

University Instructors Use of, and Satisfaction with, Library Services in the Year Following the COVID-19 Outbreak

McClure, J. (2023). The COVID-19 pandemic and the rapid shift to an exclusively online format: Tracking online instructors' utilization of library services over a year of virtual learning at the University of Memphis. *College & Research Libraries*, 84(1), 100–120. <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.84.1.100>

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[See table of contents](#)

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Article abstract

Objective – To determine online instructors' satisfaction with and level of use of library services during the year following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Design – Survey questionnaire and follow-up interview.

Setting – The University of Memphis (UofM) is a medium-sized, public, urban, R2 (doctoral university with high research activity) university. At the time of publication, UofM employed 930 full-time faculty and—through UofM Global—the option to earn degrees entirely online.

Subjects – Survey respondents (n = 56) were online instructors at the University of Memphis.

Methods – A confidential survey was distributed to all deans and department chairs at the UofM with instructions to disseminate the survey to all instructors teaching online course(s). Respondents were invited to participate in a follow-up interview.

Main Results – Three common themes identified from the data were 1) respondents would have used the enhanced library services but were not aware of them; 2) respondents were very grateful for the services offered, in particular library instruction, Kanopy, and interlibrary loan; and 3) respondents did not feel like their courses would benefit from the library or its offered services.

Conclusion – Based on the research results, the author concludes that the UofM Library must focus efforts on increasing visibility and communication, embedding the library in course design and assessment, as well as improving hybrid library instruction and offering purchase-on-demand collection development. The author has begun work on a follow-up study looking at ways to enhance the embedded librarianship service and increase communication between the UofM librarians and online teaching faculty.

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Evidence Summary

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Abstract

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Commentary

The author was able to draw on research related to a range of topics adjacent to the one addressed in this study, including library use and undergraduate success (Mayer et al., 2020), online library services (Murray, 2020), and disaster preparedness in academic libraries (McGuire, 2007). There are several relevant publications that discuss online library services in the early days of the pandemic, such as Atkinson (2021) and Shoaib (2022), that are missing from the literature review, but it is possible that they were published after this article was submitted for review.

The study was appraised using the *CAT Critical Appraisal Tool* by Perryman and Rathbun-Grubbs (2014). The research questions are explicitly stated, and the literature review provides relevant background given the availability of literature on the topic at the time of submission. The chosen methods are appropriate. However, as the author points out, the data may not be representative of all departments at the UofM due to the unknown extent of survey distribution and low response rate from research-intensive departments. Both the survey tool and interview questions are included in the study. Very few participants ($n = 2$) agreed to a follow-up interview; however, the survey instrument included several open-ended questions, so the author was able to collect qualitative data.

The quantitative results are presented clearly in the text as well as graphically. The selected quotes from the open ended responses provide insight into the breadth of responses received. These data illustrate the uniqueness of each instructor's perspective on library services. The author helpfully divides the implications of the research into three main sections: marketing and outreach, faculty involvement and training, and enhancement of existing services.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a dramatic and lasting impact on libraries around the world. This study provides insight into how a library at a research-intensive university in the United States responded to the changes required in the early months of the pandemic and how those changes were received by the instructors teaching online. Now that the effects of the pandemic have lessened, it would be interesting to determine which services initiated in the spring and summer of 2020 have been maintained and which have been retired. The data suggest that the awareness, perceptions, and practices of the respondents are quite variable. This bolsters the value of the liaison model, whereby academic librarians know the needs and expectations of their departments well and can tailor their offerings accordingly.

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