our users tell us?
  - How do they do their research anyway?



# SCI Interface Design Class, Spring 2008

- Course instructor: Jacek Gwizdka, Ph.D.
- Modified ethnographic method
  - Survey
  - Cognitive walkthroughs
  - User-centered design principles
- Class presentations
- Presentation to RUL
- Evaluation and Redesign of Selected Areas of the Rutgers Libraries Website (Steven Caruso and Inma Megia, August 2008)
  - Issues and problems in general and for specific areas
  - Solutions
  - Presentation slides

## Principle Investigators

- Jeanne Boyle, AUL/POR
- Valeda Dent Goodman, Former AUL/RIS
- C. Todd White
  - PhD Anthropology, University of Southern California
  - Co-Principle Investigator and Lead Ethnographer

## Our Teams

- Core Team
  - Grace Agnew
  - Ka-Neng Au
  - Susan Beck
  - Jeanne Boyle
  - Judith Gardner
  - Valeda Dent Goodman
  - Samuel McDonald
  - Chad Mills
  - C. Todd White
- Project Team
  - Ka-Neng Au
  - Stephanie Bartz
  - Jeris Cassel
  - Shaun Ellis
  - Rebecca Gardner
  - Karen Hartman
  - David Hoover
  - Thomas Izbicki
  - Rhonda Marker
  - Samuel McDonald
  - Robert Nahory
  - Gene Springs
  - C. Todd White
  - Tao Yang

What we did...(meetings!)

# OUR PROCESS

## Six Major Tasks

- Manage the project (meetings!)
- Create and conduct an online survey
- Conduct and record interviews
- Analyze (and share!) the results of the survey
- Analyze (and share!) the results of the interviews
- Provide recommendations for the website redesign

## Manage the Project: Meetings

- February 2009 - November 2009
- 10 primary meetings
  - 4 for Core Team
  - 6 for the Project Team
- Plus 2 more WAC meetings focused on the ethnographic project
- Plus 6 Project Team co-viewing sessions
- Plus many mini-meetings for coordination purposes

# The Survey: Part 1: Design

- Complete the first part of the discovery phase
  - Create a survey of undergraduate and graduate students to learn about their use of the existing library's website and other internet services and technologies in their research
- Satisfy IRB requirements (meet deadline!)
- Be short enough for users to finish (<25 Q)
- Be reasonably jargon free

## The Survey: Part 2: Issues

- Originally planned to be one single survey that allowed entries from both undergraduates AND graduates from April 1 - April 22 as "21 Days to Have Your Say"
- ...but we had a conflict with another major RU undergraduate survey
- ...so we divided the survey into two "Seven Days to Have Your Say" (one for undergraduates and one for graduates)



## The Survey: Part 3: Implementation

- Conducted using SurveyMonkey
- Prizes/incentives: MacBook and iPod Touch (one of each for undergraduate/graduate)
- April 7-14: Graduate student survey
- April 20-27: Undergraduate student survey

## Interviews

- Conducted by our Ethnographer Dr. C. Todd White
- Video-recorded by a member of the Project Team
- Audio-recorded for transcription service
  
- Each 45-60 minutes
  
- 21 Undergraduates
- 8 Graduates
- 4 RU faculty

## Co-viewings

- Project Team co-viewings (~8 of 33)
- Project Team members worked on becoming “experts” on at least 2 interviews
- Transcript corrections, coding, notes (aha! moments)
- Public co-viewings (5)

# Data Collection

- Survey
  - Quantitative
  - Qualitative
  - Ethnographer's report
- Interviews
  - Co-viewings
  - "Expert" knowledge and notes
  - Ethnographer's report

Qualitative Data, Quantitative Data (Lots)

