

Marketing the Millennials: What They Expect From Their Library Experience

Patricia M. Duck and Randi Koeske

Introduction

For years academic librarians have acknowledged the need for marketing their services to their users. The literature is replete with numerous examples.¹ “There is an overall commitment to selling the library to everyone--both within the library walls and to the outside world.”² But who are our newest users and how do we market them? The latest demographic information³ indicates that they are “millennials.” Millennials, those students born after 1981 (also known as Generation Y, Echo Boom, 14th Generation),⁴ are flooding campuses nationwide. Overall, more than 14 million students were enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities in 2000. Future enrollment is expected to increase by approximately 40,000 freshmen per year over the next decade.⁵ Neil Howe in his book *Millennials Go to College* suggests that “a new generational wave is breaking across campuses in America” and that “wherever you are in university life, you face a choice. You can ignore

this breaking millennial wave, by treating today’s collegians as you did the last generation. You can resist it, by pursuing decades-old agendas. You can ride it, by adapting as fast as you can to new needs as they arise. Or you can ‘lead’ this new youth wave, by preparing for Millennials before they arrive in full force.”⁶

The Millennials

A definition of the generations and statistics related to millennials is problematic. Kate Manuel⁷ uses the dates of 1946–64 to define the Baby Boom generation in her article on teaching information literacy to Generation Y while Howe and Strauss⁸ use 1943–60. Manuel also maintains that millennials as a group are “one-third larger than the Baby Boom Generation (1946–1964) and three times the size of Generation X (1965–81).”⁹ These statistics are not borne out by the U.S. Bureau of the Census data (Table 1). That data states that in the year 2000 millennials, who numbered more than 80

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million people, had not yet eclipsed the Baby Boomers (82 million). However, population estimates in 2002 suggest an increase of almost seven million people, presumably as a result of new births.

Various characteristics have been attributed to the millennial generation.¹⁰ As a whole they are said to be confident, optimistic and intelligent. They are team and rule-oriented and tend to be conformists. The most ethnically diverse generation to date, millennials are said to be the most “watched over” generation in the nation’s history. Having grown up in an era of television and video games, they are visually oriented and are easily bored with sequential tasks and may have short attention spans. While hard working, they prefer active learning exercises and tend to see the big picture first. Quite naturally they have a strong attachment to computers and any new technology that might make their lives more interesting or easier. Millennials also tend to be demanding. They have high expectations and have become the ultimate consumers. Businesses have already identified this market and have modified their selling practices accordingly. Colleges have also recognized this trend and have

allocated huge sums of money for new facilities to enhance campus life.

Given these characteristics, how might millennials approach academic life and what expectations might they have regarding libraries and their services? Accustomed to having the “best of everything,” millennials “prefer subjects in which they can measure their progress, such as technology, economics, social sciences, rather than arts and religion” and “want cutting edge facilities, particularly for extracurricular activities.”¹¹ It is a sobering thought for librarians to realize that “the rising generation of students is so accustomed to doing their research over the Internet that they may hardly know their way through library stacks, an old periodical, a microfiche reader, or a great book in its original language—all skills they need to learn.”¹²

Based on this information, the Millstein Library at the University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg teamed with senior psychology students and their advisor in developing a survey of “library experiences at UPG” to ascertain how millennials were using the library, what their attitudes were in regard to library services, and what their confidence level was in carrying out various library tasks.

Library Experiences at UPG

The University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg (UPG) is a regional campus of the University of Pittsburgh with an enrollment of approximately 1,800 students. The Millstein Library is part of the University Library System at the University of Pittsburgh. Students at each of the four regional campuses (Bradford, Greensburg, Johnstown and Titusville) have access to a catalog of over four million items, and hundreds of full text and bibliographic databases through the Pitt Digital Library.

Since 1986 the Greensburg Campus library has been involved in assessing library services and in marketing those services. We have conducted several general satisfaction surveys and, in 2003, developed an assessment of our library instruction program for first-year undergraduates. Marketing efforts have included the establishment of an annual children’s literature conference, creation of a successful Friends of the Library group,

Total population:	281,421,906		
By age group:		Date of Birth	Percent of Population
under 5	19,175,798	2000–1996	6.8
5 to 9	20,549,505	1995–1991	7.3
10 to 14	20,528,072	1990–1986	7.3
15 to 19	20,219,890	1985–1981	7.2
Total Millennials	80,473,265		28.6
20 to 24	18,964,001	1980–1976	6.7
25 to 34	39,891,724	1975–1966	14.2
Total Gen X’ers	58,855,725		20.9
35 to 44	45,148,527	1965–1956	16
45 to 54	37,677,952	1955–1946	13.4
Total Baby Boomers	82,826,479		29.4
Total Estimated			
Population (2002)	288,369,000		

(Source: Statistical Abstract of the United States 2003, no. 13, p. 15)

partnering with various student groups on campus for cultural and educational events, and involvement in various student events such as the *New Student Information Fair* held at the beginning of each academic year. Taking a leaf from our public library associates, we have distributed pens with slogans such as “Chill at the Mill (stein) Library” and refrigerator magnets advertising our annual Children’s Literature Conference.

