
This study looks at the information-seeking behaviors of students enrolled in studio art courses at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill and the students’ perceptions of the effectiveness of the library instruction session within their art courses. In an effort to contribute new findings to the established discourse on this topic, surveys were distributed to graduate and undergraduate students to determine similarities and differences in behaviors and perceptions. The results of the survey echo the findings of earlier literature on the information-seeking behaviors of studio art students, reinforcing the idea that this population seeks creative inspiration for their works from a variety of sources. Survey results also reveal that a majority of responders have attended library instruction sessions as part of a studio art course and have found these sessions useful in various ways when conducting research for art-based projects.

Headings:

Art/ Information services

Art research

Information-seeking behavior

Library orientation for art students
MEETING THE INFORMATION NEEDS OF STUDIO ART STUDENTS IN THE ACADEMIC LIBRARY: A STUDY CONDUCTED AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA-CHAPEL HILL

by

Caroline M. Eckardt

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Approved by

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Barbara B. Moran
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Introduction

As a graduate research assistant in the Sloane Art Library focusing on reference and instruction, I see many people come through the doors of the library seeking out information: undergraduates in art history courses needing help with their formal analysis papers, students in introductory level courses coming in for library instruction, Ackland Art Museum docents gathering information for their tours on photography, visiting researchers utilizing the vast collection of art resources the Sloane Art Library has to offer. Some are able to locate the resources they need on their own with ease, while others seek help from the librarians and assistants in learning how to find various materials that might be helpful in their research.

There is one type of library patron that continually interests me, though: the studio art student. In my time working at Sloane Art Library, I have come to realize I have not interacted with them as often as I do with other types of patrons. There have been seemingly few studio art classes coming to the library for instruction, an area of librarianship about which I feel very strongly. When these students do come to the library, they sometimes sprawl out in the stacks with piles of books surrounding them as they scribble in notebooks, while at other times, they pop in and out after quickly scanning images. In my own judgment, they seem to be much more cautious and independent in terms of conducting their own research without assistance from information professionals than other student populations. It is this perceived mystery
surrounding the student enrolled in studio art courses that lies at the crux of this study: how do students enrolled in studio arts courses conduct research that informs their work, and how can an art library, in particular the instruction session, fit in with this process?

One of the goals in any academic library is to satisfy the research and information needs of its intended user group. Each academic discipline has its own set of particularities and challenges associated with it that the library must rise to and meet to ensure its user population is being fully served to the best of the library’s ability. Studio art students are a particular kind of user group whose information needs are not necessarily met in the traditional ways. In creating their artistic works, the research process for this group seems to be much more serendipitous than methodical and conducting studio art “research” can be defined differently according to varying user personalities; both of these can be very individualistic processes. No two artists have the same information needs, nor will they seek that information in the same ways.

However, the importance of the instruction session still needs to be underscored when discussing the creative research in which these students are partaking. It cannot be forgotten that the members of this particular group are first and foremost students, who are continuously learning and refining their research skills throughout their academic careers, and librarians need to be prepared to help with this task, whether it is more “traditional” research or something more out-of-the-box. Using myself as an example, I am certainly more comfortable helping a student studying art history find a source for an academic paper than assisting an artist find something to inspire his or her next art piece for a class assignment. It needs to be understood how these students view the library in terms of their research process, as well as how the instruction session fits in to that
process. It is the intention of this study to look at the information needs of the studio art student, in particular the needs of those students studying at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH), and how the academic library is able to serve those needs, especially through the library instruction session.
**Literature Review**

The literature review is divided into two sections and will address the topics of the information needs of student artists and the library instruction session as it applies to studio art.

