

Falvey Memorial Library
Results of Two Faculty Focus Groups conducted by OPIR
March 2010

Background and Purpose of Study

In November 2009, the Office of Planning and Institutional Research (OPIR) was requested by Falvey Library to conduct a focus group to mine further the results of a May 2009 survey of faculty opinions about Falvey. Despite being satisfied with the survey's response rate, the Falvey staff felt that a focus group would provide greater contextual and detailed information regarding the faculty's perception of the Library's services.

Methodology

Falvey Library staff scheduled two focus group sessions in March 2010. Faculty members who had previously completed the May 2009 survey were invited to participate via multiple emails. With a target of approximately 10 to 12 faculty per group, initial interest was fairly high, but ultimately dwindled primarily due to teaching schedule conflicts. The first focus group session, held Tuesday, March 9 at 3:00 pm, had five faculty participants. The second session, held Wednesday, March 10 at 3:30 pm, was better attended with nine participants. Overall, three of the four undergraduate colleges were represented (Arts and Sciences, Business, and Nursing). To begin each session, Joe Lucia, University Librarian and Director of Falvey Memorial Library, along with Jutta Seibert, Coordinator for Academic Integration, welcomed the participants and thanked them for their attendance. Joe and Jutta then left the room and did not observe the sessions.

Standard focus group processes were utilized. Two facilitators employed an interview protocol developed by Falvey Memorial Library and OPIR (see Appendix A). The facilitators were John M. Kelley, Ph.D., OPIR Executive Director and Stephen A. Sheridan, Jr., MPA, Assistant Director for Institutional Research. Focus group participants were ensured confidentiality in that none of their comments would be attached to individuals. Though scheduled for 75 minutes, both sessions went longer as the participants had much to offer on several of the focus group questions and were fully engaged in the conversations.

The results that follow represent the opinions, perspectives, and experiences of the faculty members. During the focus group sessions, items of consensus emerged among the faculty, as well as points of divergence, which are highlighted in the next two sections. Please keep in mind that due to the small sample size of the faculty, from within the colleges and across the University as a whole, the results of the focus groups should not be used to generalize about faculty opinion.

Points of Consensus

Student Research Practices: Questions 1, 2, and 4 on the Protocol all refer to the research practices of students, though each addresses the topic from a different perspective. Regardless of how this theme was broached, the faculty agreed that students are lacking in their knowledge of how to go about conducting a research assignment.

Q1: Tell us your perspective to this quote. QUOTE: “The Google generation is more frequently using free, unevaluated web sources and fewer professional journal articles for research assignments.”

Question 1 specifically addressed the usage of Google and other free, unevaluated resources for research purposes. The faculty acknowledged that Google is a good, convenient place to start, a “giant oasis” of information, and considerably faster than digging through the Falvey Library website. That said, “Google is the path of least resistance versus going through the trouble of looking up scholarly articles.” The faculty preferred their students use the Falvey website, but find that undergraduates do not know how to conduct research using scholarly journals, nor do they understand how to exactly access or use the Falvey website materials. Several participants explained that they dedicate considerable class time to introducing the research capabilities of the Library through visits and orientations led by reference librarians. Further, some bring graduate students in for the same training because even at that level, students are not immune to bad research habits. Regardless of the time spent on training, however, faculty members are disheartened that students will still turn to Google or Wikipedia, leading one participant to exclaim, “If it is not on Google, it does not exist!” Another faculty member expanded upon this notion, “The younger generation is being exposed to fast, electronic sources. Some are specious. They get weak information and uncritically embrace it. These are unwholesome intellectual experiences. Students do not deliberate and patiently reflect upon material.”

Q2: Think back to the last research assignments you graded. What impressed you most about your students’ research sources? Was anything particularly frustrating?