For several years, the UPG campus has also been involved in assessing the needs of the student body, utilizing a student-generated survey known as the UPG Campus Survey, which is loosely based on the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE).¹³ In the fall 2003 semester, Dr. Randi Koeske, Associate Professor at UPG, and her senior psychology students developed and conducted a special version of this survey entitled “Library Experiences at UPG.” Unlike our previous user surveys, this was the first survey conducted “outside” the library. Students were surveyed in classrooms, the student center and various locations on campus. Although surveys were available in the library, students were not solicited for their input at that location. The “Library Experiences at UPG” survey provides information on library use, attitudes, instruction and demographic data related to sex, age, marital status, major area of study, GPA, employ-

ment, and residency (residence halls or off campus). 202 participants were included in this study, which surveyed roughly 11.2 percent of the total number of students at UPG that term.

The first section of the survey (30 questions) queried students on what they did in the library; for example, “used the library to read or study quietly,” “accessed an electronic journal article through the university library system,” or “requested interlibrary loan materials,” etc. The second section, containing 10 questions, assessed students “attitudes” toward library services. For example, “If the library stayed open more hours, I would use it more”, “I feel more comfortable in the library than anywhere else on campus”, “The library staff members are friendly and willing to help.” (See Appendix A. UPG Library Experiences—Attitudes Toward UPG’s Library Services) Students were asked to rate their answers on a standard agree/disagree scale. Section three asked four questions on library use, “how many hours have you spent in the library?” or “how many times” have you used particular areas of the library such as the computer lab or carrels. Section four included ten questions related specifically to library instruction, while section five contained a set of twelve questions related to “confidence in carrying out library tasks” such as “locating an item in the library if you know its call number” and included four items on the ease of using various campus technologies or resources for course assignments (Courseweb, Internet, Pittcat, library research resources). The remainder of the 4-page survey requested demographic information.

Survey Results

The data were input into an SPSS file by the senior psychology students for analysis. Frequencies for each question in the survey were tabulated and analyses were run examining the impact of various independent variables, such as employment, residency and age. Not surprisingly, almost 80 percent of the respondents in this survey were millennials; i.e., individuals born after 1981, while the remaining 20 percent were Gen X-ers (those students born from 1965–81). Overall results of this survey indicated that 71 percent of the students had received instruction either *a few*, *several* or *many*

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations of the Most Frequently Reported UPG Library Experiences

	N	Mean ¹	SD
Used internet search engine—for class	201	2.02	1.10
Used library to read—study quietly	202	1.69	1.16
Used library index or database—for class	200	1.69	1.11
Did information search using PittCAT	201	1.62	1.05
Asked librarian to help me find information	199	1.44	1.06
Accessed electronic journal or e-book	200	1.19	1.09
Used library to meet for group project	201	1.19	1.04
Received instruction in library	200	1.08	0.90
Photocopied materials in library	202	1.05	1.05

¹Note. All ratings reflect the following scale: 0 = never, 1 = a few times, 2 = several times, 3 = many times. Items have been ordered from most to least frequent.

Least likely were: requested an interlibrary loan using the online request form (Mean = .021 ± .60); used library microfilm materials (Mean = 0.18 ± .53); and worked as a library intern or work-study (Mean = 0.14 ± .61).

times at UPG, while 92.3 percent strongly agreed or agreed that *library staff was friendly and willing to help*. Library experience statistics from section one of the survey revealed that most students used the library for study (79.2 %), a finding consistent with our own previous user studies. However, the results obtained for the means and standard deviation for the questions in section one indicated that the most frequently reported library experience of this group was using “*an internet search engine not provided by the university (e.g. Google, Yahoo) to find information for a class*” (Table 2) while using the library for studying was the second most frequently report library experience.