*Information needs of student artists*

Literature concerning the information needs of student artists begins in the mid-1970s with publications by Toyne concerning the information-seeking behavior of student artists at the Falmouth School of Art in Cornwall, England (Toyne, 1975 and 1977). Toyne was the first librarian at Falmouth, which existed without a library for its students from its founding in 1902 until 1967, when Toyne was hired to build and manage the collection. His writings on the information needs of student artists were the first of their kind, and featured simple surveys to gauge what the students would need and want to help them with their art. His later publication titled “A philosophy for Falmouth” advocates for libraries to “give stimulus and support to the whole spectrum of the students’ work,” meaning collections should be built to not only serve the students’ physical activities as artists, but also to fuel their inspirational needs that are many times beyond the traditional “art” scope (Toyne, 1977, p. 25).

Pacey, an art librarian at Preston Polytechnic, worked in a similar vein as Toyne. Whereas Toyne was more systematic in his approach to gauging and reporting on students’ needs, Pacey used anecdotes throughout his article to convey the information needs he saw as the art librarian at Preston Polytechnic. Through his stories, Pacey
conveys a similar message to Toyne, in that he stresses the idea of being able to provide art students with creative stimuli and visual information across a wide variety of subjects; this idea of providing creative stimuli is emphasized heavily in the early literature surrounding this topic and will continue to resurface in much of the literature that follows. Pacey also made note that these students were seeking out a great deal of visual material in comparison to text-based resources, so much so that the language the materials were written in was not necessarily important. In addition, he found that browsing the collections was an important component in the student artists’ method of research. (Pacey, 1982)

Frank went into great detail in her investigation of student artists in Minnesota and their use of the library (1999). The main questions that guided her study were “What are student artists seeking? What do they need? Why are they searching?” (Frank, 1999, p. 445). In interviewing a selection of both art students and professors from numerous colleges and universities across Minnesota, Frank learned a great deal about these user groups. Frank first spoke with the professors to determine, from their standpoint, why students were seeking information in the library setting; these professors made mention of students seeking “creative stimulus” (Frank, 446) in the materials found at the library, as well as a basis for comparison with works being created and exhibited in the contemporary art world.

When Frank transitioned from speaking with professors to interviewing students about their general use of the library, the studio students communicated that they more “discovered the library” than was it presented to them through their studio art classes; that they were not introduced to the space and its resources through an instruction
session, but learned through their own efforts what the library held and how it could help in their development (1999, p. 447). The author also established that studio art students mainly used the library through browsing its collection rather than conducting pre-planned searches. They were not necessarily looking for specific items in most cases, but for items that provided, as their professors previously stated, “creative stimulus.” This point was stressed greatly throughout the article.

Frank also identified three kinds of materials that studio art students were primarily looking for when they visited the library, the first being artworks, or images, more generally. Many of these students used the examples as inspiration for their own creative works, but they also referred to these images as a way to build a base knowledge in the discipline. The second area that students sought information in was art narratives and texts; they used these chiefly to learn ways in which to talk about art, either their own or work created by someone else. The last major area in which studio students were interested when they visited the library was more general materials that serve as influences for their art. These materials included periodicals, newspapers, reference items, audiovisual objects, and fictional texts, such as novels (Frank, 1999, p. 448-449).

More recently published was Bennett’s “Bringing the studio into the library: addressing the research needs of studio art and architecture students.” Bennett, a librarian at Yale University’s Art and Architecture Library, was struggling with ways to advertise the library’s services and bring in studio art and architecture students to the library. Her consideration of the studio art student echoes some of the issues raised by Frank and later, by Mayer; early in her article, she stated, “The unassuming studio student might indeed wonder where the library logically fits within his/her art studio curriculum”
In the article, Bennett relayed the results of polling the needs of her students and also provided ways in which she inserted herself into the studio art and architecture courses (and their syllabi) to better serve the population.

In terms of surveying the studio art students, primarily second year MFA candidates, and their information needs, Bennett found that these students were interested in seeking more “practical” information, such as help finding grants and fellowships or information regarding grant writing, issues surrounding copyright and digital images, and free resources available to them after they graduated and no longer had access to the resources provided by Yale (2006, p. 39). These are new information needs that have not been addressed in previous literature, as many texts have focused on the undergraduate student as opposed to the graduate student. Bennett also collaborated with faculty and helped them incorporate the library more into classes’ syllabi and assignments, thereby requiring students to attend library instruction sessions as necessary components of the course. In these sessions, the studio art and architecture students learned of various resources available to them and they were taught certain skills that would be beneficial in completing future assignments.

