

How the Use of Varied Content Types Drives Impact in Research, Teaching and Learning



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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Survey Methodology	4
Key Findings	5
Faculty rely on varied types of content in teaching and research.....	5
Faculty believe students benefit from using a rich mix of content types for their assignments and research.....	7
Faculty believe that primary sources are particularly valuable for student development and learning.....	8
Students are influenced by faculty.....	9
Conclusion	11
The Library's Role.....	11

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While peer-reviewed journals continue to be an essential resource for research and teaching, the mix of content being used by faculty and students is expanding, encompassing a rich variety of sources. This trend has been well-documented through past surveys conducted by Ithaka S+R¹ as well as studies by ProQuest².

Less documented are the **reasons why** faculty and students look beyond scholarly journals – and to a myriad of additional content types – for research, teaching and learning. In 2018 ProQuest surveyed more than 1,300 faculty and students around the globe to better understand the value they find in various types of content.

Among the survey's key findings:

- Faculty and students use a variety of resources in both teaching and learning.
- Faculty overwhelmingly see value in students using a wide variety of content types in their studies, noting that it aids students' understanding of a subject, contributes to better quality assignments and grades, and allows for a more thorough review of existing literature and research findings.
- Faculty encourage students to use primary sources because they believe these sources help students develop critical thinking and other key skills.
- Students are influenced by their professors' recommendations when choosing content to use in their research and assignments.

The library plays an important part in introducing students to these sources, according to research by Ithaka S&R¹ – which tells us that faculty believe that the library plays a key role in helping students understand the differences between primary and secondary sources, as well as helping make content available, discoverable and accessible for use in coursework and research.

The demand for more content requires commitment from the entire information community, including libraries, publishers and aggregators. By working together, we can ensure libraries are the source students and faculty rely upon for their most important research.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Driven by a ProQuest email and social media campaign in March 2018, our latest survey garnered 1,355 responses. Of the respondents that indicated their role, 58% identified as tenured faculty, 21% as pre-tenure faculty/lecturer/reader/associate professor, 15% as a student (either graduate/postgraduate or undergraduate), and 5% as unaffiliated researchers. The responses came from across the globe and represented faculty and students from a wide variety of disciplines. Of those that stated their discipline, the most common responses were Humanities (227), Business (219), History (208), Arts (164), Education (152), Science (139), Nursing (66), Religious Studies (56), and Social Science Other (307). We also asked respondents to state their location; The most common responses to this question included North America (348), Asia (217), United Kingdom and Europe (196), Australia and New Zealand (139), Middle East and Africa (82), and Latin America (51).

Disciplines/Areas of Study of Respondents

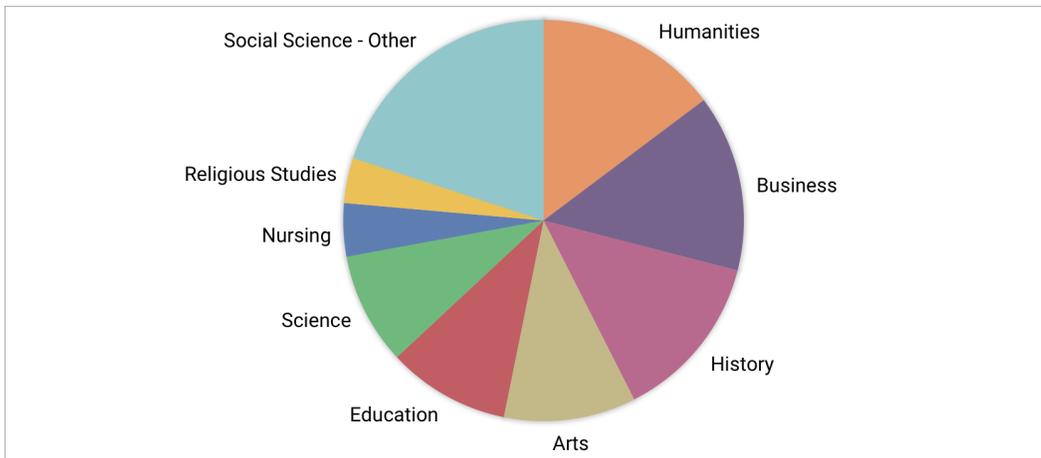


Figure 1: "Which best describes your field/area of study/teaching?"