Since the library had conducted several general user surveys over the years, we were most interested in section two of the survey, “Attitudes Toward UPG’s Library Services” (Appendix A) and wanted to consider how the results might pertain to our marketing efforts. Given the information we had obtained from the literature (primarily Howe and Strauss), we hoped to examine the results of the survey to try and determine whether or not we were meeting millennial students’ expectations for library service.

Several questions in section two of the library survey implied an “expectation” of the user. An “expectation,” as defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, suggests the “action of waiting,” “looking for something as one’s due,” and “the condition of being likely, or entitled to receive or experience something in the future.”¹⁴ Consequently, if results to the first question, “*If the library stayed open more hours, I would use it more*” produced a response of “strongly agree” or “agree,” it would be possible to conclude that a majority of students in this survey had an “expectation” of the library being open longer hours. Figure 1 illustrates the responses to all ten questions on “Attitudes Towards UPG’s Library Services” while Table 3 reports the means and standard deviations for these 10 attitudes.

Data from this survey indicates that students were much more interested in having refreshments in the library (38.8% agree) than keeping the library open longer hours (35.5% uncertain). They were split on using library facilities for wireless computing (27.4% uncertain, 26.9% agree) and uncertain (33.8%) if they were more comfortable in the library than anywhere else on campus. Happily, they overwhelmingly decided that the

Table 3. Means and Standard Deviation for 10 Attitudes Toward UPG Library Services

	N	Mean ¹	SD
Library staff are friendly and willing to help	195	4.38	0.75
Library staff are knowledgeable	194	4.25	0.97
It should be possible to access all campus materials by login	196	4.17	0.87
I would use the library more if it had refreshments	196	3.46	1.04
I would use the library facilities for wireless computing/laptops	175	3.27	1.18
I feel more comfortable in the library than anywhere	195	3.16	1.09
I would use the library more if it stayed open later	197	3.13	1.18
Pitt’s electronic journal database is confusing or difficult to use	181	2.87	1.11
PittCAT (the online card catalog) is confusing or difficult to use	191	2.69	1.11
I don’t know who to approach for help at library	193	1.81	0.96

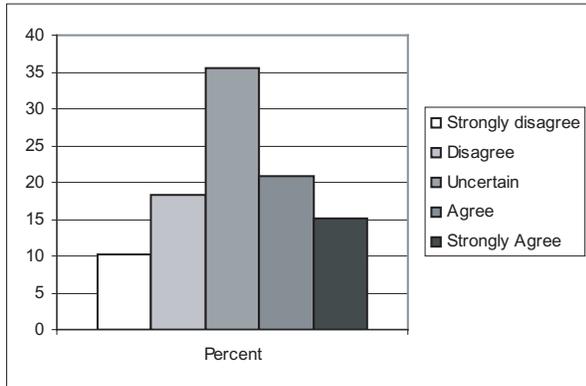
¹Note. All ratings reflect the following scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = uncertain, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree. Items have been ordered from highest to lowest agreement.

library staff was friendly and willing to help (49.2% strongly agree, 43.1% agree) and are knowledgeable (47.9% strongly agree and 39.7% agree). Results for question seven validated the previous questions about library staff indicating that users do know who to approach in the library. Participants strongly disagreed (44%) or disagreed (40%), that they didn’t know who to approach in the library for help.

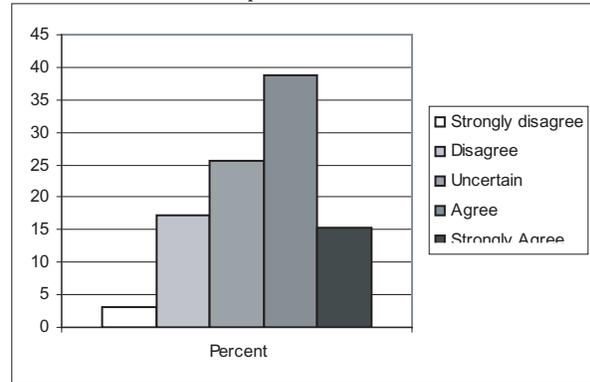
Questions eight through ten of this section of the survey (Appendix A) relate to expectations of the users in regard to accessing library materials. Most users apparently felt that Pittcat, the online catalog, was easy to use. They disagree that Pittcat was confusing or difficult to use (38.2%). When it came to using the library’s online databases, students were split in their responses. While 30.9 percent disagreed that the databases were confusing or difficult to use, another 24.9 percent and 28.2 percent remained uncertain or agreed, respectively.¹⁵ Question ten, however, elicited

