<u>**Final Report 2020-2021 Assessment Inquiry Grant**</u>
Project Title: The Impact of COVID-19 on Providing Online Library Research Appointments

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Introduction
Each year the Pollak Library receives about a hundred student requests for one-on-one research consultations through the library's website. The purpose of these appointments can focus on a specific research assignment, capstone project, or provide a general overview of the scope of available library resources and the search process.

Before the spring 2020 semester, library research appointments were primarily conducted in person. Subject librarians also arrange to meet with students without a formalized request. This project does not include that data; in the future, it will be considered. In the spring 2020 semester, the library had to pivot quickly, like other organizations and businesses, to provide services in an online format. The library set out to understand the student experience of requesting online research appointments with librarians during COVID-19. Throughout this challenging time, we learned to utilize technology and communicate more flexibly.

For this study, the library examined the demographic differences of students who requested a library research consultation during COVID-19 (spring and fall 2020) versus primarily in-person appointments pre-COVID-19 semesters (spring and fall 2019). Looking at student demographic data is not something the library has explored much. Like other departments on campus, the library wanted to understand which students were using library services. This project attempts to look at data the library collects and use it in a meaningful way to adapt our services to improve how we assist students and connect with campus partners. Another component of the study assessed the impact of using this service in a virtual environment and how well it supported the research needs of students, their awareness of library resources, and their experience using virtual library services.

Methods of Inquiry
The library utilized two methods of inquiry for this project: a six-question post-survey and an analysis of student demographic information. The library created a six-question Qualtrics survey to seek student opinions regarding their use of the library research consultation service in an entirely online format during the spring and fall 2020 semesters. This survey was sent out to 107 students during the spring and fall 2020 semesters. Only 24 students completed the survey, with about a 22% response rate.

The survey examined various aspects of using the service, seeking to understand:
- student motivation
- mode preference (online VS. in person)
- were research needs met
- recommendations for improvement of the service
- what the student learned, if anything, from the research appointment

The Office of Assessment and Institutional Effectiveness provided the student demographic data. The requested data included student level, major, underrepresented status, first-generation status, graduate/undergraduate status, race/ethnicity, and gender. The library requested data about students who had used the research consultation service in the spring

and fall semesters of 2019 and 2020. We used Excel and Qualtrics to graph and analyze the data for the survey and demographics.

Results

Survey
When asked about motivations for setting up a research consultation, nearly 42% of students said a professor recommended the service. Professor recommendations were the most selected reason, followed by almost 33% of students who found it on the library's website. Other reasons students used the service included: they had used it before, learned about it from attending a library instruction session, or a classmate recommended it.

Faculty and peer recommendations showed to be valuable for directing students to the research appointment service. The library's website organization and usability also played a role in students finding the service.

Q1. What motivated you to use the online library research consultation service?
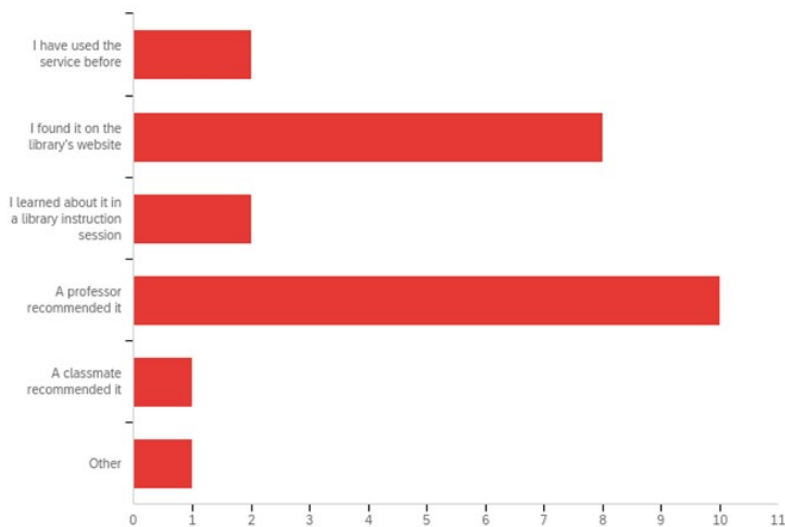

When asked about the delivery format, students preferred online Zoom meetings for library research appointments, with almost 57% of respondents selecting this option; in comparison, 33% of students favored meeting in person with a librarian. It is interesting to note that even though students favored online appointments, there is still a segment of students who prefer in-person consultations.