Geographic Regions of Respondents

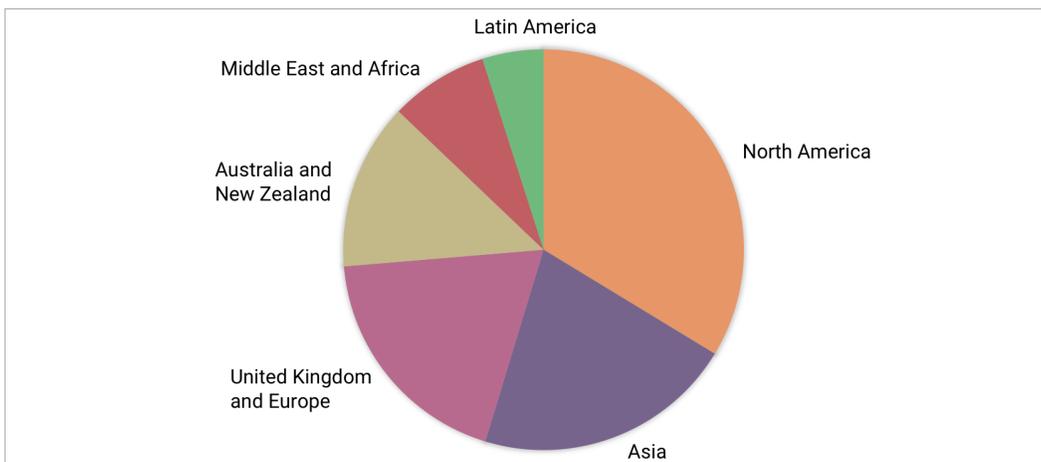


Figure 2: "In which region is your institution located? If you are an unaffiliated researcher, please indicate where you live."

KEY FINDINGS

Faculty rely on varied types of content in teaching and research

Faculty overall rely on a variety of content types to support their work. Scholarly journals, print books, ebooks and dissertations were indicated as the most-used resources for both teaching and research.

Faculty very slightly favor using more resources in their own research versus their teaching. When viewing the top 10 most-used resources, differences emerge between those resources used for research (Figure 3), and those used for teaching (Figures 4).

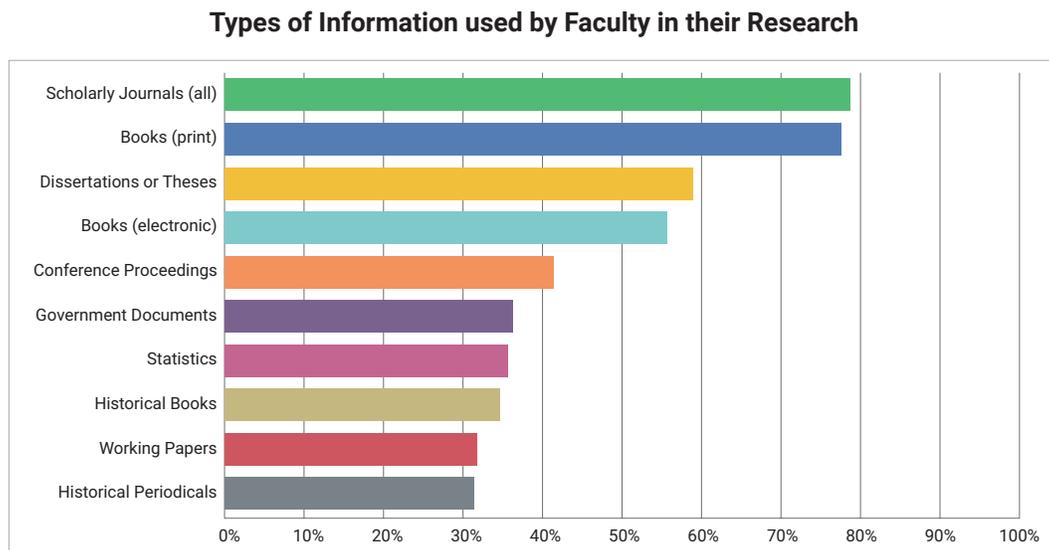


Figure 3: "Which of the following types of information do you use in your research?"

