MEASURING LIBRARY GOODNESS

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Staff Training Day

October 8, 2007

What Makes a Good Library?

- Library "Goodness" **traditionally** defined internally:
  - Quality (Bigger was better)
  - Effectiveness
  - Efficiency
  - Economy
  - Equity
- **Now** focus on : **How much good does this library do?**
  - Impact and outcomes for customers
  - Value to customers and stakeholders

How Do We Measure Library Goodness?

- **Public Library Statistics reported to WSL**
  - Revenues and expenditures
  - Outlets, registered borrowers, staff
  - Collections/holdings
  - Circulation
  - Library programs (# programs, attendance)
  - Library service measures (hours, patron count, ref stats)
  - Computer use detail
  - Internet connectivity
  - Electronic services measures
  - Internet presence
- **However, these don't tell us the value to the user**

The Challenge for Libraries

- Traditional statistics don't define the 21st Century Library
  - Emphasize inputs, expenditures, acquisitions, holdings – how big and how much
  - Can no longer tell the library's story
  - May not be aligned with library/institutional goals and plans
  - Don't define and measure service quality
- Need metrics describing outcomes: success and value from the user's perspective
- The organizational culture and structure, tools, and skill set needed for libraries to acquire this information

The Role of Library Assessment

Library assessment provides a structured process to learn about our communities, their work and the libraries connection to what they do

The information acquired through library assessment is used in an iterative manner to improve library programs and services and make our libraries responsive to the needs of our communities.

Libraries do not exist in a vacuum but are part of a larger institution and community. Assessment may take place at the library level as well as at the broader community level.

Community Assessment and Public Libraries

- Identify communities served
- Know their characteristics
- Understand community library and information needs
- Relate to the goals and mission of the library and its parent institution

The Value of Community Assessment

- Know actual and potential customers
- Understand needs and use preferences
- Use funding and staff effectively
- "Competition"
- Community involvement
- Marketing and outreach
- Customer-centered and focused
- Measure, demonstrate, present the value of the library to the community

Assessment Allows Us to Understand <u>Diversity</u> in the <u>Community</u>

- Library and information needs and use may differ substantially by age, occupation, needs and culture

- Identifying and understanding these differences enables libraries to target and market services that add the most value for each group or area

- Multiple assessment methods, including both quantitative and qualitative data, can identify differences and provide the most comprehensive picture of these communities

Customer-Centered Library

- All services and activities are viewed through the eyes of the customers

- Customers determine quality

- Library services and resources add value to the customer

The Customer-Centered Library

- Focuses on customer information needs and services
- Customer is at the center of service & resource decisions
- Quality services and user satisfaction are goals shared by all library staff
- Personalized service that recognizes diverse user needs
- Operations organized to attain user-centered objectives
- Evaluation & assessment focused on customer outcomes
- **Decisions are based on data not assumptions ("assumicide")**

Assessing Market Penetration

- Who are our **current** customers?

- Why are they our customers?

- Will they continue to be our customers

- Who else should be our customers?
  - Identify underserved demographic groups/geographic areas
  - Identify services and programs that are important to them-

"Library" Users in the Networked World

(Adapted from Peter Brophy)

- Personal search replaces 'ask a librarian'
- Global search of the global library
  - Google, flickr, del.icio.us; PubMed; Google Scholar
  - If there's no response in 3 seconds, try elsewhere
    - *Then: Resources scarce, attention abundant*
    - *Now: Attention scarce, resources abundant* [Dempsey]
- 'Phone/text message a friend'
- Social networking services, wikis, blogs
- Where's the text? Discovery to <u>Delivery is one action.</u>
- Satisficing
  - *Then: what is the best source of authoritative information?*
  - *Now: which is the most readily accessible source of adequate information?*
- Those network tools <u>used</u> are embedded in workflow

What do all these have in common?

- The E word: **Embedding**
- 'Users' need library services which are embedded in their:
  - Workflows
  - Learnflows
  - Leisureflows
  - Lifeflows
- Emerging new/revised roles for the librarian

Supporting learning, research and life where they occur – and surfacing that support within the users' lifeflows

So Understanding Users is Critical

- Engage with the users' languages and their processes of learning, research, leisure and … life

- Learn what's important to them

- Because they may not come to you

If It Was Only This Easy!

Donning his new canine decoder, Professor Schwartzman becomes the first human being on Earth to hear what barking dogs are actually saying.

So How Do We Measure Performance?

"Sometimes I lie awake at night, and I ask, 'Where have I gone wrong?'

Then a voice says to me, 'This is going to take more than one night'."

Charles Schultz/Peanuts

What Will We Measure?

