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# Now, Don't Go Chasing Rabbits

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## Now, Don't Go Chasing Rabbits

The Ithaka US Faculty Survey 2012 (<http://bit.ly/10NnQw9>) is out, and by the time you read my blurb, it will have cobwebs on it, and the 2013 will be well on the way. So, why write about it at all? First, it's always important to find out what people think of you, in this case libraries and their main clientele, faculty, even if what you find out may have to have a dozen qualifications surrounding it. Second, we librarians live, as the saying goes, in interesting times. Libraries and librarians are either on the cusp of something new and exciting, or on the edge of the abyss, soon to fall into oblivion, so finding out what people think should be important to us. Finally, if we listen carefully, we may be able to strengthen the good and weaken the bad, so why not take a peek?

I am not the first to take this on, by any means. Barbara Fister had her say (<http://bit.ly/16XCmou>), as did Wayne Bivens-Tatum (<http://bit.ly/12o09i6>), so if you don't like what you read here, you can also go there. There are, of course many others who have commented upon it. But I am less concerned about what library bloggers have to say about such studies than what workaday librarians think about them, assuming they have time to read them among all their other regular duties.

In a word, the study indicates that faculty, one of our main clients, don't think libraries all that important any more. The previous Ithaka Study said about the same thing, as have other studies such as the Educause's *ECAR Study of Undergraduate Students and Information Technology, 2012* (<http://bit.ly/U9NbSs>). Neither faculty nor students think they need libraries all that much. Faculty tell us in the Ithaka Study that apart from the databases they cannot afford, they don't use the library that much. Even then, they turn to us only when they cannot find what they need on the Web. Students tell us, in the Educause study, that, while the library website is important, other technologies are far more important, such as course management systems and, of course, our *bête noire*, Google.

What should we make of all this? Here's what I think. First of all, the studies *are* important. They aren't the be-all and the end-all, but they help us balance the anecdotal evidence we may hear from day to day against what the majority believe. That is, you may help students find something that they have not been able to find and they may well shower you with well-deserved praise. They may also fustigate the Web and Google and all the rest because they have been frustrated by their inability to find what they want. The same could be said of that ABD faculty member who wants to give you a Nobel Prize for finding that article she's been looking for, for months. But those are three, or five, or even twenty, of the five thousand or ten thousand or twenty thousand on your campus. What are *they* saying, and if nothing, why? Could it be because they are using something else?

Further, if nothing else, these studies confirm that a) we're still not telling the library story very well; b) that all the very valuable help we provide is to but a fraction of those who really need us; and c) we really need to come up with a more effective strategy of reaching students and faculty. The current strategy we're using just isn't working, or it isn't working all that well.

But it doesn't matter what I think. What do see in them? By all means, go read the studies. Don't listen just to me or anyone else. Read them for yourself. And then, let's not put our heads in the sand about them when they reveal something we don't want to hear. These studies are not the library's

Armageddon, nor should they be shoved down Alice's Rabbit Hole of nonsense. And while I'm on the allusion kick, let me end with this: Let's learn from them what we can in order to avoid a Waterloo of our own making.