

The Library Is Our Lab:

the case for print books in an academic library

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The D.B. Weldon Library

Session Outline:

- Context and Background
- Existing Research
- Research Question
- Methodology
- Discussion of Research Results
- Next Steps

Context and Background:

- The University of Western Ontario is a comprehensive research university with approximately 33,000 students
- Western Libraries which serve all disciplines including professional programs and an increasing number of interdisciplinary programs
- Strong institutional support for library acquisitions
- Approximately 30 librarians directly involved in Collections management and development

E-Books in Western Libraries

- Early adopter of demand driven acquisition [DDA]
- Began in 2010 with a small pilot project with only selected subject areas included
- In 2012, the DDA program was applied to all subject areas and a significant proportion of the monograph budget was devoted to it
- Librarians were encouraged by administration to move from 'just in case' to 'just-in-time' collecting

Motivation for Our Project

- In Arts and Humanities disciplines, monographs are the primary research tools
- Anecdotal evidence suggests a strong preference for print among scholars in these disciplines
- Can we demonstrate that our observations about print preference are justified?

Existing Research

- Studies of the use of e-books in academic libraries date from the early 2000s
- 2012 article by Jeffrey Staiger synthesizes the finding of papers published between 2006 and 2011
- As e-books begin to be a more significant portion of an academic library collection, more and more research into their use and acceptance is being conducted

Questions

- Do researchers in the Humanities prefer print books or e-books?
- What issues related to book format have an impact on research and teaching?
- What features enable researchers to make optimal use of e-books?

Challenges related to E-Book Research

- Rapidly shifting landscape of e-books makes comparison of research results difficult
- Definition of an “e-book” is far from clear

Methodology

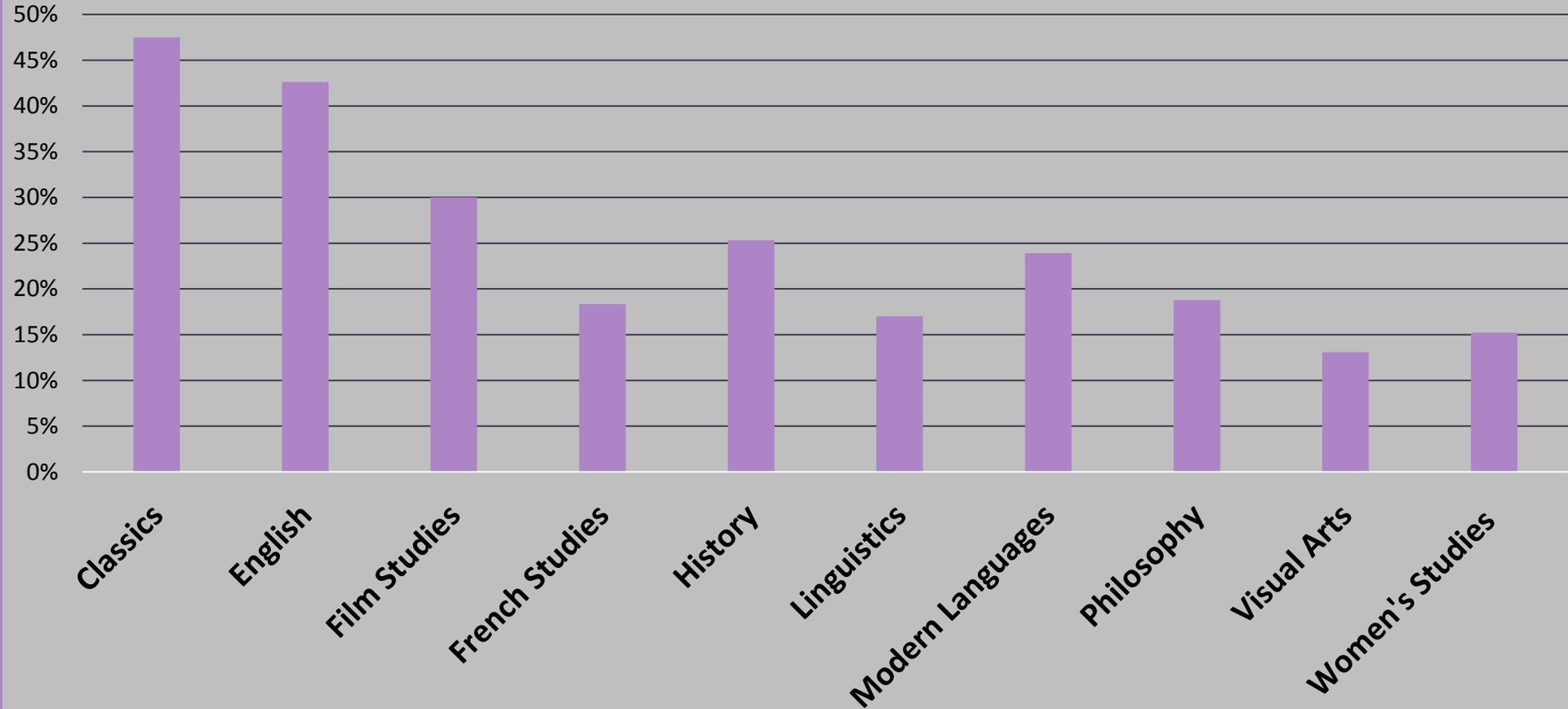
- Received approval from Non-Medical Research Ethics Board to conduct an online survey
- Sent survey consisting of 16 questions to all faculty members and graduate students in the faculty of Arts and Humanities and in the History department
- Most questions included an opportunity to add further comments

