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Article By: MC1 Leonardo Carrillo

A Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) course on survey research methods has provided critical data on distance learning (DL) student usage of the Dudley Knox Library (DKL). Operations Research Associate Professor Dr. Ron Fricker revealed the data, captured by his 0A4109 Survey Research Methods class, to NPS students, faculty and staff during a presentation at the library, Dec. 8.

"The goal of the survey was to help the library get clearer feedback from the students on their exit surveys," said Fricker. "We discovered that the students liked the library a lot, they used it a lot ... and in the whole process we also learned some things that could really help the library."

The annual 10-week course was developed with the objective of giving students a firm grasp on all aspects of research survey methodology. Each term, it focuses on a real-world survey project. This time it took on the task of developing and conducting a specialized survey that focused on the use of the library by DL students.

"We were very excited about this project," said University Librarian Eleanor Uhlinger. "Each quarter, the Office of Institutional Research administers a DL student exit survey and we had these numbers that didn't correlate with our resident students' survey. Working with professor Fricker's class we were able to hone in on what we were missing."

NPS student lead on the project, Lt. Cmdr. Walter Kulzy, explained that the surveys were producing unusually high numbers of "None Applicable (N/A)" responses from DL students, when most students use the library's resources for their courses while attending NPS, on campus or off.

"It's difficult to interpret an N/A," said Kulzy. "It seemed unlikely since students use the library on a regular basis, so they asked Dr. Fricker to see if the class could build a survey geared towards those distance learning students."

The class of 19 students got to work right away, said Kulzy. They divided the project into four groups doing research, designing the survey instrument, fielding the survey, and finally, analyzing their findings.

In the end, the project provided students a real-world exercise on which to apply the theories they learned in class while providing the library with valuable data that library leadership intend to use to continue to improve their services.

The project proved to be an effective collaborative effort across campus. Multiple departments joined efforts to participate in the project such as the Office of Institutional Research, DKL, GSOS, the Center for Educational Design, Development and Distribution and others.

For Fricker, the support that he received from the different offices around campus was key to the success of the students' work, providing him with services and information crucial to the project. Also, the opportunity to work with the students and different elements of the library and school, made the experience very rewarding.

"The students are great," said Fricker, "they work hard, they are really motivated but furthermore, they were working on a topic that was both directly relevant to them as students, and to the school. It was rewarding and a lot of fun."

For the library, the project shed some light on the 'mystery' remarks from the survey, but more importantly, gave them points of reference for improvement with specific remarks and concrete feedback.

"I'm super grateful for this work, we could never do a project like this – the hours that it took them, we would never have the time or staff to do it. It's incredible," said DKL Manager of Reference and Instruction Ann Jacobson. "I'm very encouraged by the information they showed on students wanting more guidance and training."

The sentiment was shared by Uhlinger who was pleasantly surprised by the amount of feedback received from the students and the amount of students who wanted to help the library in follow-up focus groups.

"We're really here to serve the needs of the students and the faculty. Our major users are students so we really need to reach out and meet them where their information need is," said Uhlinger. "It was really exciting, you don't often get the kind of feedback that goes back into wanting to make the product better for themselves. And to offer to continue to help with that, I think, that says a lot about our students."



Operations Research Associate Professor Dr. Ron Fricker presents the results of his 0A4109 Survey Research Methods Class to NPS staff, faculty and students during a presentation at the Dudley Knox Library, Dec. 8. The course provided the opportunity for students to practice concepts learned in class while providing the library with invaluable data and insight.