"What is easy to measure is not necessarily what is desirable to measure. It is always tempting to set goals based on the data that are gathered, rather than developing a data-gathering system linked to assessing progress towards meeting established goals."
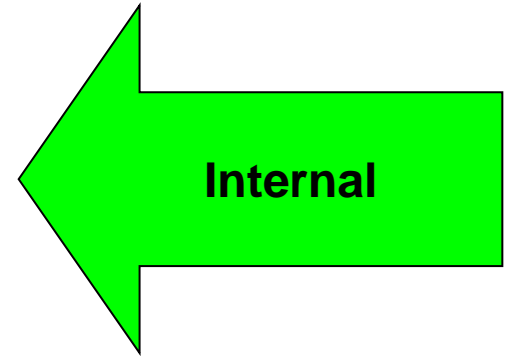
M. Kryllidou, "An overview of performance measures in higher education and libraries", 1998
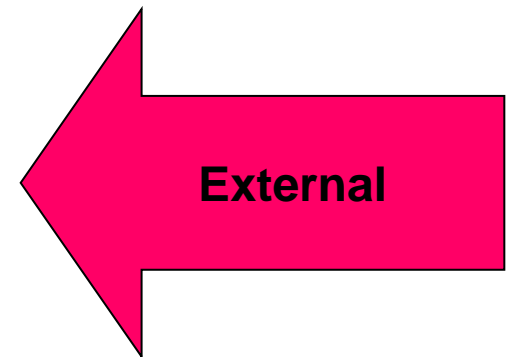
A More Skeptical View of Metrics

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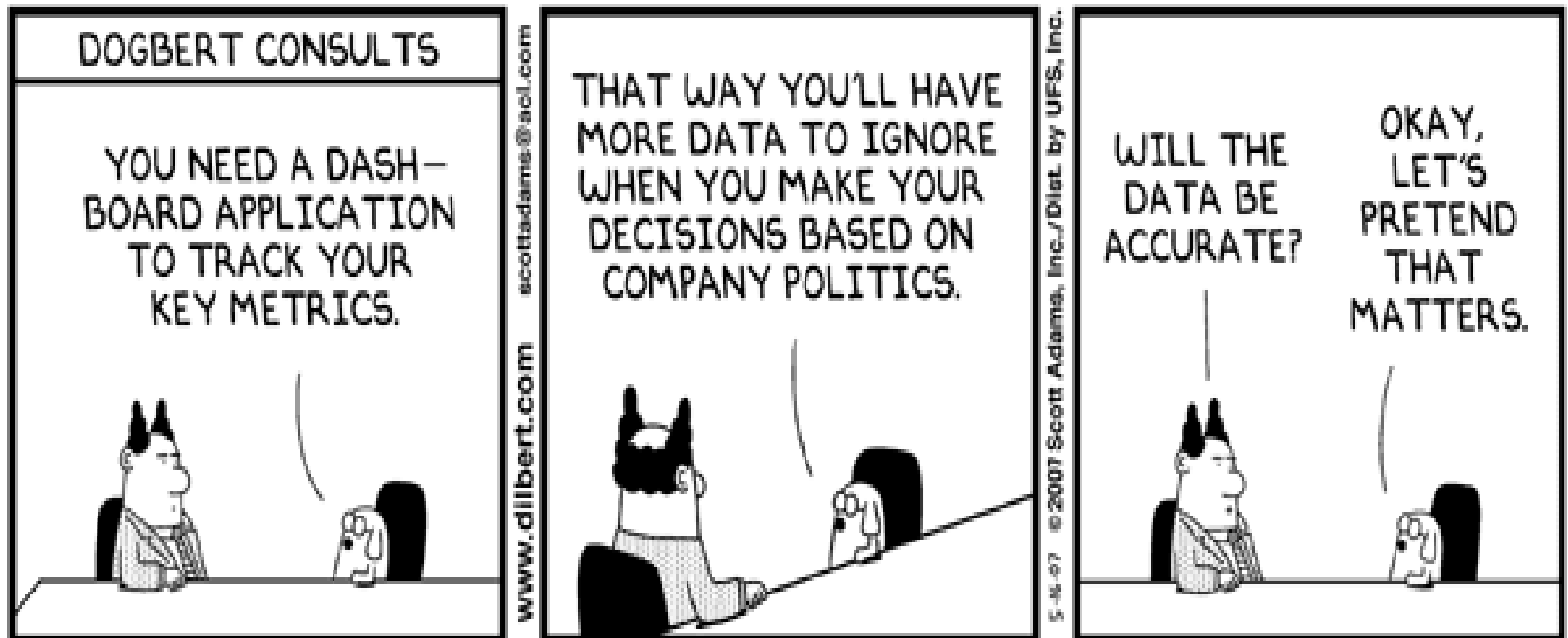
What kinds of methods?

- Observation
- Conversation
- Self-reflection
- Textual analysis

Internal

- Questionnaires
- Interviews
- Focus groups

External

Choosing the Assessment Method

- Is it appropriate?
- Is it timely?
- Is it cost effective?
- Who will conduct it?
- What expertise is needed?
- What is the degree of user involvement?
- How representative is the population?
- How will the results be used?

Assessment Methods: Using Existing Information

- Community data sources

- Reference staff observations

- Library use data

- Acquisition requests

- Interlibrary loan data

- Computer log data

Making Data Meaningful

- Summarize
- Compare
- Analyze
- Present
- Go below the surface to examine results by:
  - Demographic group
  - Users and non-users
  - Stakeholders vs non-stakeholders
- Compare current data with information from the past
- How can we use the data for action?
- Be wary of ratio's and comparing data between libraries

The Goal is Practical Assessment Results That Can Be Used!