Survey Response

Response rate was 26%
(194 responses from a total population of 753)

Status	Respondents	Total	Response rate
Faculty	98	284	35%
Graduate students	84	469	18%
Unidentified	12		
Total	194	753	26%

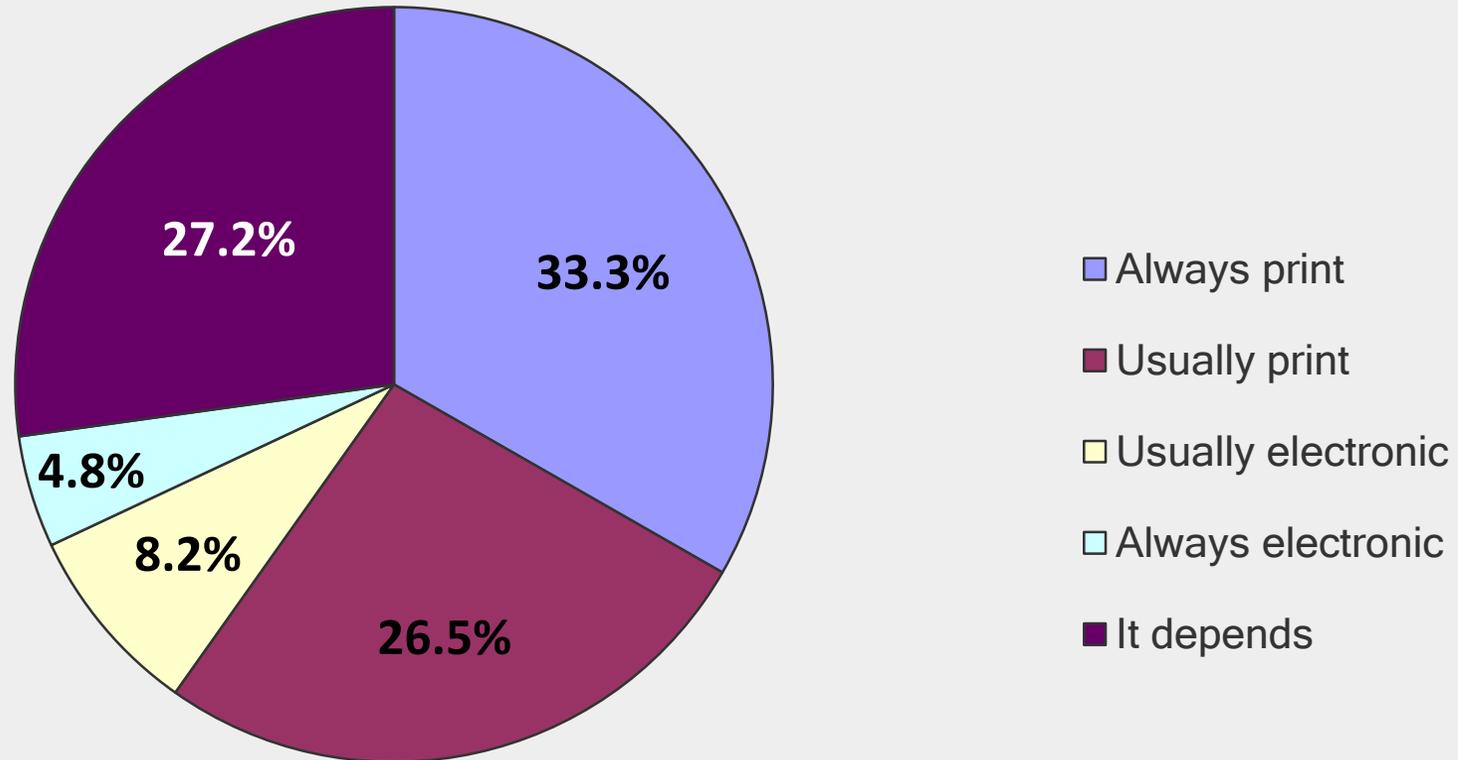
Response Rate by Department



Summary of Findings

- Overwhelming preference for print for most reading
 - **Read** paper / **Use** e-books, sometimes
- Expectations of digital functionality without obstacles:
 - Multiple user access
 - Include sections in course reserves /course management system
 - Downloading and printing sections or chapters
 - Hyperlinking to notes and other e-texts

Question 7: When you have access to both print and electronic versions of the same book, which would you use?