Question 2 requested the participants to explain what impressed them most about students’ research sources, as well as what was particularly frustrating. The one disappointment repeated over and over again was the students’ reluctance to use books as a resource. This problem is not restricted to undergraduates, as graduate students also tend to avoid books. It is important to note here that their issue is not Google/Wikipedia versus academic resources, but rather the use of an actual book as opposed to journal articles and other scholarly resources. Even when books are put on reserve, they are very rarely asked for, sometimes even ignored all together. There was little doubt about the deep love of books expressed by the faculty, “Leafing through pages of a book has something valuable about it that you don’t find on line.” More than a few explained that one of the greatest benefits of a library is going into the stacks to find a book only to discover another book on the same topic that the researcher did not know existed. One professor referred to this as “experiencing the trail” of research. Students oftentimes list the book as a reference without ever delving into it in a deeper, more extended way. Electronic references were deemed fine up to a point, but faculty say it is distressing to review term papers where every single reference is electronic. “We’re ending up with shallow thinkers.” Another point of

frustration for the participants is inconsistent or poor citation, “They don’t understand intellectual ownership.” Finally, the faculty members found that undergrads do not discriminate between refereed journals and popular journals/press articles, underscoring that students need to have a better understanding between quality research and statements of opinion.

In regards to what impressed the participants about the resources their classes used, there were not enough responses to glean a clear points of consensus or divergence. A few professors did note that they are most pleased when students use a bevy of sources, including primary and secondary, or if they pursue resources beyond what is electronically or physically located at Falvey Library.

Q4: I teach in the Master of Public Administration program. When I assign a research project, I approve the topic but leave students to their own devices in selecting sources. Do you do this with your undergraduate students or do you direct students to specific Falvey Library resources such as a specific section the Library website, the research desk, etc?

For Question 4, the conversation turned toward whether or not the faculty members direct their classes toward specific resources for research material, and if so, where do they direct the students to go. Overwhelmingly, the participants direct their classes to visit Falvey Library through the web and in person. Some of the faculty felt that the Falvey website has “too many clicks” to get to subject guides/journals; thus, students will still turn to fast and easy resources. Several participants directed their students to specific library areas and/or to research librarians and databases. Additionally, professors spoke of setting up hyperlinks in emails and syllabi to take students directly to preferred resources for research.

The participants were very forthcoming with ideas on how to deter undesirable research practices. These ranged from offering extra credit for using approved sources to the straightforward requirement to use refereed journals. Others require up to three drafts of a research assignment, with one instance of the professor having to approve the bibliography ahead of time.

The faculty members also offered some suggestions for the Falvey Library staff to consider:

- Whittle down core databases so that users can reach information within one or two clicks; thus, increasing ease and accessibility.
- Provide a classroom environment where the entire class can physically see, touch, and review materials.
- Be sure that student-led Campus tours for prospective students focus on the academic dimensions of the Library. “There is a real problem with the Blue Key student guides. For example, I heard a guy say ‘I haven’t been in the library once this semester’ and then went on to stress Falvey as great place for computer use, coffee, and a reading room. Who’s training the student guides?”

Remote Storage: When presented with the potential implementation of remote storage, as outlined in Question 6, none of the faculty bought into the notion, whole cloth.

Q6: Please take a few minutes and read the passage on the card being passed around.

Falvey Library is strongly committed to its book collection, but the current size of its print collection leaves very little room for necessary improvements requested by faculty and students. The Library has received numerous requests for additional areas that allow for a comfortable reading and studying environment, study carrels for graduate students, and better event space. Falvey is currently exploring the option of using Garey Hall as a remote storage site for little-used, pre-1970 imprints. Any book in remote storage will be available by request, either through the online catalog or in person, and available within 24 hours of the request.

What are your feelings about remote storage?

To a person, participants preferred accessible materials, even if it meant having to use out-of-the-way areas, such as “five floors up in a claustrophobic, dark room in old Falvey.” One faculty member was “completely opposed” to the idea, contending that remote storage defies open-ended research, e.g., going to the stacks for a book and right next to it are a half dozen other very pertinent books. Others agreed, recollecting their own experiences wandering the shelves and discovering new books in this manner.

One viewed remote storage as a symbol of greater issues facing Falvey Library. The following quote was met with universal agreement:

“There is a more basic issue, namely, the future of Villanova and its aspirations. We really have to be extravagant in our library. It is the heart of a great University. Here it seems to be an afterthought. We share the lecture space with the coffee room and the clatter of muffins. It’s embarrassing if we bring in outside speakers. There should be a really serious commitment if we are to be a first rate institution. We simply can’t have speakers in a café.”

