EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the spring of 2012, the Boston University libraries surveyed BU graduate students to determine their use of and satisfaction with current library services and resources. This survey followed a survey of the faculty in the fall of 2010, and is part of a planned cycle of faculty, graduate student, and undergraduate surveys every three years.

The survey was sent by e-mail to 13,298 BU graduate students, and 4,055 responses were received, a response rate of 30%.

PATTERNS OF LIBRARY ENGAGEMENT

The survey shows that most BU graduate students use the libraries on a regular basis. 51% of graduate students report visiting a library in person at least once a week, while 66% access the libraries online at least once a week. Only 10% (in person) and 5% (online) visit less than once a semester.

Patterns of library use vary greatly across schools and disciplines (figure 4). For example, in the College and Graduate School of Arts & Sciences, 75% of graduate students in humanities departments visit the library in person and online at least weekly, while only 12% of graduate students in science departments visit at similar rates. Science students still use the libraries, but primarily online, with 67% accessing them online at least weekly.

“Overall, each library has very knowledgeable staff members who seem to enjoy their jobs, are patient, and are willing to help students. They also keep updated on the latest technology while having a keen understanding of archival resources and non-book resources.”

All quotes in report are taken from comments made by graduate students in survey.
**CONTRIBUTIONS TO ACADEMIC SUCCESS**

The survey explored four areas in which BU libraries contribute to the academic success of graduate students.

**A Source for Scholarly Resources** The survey shows that e-journals and databases are the most important scholarly resources for graduate students. Print books and e-books are also important, though overall to a lesser extent. In some fields print books remain the most important resource, while in others e-books equal or surpass them. Similarly, while e-journals have largely surpassed print journals in importance, print journals still have some importance in most fields.

**Assistance in Finding and Evaluating Scholarly Resources** Most graduate students agree that the ability to find scholarly resources is an important skill for academic success. The search tools provided by BU libraries are among the most important tools for finding scholarly resources. Assistance from BU library staff is also important for many graduate students, and most are satisfied with the assistance they receive.

**Instruction in Information Literacy** BU libraries are only reaching a minority of graduate students through librarian classroom instruction and online guides and tutorials. To fulfill their role in promoting information literacy, the libraries need to find new ways to reach students, including expanding online tutorials for databases and research skills, providing assistance with submitting papers for publication, and support in managing and archiving research data.

**A Place to Study** BU libraries are important places for study for many graduate students. “More quiet work and study spaces in libraries areas” had the strongest positive response when students were asked about possible augmented library services. “More group work and presentation spaces in libraries” also had a strong response.
Next Steps

There are a number of steps the BU libraries should take in response to the survey to improve their support for graduate students:

- Improve and expand the quiet study and group study spaces.
- Continue to place a priority on digital resources, while still maintaining print collections as appropriate.
- Provide links to library resources and services in course management software.
- Move forward with plans to provide education and support in managing and archiving research data.
- Expand assistance to patrons with submitting papers to journals and digital archives.
- Provide additional online tutorials for databases and research skills.
In the spring of 2012, the Boston University libraries surveyed BU graduate students to determine their use of and satisfaction with current library services and resources. This survey followed a survey of the faculty in the fall of 2010 (see Boston University 2010 Faculty Library Survey Report, http://www.bu.edu/library/files/2010facultylibrarysurveyreport.pdf), and is part of a planned cycle of faculty, graduate student, and undergraduate surveys every three years.

The survey was sent by e-mail to 13,298 BU graduate students, and 4,055 responses were received, a response rate of 30%.

The survey responses provide an insight into patterns of library engagement by graduate students, demonstrate the ways and extent to which the libraries contribute to student academic success, and suggest next steps the libraries should take to improve their support of graduate students.

**Survey Description**

The survey instrument was adapted from one developed by the University of Washington Libraries, and the research protocol was approved for exemption by BU’s Institutional Review Board.