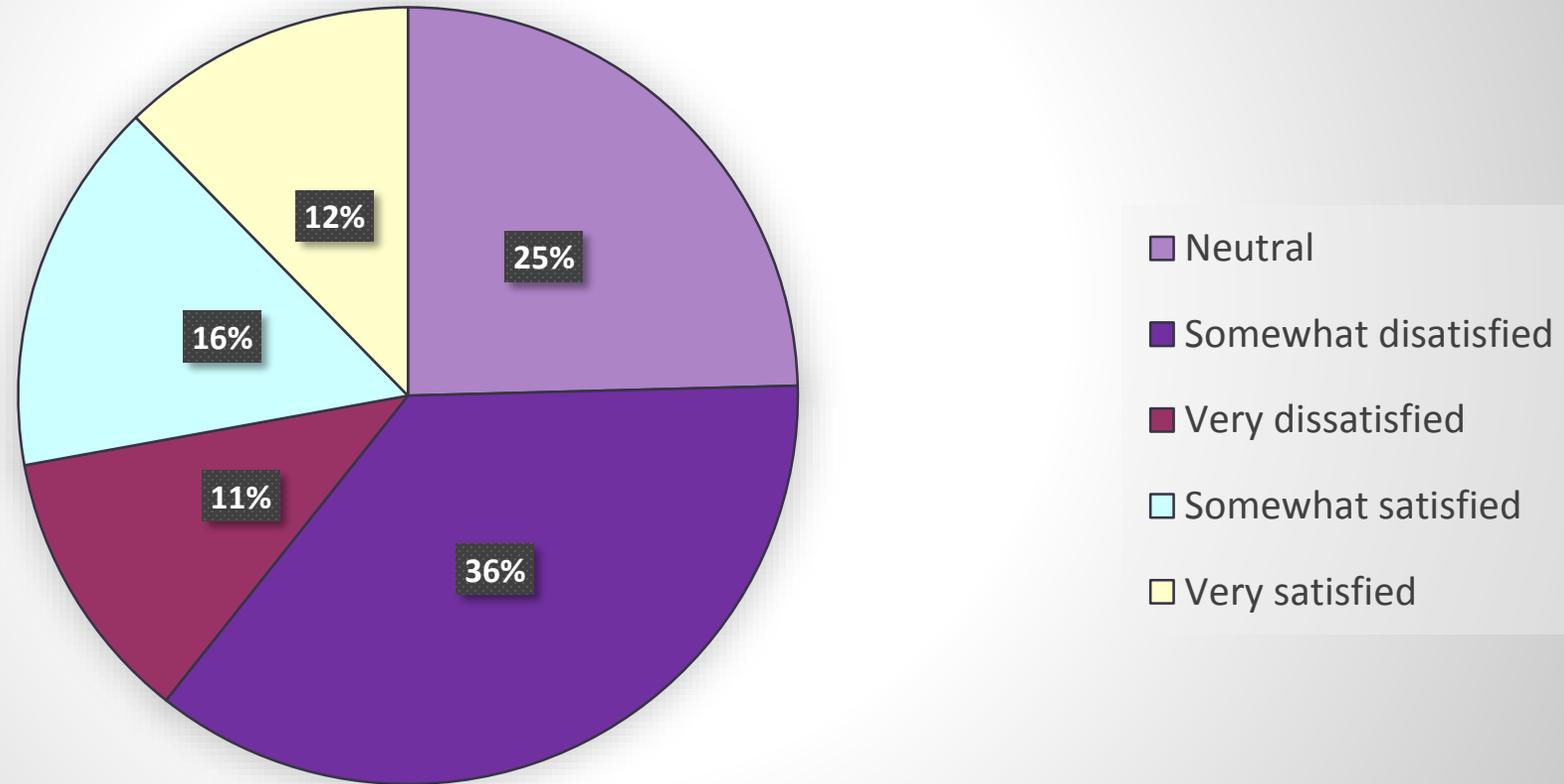


Question 9: Why would you use a print book instead of an e-book?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Other	5.4%	8
No e-book available	35.8%	53
Paper is easier to read	69.6%	103
Prefer print for deeper reading	77.0%	114
Print format is convenient to navigate	66.9%	99
No technical issues	58.1%	86
All of the above	12.2%	18
		17

Respondent satisfaction with e-books

Thinking about your experience using Western Libraries e-books, how satisfied were you with the experience?



