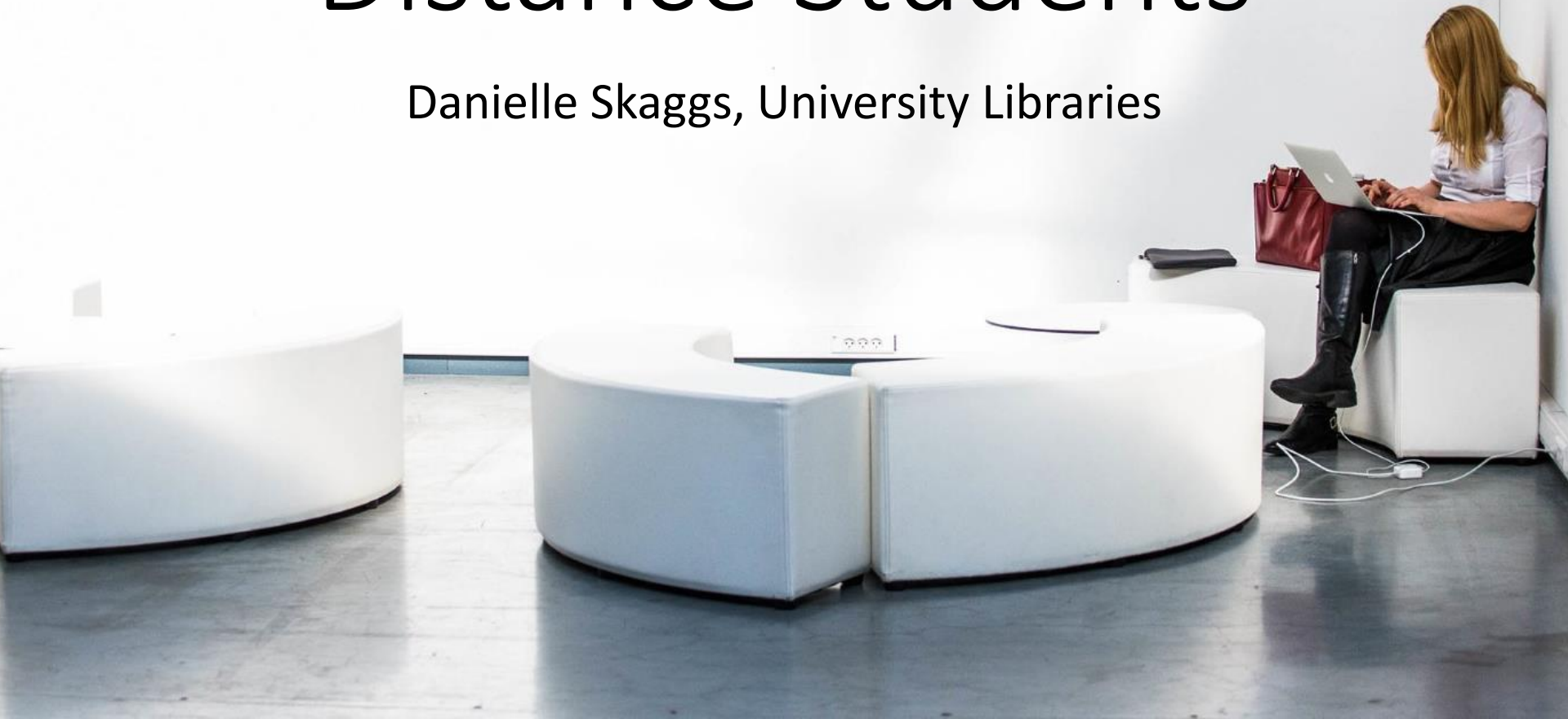


# The Research Process of Distance Students

Danielle Skaggs, University Libraries



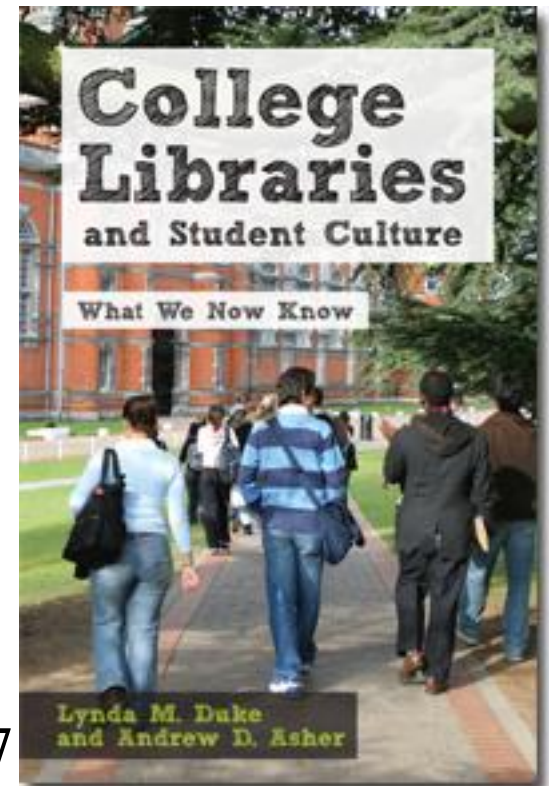
## Research Reports

"[Staying Smart: How Today's Graduates Continue to Learn Once They Complete College](#)," Alison J. Head, Project Information Literacy, Passage Studies Research Report, January 5, 2016. (Two different versions available: [Full report with appendices](#), 112 pages, PDF, 6.9 MB or [report without the appendices](#), 71 pages, PDF, 6.5 MB). An [open access survey dataset](#), including the survey instrument, frequency codebook, and user guide, is available through OpenICPSR. Infographic of report results is [available here](#).

"[Phase One: Trends from the Lifelong Learning Interviews with Recent Graduates](#)," Alison J. Head, Project Information Literacy, Progress Report for the Lifelong Learning Study, July 29, 2014, 6 pages, PDF, 130 KB.