Some faculty took issue with the logistics of how the Library would select the books/documents to be stored off-site. One group member said that it would be a question of instructional materials versus research materials, with the former requiring immediate access. Others felt the phrases “little-used” and “pre-1970” may not be the ideal method to distinguish which materials are sent to remote storage. “There are a lot of works that are critical to research but are not frequently used.” Another participant explained that what gets stored off-site might best be guided by the needs of a specific discipline. For example, the classics and humanities might be interested in pre-1970 or older resources. A blanket policy may therefore not be appropriate. Interestingly, a professor offered that in some disciplines, such as mathematics and the sciences, practically all research is done through using journals, not books. Therefore, Falvey might assess whether some subjects lend themselves better to remote storage than others do.

Some participants said that if the Library had no choice in the matter, it might consider systems to help researchers become aware of what is not retained in the library. For example, “...a list

right on the shelf, either hanging there or electronically, to make us aware of related works that are in remote storage.” Other faculty members were firm that if there was a remote storage area, it must be accessible and visible for researchers to browse, perhaps delineating an entire discipline in Garey Hall as satellite library.

Nevertheless, all agreed that the Library should consider all other options before moving to remote storage. Such might include compact shelving, restoring Old Falvey (even though such a project could be prohibitively expensive), or expanding the idea of multiple satellite libraries across the campus, decentralized by discipline.

Librarians Are Partners: Due to the different twists and turns of the two conversations, Question 3 only made it into the first focus group. However, there was universal praise about how helpful the reference librarians are in many facets of the education process.

Q3: In what ways do you see librarians as partners in the education process?

One faculty member felt that some colleagues do not realize that the reference librarians are often expert in their fields and not “just librarians.” All agreed, “Our librarians know so, so much and have so, so much to offer. They are very educated. Many possess the expertise in the academic field with which they work.”

The group had some suggestions that might greater enhance the collaboration between the faculty and the reference librarians:

- Participants would prefer even more communication about library offerings, while recognizing that the Library is really doing “much more in the communication area” than in the past.
- It was noted that some reference librarians visit academic departments once, or even twice a year, and that it “is a wonderful experience for us to learn about the library.” However, others noted that this does not take place in their departments and would love to see it happen.
- The participants believe that Falvey Library could act as a locus of intersection among related academic fields, especially within the College of Arts and Sciences, in an effort for the faculty to better collaborate with each other and with the Library. An example would be for departments to team up for a lecture series instead of having two separate series about the same topic.

Points of Divergence

More Room for Faculty: In the first focus group, one theme that emerged was a need for more research space for faculty. These opinions permeated the discussion about remote storage. More than one participant iterated that Falvey Library has developed a “student-first climate” in recent years. To counterbalance this, the participants called for designated faculty areas for reading, research, and scholarly interaction among themselves. More specifically, professors desired faculty carrels, more viewing areas (with additional multi-regional DVD players), and

conference space that was void of “kitchen chatter” that overtakes the current presentation space within Holy Grounds at Falvey Library.

Conversely, the second focus group felt the atmosphere was fine for faculty. While the group concurred that the addition of faculty carrels would be nice, they noted that such space had been historically available in Falvey Library but went largely unused. It was eventually replaced by more pressing initiatives. In addition to working in the Library, this group was content to conduct their research in various places, such as their home and/or Villanova offices, their local libraries, and in the field. However, this second group joined the first group in articulating a pressing need for additional lecture/presentation space. “We need a spot where we can go and enjoy each others scholarship,” explained one participant, “I love what Falvey has been trying to do with lectures, but not with all the chatter, dropped muffins, students yakking and getting coffee.”

Responding to Budgetary Pressure: Perhaps the most interesting development between the two focus groups was their responses to Question 7, which asked the faculty to speak on budget pressures realized by Falvey Library.

Q7: Libraries are experiencing budgetary pressures, resulting most notably from the steep rise in scholarly journal subscriptions. How do you think we should respond to this pressing issue?

The professors in the first group resented that Falvey is facing tight operational budget constraints:

- “This is not a budgetary issue, it is a strategic issue. Reallocating budget to support strategy shouldn’t even be a question.”
- “Treating it as a budget issue is bogus. Budget follows strategy and priorities. This is not a line item, it is a vision.”
- “Conceptualize within a strategy – not a budget issue. If we want to be the Harvard of the Catholic world this is one way to do it. A distinctive library!”