*The library instruction session as it applies to Studio Art*

The library instruction session, or more simply the library session, is an important component in meeting the information needs of any user group. During these sessions, students can be introduced to new ways of conducting research, particularly within a specialized collection, such as the collection of the Sloane Art Library at UNC-CH; they can also be introduced to the collections themselves, or in this instance, students can learn how a collection of resources could fit into the concepts surrounding their own artistic
practice. The literature surrounding this topic has been more recently published compared to the general information needs of this user group and in comparison, is considerably less.

At Western Carolina University (WCU), the librarian-professor team of Zanin-Yost and Tapley observed studio art students throughout their creative process and determined that “students tend not to find the process of learning and creating art compatible with library research because the majority have not learned how, or been encouraged, to meld the two” (Zanin-Yost and Tapley, 2008, p. 40). In their article “Learning in the art classroom: making the connection between research and art,” Zanin-Yost and Tapley highlighted some of the issues they saw at their institution concerning student artist research; specifically, students at WCU needed to learn how to use resources provided by their library to be more successful in their work, and instructors needed to express to their students how important it is to conduct research as part of their artistic practice. The authors also pointed to the idea that instructors cannot just assume that students know how to conduct research already.

Zanin-Yost and Tapley highlighted ways in which a librarian would be able to help mitigate these issues, namely in working more closely with faculty to make the library experience more meaningful to the students. For example, before research assignments are given to a class, students partake in a library session to learn how research is conducted so they at least have a base understanding of what it is they are expected to do within that field. Not only should students attend these sessions as part of their courses, but they should attend them with some level of frequency to reinforce these necessary skills.
Especially enlightening was Mayer’s article “Embedding information literacy into a studio art course” (2010). In this text, Mayer, who serves as an associate librarian specializing in the areas of Fine Arts and Women’s Studies at the University of Wyoming-Laramie, outlined the survey she conducted in 2009 concerning information literacy and library instruction as it pertained to studio art students, namely how libraries were leading these instruction sessions to this group with specialized needs. She collected statistics from both national and international institutions.

Several elements of Mayer’s study were particularly interesting. She looked at the common topics covered within an instruction session and analyzed the responses received. Common topics (and the percentage of librarians who taught them) included: art-related databases (83%), how to locate images (75%), searching techniques and concepts (65%), evaluating information sources for credibility (64%), how to define a research question/problem (48%), interdisciplinary resources (41%), legal and ethical issues (43%), open-access resources for post-graduation (23%), visual literacy (19%), and professional-related competencies (17%) (Mayer, 2010, p. 150). The topics covered do appear to be “common” enough, to use Mayer’s wording, but what is surprising is the lack of attention paid to the studio art student’s need of browsing, as mentioned by authors such as Toyne, Pacey, and Frank. Browsing the collection as a way of gathering inspiration is such a large component of the creative process that many professors, even within the art department at UNC-CH, require their students to do so as part of various studio classes. While the librarians who responded to Mayer’s survey may have considered browsing under the more general topic of “searching techniques” and recorded their answer in such a way, I would make the argument that this would be a
separate skill, especially as it applies to studio art students, that should be included as its own element in an instruction session.

Other elements of note in Mayer’s study were the challenges librarians feel they face in trying to provide instruction to this group of students, as well as the lack of assessment in determining the effectiveness of the instruction (2010, p. 151-152). In terms of the challenges, some librarians cited lack of support from faculty in incorporating the library and information literacy into their coursework, as well as students finding difficulty in applying the skills taught within a library session to their use of art techniques and finding inspiration for their work. Indeed, both are challenges in developing and delivering to this audience that librarians must work to overcome.