- Keep it simple and focused – "less is more"
- Know when "good 'nuff" is good enough
- Focus on what is important to your customers and stakeholders
- Use assessment where it can add value to customers
- Present results so they are understandable and actionable
- Libraries are organized to act on results

Assessing Services

- High performing, heavily used services
  - Celebrate their success
- High performing, but underused services
  - Is marketing needed?
  - Is the service outmoded?
- Poorly performing services
  - Can they be fixed? Should they be discontinued?
- New services that are needed
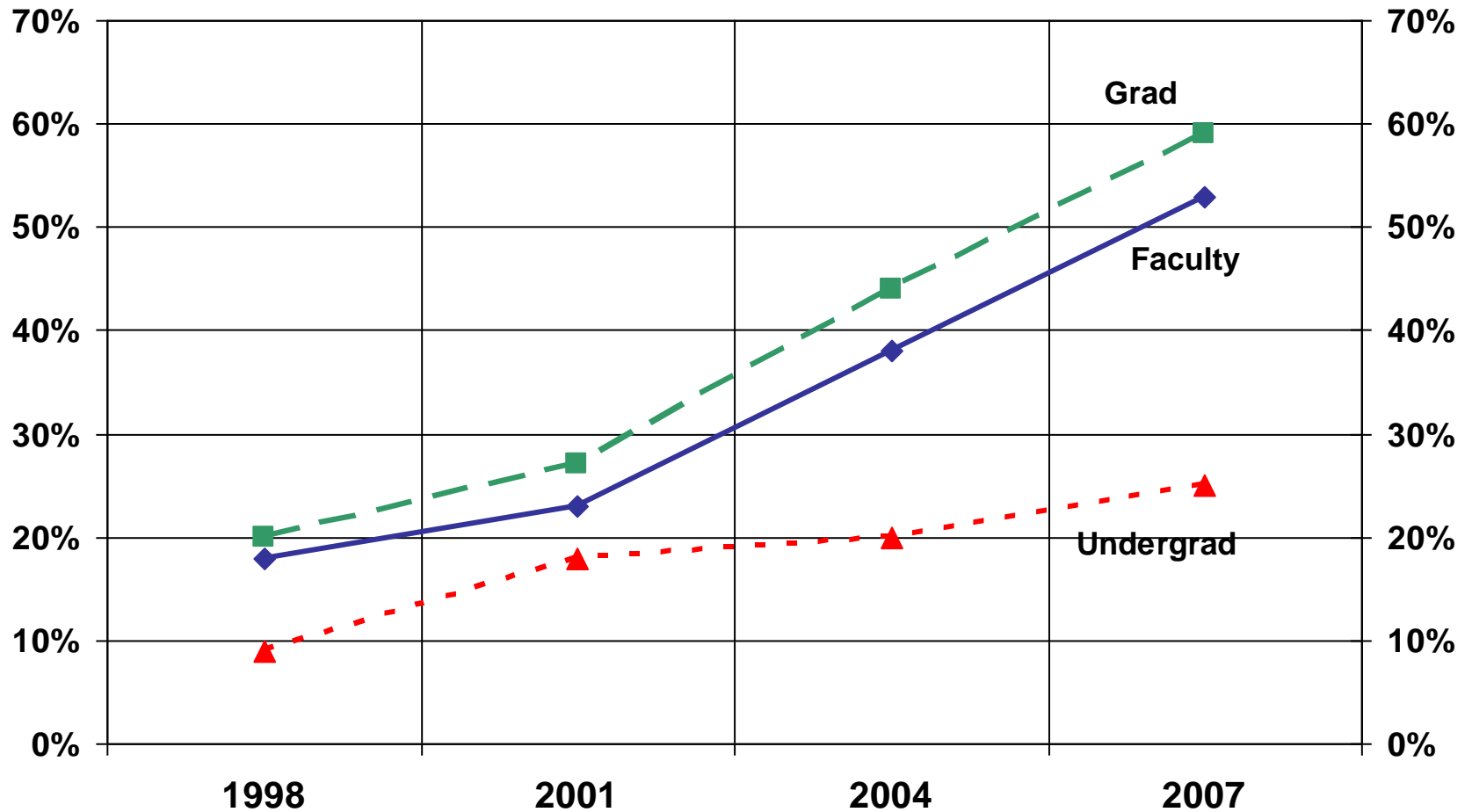
UW Libraries In-Person Reference Queries
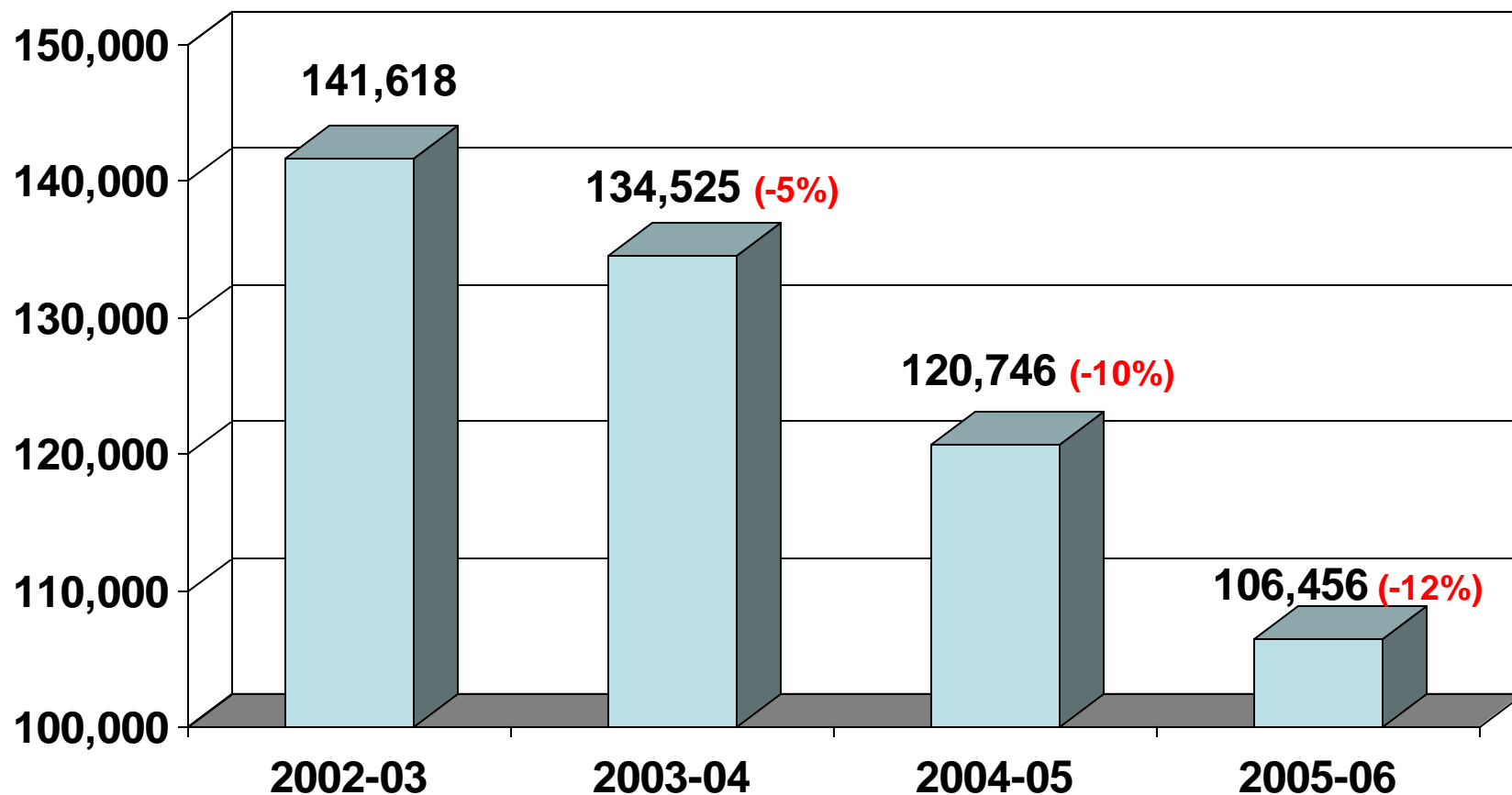
In-Person Visits 1998-2004
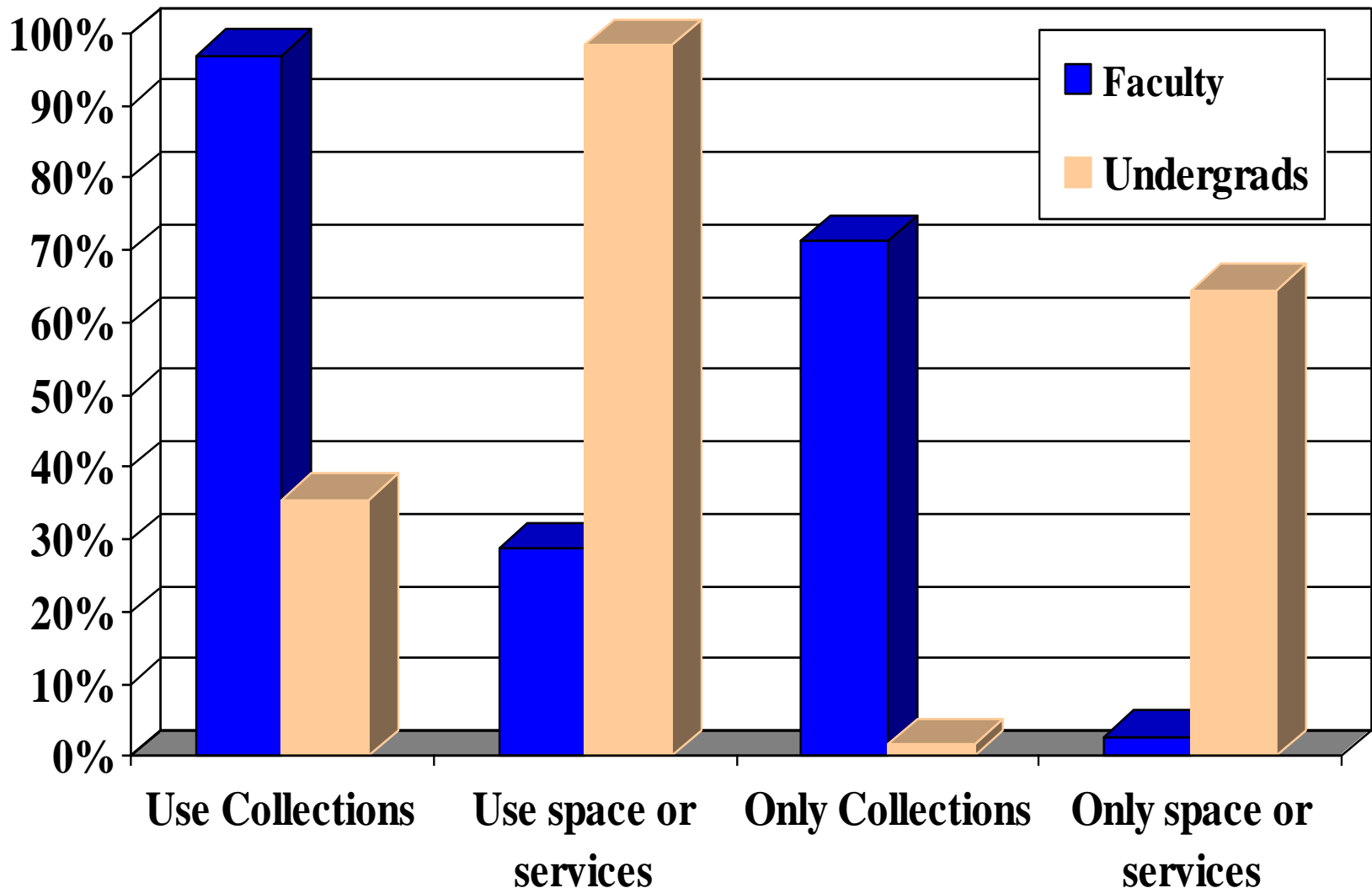(% UW faculty and studens using library at least weekly)
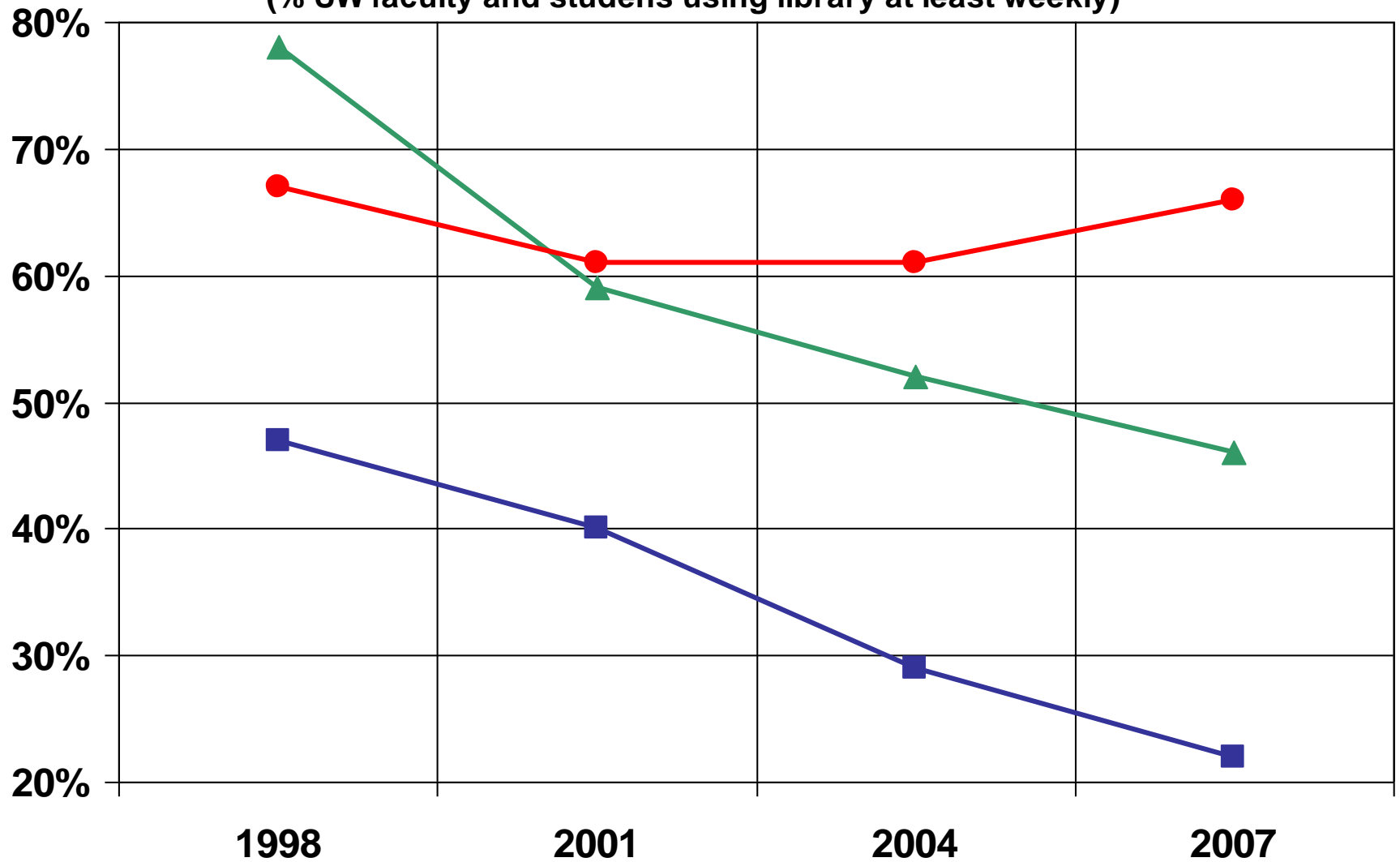
Off-Campus Remote Use 1998-2007