# THE RESULTS

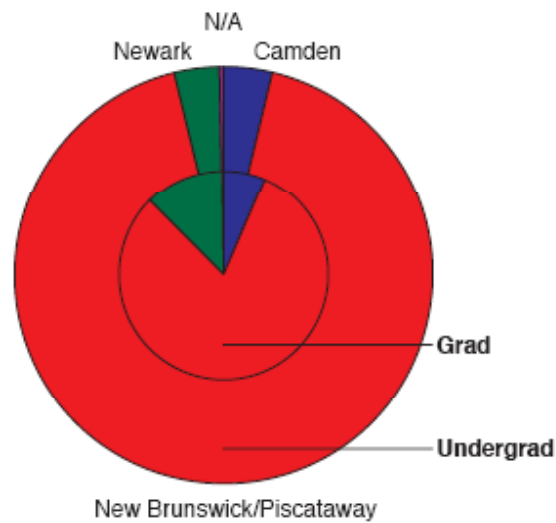


Figure 4: Relative Percentages of Undergraduate and Graduate Students by Campus



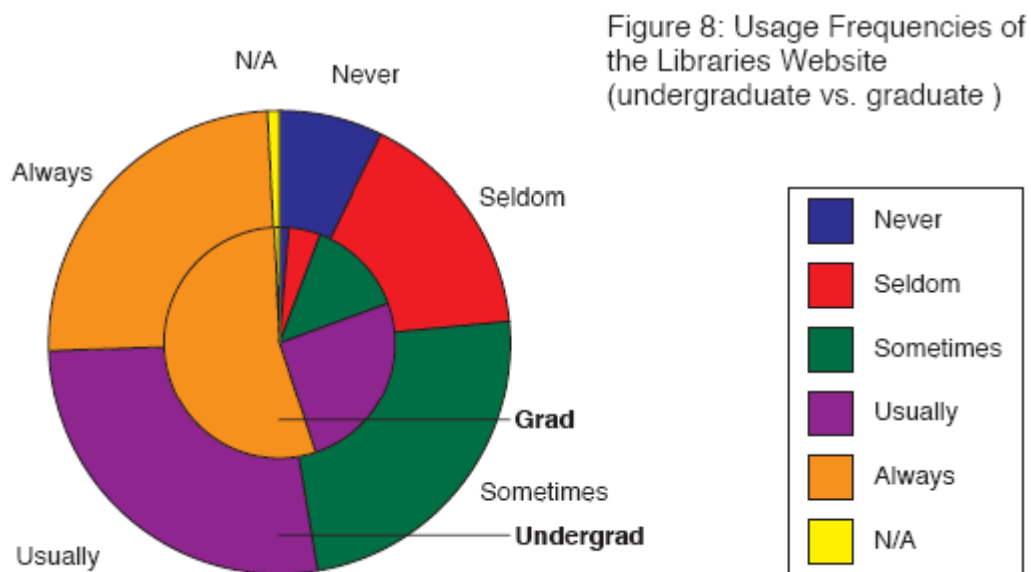


Figure 12: Typical Means of Site Access

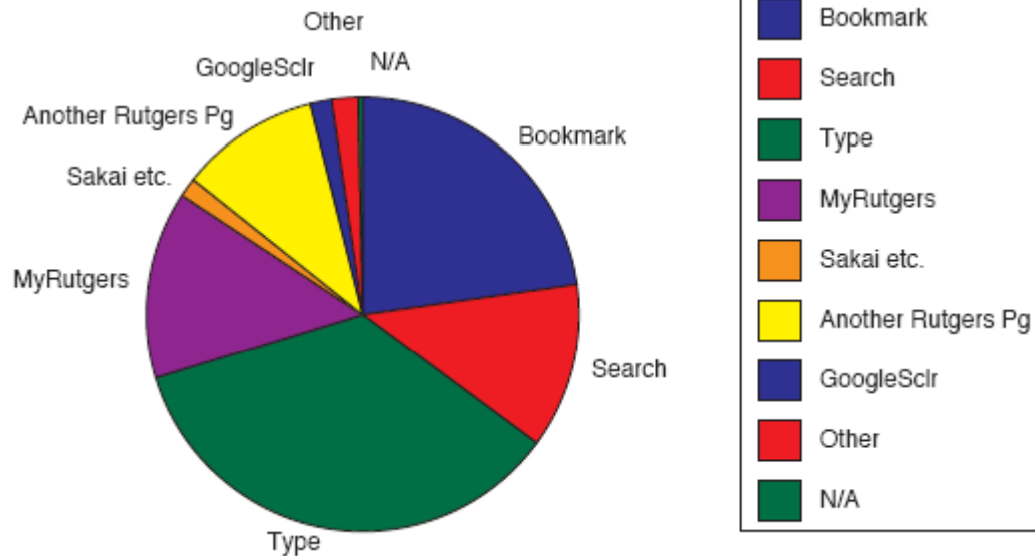




Figure 15: Library Resources Ranked in Importance

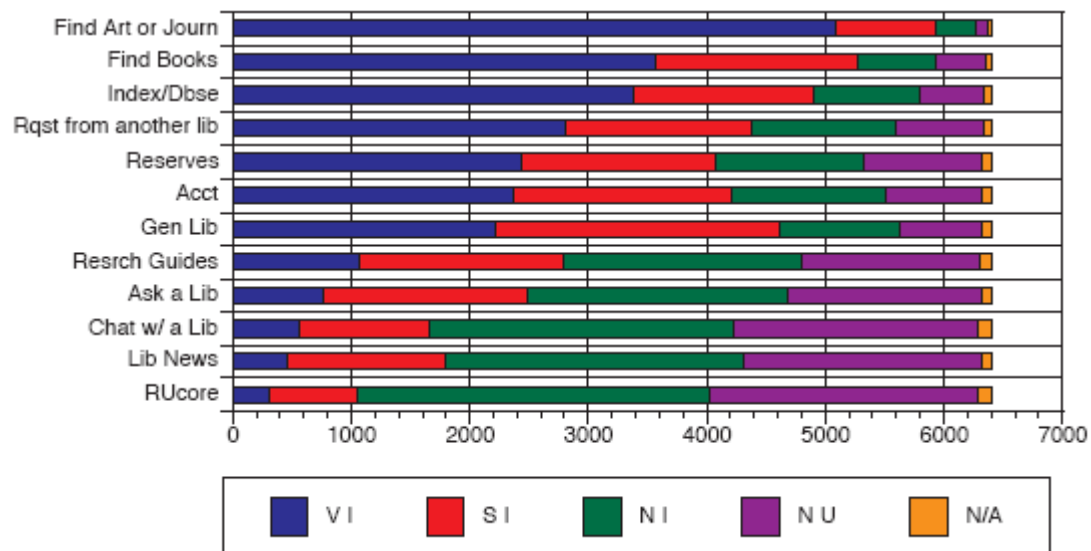


Figure 16: Search Tendencies, undergrads vs. grads

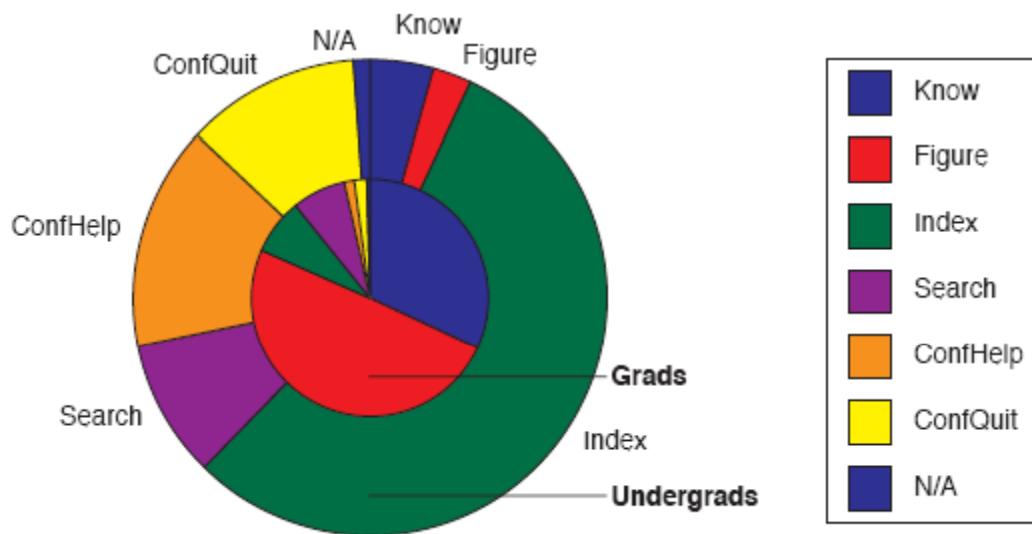


Figure 17: Internet Devices, all students

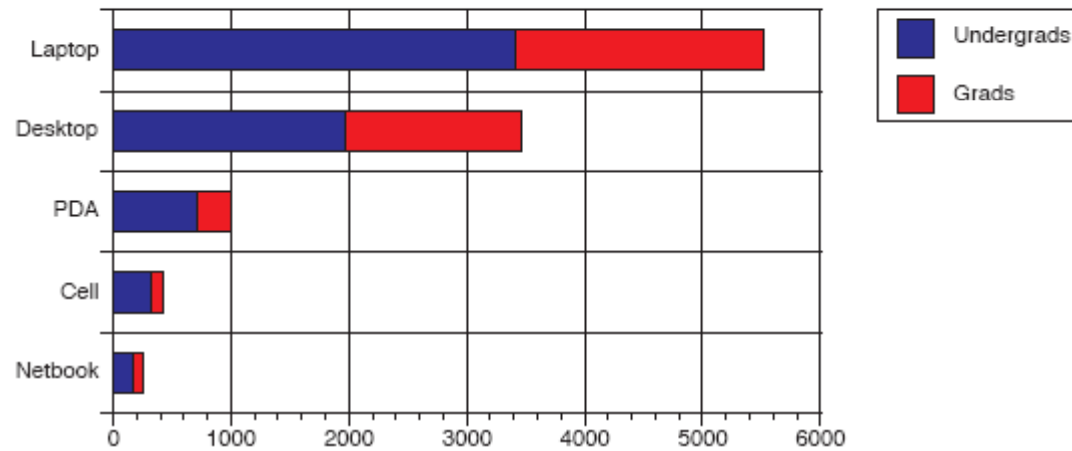
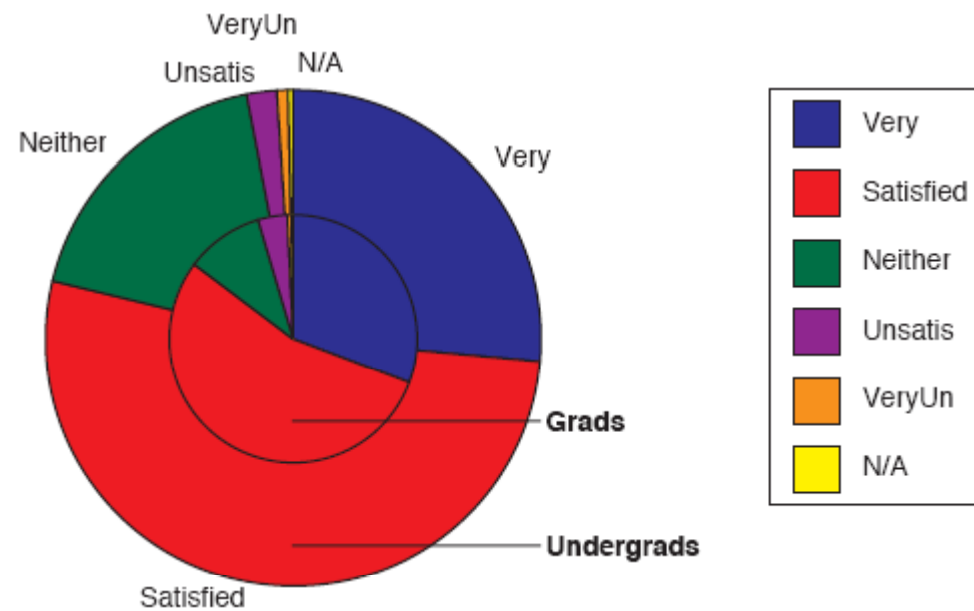


Figure 23: Overall Satisfaction with the Libraries Website, graduate vs. undergraduate students



## Survey Comment Examples

- From comments tagged “1” for Ask A Librarian
  - The Meebo chat with the librarian has been really helpful- I've had a few minor questions that made research a lot easier with a few quick answers from people who are more efficient with the website than I am
  - I really have never had any problems with the Rutgers University Libraries website. If I ever need help I can just use the Meebo chat, and my issue is usually resolved pretty quickly
  - The chat reference service needs to be expanded; a single person available during the limited hours is not sufficient for a user base the size of Rutgers

# Survey Comment Examples

- From comments tagged “5” for Collections