The lack of assessment in determining the effectiveness or impact of such a session was surprising detail. From the results collected, 55% of institutions surveyed do not conduct any type of assessment following their instruction sessions (Mayer, 2010, p. 151). That is a significant percentage, and may explain some of the challenges librarians face from both faculty and students, as described above. Without polling the students and seeking their opinion of which elements of an instruction session either work or do not work for them, or asking what they would like addressed in those same sessions, there will continue to be dissatisfaction, ignorance, or both coming from those students regarding the library and how it can fit in with their studio art education.

In “Touch, see, find: serving multiple literacies in the art and design library,” Wilson and McCarthy emphasized the difficulty student artists and designers can sometimes have in the context of the library instruction session because of their individual learning styles; according to Wilson and McCarthy, “…art and design students
tend to have a deep-seated aversion to, or fear of, the library and research in general” (Wilson and McCarthy, 2010, p. 183). Many of these students tend to be more visual learners, and librarians working with this user population should think outside the box for ways that might connect the idea of performing research with the students’ own artistic needs. In the example they provide, librarians began the library session by asking students to draw their interpretation of the information-seeking experience. As a population that “fears” the library and performing research, this task introduced the idea of performing research to art and design students in a way that was more familiar to them and may have made it less intimidating as they visualized, and then verbalized, their interpretation of the experience. This also gave the librarian an opening to address the ideas of performing research, and the research process more generally, and in ways that are more recognizable to the student.

While the literature available on these related topics is not necessarily abundant, it is thoroughly researched and includes studies on which generalizable information can be gleaned. In all the studies, the methods student artists use to conduct research and gain inspiration for their creative works appear to be well understood, while the ways in which the library instruction session can fit in with creative needs of students less so.
Methodology

In attempting to address the questions of how students conduct research for their studio art courses and how the library instruction session plays a part in that, I used the above literature review to inform and shape a survey (see Appendix A) distributed to graduate and undergraduate students enrolled in studio art courses at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill (UNC-CH). In conducting my research in this manner, I was able to draw upon past investigations of these topics and contribute new findings. From there, I compared established research with the reality of the local population, either confirming past research or open up new avenues for librarians to consider.

The studio art program at UNC-CH is a nationally ranked program that offers degrees at both the graduate and undergraduate levels. At all levels, students are encouraged to “develop both skill acquisition and a personal creative vision” and explore working in a variety of media including, but not limited to, painting, drawing, ceramics, photography, sculpture, and mixed media. Graduate students focus on preparing for careers as professional artists, as well as teaching positions related to their media emphasis, while “refining the intellectual content within the work.” (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Art Department)

The decision to craft a survey was not an easy one. In reading through the published literature, it became evident that while researchers were interested in how this population conducted research, the literature concerning students did not explore a connection between the student doing research and the library session. Again, the
population being studied is university students, who enter into higher education with a varied skill set; they continually learn and modify this skill set throughout their time at their respective university or college. I came to the decision that the best way to understand this user group would be to distribute a survey and get a first person response from the population being studied.

The survey itself is concerned with understanding what student artists use for inspiration in their creative works and how they conduct their research. Questions seek out what materials students use in their research and if they use the library to access these materials. The survey also asks if the library instruction session played any part in their research process, and if it did, was the session helpful to the student. These were gaps I identified in previously published literature.

The survey conducted was a pen-and-paper survey that was distributed to students during class time with prior approval and cooperation with the course instructor. Classes were chosen to participate in this survey based on several factors. These included class level (introductory, intermediate, advanced/graduate) and artistic medium. This was done to ensure both a varied response from students and that one particular group was not being oversampled. Another factor considered was the scheduled meeting times of studio art classes. Because this was a paper-based survey, classes chosen to participate were limited to those that fit within the schedule and time constraints of the principal investigator.