Figure 1. UPG Library Experiences

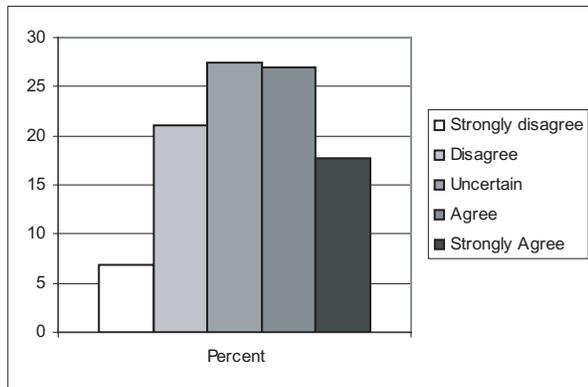
Question 1. If the library stayed open more hours, I would use it more.



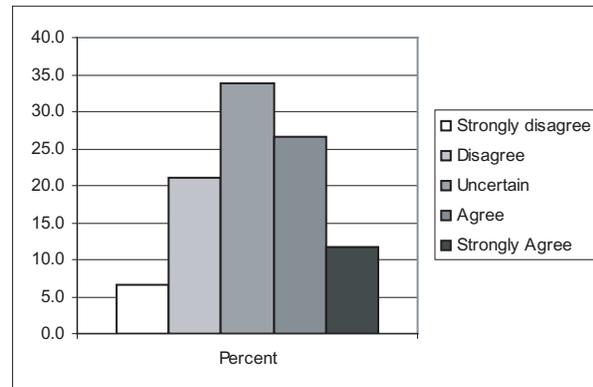
Question 2. If the library had an area for refreshments, I would spend more time there



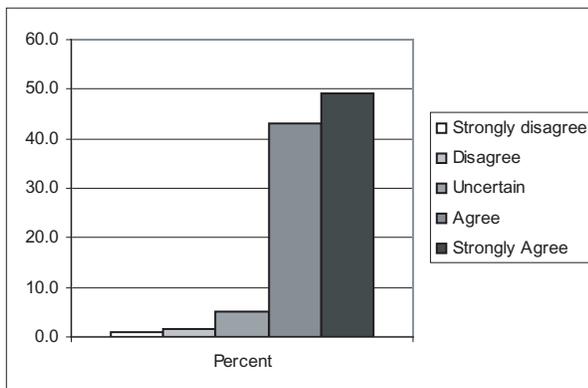
Question 3. I would make use of library facilities for wireless computing or plugging in laptops if they were available.



Question 4. I feel more comfortable in the library than anywhere else on campus.



Question 5. The library staff members are friendly and willing to help.



Question 6. The library staff members are knowledgeable and able to help.