(Percentage using library services/collections at least 2x week)
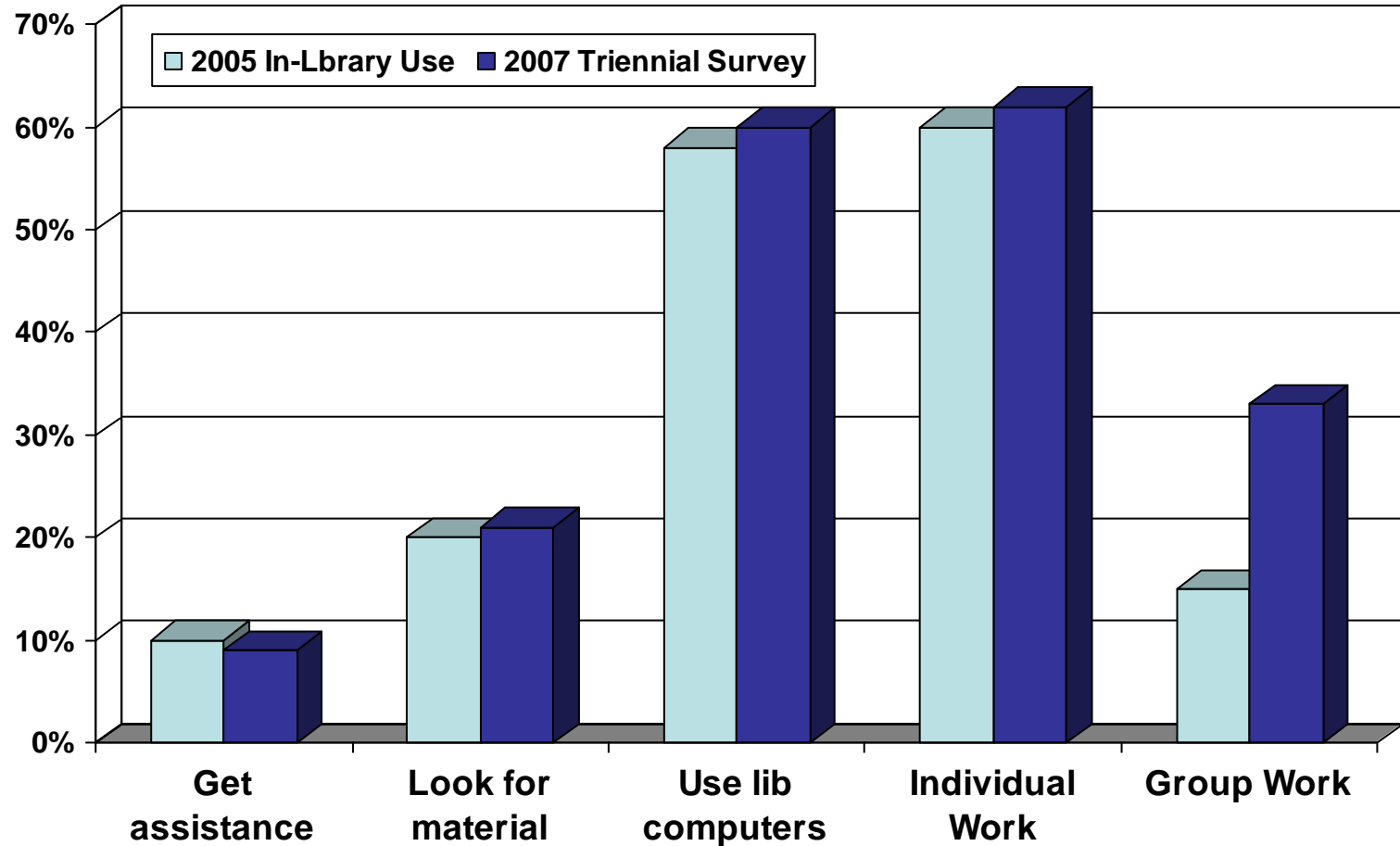
Reasons for In-Person Library Visits 2001
Faculty and Undergrads Visiting Weekly or More Often

