INTRODUCTION

The University of Cincinnati (UC) is an Ohio public research university with an enrollment of more than 40,000 students. The UC College of Engineering & Applied Science (CEAS) Library serves a college that includes approximately 3,500 graduate and undergraduate students and 140 faculty. In 2011, the UC Libraries broadened its user assessment program to encourage individual units such as the CEAS Library to focus on local concerns within specific user groups. The CEAS Assistant Engineering & Applied Science Librarian and CEAS Library Graduate Assistant developed a mini survey to assess CEAS user attitudes about e-books. The library had been buying e-books for many years and anecdotal feedback seemed to indicate a mixed reaction from our users towards e-books. The mini survey was an excellent tool to easily assess patron attitudes. In 2012, a second mini survey was sent out and the responses were compared to the 2011 mini survey results to determine if user attitudes had changed.

OBJECTIVES

1. To assess CEAS user attitudes toward e-books and how those attitudes might be changing over time.
2. To find out if CEAS patrons were using e-books and in what CEAS programs.
3. To use data from the mini survey results to determine if patron collection resource needs were being met.

METHODOLOGY

In 2011, the CEAS Library used SurveyMonkey to conduct the mini survey. The mini survey consisted of five short questions that would allow for the tabulation of data by user status and discipline in the College. Questions also dealt with personal preference by format. The mini survey also allowed recipients to include comments, if they chose to elaborate. The mini survey was distributed by email to faculty, graduate, and undergraduate students using lists created by the CEAS. In 2012, the mini survey was again sent to the same user groups. Data from 2012 was then tabulated and analyzed to see if attitudes had changed from the year before.

RESULTS

1. Response to the survey was the greatest from the faculty (2011: 19.3%, 2012: 19.3%, Change: 0.0%), followed by graduate students (2011: 11.0%, 2012: 10.2%, Change: -0.8%), and undergraduates (2011: 3.1%, 2012: 14.1%, Change: +11.0%).
2. The use of e-books varied by user group, with the highest preference for e-books coming from undergraduates (57.0%) in 2011 and from graduates (49.6%) in 2012. The lowest preference came from faculty (2011: 37.0% & 2012: 33.3%) in both years.
3. Preference for print version by user group was highest for graduate students and faculty with both at 37.0% and lowest for undergraduates (22.0%) in 2011. In 2012, the highest preference for print was for undergraduates (41.2%) and lowest for faculty (29.6%).
4. Preference by academic program varied widely, too. Counting together e-book and the no preference category, the results favoring e-books ranged from a high of 75.0% for Construction Management to a low of 33.0% for Materials Engineering in 2011. In 2012, the results favoring e-books varied from a high of 89.8% for Biomedical Engineering to a low of 33.3% for Construction Management.
5. When asked which version of a book they would want the library to purchase, the overall preference (including “no preference”) was for e-books at 68.4%. For print, the preference percentage was 31.7% in 2011. In 2012, the overall preference for e-books was at 61.8% and for print at 38.1%.

CONCLUSIONS

The mini survey demonstrated that acceptance of e-books is not universal. While the significant majority accepts the value and benefits of e-books, there are many who prefer the book in a print format. Those patrons who wanted both the print and electronic versions will make collection development more challenging in an era of shrinking budgets.

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