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Difficulties in the information-related research tasks encountered by the undergraduates: a case study of third year science undergraduates of University of Colombo

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A survey was conducted in 2013 in the Faculty of Science, University of Colombo on the information-seeking behavior of the third year undergraduates, and part of the findings are presented here. The specific objectives of this paper are 1) to illustrate the Difficulties in the Information-related Research Tasks (DIRT) encountered by the undergraduates 2) to examine the findings in the light of the previously published research, and 3) to make recommendations to improve the use of librarians in their information search. To study the (DIRT), twenty statements related to six stages of the research process; starting process, searching for information, evaluating, using, citing and completing the process* were used with seven Likert type response categories and MS Excel was used to analyze the data.

Of 46 questionnaires, 74% were returned and the majority (65%) was from female between 21-23 years old. Majority (26%) of respondents have obtained a GPA of 3.0-3.5, but 38% of respondents did not reveal their GPA. There were no statistically significant correlation between the GPA and DIRT but a difference existed between gender and DIRT. Higher percentages of females recorded that, most of the tasks were difficult for them, than for the males. Twelve information-related research tasks out of 20 were difficult for the 50% of the respondents and the most difficult were the starting and searching processes. It is recommended to extend the current Information Literacy programme to all first year students and to offer a separate programme for the third year students paying more attention to the tasks, which are difficult for them.

Keywords: *Science undergraduates, Information seeking behaviour, difficulties in research, information-related tasks, Information Literacy.*

*A survey instrument used by Head and Eisenberg (2009) was adapted for this research and these twenty statements are used in their instrument and includes various information-related tasks from starting to the end of the research.

Head, A. and Eisenberg, M. (2009). Lessons learned: how college students seek information in the digital age. http://projectinfolit.org/pdfs/PIL_Fall2009_finalv_YR1_12_2009v2.pdf. Accessed on 24.02.2012