These were just a few of the emphatic opinions voiced by the participants. Among the others was a disappointment that Villanova can raise money to build a great basketball program and training facility, but not a world-class library. One professor pointed to the University’s increasing emphasis on faculty scholarship as a foundation for an argument for more funding for the Library – faculty scholarship calls for faculty to go beyond the classroom to bring new knowledge to students. “A great university is not just great teaching in the classroom but the generation of knowledge – the library is a critical part of that.” Another felt that a library should be used as a branding tool to recruit high quality students. The participants were put off by the seemingly “Disney World” mentality toward making Falvey a comfortable place for students, not necessarily a place for higher learning. They saw the Library’s hours of operation as a symbol of this, noting that Falvey reduces hours or closes when students are not on campus. Regardless, the group felt that they needed more information about the budget process before they could make specific suggestions on how to alleviate constraints.

The second group was less passionate about the budgetary pressures affecting Falvey. They were more concerned about the possibility of losing online databases and e-journals. These faculty members were pleased with all of the electronic services the Library offers. They use them frequently and pointed to their value to distance learning. One professor preferred the ability to access or purchase individual articles, via Falvey, over paying for a journal subscription. While some participants admitted having trouble accessing these materials off campus, this seemed to be a sporadic occurrence. Some professors expressed interest in expanding the database to include foreign language journals.

One faculty member acknowledged the fiscal pressures, highlighting that “math and science journals are more expensive than those in history and humanities are – how is Falvey to choose which are more important to invest in?” The faculty agreed that the electronically managed databases and journals are expensive, but they would still like to see as many as possible.

I Wish Falvey Had: In the discussions that followed Questions 5 and 8, almost every participant had her or his own idea(s) for improvements the Library should investigate. Some ranged outside the main focus of the groups, and these are listed in Appendix B.

Q5: Whether at another library, a conference, or even something you read about or saw on television, what have you experienced that you wish was available in Falvey?

Q8: For the last question, let's open it up -- is there anything else you'd like to tell us about Falvey? Any additional recommendations?

Some proposals repeated thoughts already highlighted in the previous sections:

- Access to even more journals to lessen the need for interlibrary loan
- Better conference space for lecturers
- Too much of a student climate, more faculty presence needed for balance
- Further inspire faculty scholarship by providing more research space
- Falvey Library should be a symbol of excellence in education and research

One professor wished that Falvey could either invest in or subsidize electronic and/or physical access to neighboring “research intensive” institutions, such as the University of Pennsylvania and/or Princeton (it was noted by a member of the discussion that this might already be available to the faculty). Another professor reasoned, “There are so many colleges in the area that collaboration or a cooperative might be a way to multiply resources (including electronic access to databases and journals) at little cost.”

There was also curiosity and discussion surrounding Falvey's current use of e-books and Kindle. Will such technology be indoctrinated to the Library's growing myriad of resources? If so, then how?

Faculty members in the focus groups voiced a need for better communication of what resources Falvey Library has and what is new or forthcoming, especially in regards to databases and e-journal subscriptions. Some faculty thought a master list would be helpful. Along the same line, there were a few faculty members who thought the Library could do a better job advertising/outlining "who does what" at the library. They noted that they always get the help they need, but it might not be coming from the appropriate person.

Finally, there were multiple calls for the reference librarians to have larger and more visible office space within the colleges, much like in the College of Nursing.

Summary Findings

Many different ideas, perceptions, and viewpoints were mentioned, with the following having the most points of consensus:

1. The faculty agreed that a considerable number of students lack a proper understanding of research skills, including the citation and utilization of scholarly resources.
2. Graduate and undergraduate students alike are not fully using the resources offered by Falvey Library when completing research assignments.
3. The faculty is not in favor of remote storage in general, and questioned several factors specifically presented in Question 6.
4. Falvey Library needs to provide lecture/presentation space that is separate from the distractions caused by holding such events in a coffee shop.