Types of Information used by Faculty in their Teaching

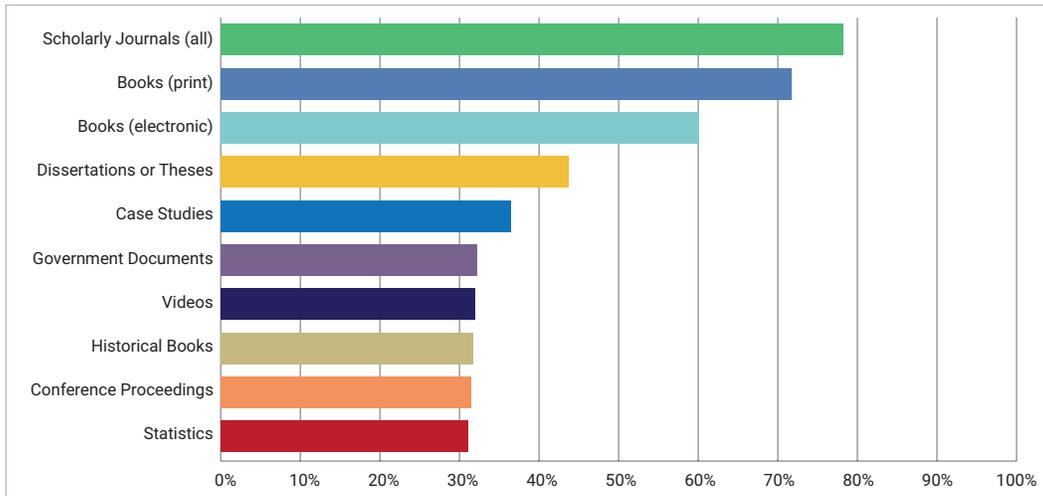


Figure 4: "Which of the following types of information do you direct your students to in your teaching?"

For instance, while working papers and historical periodicals were among the top 10 most-used resources by faculty in their own research, they were less likely to be used for teaching. Furthermore, case studies and video were among the top 10 most-used resources by faculty for teaching, but were less likely to be used for research.

While there are some differences between those resources preferred for research and those preferred for teaching, the overall findings illustrate that a rich set of resources are used by faculty across their teaching and research spectrum.

Faculty believe students benefit from using a rich mix of content types for their assignments and research

Faculty respondents overwhelmingly believe that being exposed to and using a variety of content types promotes better learning outcomes for students, helping them to build foundational knowledge and generate higher quality work (Figure 5).

- 94% of faculty strongly agree or agree that leveraging varied information types helps students conduct a more thorough review of the existing literature in their field.
- 97% of faculty strongly agree or agree that the use of varied information types helps students to more fully understand concepts and ideas in their field.

Faculty also believe that using various types of content delivers demonstrable outcomes by enabling students to produce better quality assignments (92% strongly agree or agree). There is also overwhelming agreement (73% strongly agree or agree) that the use of varied information types helps students achieve better grades in their course.

Faculty respondents commented about other benefits of using varied content types – including improving research skills and development of critical information literacy skills such as evaluating different viewpoints, drawing conclusions, and identifying the quality of sources.

Faculty Views on How Different Types of Information Helps or Does Not Help Students