  - I get really upset when an article is listed but not available through the website; can you please make them available
  - Access to more academic journals and more back-issues of those journals
  - This may end up being a fairly common one, and I am aware that funding limits your options, but to be able to have more journals available through the Rutgers would be the one improvement I would make over any others
  - It would be a HUGE advantage if I could search Google Scholar off campus and have links to the articles from RUL; unfortunately logging into the library system remotely does not enable one to link up with Google Scholar in the same way it does when searching from the university network

From Research to Design

# WHAT'S NEXT

## What is Happening Now?

- Survey portion of report was distributed via rul\_everyone and is available on the staff pages
  - Planning and Assessment/Committees and Task Forces/ERP/Reports
- Various individuals and groups are reviewing coded comments from the online survey for application to the website as well as overall services
- Project Team responsibilities have merged into WAC
- Two prospects for graphic design work have been identified
- Quantitative portion of report is being drafted by Dr. White



# The Qualitative Report

“The reader should enter into this study knowing that the students at Rutgers are grateful to the librarians and appreciate the services that are provided. They know that the librarians seek to be helpful and without exception have had good experiences, overall, with Libraries services.”

## Qualitative Data Teasers

- Where do I start?
- The students tried to be nice about our front page
- The rollovers got mixed reviews
- Searchlight was not seen, even by those who want a single search box
- Journals and journal articles are hard to find
- ILL is not understood
- Many students do all that they can to *not* engage a librarian
- The Indexes and Databases page is overwhelming, or the best thing on our site

## What Will Happen Next??

- The quantitative report and all qualitative comments from the survey will be released to you this month
- The Core Team will then:
  - Receive and digest the survey comment responses and the qualitative report from Dr. White
  - Develop an overview with principles and recommendations
  - Meet in retreat style December 7 to develop a process for setting priorities and developing principles and begin that work
  - Continue to provide the support WAC and others will need to carry through the redesign

## Moving From Research to Design

- The Core Team will continue to set priorities as needed through the design phase
- WAC and Web Services will iteratively develop the redesign
  - Certain amount of low hanging fruit at start
  - More effort for such possibilities as mobile device support, personalization, etc.
- We will develop a process for continuous assessment and action
- We will keep you informed