Q2. Which method of service delivery for library research consultations do you prefer?
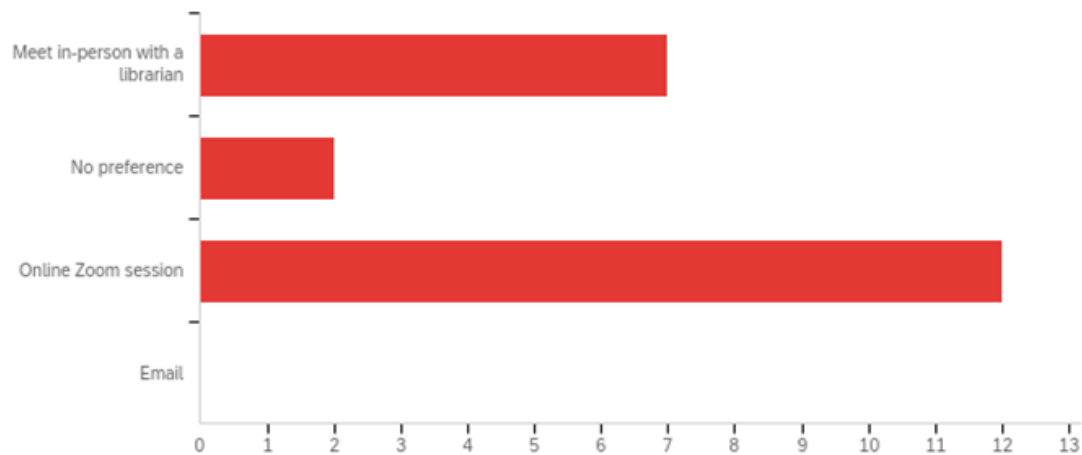
Almost 86% of students said the research appointment met their research needs. This data suggests the service in its online format worked sufficiently for student research goals. Two students had neutral responses and one student found the consultation did not meet their research needs. When students selected 'No' or 'Neutral', the survey offered students the option to have a librarian follow up with them to provide further support. Students who selected these answers chose not to be contacted.

Q3. Did the appointment meet your research needs?
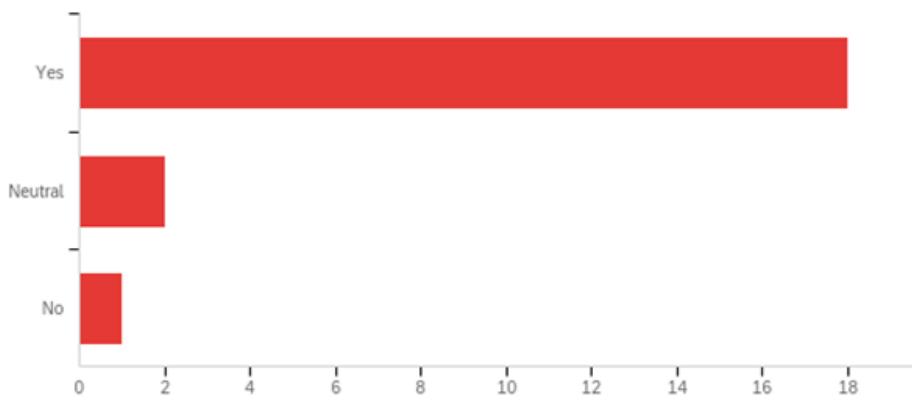
When asked to provide improvement recommendations for the research appointment service, students gave various responses, including recording the zoom session and providing further assistance with navigating online databases. Another student shared, the online conversation was inefficient in helping them become more proficient with the online research environment.

For the final question, students when asked to share what they learned from the research appointment. There were various responses:

- Several students felt they were better able to locate articles/journals/resources.
- A few students mentioned their previous community college library experience. They highlighted they had a greater awareness of available databases and search tools, more

resources, and could apply advanced search techniques (Boolean operators, result limiters, etc.) to find articles.
- The meeting clarified how to approach locating research sources, selecting appropriate search tools, narrowing and developing advanced search strategies.
- Some students needed assistance with interpreting data or reports
- One student stated they did not learn anything.

There were a lot of positive comments from this question. It was interesting to note the importance of the transfer student experience. As some of these students were aware of the basics of the library, they seemed to benefit from being shown the extent of subject specific databases and using more advanced search techniques.

The overall survey results showed that for most students, online meetings were sufficient, while in person appointments are still desired by some students. Most students were satisfied with the help they received in the online meeting format, though at least one student found it not helpful. Students seemed to have learned from the research appointments and had an overall positive experience, with some offered improvement recommendations to be considered by the library.