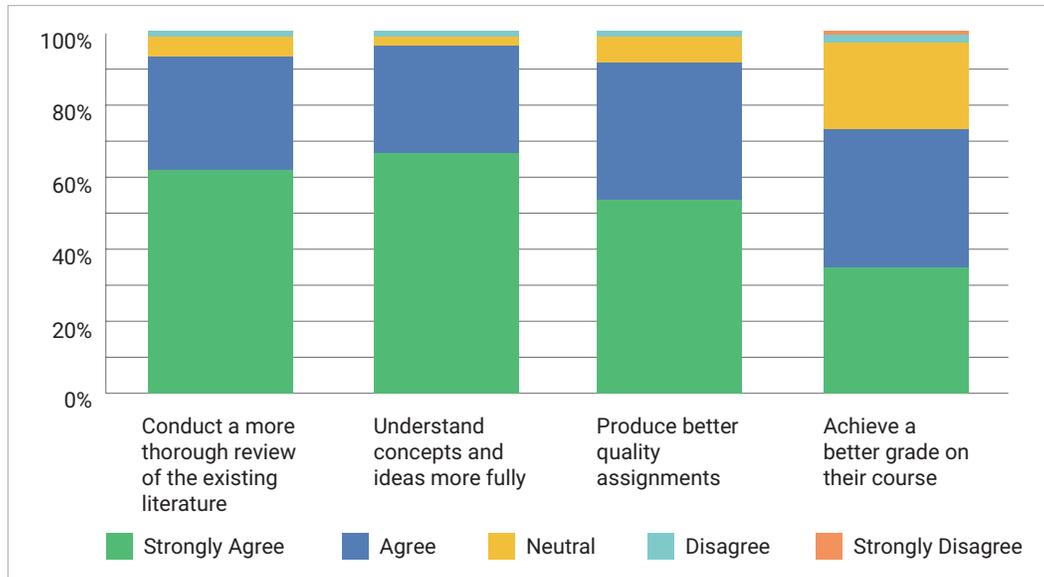


Figure 5: “Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following: Using a wide variety of different types of information allows students to...”

Faculty believe that primary sources are particularly valuable for student development and learning

The survey showed broad consensus among faculty when it comes to the importance of primary sources, and they noted specific reasons for assigning primary sources in the classroom (Figure 6). The main reason was faculty believe primary sources help students develop critical thinking skills — 81% of faculty found this extremely important and 17% found this very important. Other reasons that faculty assign primary sources, in priority order, include:

- Primary sources help students gain a greater understanding of topics they are studying (extremely important 70%, very important 27%).
- Primary sources allow students to work with original sources (extremely important 63%, very important 30%).
- Primary sources allow students to come to their own conclusions about how events may have happened in the past (extremely important 50%, very important 36%, somewhat important 9%).
- Primary sources help students develop a grounding in history to better question interpretations made in secondary sources (extremely important 47%, very important 36%, somewhat important 13%).
- Primary sources help drive impact and outcomes in the classroom (extremely important 36%, very important 37%, somewhat important 21%).

Faculty Views on the Importance of Assigning Primary Sources

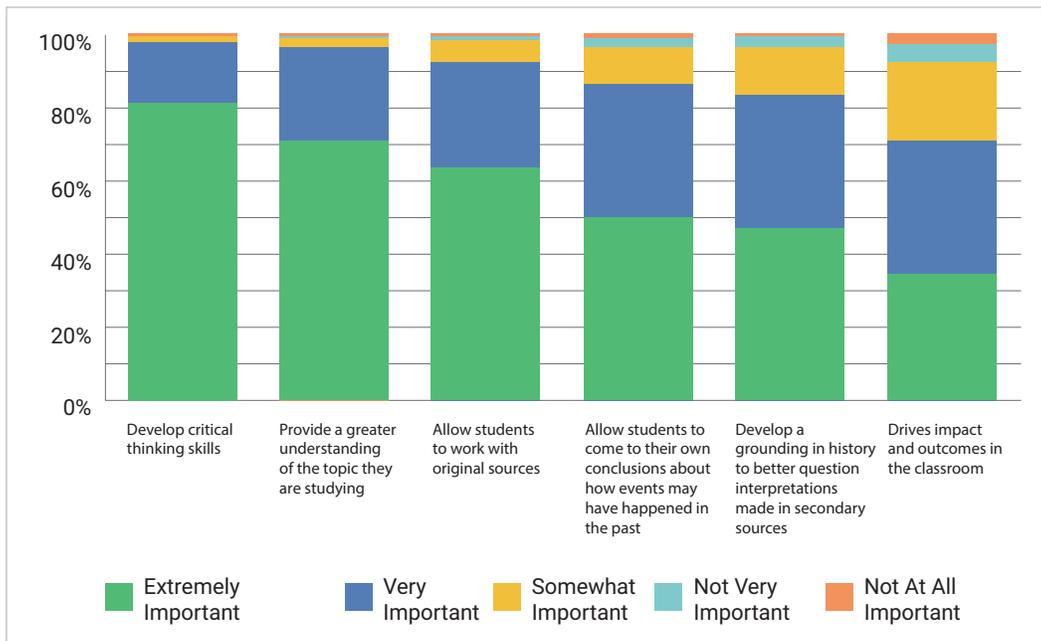


Figure 6: “You indicated that you assign primary sources to your students. For each reason listed below, please indicate how important each reason is to you, where 5=Extremely Important and 1=Not At All Important.”

Additionally, specific feedback from faculty respondents on the value of primary sources was insightful and intriguing. Respondents, quoted below, say these sources can lead to serendipitous discovery, inspire students and bring topics to life and help bridge the divide of time.

