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### The Humanities Scholar and the Library

A review of selected humanities literature shows how humanists seek information, their research needs and how libraries can best meet those needs, the types of information humanists use, and current issues facing humanities scholars in terms of technology and economic factors. This paper is a summary of information gleaned from the literature.

Humanists have unique information seeking behaviors that are concentrated around the nature of the materials they prefer and the materials that lend themselves to their current research topic. Research by Wiberley (1989), Allen (1993), and Barrett (2005) has found that humanists prefer primary source material found in archives, museums and special collections; and in terms of general library material, humanists prefer monographs over journals.

The humanities scholars are generally very familiar with the material in their field, using journals only to facilitate staying informed of recent publications via book reviews (Carr, 2005). Their knowledge is often supplemented by personal 'home' libraries and a close familiarity with card catalogs and more recent OPACs at libraries they frequent (Wiberley, 1989). This familiarity reduces their need to seek assistance from reference library staff unless they are venturing into a new area of interest. In contrast, their predominant use of primary source material mandates close working relations with, and information seeking assistance from, staff members in archives, museums, and special collections (Allen, 1993; Wiberley, 1991).

In terms of physically finding information, humanists prefer to browse the stacks where they very often come across related information they were previously unaware of. Once a resource is found, they then rely on what is called 'citation chasing' or culling related citations from the resource (Barrett, 2005; Wiberley, 1989). Beyond this method, humanists also rely on

what has been called the ‘invisible college’; a network of peers from different colleges that share similar research interests and resource information (Wiberley, 1989).

Research has shown that humanists have been slow to adopt advances in technology due to the time required to learn the technologies, the time required to use the technologies effectively, and the ease of use or design of the technology interface (Bates, 1996; Wiberley & Jones, 2000). These studies give effective information concerning a humanities scholar’s approach to technology in general but are somewhat dated with regards to current advancements in technology. More recent evidence by Barrett (2005) and Rimmer (2007) find a marked increase in technology use by humanists due to improved search and recall abilities in online journals, access from the home or office to OPACs, indexes and websites, and a proliferation of primary source material available through online digital libraries.

As humanities scholars are becoming more comfortable with online resources they are imposing their values on the quality expected of digital resources. Warwick et al. (2009) found that humanists are judging a resource’s worth by ease of use via navigation through the resource. Humanists are demanding documentation of the resource’s design and/or methods to insure authenticity and authority; and they are researching the human aspects (use and impact) of the numerous digital worlds of the internet. (Warwick et al., 2009).

The crux of the humanist endeavor to find ‘value’ as explained by Blazek & Aversa (2000) is now hampered by economic and societal forces that are impacting not only the methods used to facilitate research, i.e. the library as laboratory, but the discipline as a whole within the university framework (Cohen, 2009). The creation of critical thinkers, as defined by MacAdams (1995), that can function in any field is being forewarned for persons studied in more narrowly

defined commercial fields that offer greater opportunities of employment rather than greater enrichment of the societal whole (Frow, 2005).

Librarians who work with humanities scholars at undergraduate, graduate and faculty levels can best assist them by being aware of their research habits, information needs, and external academic pressures when selecting resources for this unique group of library users (Barrett, 2005). Current directories to holdings of special collections, museums, archives, rare book dealers, digital resources and digital libraries (Eden, 2005) should be near the top of the 'resources to consider' list; followed closely by directories of grant foundations who predominantly contribute to humanities research, and journals that primarily publish book reviews of humanities monographs and resources. The humanities resource guide by Blazek & Aversa (2000) is a good place to start when considering humanities resources for all three academic levels, but the humanities librarian will have to supplement this work with more current information in the field (Warwick et al., 2009; Rimmer et al., 2007; Alter, 2009;).

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