Student Demographics
Overall, there was an increase in research consultation requests from 2019 to 2020. The biggest users of the service were upper-level students: juniors, seniors, and graduate/post-bac.
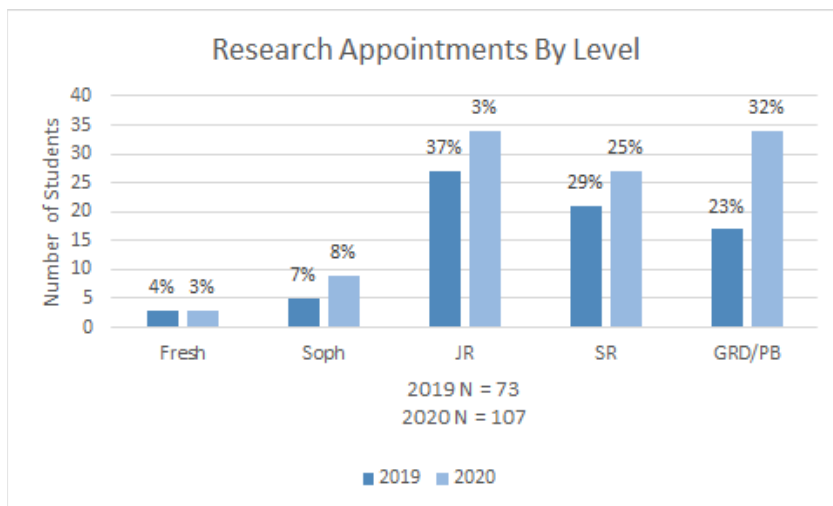

Underrepresented students made up nearly half of the research appointment requests, with 56% in 2019 and 44% in 2020. With almost half of research requests coming from underrepresented students, there could be a need to offer specialized services or programs to these students.

Research Appointments by UR Status

2019 N = 73
2020 N = 107
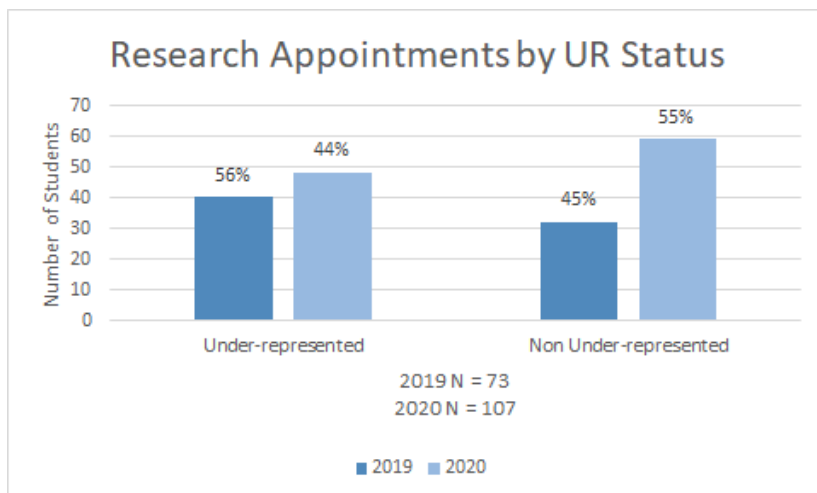
First-generation students made considerable use of the library research appointments, consisting of 34% in 2019 and 44% in 2020. Again, similar to underrepresented students, this data shows underrepresented students are using the library, but could be better served by providing additional outreach and library support.

Research Appointments by First-Gen Status

2019 N = 73
2020 N = 107
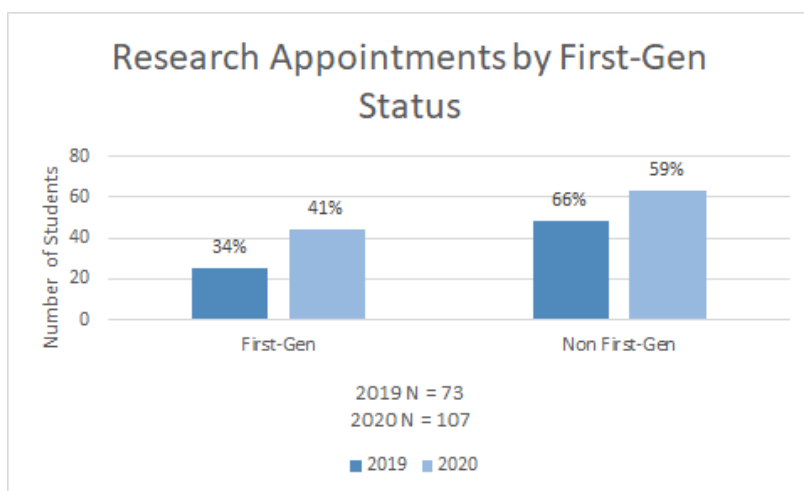
The top majors that requested research appointments the most were history, nursing, communications, pre-business, and sociology in 2019. In 2020, the top majors using the service were sociology, history, and nursing. In 2019 and 2020, history and nursing majors were the most frequent users of the service. Additional efforts to promote library services to departments not represented here could prove helpful.