- “Archival materials require students to spend time in the library and archives (physical or virtual). Exposure to such materials may lead students to serendipitously discover other relevant and useful materials, leading students to understand and think about their research assignments in new ways.”
- “Primary sources help students understand history as a product of raw materials. Even a single exposure to a handwritten text—even electronically—can ... be an inspiring experience for students, taking them out of their comfort zone and into unfamiliar material, people, and language.”
- “Primary sources connect the past to the present.”

Students are influenced by faculty

There is remarkable similarity between the types of content that faculty direct their students to use and the types of content actually used by students (Figure 7). This trend is unsurprising and indicates that students are strongly influenced by their professors’ recommendations, particularly when it comes to the use of high-level scholarly content like journals and conference proceedings.

However, while faculty recommendations and students’ use of specific content types are generally aligned, there are some interesting nuances.

Teaching faculty recommend historical books, but these sources did not register on students’ top ten list. Conversely, students indicate that news, newspapers and working papers are among the sources they are most likely to use. However, those sources were not among the faculty respondents’ recommended top 10 list — though those content types were recommended by faculty at a less prevalent rate (as the 11th and 16th top faculty recommendations, respectively).

Video is an interesting content type to explore further. Previous research published in Library Journal³ and by ProQuest² has demonstrated the growing importance of video over the past five years. This trend is confirmed again in this study with video being the seventh-most recommended resource by teaching faculty, and the 16th-most used resource type by students. Recent evidence published in Library Journal³ shows that libraries are in agreement with faculty in this regard, and are continuing to invest in video, with 95% of North American libraries offering streaming video content.

With libraries investing in video, and teaching faculty routinely recommending it to their students, it's likely that student use of video will further increase in the future – a trend worth watching.

TOP 10 CONTENT RECOMMENDED BY FACULTY TO STUDENTS	TOP 10 CONTENT USED BY STUDENTS
1. Scholarly Journals	1. Scholarly Journals
2. Books (print)	2. Books (electronic)
3. Books (electronic)	3. Books (print)
4. Dissertations or Theses	4. Dissertations or Theses
5. Case Studies	5. Case Studies
6. Government Documents	6. Statistics
7. Video	7. Government Documents
8. Historical Books	8. Working Papers
9. Conference Proceedings	9. News & Newspapers (current)
10. Statistics	10. Conference Proceedings

Figure 7: Top 10 Content Sources Recommended by Faculty and Top 10 Content Sources Used by Students in their research

CONCLUSION

The results of ProQuest's 2018 research illustrate important reasons that faculty and students want and need access to a wide variety of materials. Put simply, a mix of content types best supports teaching, research and learning. These results are consistent with other studies, notably ProQuest's 2017 study,² as well as the Ithaka S+R US Faculty survey¹ published in 2016.

While the ubiquity of access to multiple content types in recent years may have driven changes in the materials being used to support research, teaching and learning, the results of this study document the types of content that faculty and students find valuable – and perhaps more importantly, they document the *reasons* why faculty and students recommend and use a variety of materials.

Faculty see tangible benefits to their students' learning outcomes and ability to think critically. The importance of exposing students to materials that will challenge them to analyze, fully understand concepts, and draw their own conclusions is critical. In an environment where the value of higher education is being scrutinized, preparing students with the skills that employers find essential, like critical thinking, is a compelling and practical outcome.

The Library's Role

Libraries are key to connecting students with these resources, and their role as information guides is growing. However, this presents both opportunities and challenges.

Libraries cannot face the challenge of expanding their collections to accommodate this trend alone. It requires commitment from the entire information community, including:

- Careful consideration from libraries on the proper balance between access (subscription-based content) and ownership (permanently owned or preserved content)
- A charge by faculty to pursue content that prepares students with practical skills that employers find essential – including critical thinking

At ProQuest, we're working with our partners to get closer to this goal – including identifying curriculum needs and matching collections to provide the mix of resources today's faculty and students have come to expect.

If you'd like to learn more about this study – or how academic institutions can improve teaching and research outcomes through their libraries – contact your ProQuest representative today.

¹ <http://www.sr.ithaka.org/publications/ithaka-sr-us-faculty-survey-2015/>

² <https://www.proquest.com/blog/pqblog/2017/Researchers-Demand-More-Diversity-in-Content-Sources.html>

³ https://lj.libraryjournal.com/2017/09/academic-libraries/academic-mainstream-streaming-video/#_