This survey was conducted from October 21 to October 29, 2014. In all, 6 studio art classes at UNC-CH were chosen and able to participate in this survey out of 30 instruction-based classes scheduled during the Fall 2014 semester. Upon the distribution
of the survey, students were informed of the intent behind the survey and that participation was completely voluntary, but limited to those over the age of 18 due to parental consent stipulations; of 70 distributed surveys, 66 were completed for a response rate of 94.2%. In seeking responses to this survey, both graduates and undergraduates at UNC-CH were surveyed. This was done to understand the similarities and differences in their needs and perceptions of how the library serves them, as well as seek possible ways in which the library might be better able to serve these two populations moving forward.

Approaching this study through both a literature review and distributed survey had several advantages. While somewhat narrow in scope in comparison to other areas of library and information science research, the literature that is available concerning the information needs of student artists, and the associated instruction sessions that can accompany this discipline, are well-researched and provide a solid grasp on the evolution of understanding in this area. In addition, the survey itself allowed for a direct response from the population being studied. Students were able to freely express their experiences and opinions, giving librarians working with this group a glimpse into how this particular group operates in the context of the library and how they view the effectiveness of the library in their creative process.

As with any method, there are certain disadvantages associated with conducting a survey. This survey was delivered to participants via paper-and-pencil and did not allow for follow up clarification to the answers supplied by the participants. The survey also included many questions that were open-ended, which, while allowing students to explain themselves more in depth, also result in a greater variation in responses, thus limiting the
generalizability of the results. In addition, due to schedule and time constraints of the principal investigator, not all studio art courses participated in the survey.

This study is not meant to be generalizable because it is based on only a small sample of the population being studied. It does, however, contribute to the discussion surrounding the topic of serving the needs of studio art students. While some of the responses may seem anecdotal in nature, they represent the real experiences of students and need to be taken into consideration in the context of this discussion.
Survey Findings

In conducting this survey, responses were gathered from 66 students enrolled in studio art courses at UNC-CH. Question One of the survey asked student to identify their student status at the University. Of these 66 responses, 13 self-identified as being a graduate student, while the remaining 53 self-identified as undergraduates. For comparison purposes, survey results were divided and will be reported in two categories: graduate and undergraduate. The questions contained in the survey will be addressed below individually.

Graduate Participants’ Results

Question Two of the survey asked students to identify and list any and all materials used to gain inspiration and conduct research for his/her own artworks. Graduate students identified a wide selection of materials used to gain inspiration and conduct research for their own artistic projects (see Figure 1). The most popular responses were books (8 responses) and the Internet (6 responses). More precisely in reference to books, responders offered more specificity in terms of subject matter, answering with: photography; painting; sculpture; drawing; contemporary art; landscape; relevant artists- both contemporary and historical; catalogues; and artist books. Magazines received 2 responses. Other inspirational materials used that received one response included: films/documentaries; video interviews; art blogs; family history; family stories; talking and listening; observations and interactions with people; newspapers; one’s mind and body; subjective filtering of lived and mediated experience;
philosophical and theoretical texts; art making materials, including oil paint, pencils/pens, paper, canvas, panels, camera equipment, lighting equipment, resin; nature; works of art; and relevant readings/texts.

Question Three asked students if they used the UNC Libraries to locate/access these materials. In gaining access to these materials, 11 graduates responded saying they use the UNC Libraries to access these materials, while 2 graduates responded saying they do not use the UNC Libraries.

Question Four asked if students have participated in a library session as part of a studio art course. All 13 graduate students reported as having participated in a library session as part of a studio art course. Question Five asked if there was a specific assignment being worked on when the studio class had a library session. Again, all 13 students were working on a specific assignment when that studio course visited the library for an instruction. Question Six asked if students found this session valuable in helping to complete research. Of the 13 responders, 12 found the session useful in
helping to complete research, while one graduate student believed the session was unhelpful.

Question Seven asked students to identify how they found this session valuable in the student’s own research, either generally or for the assignment being completed. Many students commented on how helpful the session was in learning how to navigate the UNC Libraries’ website, how to carry out more effective search strategies when completing research, and which resources and services the library provides to students, including freely available online resources and services like interlibrary loan (ILL) and CarolinaBLU, UNC Libraries’ document delivery system.