The anonymous, web-based survey asked graduate students for their demographic information, including campus, college or school, and department affiliation; distance education status; whether they taught; whether they worked on external funded research; and whether they had been published.

The survey asked graduate students:

- How frequently they visit the BU libraries in person and access them online.
- The importance of various types of resources to their work and their satisfaction with BU library resources.
- The importance of various research skills to their academic success.
- The importance of various aids for finding resources.
- The importance of various library services to their work and their satisfaction with these services.
- Whether BU libraries are open when needed.
- How useful seven proposed services would be to their work.
- The contributions the libraries make to various aspects of their work; and their overall satisfaction with library services, collections, and facilities.

Opportunities to comment were interspersed throughout the survey.
Patterns of Library Engagement

Survey responses provide information on how often graduate students use the library in person and online. As shown in figure 2, 45% of respondents visit a BU library in person once a week or more, and 66% access library resources online once a week or more.

Figure 3 combines responses about in-person and online visits to show different patterns of library engagement. With “frequent” defined as at least once a week and “infrequent” as less than once a week, 34% of graduate students are frequent library users both in person and online. 32% are frequent online but infrequent in person; 11% are frequent in person but infrequent online, and 23% are infrequent in both methods.

While these overall numbers give some insight into library usage by graduate students, they combine students in different fields who have different needs for library resources and...
services. They also include the 16% of respondents who report being affiliated with distance education programs, who have much less opportunity to visit the BU libraries in person. It can be more informative to look at how these patterns of engagement vary across schools and colleges, and to consider distance education students separately.

Figure 4 shows the frequency of in-person and online visits for non-distance education graduate students in each school and college. Because it is so large and includes such a wide variety of fields, the College and Graduate School of Arts & Sciences has been broken down by academic discipline, based on department affiliation.

**Figure 4.** For each school or college, shows breakdown of non-distance education graduate students by how often they visit BU libraries in person and online. “Frequent” is defined as once a week or more often. “Infrequent” is defined as less than once a week. For CAS/GRS, students are further divided by their scholarly discipline, based on their department affiliation. Numbers following names give the percent of respondents who report their primary affiliation as that school or college; the area of the circles is proportional to these numbers. Respondents who did not answer questions about their library usage or school or college affiliation are not included.
Figure 5 shows a similar breakdown for distance education graduate students. Most of these graduate students are affiliated with Metropolitan College, the College of Fine Arts, and to a lesser extent the School of Social Work; the remainder are scattered in small numbers among the remaining schools and colleges.

These figures show that graduate students in some schools and colleges are significantly more engaged with the library than those in others. What they do not show is whether fields with less library engagement are the result of shortcomings of library resources, services, and outreach; or are the results of less need for library support in those areas.

“As an online student I wasn't even aware of online library access or how to use it until about halfway through. Once I used it, it was very valuable- I think this information needs to be pushed more to online students.”
Library Contributions to Graduate Student Academic Success

In the survey, 64% of graduate students report that the BU libraries make a major or significant contribution to their overall academic success (figure 6). As would be expected, the strength of this response varies by how often the student visits the library, with 75% of those who visit both in person and online at least once a week reporting a major or significant contribution, but even for those who don’t use the library in either form on a weekly basis, 50% report a major or significant contribution.

How do the libraries contribute to academic success? The survey also asked about the contribution to various activities (figure 7), and the results show substantial positive contribution to being a more productive researcher (65% giving a 4 or 5 rating), finding information in related fields or new areas (65%), and keeping current in your field (58%).

The contributions to career preparedness (34%), being a more effective instructor (22%), and the decision to attend BU (12%) are smaller. In the case of being a more effective instructor, however, this number is somewhat misleading, since most respondents who answered the question (53%) gave a rating of “N/A,” possibly because they are not involved with teaching. If these responses are omitted from the calculation, 47% of respondents with an opinion gave a 4 or 5 rating for contribution to being a more effective instructor.