Research Appointments By Major 2019

Research Appointments By Major 2020
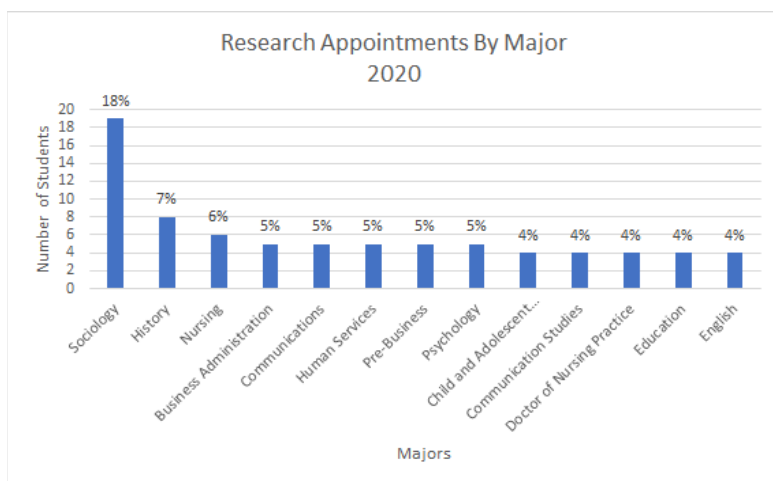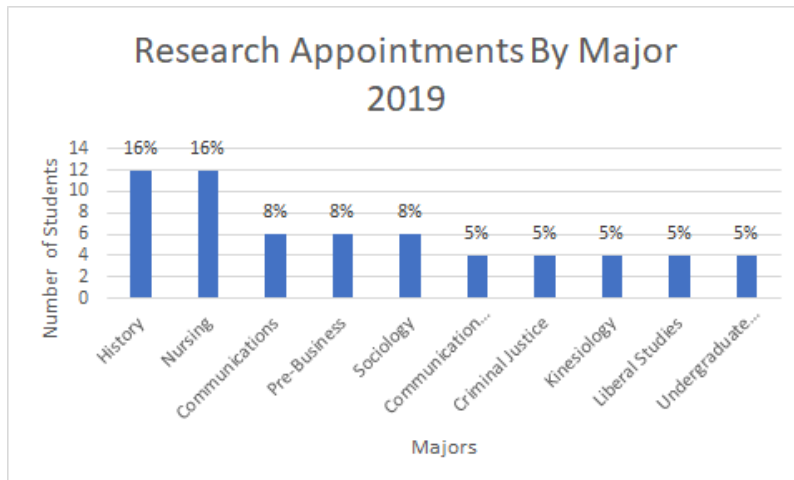
Discussion

This project offered the library an opportunity to analyze the research appointment service under COVID-19 lockdown and revealed new ways of thinking about the service to better connect with students. The post-survey and student demographics brought to light several things to consider. From this data, we realized there might be a need to reach out to specific groups: transfer students, underrepresented students, first-generation students, and faculty.

The project helped lay the groundwork for and a path toward sustainable and continuous assessment. In this specific instance, improving how this service is delivered to meet the needs of students depends a great deal on how it has proved both accessible and impactful during a time in which online support has been in demand, namely, during the pandemic. In the future, it is more apparent now which partners or entities on campus need to be involved and at what level. This includes access to assessment tools, staff, and other resources.

Faculty have the most contact with students and would be ideal for promoting library services and resources. Subject librarians, newsletters, and faculty library training events could be helpful in better serving our students. Similarly, working directly with partners on campus that support transfer students, the Diversity Initiatives and Resource Centers (DIRC), and individual colleges, the library can increase its efforts to support first-generation students, underrepresented students, and transfer students.

As we better understand the makeup of users, we can, in turn, better understand what gaps exist in terms of groups we wish to target on campus who can best utilize the service. Similarly, tracking majors and the courses that drove users to seek this form of support will help the library promote it at the department level.

Since beginning this project, the library has already started to reshape the research consultation service. The online request form has been revised through the website to require students to log in with their CWID, the follow up survey was revised and automated, and librarians have even incorporated new ways of streamlining the research appointment request process via applications like Calendly.

Once in place, the assessment process can be shared with interested parties within the library. The assessment officer can bring new insight into these conversations to build out what future assessment projects might require to be carried out. For example, additional projects may require similar student data and/or the use of tools that helped bring about the results of this assessment project. Indeed, learning how to gather data and navigate within campus resources to carry out the pilot proved invaluable and sets in place future success. Going forward, the library will work more closely with campus partners and explore new ways of connecting and supporting our students. Ultimately this will improve the experience and interaction between learner and specialist.