Question Eight asked students to identify any faults they perceived in the library session. Several students commented that it was difficult to feel engaged with the session, one student stating s/he has a “hard time following along unless I do it or it’s one-on-one” and another student commenting there was “too much clicking and talking- not engaging enough.” In the same vein another graduate student offered that “talking about how we could hypothetically use the resources doesn’t stay in my brain as well as if I am actually seeking something and being guided through in a way that’s specific to my research.”

Question Nine asked students to state any ways in which they think the library and/or the library session can better serve the students’ general information needs as students and artists. The graduate students offered several ideas on how the library and the library sessions might be able to serve their needs as practicing artists. Several mentioned the difficulty of conducting research as contemporary artists, as many resources needed for their research are not available in hard format (book) and that they would prefer the library to promote useful electronic and online resources related to their
field of study; one student in particular commented “most students these days, including myself, prefer electronic resources and communication. Maybe implement that a little more?” Other ideas offered include a more visual, intuitive search interface that offers suggestions for related resources, like what is done on Amazon.com or Pandora Internet Radio, as well as a collection of resources related to artistic opportunities, such as fellowships and residencies. One graduate stated: “it would be wonderful to have a vetted aggregator of artistic opportunities- residencies, calls, proposals, openings/positions.”

Question Ten asked students to provide any additional comments they wished to share. In general, graduate students seemed satisfied and very appreciative of the information offered during the session and the services provided by the library, particularly by the staff at the Sloane Art Library. As one graduate responded, “Thanks to the awesome Sloane Art Library staff- consistently positive and helpful!”

*Undergraduate Participants’ Results*

Question Two of the survey asked students to identify and list any and all materials used to gain inspiration and conduct research for their own artworks. Undergraduates also identified a wide variety of materials used to gain inspiration and conduct research in their artistic practice (see Figure 2). The most popular responses were the Internet (31 responses) and books (29 responses), followed by artworks by other artists (10 responses), magazines (6 responses), and nature (6 responses). Related responses that would fall under the umbrella term of the “Internet” include Pinterest (2 responses), Tumblr (3 responses), artist websites (3 responses), social media (2 responses), blogs (2 responses), YouTube (1 response), art museum websites (1 response), online collections (1 response), online stores (1 response). Other materials
used that received one response include: class lecture notes; conversations with people; graffiti; journal articles; campus art; art galleries; images; video/film; cover art; “the void;” fashion magazines; art making materials, such as pencils, oils, canvas; works of fiction, such as fairy tales and myths; music; old photographs and pictures; sentimental objects; television; “things around me;” and daily life. One undergraduate responded that s/he “doesn’t really do research.”

![Figure 2: Materials Used by Undergraduates](image)

In response to Question Three, 31 undergraduates responded that they use UNC Libraries to access these materials, although some responders qualified their answers with “sometimes” or “not often,” while 22 undergraduates responded they do not use the library to gain access to their materials.

In response to Question Four, 29 undergraduates reported they participated in a library session as part of a studio art class, while 24 undergraduates did not. Similar numbers were recorded for Question Five: 29 undergraduates replied there was a specific assignment, while 24 undergraduates replied there was no assignment or this question was not applicable as they had not participated in a library session. Question Six saw some variation in response, as 25 undergraduates replied the library session was helpful,
while 28 undergraduates replied it was not. See Figure 3 below for a visualization of Questions Four, Five, and Six.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 3: Undergraduate Student Response</th>
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<tr>
<td>Question 4: During your time at UNC, have you participated in a library session as part of a studio art course?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 5: Was there a specific assignment you were working on when your studio class had a library session?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 6: Did you find this session valuable in helping you complete research?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Question Seven asked students to identify how they found this session valuable in the student’s own research, either generally or for the assignment being completed. Of those students who identified as having attended a library session as part of a studio art class and found it helpful, they replied with a variety of answers as to how it was helpful. Several students (7 responses) recorded that it was useful when the librarian pulled books to look at for their individual classes ahead of time. In these cases, students were new to the field being studied and these books helped provide “direction and inspiration” for the assignments they were working on. Other students answered they found the session helpful in that it introduced them to the UNC Libraries website and resources and services available to them, including databases, tools, and course pages. Additionally others noted the session was helpful in exposing them to how to effectively search the catalog and databases for resources and images.

