



# Accessing Information Use by Humanists and Social Scientists: A Study at the Universidad de Buenos Aires, Argentina

by Susana Romanos de Tiratel

**This study investigated the information-seeking behavior of Argentine humanities and social science scholars and found no substantial differences between them and scholars in Anglo-Saxon countries. Scholars in these two areas, regardless of country studied, have similar information-seeking behavior.**

Anglo-Saxon literature on library and information science (LIS) presents a considerable number of user/use studies describing the needs and behavior of humanities and social science researchers in their search for information. In addition, reviews synthesize and integrate findings from these studies, listing the characteristics that describe and typify these researchers. For years, LIS professors in Latin America have provided their students with somewhat accurate portrayals of these scholars based on research in the United States and Great Britain. Is it valid to apply the conclusions of these studies to scholars in countries with access to less developed library systems and services? Furthermore, does information-seeking behavior related to the conduct of research exist despite a dissimilarity in resources readily available? Are there common traits that characterize humanities and social science researchers in how they access information, in what their preferences and informative needs are?

Based on answers to these questions, this article, which is based on a three-year project (1995–1997), is the first longitudinal study in Argentina to profile the preferences and the information-seeking behavior of researchers at the Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Universidad de Buenos Aires (UBA), in nine disciplines in the humanities and the social sciences: philosophy, literature, classic languages and literature, art, history, anthropology, education, geography and library science.<sup>1,2</sup> The purpose of this study is to determine: (1) how they found necessary information about the latest advances in their respective disciplines and that supports their research tasks; (2) their preferred format for

the literature to appear in (e.g., books or journals); (3) the rate of obsolescence of the material they handle; (4) the degree of subject dispersion of the information they need; and (5) the language they prefer the literature to be in. Furthermore, the findings are compared to analogous research, principally in Anglo-Saxon countries.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In Argentina, no line of ongoing research focuses on user/use studies. In the late 1960s, at the Centro de Investigaciones Bibliotecológicas de la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras (UBA), Gustavo F. J. Cirigliano studied the information-seeking of senior university students and recent graduates, regardless of discipline or area of study.<sup>3</sup> In 1977, Dominique Babin investigated Argentine political scientists,<sup>4</sup> but it was not until 1995 that a new user-study program was initiated (see below), and further data on information seeking was gathered.

User/use studies in the United States and Great Britain identify information users and the characteristics of the information they rely on, their information needs and uses, and the structure of the specialized literature they consult: its size, growth, and composition. Table 1 offers a general comparison between the two areas, whereas this section highlights each area and literature from other countries.

## Humanities

Rebecca Watson-Boone notes that: (1) researchers have a limited need for developing or using general bibliographic tools; (2) they consult colleagues and initial print source material for explicit and implicit references to other works; (3) book reviews and personal collections are the leading information sources; and (4)

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**Table 1**  
**Comparison of Characteristics Studied in Humanities and Social Sciences in Anglo-Saxon Bibliography**

Analyzed Aspects	Humanities	Social Sciences
Access to information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Limited use of bibliographic tools and secondary information services</li> <li>● Consultations with colleagues and experts</li> <li>● Tracing of citations found in books and journals</li> <li>● Use of library catalogs to locate previously identified material</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Low use of bibliographic tools</li> <li>● Consultations with colleagues and experts</li> <li>● Tracing of citations found in journals</li> </ul>
Format	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Preference for book format to journal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Equal preference for books and journals</li> </ul>
Obsolescence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Inordinate age of the studied sources</li> <li>● Critical/Theoretical literature valid for 20 to 30 years</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Intensive use of current material</li> <li>● Average use validity of literature: nine years</li> <li>● Use of periodicals: six years</li> </ul>
Subject dispersion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Large size of subject matter used</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Significant number of citations from other fields</li> <li>● High rate of autocitation within the whole of social sciences</li> </ul>
Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Important use of material in mother tongue</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Important use of material in mother tongue</li> </ul>

they use catalogs to find known, secondary source materials. It would seem that there is an inadequacy among access tools and that “secondary services may not be a matter of much concern to humanities researchers. And what may be perceived as an attitude of indifference may instead simply reflect a general lack of need.”<sup>5</sup>

Ron Blazek and Elizabeth Aversa affirm that humanistic researchers still prefer the monograph to the periodical article.<sup>6</sup> Sue Stone, in an article summing up research published between 1970 and 1982, states that books and journals were cited as the most frequently used research material, noting that there was conflicting evidence as to which is used more heavily.<sup>7</sup> On this point, Watson–Boone concludes that:

Although the assumption holds true that books play a greater role than do journals, it needs to be tempered: the subjects and periods covered by the research topic determine whether the scholar will use a greater or lesser percentage of articles, and whether the monographic material will be the primary works of the individual(s) under study or the critical (secondary) literature.<sup>8</sup>

Humanities researchers are likely to be interested in older works (e.g., dating back 20, 40, or 50 years). Of course, if one considers the “classics” in each field, interest can extend to items dating back 2,000 or 3,000 years in time.<sup>9</sup> Stone says,

“Having retrospective coverage may be more important to the humanist than having access to current material.”<sup>10</sup> However, Watson–Boone states that most of the citations and primary and secondary references have to do with material preceding the past 20 or 30 years of the research. This does not imply that older items are not used, but rather that a large proportion generally falls within this period. In other words, the theme of the research will dictate the exact time span (e.g., the older the subject is, the further back in time the citation is likely to be).<sup>11</sup>

Robert N. Broadus indicates that “The mean number of subjects per fellow, 26.3, shows something of the remarkable breadth of interest” and this:

. . . does suggest a need for reference librarians to remind themselves of the widely-dispersed sources of information that may be useful to humanists. . . . The wide range of subjects represented by these requests lends support to the view that, for humanities scholars, centralization is more practical.<sup>12</sup>

Stone had already warned that it is impossible for only one collection or library to satisfy totally the needs of humanities studies. Thus, because of the breadth of topics and the material a researcher needs, interlibrary lending is essential to the humanities.<sup>13</sup> Broadus states the percentage of items in English was

noticeably higher than most citation studies in the humanities indicate. “For the 38 NHC [National Humanities Center] research fellows in Special Humanities the requests for English language materials were 82.3% of the total.”<sup>14</sup> John Cullars, who studied the characteristics of citations in French and German literary monographs, shows similar percentages in reference to the respective mother tongues (75% for German and 84.4% for French).<sup>15</sup> Elsewhere, he registers like amounts in the fine arts when analyzing citations in the monographs of American researchers: 70.2% are in English.<sup>16</sup>

#### Social Sciences

In a review, Mary B. Folster identifies different methods employed over the past 30 years to study the kind of information that social science researchers use and how they utilize it. These methods include: citation analysis, questionnaires, a combination of questionnaire and interview techniques, or structured observation together with interviews.<sup>17</sup> Folster affirms that:

social scientists place a high amount of importance on journals.” Furthermore, “most of their citation identification comes from journals, a practice that has been referred to as ‘citation tracking’; . . . Informal channels, such as consulting colleagues and attending conferences, are an important source of in-

formation; and . . . library resources, such as catalogs, indexes, and librarians, are not very heavily utilized.<sup>18</sup>

As Folster discusses, "social scientists are very print-oriented. Their use of sources is limited basically to printed materials. Monographs and periodicals are most important in their first information sources."<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, it must be kept in mind that preference for one format or another varies among fields of disciplines<sup>20,21</sup> and that the studies discussed were conducted prior the advent of the Internet and the World Wide Web had not gained the prominence that it now has. At any rate, there is a concurrence that books are used just as often as journal articles.

According to Tze-chung Li,

the general pattern is that current materials are heavily used. The use of materials in the social sciences is, however, prolonged and often repetitive. . . . Periodicals in the social sciences on loan usually have a half-life of 3.5 years . . . ; but the spread in time of citations is greater than the loan demand . . . the half-life of social science citation, as a whole, is nine years, and citations to social science periodicals six years.<sup>22</sup>

As well,

. . . self citation [sic], that is, social science citing social science items, accounts for 58%, but that the self-citation of a particular subdiscipline of the social sciences is generally lower. Compared with literature use in science and technology, self-deprivation, that is, social science citing items in other fields contributing to the social sciences, is appreciably higher.<sup>23</sup>

Nevertheless, the percentages vary by discipline. Social scientists make little use of foreign language works. Prior research cited by Tze-chung Li sustain that the variation in the use of materials in English (mother tongue of the subjects studied) ranges between 87% and 99.3%.<sup>24</sup>

## PROCEDURES

In his book *Epistemología y metodología* Juan Samaja identifies three components of the scientific learning process: the object or product of the process, the research actions or methods, and the means or conditions to carry it out. The first is scientific knowledge resulting from the combination of theoretical and empirical components. The second encompasses the actions leading to the discovery and validation of knowledge. And, finally, comes the technical and institutional resources whereby research is conducted.<sup>25</sup>