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1 While most questions on the survey asked for a response on a five-point scale, with only the first and last points labeled with a word or phrase, for the purpose of this report names have been assigned to the intermediate results. Thus, the fact that 64% of respondents gave a “Major 5” or “4” rating (on a five point scaled from “Major 5” to “None 1”) is stated as 64% of respondents gave response of “Major” or “Significant.”
Looking at the rest of the survey results, four areas where BU libraries make concrete contributions to graduate student academic endeavors can be identified. The areas are as a source for scholarly resources, assistance in finding and evaluating scholarly resources, instruction in information literacy, and a place for study.

The following sections explore what the survey shows about the contribution of BU libraries in each of these areas.

**A Source for Scholarly Resources**

One way in which BU libraries contribute to graduate student academic success is by providing the scholarly resources they need for their work. The traditional view of a library is a building full of books. However, when graduate students were asked to rate the importance of various types of resources to their work, the two types they rate as most important are both digital formats: e-journals (75% rating them very important to their work) and databases (70%). As shown in figure 8, these were also the top two resources for faculty in the 2010 Faculty Library Survey.

Next in importance to graduate students are books, both print (33%) and e-books (32%); print journals follow at 23%. Here there is a noticeable divergence from faculty, who rate print books (37%) and print journals (30%) substantially ahead of e-books (20%). This divergence may be due to the relative youth of the graduate students compared to

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**Figure 7.** Percent (of graduate students responding to each question) giving a 4 or 5 rating (on a 5-point scale) when asked what contribution BU libraries make to each activity.

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“I have always felt that Mugar staff would go out of their way to help me have access to information. They have been integral to my academic success.”

“I've been very pleased with the broad offerings of the BU Library system, especially in terms of access to scholarly journals and e-resources.”
faculty, as well as the time that lapsed between the two surveys. It will be illuminating to observe whether there is a shift in the importance of e-books in the next faculty survey.

Figure 8. Percent (of graduate students or faculty responding to question) who rate the importance to their work of each type of resource as “Very important 5.” Numbers for faculty are taken from the 2010 Faculty Library Survey.
While databases are given a high rating for importance across all schools and colleges, the relative importance of other digital vs. print resources varies widely between schools and colleges, as shown in figure 9. In some fields, such as the humanities in the College and Graduate School of Arts & Sciences and in the School of Theology, print books are as important as e-journals and much more important than e-books. In other fields, such as the School of Medicine, e-books are more important than print books.

“I do not like how the library has begun purchasing so many books that I want to look at as E-Books. I cannot stare at a screen for hours to read a book. I would prefer to hold a paper copy.”

**Figure 9.** Percent (of graduate students responding to each question) who rate the importance to their work of each type of resource as “Very important 5,” broken down by school or college. Omits respondents who did not give a school or college.
SATISFACTION WITH BU LIBRARY RESOURCES

The graduate students were also asked about their satisfaction with the various BU library resources, as well as their overall satisfaction with the BU libraries’ collection (figure 10).

“Please please please make sure that your electronic resources are as comprehensive as possible, they are our research lifeblood and essential for us to make scientific progress”

RELATED LIBRARY SERVICES

In addition to the resources they own or make available online, BU libraries also provide scholarly resources through services such as interlibrary loan and BU WorldCat Local, allowing patrons to request materials not held by the library. When asked about these services, 47% of graduate students who expressed an opinion rated them as important or very important to their work. And of the 55% of graduate students who report using the services, 58% are satisfied or very satisfied.

Graduate students were also asked how useful augmenting access to streaming media resources would be to their work; 44% of those who responded indicated it would be useful or very useful.

ASSISTANCE IN FINDING AND EVALUATING SCHOLARLY RESOURCES

Providing a large collection of scholarly resources is of limited use if patrons can’t find the material they need for their work. Another way in which BU libraries contribute to graduate student academic success is by providing assistance in finding and evaluating scholarly resources. This assistance includes online tools and guides, as well as direct assistance by library staff.