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Falvey Library Faculty Focus Group Protocol

Duration: 75 minutes

Material Checklist:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Name tents, markers | <input type="checkbox"/> Napkins, Cups, Paper Plates |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pads, pens | <input type="checkbox"/> List refreshments |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Giant pad on easel | <input type="checkbox"/> Drinks: juice, soda, water |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Library gift | <input type="checkbox"/> Ice |

<Is quote on giant pad covered?>

<Are quote cards available?>

<Joe and/or Jutta welcome the focus group, introduce John and Steve, exit>

<John>

Good afternoon and welcome to each of you. Thank you for taking the time this afternoon to join our Falvey Library Faculty Focus Group.

You were invited, first, because you are all Villanova University faculty, and second, because of your affiliation with one of the four colleges.

<Steve>

Before we begin, let me assure you that anything and everything you say is strictly confidential. You will never be identified in any report nor will your comments be identified with your name in any discussion with the Falvey Library. However, quotes may be used in a report, but never with names or identifying information.

Please note that confidentiality is not only requested of the Villanova team working on the final report, but by all of us, too. Please do not discuss or reveal anything said here, this afternoon.

If you want to follow up on something someone has said, whether you want to agree, or disagree, or give an example, please do so. Don't feel like you have to respond to us all the time. Feel welcome to have a conversation with each other about these questions. There is no right or wrong answer to any of them.

<John>

Finally, as a thank you for joining us here this afternoon, the library has given each of you a little present. Please be sure you pick it up as you leave the room.

Any questions?

Let's begin. Let's find out more about each other by going around the room one at a time. Tell us your name, which Villanova college you are with, and share with us a "library moment" you have had in your life. The memory can be from any library anywhere, at anytime.

<Reveal quote on giant paper pad easel>

1. Tell us your perspective to this quote. QUOTE: “The Google generation is more frequently using free, unevaluated web sources and fewer professional journal articles for research assignments.”
2. Think back to the last research assignments you graded. What impressed you most about your students’ research sources? Was anything particularly frustrating?
3. In what ways do you see librarians as partners in the education process?
4. I teach in the Master of Public Administration program. When I assign a research project, I approve the topic but leave students to their own devices in selecting sources. Do you do this with your undergraduate students or do you direct students to specific Falvey Library resources such as a specific section the Library website, the research desk, etc? *<Probe: To what sources do you tend to refer your students*

<Steve>

5. Whether at another library, a conference, or even something you read about or saw on television, what have you experienced that you wish was available in Falvey?
6. *Please take a few minutes and read the passage on the card being passed around.*

Falvey Library is strongly committed to its book collection, but the current size of its print collection leaves very little room for necessary improvements requested by faculty and students. The Library has received numerous requests for additional areas that allow for a comfortable reading and studying environment, study carrels for graduate students, and better event space. Falvey is currently exploring the option of using Garey Hall as a remote storage site for little-used, pre-1970 imprints. Any book in remote storage will be available by request, either through the online catalog or in person, and available within 24 hours of the request.

What are your feelings about remote storage?

7. *Libraries are experiencing budgetary pressures, resulting most notably from the steep rise in scholarly journal subscriptions. How do you think we should respond to this pressing issue?*
8. For the last question, let's open it up -- is there anything else you'd like to tell us about Falvey? Any additional recommendations?

<John closes discussion>

Appendix B: Miscellaneous Comments

- “Need clear education in gateway and how to use it. We can’t get access from home otherwise.”
- “When [my students] click on a certain link, she’s told that it costs \$30 – what’s that all about?”
- “I’d like a booklet, brochure, or pamphlet that explains basics about the library and what’s new. Also I don’t know who does what any more after library jobs were reorganized and titles changed. Who do you see to get certain help – like ordering films?”
- “A [professor] mentioned that she used to be able to get articles flagged in her research area via email, but now there are so many fire walls that she can’t do this and when she asks, she ends up being bounced between UNIT and Falvey.”
- “I hate the turnstiles [at the entrance]. They convey an atmosphere that is not user friendly. They discourage me from dropping by if I don’t have my wallet/Wildcard” – several agreed with this.
- “The website and catalog [are] not user friendly.” All participants in the second focus group unanimously agreed that the old website was better.
- “I can’t look up books if I don’t have a call number and oftentimes all computers are busy – Not very user friendly. Perhaps [the Library could] reserve computers on the first floor for ‘look up’ only?”