"[Learning the Ropes: How Freshmen Conduct Course Research Once They Enter College](#)," Alison J. Head, Project Information Literacy, Passage Studies Research Report, December 4, 2013. (Two different versions available: [Text with appendix](#), 48 pages, PDF, 5.78 MB or [text without the appendix](#), 29 pages, PDF, 5.47 KB)

"[Learning Curve: How College Graduates Solve Information Problems Once They Join the Workplace](#)," Alison J. Head, Project Information Literacy, Passage Studies Research Report, October 15, 2012. (Two different versions available: [Text with appendix](#), 38 pages, PDF, 5.8 MB or [text without the appendix](#), 29 pages, PDF, 5.7 KB).



ERIAL Project, 2007

# Study Details

Replication of Head (2008) – primary researcher of PIL  
16 questions, plus demographics

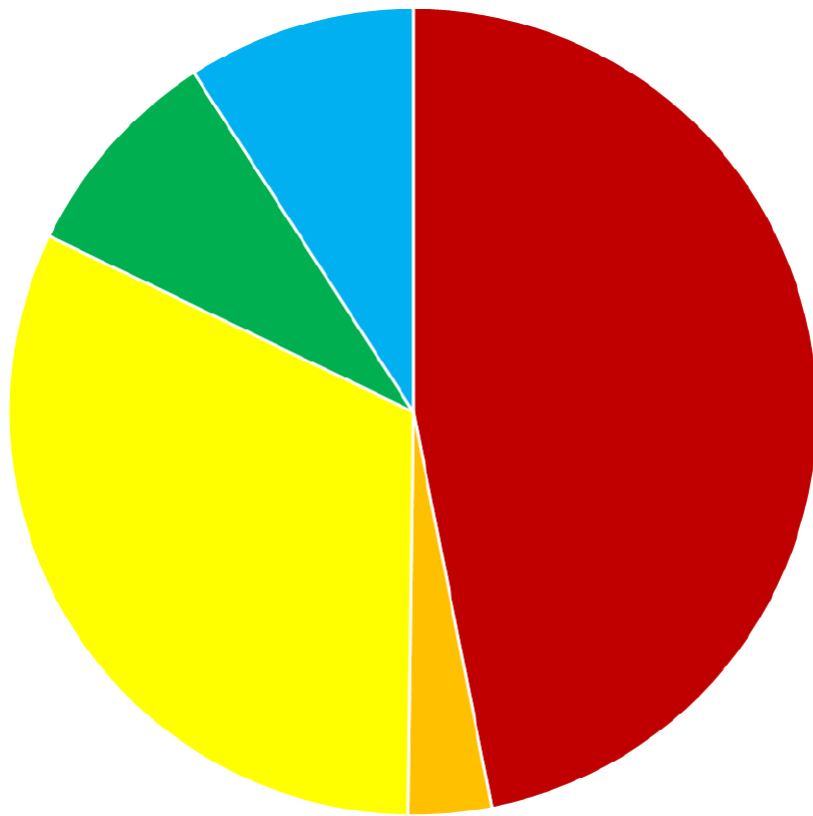
Sent to 1442 identified distance students  
241 responses (16.7% response rate)