When asked about the importance of various research skills to success in their academic program, 69% reported that “Finding scholarly information” was “Very important,” and 60% reported that “Evaluating information sources critically” was “Very important.” In the 2010 survey, faculty were asked about the importance of the same skills to graduate student success in their programs;
the corresponding ratings for faculty who expressed an opinion were 82% and 85%.

METHODS OF FINDING RESOURCES
Graduate students were asked about the importance of various methods of finding the resources they need for their work (figure 11).

The results show that search tools provided by BU libraries, such as databases and catalogs, are roughly as important as web search engines such as Google. Colleagues such as faculty and other students are next in importance, followed by BU library staff, while social media such as Twitter and blogs have relatively little importance.

The importance of library staff in finding resources is somewhat tied to how often a graduate student visits a library in person; 44% of students who visit the library at least once a week consider library staff important or very important in finding resources, compared to 29% for students who visit less often. Similarly, 63% of those who visit the library at least once a week report using research assistance from librarians, while only 42% of those who visit the library less often report using research assistance. Of those who do use the service, 71% are satisfied or very satisfied with it.

These results suggest that graduate students who primarily use the libraries online may not be aware of or may not be adequately served by virtual library services such as chat, e-mail, and phone research assistance, but may also reflect the self-help approach of students who prefer online access.

LINKING TO LIBRARY RESOURCES FROM COURSE MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE
The BU libraries are currently inconsistent in the extent to which they support linking to their resources from within commonly used course management software such as Blackboard and Sakai. Some libraries provide support for such linking, while many do not. The graduate students were asked how useful augmenting such linking would be to their work; 64% responded that it would be useful or very useful.

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2 Shortly before the survey was conducted, the libraries made a new search tool, BU Libraries Search, available. The full impact of this new tool, which is a replacement for and expansion of the libraries’ previous online catalog, is probably not reflected in the survey results.
INSTRUCTION IN INFORMATION LITERACY

Another way BU libraries can contribute to graduate student academic success is by providing instruction in information literacy, “the set of skills needed to find, retrieve, analyze, and use information.”  

When asked about various information literacy skills, graduate students rate all of them as being important to their academic success (figure 12). These results are in line with the results from the 2010 faculty survey.

CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION AND ONLINE GUIDES AND TUTORIALS

The BU libraries work to increase students’ information literacy through classroom presentations by librarians and guides and tutorials on the libraries’ websites. The survey asked graduate students about the importance of these services to their work and their satisfaction with the services.

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3 Introduction to Information Literacy, Association of College & Research Libraries
(http://www.ala.org/acrl/issues/infolit/overview/intro/).

4 In the summer following the survey, the BU Libraries website underwent an extensive redesign, which changed the appearance of the guides and how they can be found. Since respondents to the survey would only have been familiar with the previous design, data from the current survey is of limited usefulness in evaluating the libraries’ current offerings in this area.
For classroom instruction by librarians, only a minority of graduate students (37%) report using the service, and of those who do, only some (25%) find the service important or very important to their work. Those who do use the service are generally satisfied with it, with 58% reporting they are satisfied or very satisfied. Guides and tutorials on the libraries’ websites were more widely used, with 49% of graduate students using them; 58% of those who use them find them important or very important to their work. However, the usage of these services varies widely by school or college (figure 13). There is a demand for additional online instruction; 53% of respondents report that additional online tutorials for databases and research skills would be useful or very useful to their work.

“After taking a faculty seminar on information literacy, I learned about SO many resources that I didn’t realize the library has... the libraries need to let grad students know what tools are available (especially since undergrads ask us for advice [on] ‘how to research’).”

“I wish that there were a required part of orientation to learn how to access and use the library databases. I have NO idea how to access them, or how to find relevant materials, and only one class has encouraged use of articles from the library database. I feel I am missing out on a key resource, but don’t have the time or knowledge of who or how to ask for help.”