Question Eight of the survey dealt with the perceived faults in the library session. Of those who participated in a session, undergraduates did not identify many faults with
the library session. One student wished for a more interactive presentation, while another student remarked “it just seems easier to use Google.”

Question Nine asked students to state any ways in which they think the library and/or the library session can better serve the students’ general information needs as students and artists. Undergraduates offered a few ways in which this could occur. Of those who reported not having a library session, 4 students requested that their class actually have a session, and one student went as far to say a library session should be required in the instance of introductory courses. Another student suggested an information session specifically for freshmen “so that I would use the library earlier;” s/he identified themselves as a senior on the completed survey. Other suggestions include: emphasize using the internet more during the session, especially with digital media; make more library resources available online; and create a “student review section” where students can demonstrate how certain books are useful in their own research/projects.

Question Ten asked students to provide any additional comments they wished to share. For those undergraduates who have used the library and have attended a library session, they seem pleased with the services and resources available to them; 3 students replied that they find the staff at the art library really helpful, and several remarked that they would use the library in the future. Conversely, 4 students commented they had never been to the library, with one student declaring s/he did not realize there was an art library.
Discussion of Findings

The findings of this survey echo several of the conclusions reached in the published literature, and several of the general points and specific comments deserve further discussion.

Both graduates and undergraduates utilize a wide array of materials for creative inspiration and conducting research. Some of those materials are more traditional in nature, including books and relevant texts/readsings, but as technology continues to develop and artists explore different avenues of inspiration, students are experimenting with the newer resources available to them.

As Toyne, Pacey, and Frank all point out, students need inspiration for their art practice in a variety of subjects and in a variety of media, and students who completed this survey illustrate that this is still holds true today. In addition to a wide assortment of physical and electronic source material, the graduate students exhibited a higher ratio of incorporating books and materials more likely to be found within the library into their creative process; this could be due to the graduate program’s emphasis on conducting research as part of the students’ artistic development. It should also be noted that all graduate students who contributed to this survey responded they had participated in a library session and use the library. It is possible, and likely, that there is a correlation between this exposure and the integration of print material into their practice.

On the other hand, the undergraduate students displayed a higher ratio of incorporating Internet-based resources into their research, with 31 of 53
undergraduates offering “the Internet” as one way in which they seek inspiration for their work. Also, while graduate students were more explicit with the types of books used, such as books on photography, painting, sculpture, and artists’ books, undergraduates were more specific with the types of Internet resources used in their practice, including Pinterest, Tumblr, blogs, and artists’ websites. Both types of students also seem to turn equally to more non-traditional materials in conducting research for their artwork, including lived experiences, conversations with other people, art-making materials, and sentimental objects.

It is also reassuring to discover a majority of students, both graduate and undergraduate, use the UNC Libraries, and in particular the Sloane Art Library, to access these materials: in total 42 of 66 responders answered they turn to the library for these items. While my initial perceptions were unclear about student artists using the library to find items, this survey of students confirms that they do indeed use the resources available to them.

Turning the discussion to the library session, it is again encouraging to discover such a large majority of students surveyed have participated in a library session as part of a studio art course: 42 of 66 total responders answered affirmatively when asked. This suggests that not only do professors in the art department at UNC-CH recognize the importance of incorporating learned research skills into their classes, they recognize the importance of performing research as a way to inform one’s creative practice. This is a finding echoed in Zanin-Yost and Tapley; instructors cannot just assume students know how to do research for their artwork or are aware of best practices. These are learned
skills that can be taught and reinforced in working with a librarian during a library session.