Legend: Faculty, Undergrads

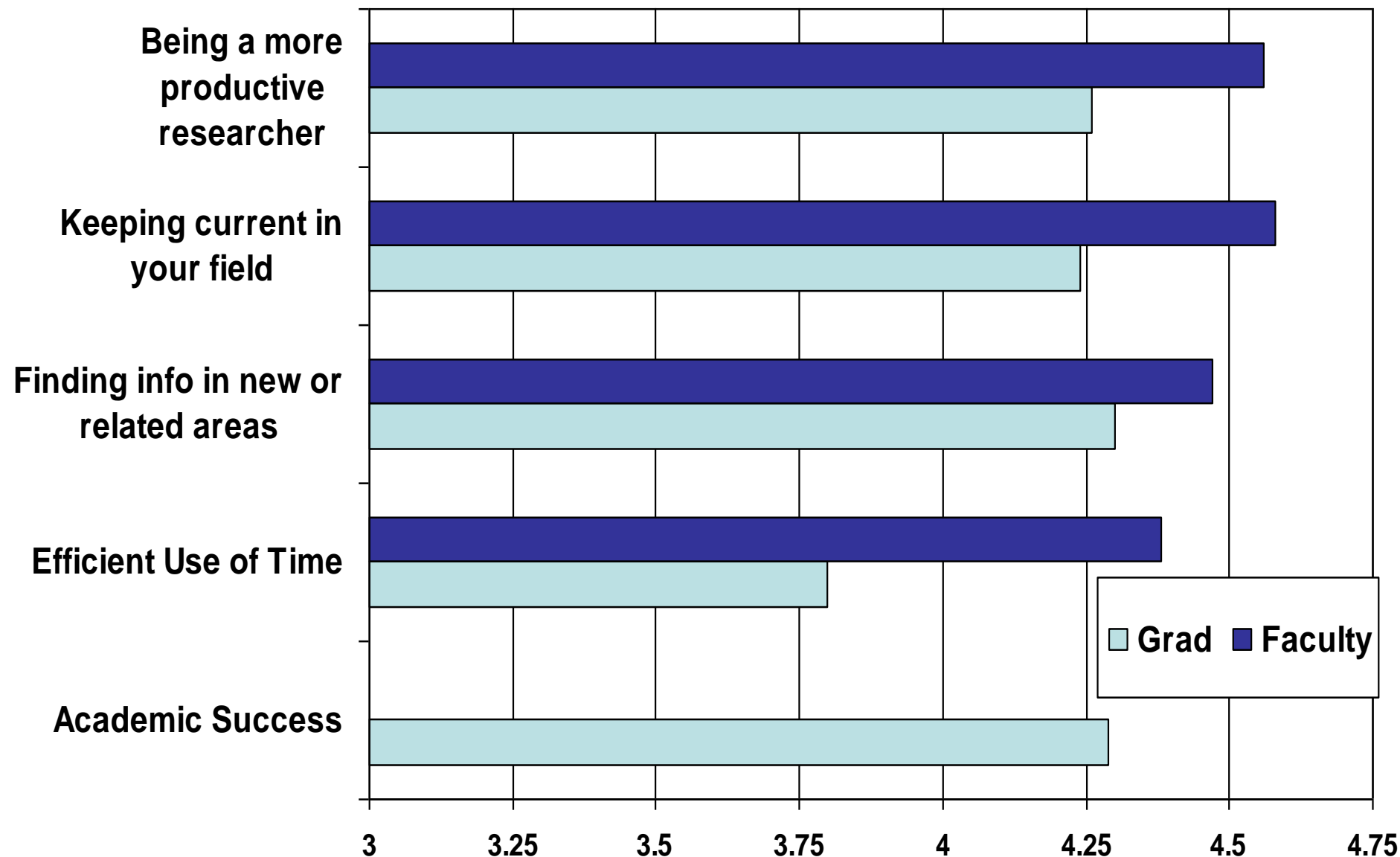Categories: Use Collections, Use space or services, Only Collections, Only space or services