20 telephone interviews






Conducted with funds from a University Research Fund grant

Head, A. J. (2008). Information Literacy from the Trenches: How Do Humanities and Social Science Majors Conduct Academic Research? *College & Research Libraries*, 69(5), 427–446.  
<https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.69.5.427>

# Demographics – Type and Gender



## Type of Distance Student

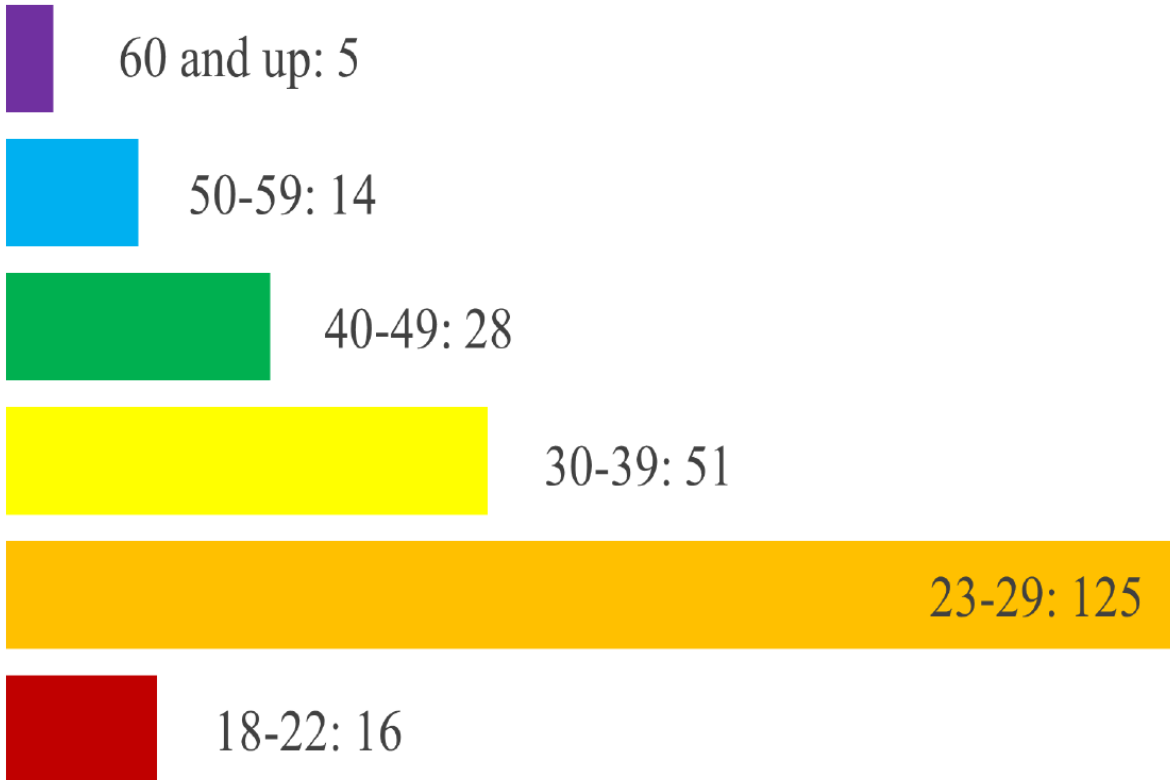
-  Distance Grad - 113
-  Distance Undergrad - 8
-  Grad Center Grad - 77
-  PHL Grad - 21
-  PHL Undergrad - 22