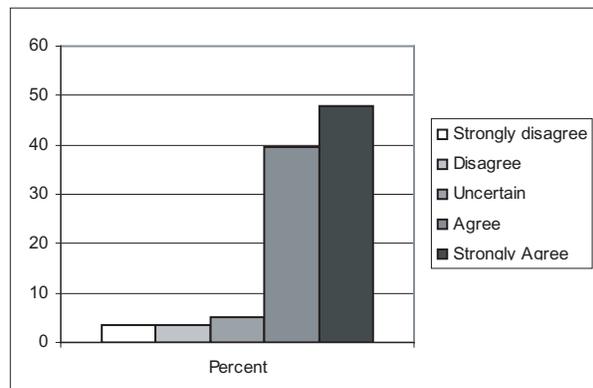
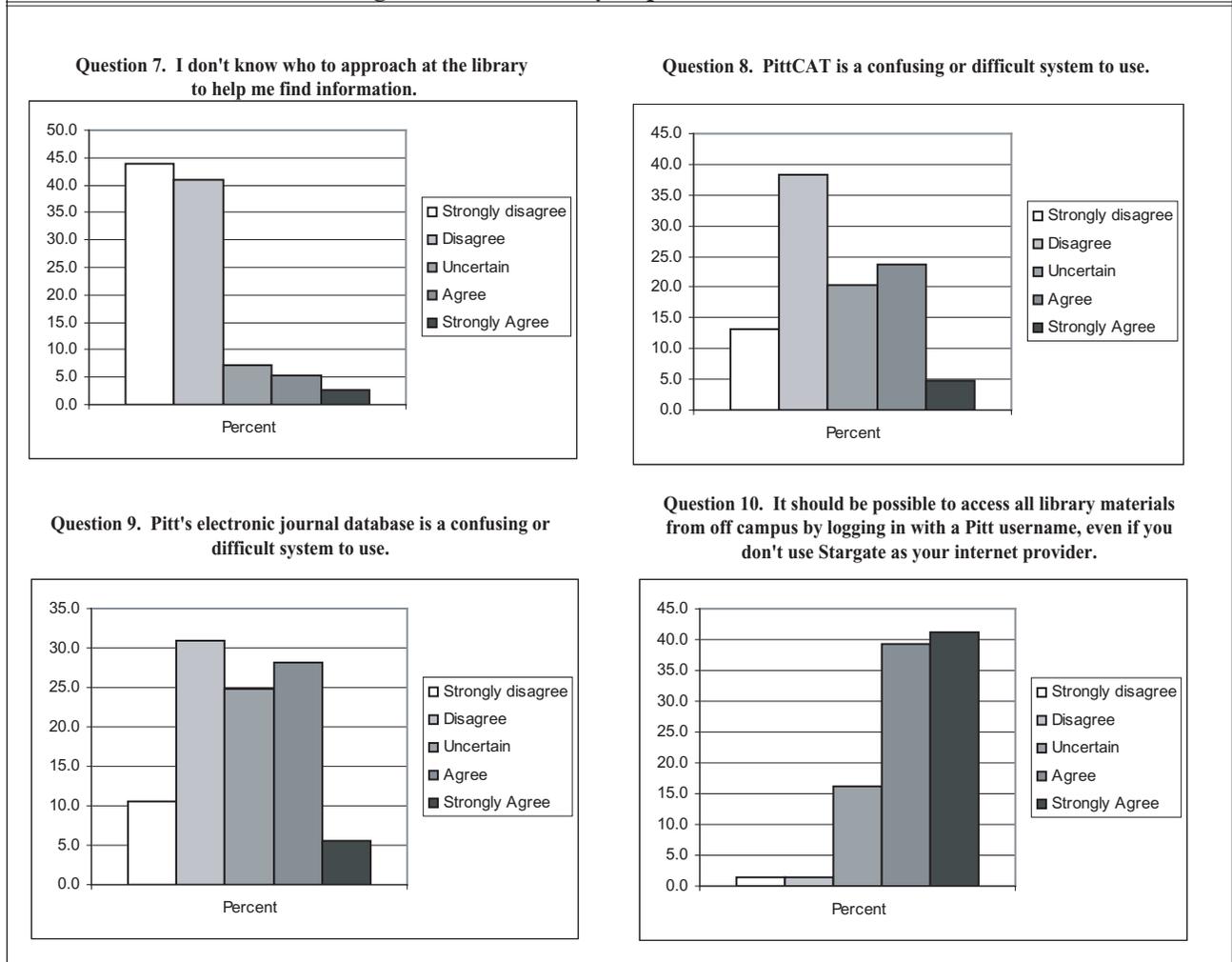


Figure 1. UPG Library Experiences (continued)



a very strong response: 41.3 percent and 39.3 percent of the users surveyed strongly agreed or agreed that it should be possible to access all library materials from off campus. (Figure 1) In this survey 54.5 percent of the students surveyed were commuters and 45.5 percent were resident students.¹⁶

An ANOVA analysis of several independent variables revealed some significant differences between groups. Both resident status (commuter vs. resident) and class (freshman vs. senior) reflected a difference for question 10 "It should be possible to access all library materials from off campus by logging in with a Pitt username, even if you don't use Stargate as your Internet provider" ($p=.000$ for resident status and $p=.007$ for class). Another significant difference was noted for question 1 "If the library stayed open more hours, I would

use it more" ($p=.018$) between commuters and resident students. Analysis of other independent variables such as employment and age yielded no significant differences for the ten items assessing "Attitudes Toward UPG Services." Based on the results of this survey, it appears as if there is little or no difference in the responses between millennials and Generation Xers regarding library experiences at UPG.

Expectations of Library Users

Responses to these questions will perhaps shed some light on the expectations of library users known as "millennials" for other academic libraries. If millennials are "demanding consumers" as suggested in the literature, evidence from this survey seems to suggest that their expectations concerning libraries center

more on comfort (refreshments in the library) and technological issues (accessing library resources from off campus) rather than facility issues such as the library staying open more hours, having a wireless network or feeling comfortable in the library. This survey also seems to confirm that while millennials are technologically savvy their visual orientation and short attention spans may hinder their efforts in doing research (53.7% of respondents were uncertain or agreed that library databases were confusing or difficult to use).