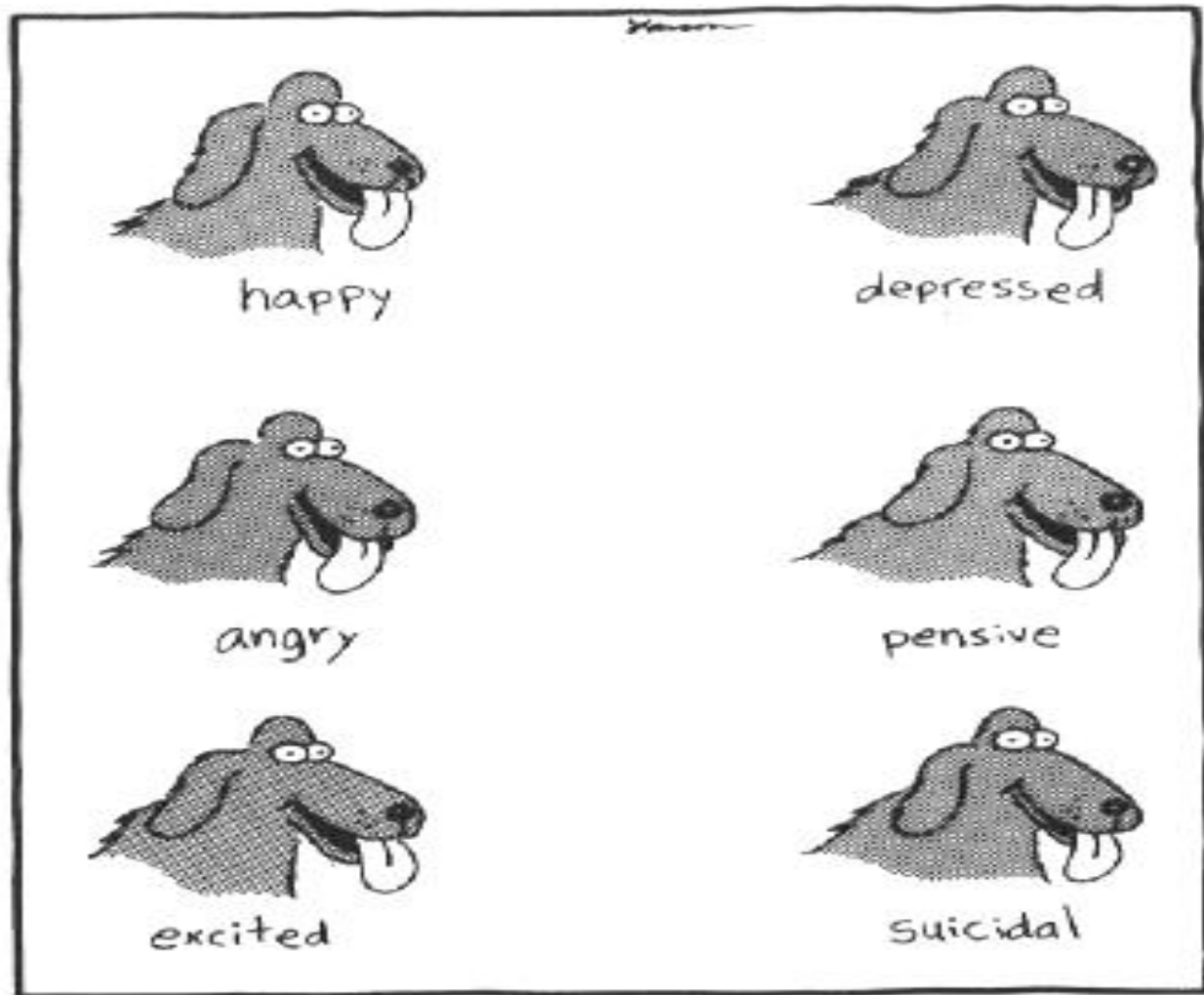# What Undergrads Do When They Visit Library

(Activity marked in 2005 In-Library Use Survey, at least weekly in 2007 Triennial Survey)

Libraries Contribution to: (Scale of 1 "Minor" to 5 "Major")

Horizontal bar chart comparing Grad (light blue) and Faculty (dark blue) ratings.

Category	Grad	Faculty
Being a more productive researcher	4.25	4.57
Keeping current in your field	4.23	4.58
Finding info in new or related areas	4.29	4.47
Efficient Use of Time	3.80	4.38
Academic Success	4.29	—

Legend: □ Grad ■ Faculty

X-axis: 3, 3.25, 3.5, 3.75, 4, 4.25, 4.5, 4.75

Sometimes The Data Isn't Revealing

How to recognize the moods of an Irish setter

The Qualitative Provides the Key

- Increasing use of such qualitative methods as, comments interviews, focus groups, usability, observation
- Statistics often can't tell us
  - Who, how, why
  - Value, impact, outcomes
- Qualitative provides information directly from users
  - Their language
  - Their issues
  - Their work
- Qualitative provides context and understanding

So Think Strategically About Library Futures and How to Measure Impact/Value

- What is the central work of the library and how can we do more, differently, and at less cost?

- What important services does the library provide that others can't?

- What advantages does the library possess?

- How is customer behavior changing?

- How do we add value to our customers work?

- What are the essential factors responsible for library success now and in the future?

- How do we demonstrate our value to stakeholders?

And If You Don't . . . .

Marketing

- Successful organizations use marketing to ensure customer satisfaction

- Products and services must meet customers' needs

- Libraries have not traditionally marketed their services

- Competition has made marketing a necessity.