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**Figure 13.** Percent (of graduate students who responded to each question) in each school or college (or discipline for CAS/GRS, based on department) who indicate they make use of librarian class presentations and guides & tutorials on the libraries’ website (by giving a satisfaction rating rather than responding “Don’t Use”).
Prospective Library Services

[In reference to assistance with submitting papers]
“Does any of this occur now, I wonder. This is a fragmented and confusing issue that is solved by each individual authorship group on each individual manuscript. It’s an absolute mess, and meaningful, streamlined assistance would be greatly appreciated.”

The survey asked about the potential usefulness of two services related to information literacy currently being considered by the libraries. 51% responded that assistance with submitting papers and other publications to journals and digital archives would be useful or very useful; 56% responded that support in managing and archiving research data would be useful or very useful.

“A Place to Study

BU libraries also contribute to the academic success of graduate students by providing a place to study. Of the non-distance education graduate students who responded, 87% report using library study or work areas, and 55% said these areas were very important to their work, while a further 18% said they were important. Of those who use the areas, 55% were satisfied or very satisfied with them.

For many graduate students, computers in the library are also a valuable resource; 61% of non-distance education graduate students report that access to computers in the library is important or very important to their work and 82% report using them. Of those who do use computers in the libraries, 64% are satisfied or very satisfied with them.

Open Hours

Students can only use the libraries for study when they are open. When asked about the hours of BU libraries, most graduate students responded that they are always or almost always open when they are needed, though the results are somewhat lower for the interim periods (figure 14).

Are BU Libraries Open When Graduate Students Need Them?

![Figure 14. Percent (of graduate students who responded to each question with something other than “N/A”) who responded with a 5 or 4 on a five-point scale when asked if BU Libraries are open when they need them during each period.](chart.png)
More Study Space Desired
The survey also reveals a strong demand for additional space. When asked about the usefulness to their work of more quiet work and study areas in libraries, 48% of non-distance education graduate students report that it would be very useful; this is the strongest response to all of the questions about possible augmented library services. In addition, 34% of non-distance education graduate students report that more group work and presentation spaces in libraries would be very useful to their work. The extent of the demand for additional study and group space varies by school and college (figure 15).

“We are so desperate for work space and study space as doctoral students.”

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**Figure 15.** Percent (of non-distance education graduate students who responded to each question) who gave one of the top two responses (on a five-point scale) when asked about the usefulness to their work of more quiet work and study spaces (top bars) and more group work and presentation spaces (bottom bars) in BU Libraries. Overall length of each bar is proportional to the number of non-distance education respondents who give each school or college as their primary affiliation.
CONCLUSIONS

The survey asked graduate students about their satisfaction with various aspects of the BU libraries, and their overall satisfaction (figure 16).

![Satisfaction of Graduate Students With BU Libraries](image)

**Figure 16.** Percent (of graduate students who gave an opinion on any of these questions) giving a 4 or 5 rating (on a 5-point scale) when asked their satisfaction with each aspect of BU libraries.

NEXT STEPS

Based on the results of this survey, the BU libraries should take the following steps to improve their support for the academic success of graduate students:

- **Advocate for additional and improved spaces for quiet study and group study in BU libraries.**
- **Continue to place a priority on acquiring access to digital resources (including streaming media) when possible, while still maintaining (and even growing in select areas) our print collections.**
- **Provide links to library resources and services in course management software such as Blackboard more universally.**
- **Move forward with plans to provide education and support in managing and archiving research data.**
- **Expand our assistance to patrons with submitting papers and other publications to journals and digital archives.**
- **Provide additional online tutorials for databases and research skills to improve information literacy.**
In addition to these steps to improve the libraries, BU libraries should consider using tools such as focus groups and smaller, focused surveys to discover why some graduate students in certain schools and colleges make little use of library services and resources. Based on the results of these further studies, BU libraries should develop a plan to reach out to such students.

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