Conclusion

Since this survey was concluded, a number of independent initiatives have been implemented at the University of Pittsburgh that may address millennials' expectations as discussed in the professional literature. To facilitate searching of library databases, the University of Pittsburgh Library System implemented Zoom!¹⁷, a search engine allowing users to search many databases across different platforms and a virtual intranet to access all library materials from off campus. On the local scene, the University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg installed a soda pop machine in the lobby of the library. (Note: users were already permitted to bring covered drinks into the library; this just made it more convenient.) A number of regular events housed in the library help to market it as a site of activity and campus-connected content, not merely a repository for books and resource materials.

Since UPG students already seem to have a positive image of library staff members and several recent steps have been implemented to meet user expectations in the areas of "comfort and technology," it seems logical to focus on other areas. Over 50 percent of the respondents in this survey indicated that they found the online databases difficult to use. It would therefore be appropriate for the library to review and improve library instructional efforts to meet user expectations in regard to online databases taking into account various characteristics of millennials mentioned in the literature, such as visual orientation to learning and a preference for team or group activities. This is an area that will provide a continuing challenge for librarians at UPG and other academic libraries as they strive to meet the expectations of current and future library users.

Notes

1. Judith Seiss provides an excellent overview of marketing in all types of libraries in *The Visible Librarian* (Chicago: ALA, 2003).
2. Sarah Reneker Andeen, "Selling the Library from the Reference Desk: Service Points as Advertisements." *The Reference Librarian* 73: 282.
3. Neil Howe and William Strauss state that America already has over 80 million millennials and, with the addition of future immigrants, we may top 100 million. Their data is based on 2001 statistics from the Bureau of the Census. *Millennials Go To College*: 35.
4. Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000) describes the various terms used to denote this group of students.
5. *Ibid.*, 18. The original source of this information is the U.S. Department of Education, 2002.
6. *Ibid.*, 5.
7. Kate Manuel, "Teaching Information Literacy to Generation Y." *Journal of Library Administration* 36, no. 1-2: 196.
8. Howe and Strauss, *Millennials Go To College*, 19.
9. Manuel, 196.
10. Howe and Strauss, *Millennials Go To College*, 7-16.
11. *Ibid.*, 124.
12. *Ibid.*, 129.
13. The College Student Experiences Questionnaire and the National Survey of Student Engagement are designed to obtain information from colleges and universities regarding student participation in various programs and activities designed to foster learning and personal development. Information regarding these surveys may be found at the College Student Experiences Questionnaire Research Program (<http://www.indiana.edu/~cseq>), and the National Survey of Student Engagement (<http://www.indiana.edu/~nsse>) websites, both of which are affiliated with the Center for Postsecondary Research, School of Education, at Indiana University, Bloomington, Ind. (<http://education.indiana.edu/pprcenter.html>)
14. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. University of Pittsburgh Digital Library. (<http://www.library.pitt.edu>)
15. A library instruction assessment of first year students at UPG during the same term (fall 2003) revealed a significant difference when searching for an article in the electronic journal database before and after instruction: 2.00 vs. 2.73 while there was no statistical difference in searching Pittcat, the online catalog (2.85 vs. 2.87).

16. Previous studies conducted by the library have indicated that 70 percent of our users are commuters. Resident students have university-supplied computers and access to all library databases in their rooms.

17. "Zoom! is an online library search engine that allows you to simultaneously search any combination of the databases, electronic journals, PITTcat, and other online resources offered by the University Library System (ULS)."(<http://www.library.pitt.edu>)

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Appendix A.

UPG Library Experiences—Attitudes Toward UPG’s Library Services (Survey Form)

Rate each of the items below, using the following scale: SD = strongly disagree, D = Disagree, ? = uncertain, A = agree and SA = strongly agree. Circle NA if the item is Not Applicable, i.e., if it does not apply to you.							
		SD	D	?	A	SA	NA
1.	If the library stayed open more hours, I would use it more						
2.	If the library had an area for refreshments, I would spend more time there						
3.	I would make use of library facilities for wireless computing or plugging in laptops if they were available						
4.	I feel more comfortable in the library than anywhere else on campus						
5.	The library staff members are friendly and willing to help						
6.	The library staff members are knowledgeable and able to help						
7.	I don't know who to approach at the library to help me find information						
8.	PittCAT is a confusing or difficult system to use						
9.	Pitt's electronic journal database is a confusing or difficult system to use						
10.	It should be possible to access all library materials from off campus by logging in with a Pitt username, even if you don't use Stargate as your internet provider						