From these library sessions, the elements found most helpful by all students surveyed were the introduction to the library’s website, various library resources and services, and how to effectively search for resources. This echoes Mayer’s findings, where art-related databases (83%) and searching techniques and concepts (65%) were two of the more common concepts taught during an instruction session. Those concepts that were less common in Mayer’s research, including legal and ethical issues, visual literacy and professional-related competencies, did not appear at all in this survey’s set of responses.

Librarians pulling related books for a specific class to browse and look through during an information session and gain inspiration for an assigned project was also believed to be helpful. Wilson and McCarthy advocate for librarians to think outside of the box when it comes to planning library instruction for art students. While pulling books is not as out-of-the-box as the example they offer of students drawing their idea of performing research, I cannot think of another academic discipline where librarians approach instruction in this manner. This act also echoes the earlier studies of Toyne, Pacey, and Frank, where the authors comment on the student-artist’s need to browse materials for inspiration.

Lastly, graduate and undergraduate students offered several plausible suggestions as to how the library could improve its services, including the library session, for students enrolled in studio art courses at all levels. One graduate offered the idea of “a vetted aggregator of artistic opportunities- residencies, calls, proposals, openings/positions.”
This idea almost exactly reiterates the concern of a graduate student at Yale in Bennett’s article. In the upper levels of higher education, students are looking for more practical information, such as available artistic opportunities, and it is within the scope of the library to at least inform students how to locate these opportunities. Perhaps the library could cooperate with University Career Services at UNC-CH or other campus resources to make this a possibility.

Several undergraduates commented on the idea of actually having a library session for their studio art class, with one student going as far to say that it should be required in the instance of an introductory course. This seems quite extraordinary for students to recognize how the library session could be useful to them as students in a course with a creative emphasis. Both Bennett and Zanin-Yost & Tapley write about the benefit of incorporating the librarian and an instruction session into the context of a studio art course. Again, instructors cannot just assume that their students will know how to do research, especially considering the artistic focus of these courses. Many of the undergraduate students enrolled in these classes are not actually studio art majors and simply use the classes to fulfill the general education requirements as established by the University. In having a librarian involved, students would gain knowledge in not only how to effectively conduct research, but how to conduct research that would inform their artistic practice.
Conclusion

Simply stated, students taking studio art classes at the university-level have unique information needs. In looking holistically at both the published literature and the findings of this survey, it can be daunting to any librarian to not only anticipate those needs in building a collection of resources that will serve their population well, but then also deliver helpful instruction on how to conduct effective research using those same resources, some of which may be very non-traditional in nature.

The survey conducted for this study reached only a small segment of the student population to be served, that population being all students enrolled in studio art courses at universities across the country. While it is not meant to be a generalizable survey, I believe it gives an accurate snapshot of how students enrolled in studio art courses conduct research for their artistic assignments, as well as how they feel the library session has or has not been able to contribute to that. In learning about what kinds of information students seek and how they seek it, which in this case is a wide variety of information coming through many different media, it is hoped that the library will be better able to meet their student needs through the collections they offer and library sessions tailored to the creative needs of studio art students.
References


Appendix A: Survey for Studio Art Students

1. Please indicate your student status: UNDERGRADUATE GRADUATE

2. What kinds of materials do you use to gain inspiration and conduct research for your own artworks? Please list any and all materials.

3. Do you use the UNC Libraries to locate/access these materials? YES NO

4. During your time at UNC, have you participated in a library session as part of a studio art course? YES NO

5. Was there a specific assignment you were working on when your studio class had a library session? YES NO

6. Did you find this session valuable in helping you complete research? YES NO

7. If so, how did you find this session valuable? What sorts of things were covered by the librarian that you were able to use in your own research, either generally or for the assignment being completed?

8. If not, what did you think were faults with the library session?

9. Are there other ways you feel the library and/or the library session can better serve your general information needs as students and artists? For example, are there other kinds of resources you would find beneficial or other ways of delivering information to you?

10. Are there any other comments you wish to share?