## Gender



# Demographics – Age, GPA

## Age



**75%** Master's, others split between undergraduate and doctoral

**76%** gpa of 4.3 or better

# Similarities



# Steps in Research

## **First step:**

- Use a textbook or other reading(s) from the class – 42.5%
- Use the library's online resources – 35.0%
- Use a search engine to find resources (e.g., Google, Yahoo!) – 15%

## **Second step:**

- Use a search engine to find resources – 29.7%
- Use the library's online resources – 26.4%
- Use a textbook or other reading(s) from the class – 25.5%

## **Third step:**

- Use a search engine to find resources – 23.2%
- Use a textbook or other reading(s) from the class – 18.2%
- Use the library's online resources – 16.5%
- Talk to the professor – 16.0%
- Use an online or print scholarly encyclopedia - 11.4%

# First steps – in interviews

Descriptor Matrix	Codes			
	Library	Google	Class reading	No resource mentioned
Buy a book(s) that has information I				
Consult a WCU reference librarian				
Other				1
Talk to the professor				
Use a search engine to find				
Use a textbook or class reading	2	2	1	1
Use an online or print scholarly	1			
Use an online "community"				
Use the online resources available	8	2		2



# Helpfulness of Library Resources

Online databases: 83.61%

Library instruction: 45.30%  
(47% neutral)

Reference librarians: 43.64%  
(49% neutral)

# Professors Help Me Do Better By...

52.7% Strongly Agree

Commenting on a draft, and letting me revise: 79.70%

Having separate deadlines for parts of the assignment: 65.00%

One-on-one coaching sessions:  
59.30%



Differences

# Types of Research Papers Assigned



Research Paper Type	Percentage
Case studies	32.49%
Literature reviews	27.00%
Theory papers	26.16%
Argument papers	5.91%
Thesis/dissertation/capstone	5.06%

Case studies: 32.49%

Literature reviews: 27.00%

Theory papers: 26.16%

Argument papers: 5.91%

Thesis/dissertation/capstone: 5.06%

In Head (2008): Argument: 30%; Literature reviews: 17%; Theory papers: 16%; Case studies & TDC: 10% each

# Time spent:

## Researching:

- Under an hour: 2.5%
- 1-2 hours: 21.0%
- 3-5 hours: 47.1%
- 6-9 hours: 13.0%
- > 9 hours: 16.4%

## Head (2008):

77% of students spent  
1-5 hours

## **Writing/editing:**

- Under an hour: 0.8%
- 1-2 hours: 8.4%
- 3-5 hours: 40.8%
- 6-9 hours: 26.6%
- > 9 hours: 24.4%

## Head (2008):

72% of students spent  
1-5 hours

# Problems During Research

1. Figuring out what each professor wants (72.3%)
2. Overcoming procrastination (65.1%)
3. Not enough info from professor to begin (64.7%)
4. Narrowing down a topic (64.6%)
5. Feeling overwhelmed by information (50.9%)
6. Overcoming anxiety about the research process (41.6%)
7. Having to write the actual paper (40.5%)
8. Trying to find resources on the library website (34.9%)

Head (2008): Overcoming procrastination (77%), feeling overwhelmed by info (60%), narrowing down a topic (59%)

# What if no full text is available?

“I usually just skip it. I get angry and then I move on.”

- 6 of 20 students skip it if there's no full text available
- 4 of 20 contact library or use ILL

# Takeaways

- Use Project Information Literacy
- Research Assignment Directions – more is more
- Library marketing + UX
- Observational studies > surveys, interviews