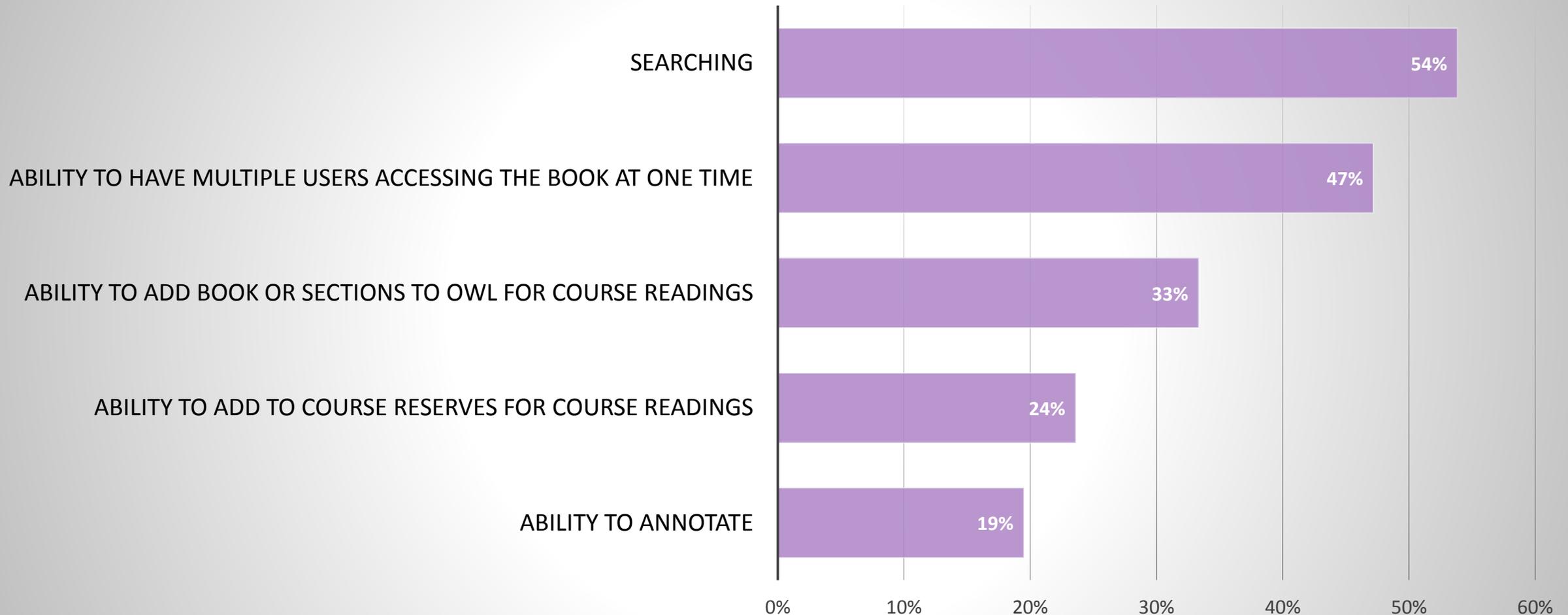
Factors affecting satisfaction

- E-books for arts and humanities disciplines are typically on platforms with significant restrictions on printing / downloading
- Inability to use most Western Libraries e-books on commercial e-book readers
- Lack of familiarity with available features of e-books
- Researchers expect the same functionality that they are used to in e-journals and other digital information resources

Reasons for Choosing an E-book Rather than a Print Book



What e-book features are important



Notable comments

I do not object to e-books; they are helpful with research, particularly with older documents ... there is something significant to a printed book, particularly when it is an artifact, for example, a text printed, signed, and put together by an author .

I dislike myiLibrary, but have no preference for the others

Please tell Western that ebooks are not an appropriate alternative to collections acquisition. It should be over and above the physical copy, not as a substitute.

Conclusions

- Results confirm anecdotal evidence – humanities researchers at Western prefer print books over e-books for most purposes and appreciate having both formats
- Provide a clearer understanding of how researchers in the departments we support are using library e-books
- Reveal some gaps in knowledge about e-book features and platforms

Next Steps

- Share results with local colleagues
- Use findings to support collections decisions in humanities subject areas
- Encourage e-book vendors to improve functionality and flexibility to meet researcher needs
- Consider expanding survey to include other faculties at Western

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