The combination of the theoretical and

empirical components is determined by the methodological courses of action. At the core lies the design of the object of the research that consists of choosing a way to delimit the object and to work on the defined data matrix system.<sup>26</sup> Samaja sustains that all of the data produced from scientific research in every discipline possess an invariable structure that can be called a data matrix and that all scientific research contains data of diverse kinds and levels of integration. There is not a single data matrix but rather a set of matrices that maintain a determined logical-methodological relationship.<sup>27</sup>

There exist at least three hierarchical levels: (1) the central matrix at the anchorage level on which the research is focused, (2) the subunitary level matrix (components of the unit of analysis at the previous level), and (3) the supraunitary level matrix (contexts of the units of analysis at the anchorage level). Matrices coordinated with the same hierarchy can exist at the different levels.

Samaja's methodology proposal sustains two original elements: on the one hand, the presentation of a four-part structure of the data matrix that aggregates the indicators or indicator schemes to the above-mentioned three (unit of analysis, variables, and values); and on the other, the dialectic relationship that takes the shape of the above matrices.<sup>28</sup>

In this research the anchorage level's unit of analysis is access to information with the following variables: accessing processes and formal and informal means of access. The unit of analysis of the supraunitary level matrix is the research project in the humanities or social sciences that gives a context to the access to information. A matrix was designed that was coordinated with the central matrix whose unit of analysis is the information of the research. The subunitary level is constituted by variables of the central matrix: format, obsolescence, subject dispersion, and language. Gathering and processing the data called for a methodological triangulation strategy combining quantitative and qualitative techniques in data gathering so as to enhance and expand the analysis and interpretation of the data.

Based on the above factors, questionnaire was drafted, pre-tested, and revised. Structured interviews were conducted with librarians in charge of the collections and services at the different research centers. Their viewpoints, it was felt, enrich the interpretation of the data obtained from the survey of researchers and the analysis of the citations in their articles.

To that end, an interview guide was designed and the data were tabulated to facilitate analysis and comparison.

A compilation of the publications by the scholars under study, edited between 1990 and 1996, yielded a total of 499 articles and 11,379 references. A stratified sample was modeled after a subject area criterion (language and literature, philosophy, art, history, anthropology, and education). A random quantity selection—selected in proportion to the size of the strata—produced a total of 128 articles, from which 3,449 cited bibliographic references were analyzed. The following variables were taken into consideration: subject matter, format, age, and language. Articles written by the researchers were analyzed using solely the variable subject matter so as to establish linkages with the subject of the references cited, as well as to detect an interdisciplinary relationship between the articles and the references cited. A relational database was designed with the EPI-INFO statistical processing program and several data analyses and data syntheses were carried out.

Primary sources and secondary literature were disaggregated. Primary sources constitute the object of study or unit of analysis of the research and those whose findings are presented in the article under analysis. Secondary literature is the rest of the literature cited; that is, other related research and the critical/theoretical body of literature. This attempted to establish the percentage of sources cited in the humanities and in the social sciences with the expectation that the former were greater because citation and reference coincide, as Ross Atkinson sustains.<sup>29</sup>

A subject analysis of the cited secondary literature was made to compare it with the analyzed articles and, thus, achieve a measure of its subject interrelationship. This was expressed in complementary percentages: discipline autocitation when citing secondary literature from the same discipline and discipline allocitation when citing from others. The conclusions, thus obtained, were then compared using the above triangulation strategy, which made it possible to later verify and validate them.

## FINDINGS

Out of a total population of 180, 124 respondents in 18 institutes, sections, and research centers of the school answered the questionnaires. The fields

**Table 2**  
**Channels for Accessing Information**

	Formal Channels	Semiformal Channels	Informal Channels
Research	Libraries: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Use of catalogs</li> <li>● Consultations with librarian</li> <li>● Bibliographies</li> </ul>	Specialized journals Publishers and bookshops	Consultations with colleagues
Current awareness	Bibliographies Selective dissemination of information Libraries	Specialized journals Publishers and bookshops Meetings/congresses Courses	Consultations with colleagues

covered the humanities: art, philosophy and literature; and the social sciences: anthropology, education, geography, history, and library science. Fifty-three researchers in the humanities (13 in philosophy, 30 in literature and 5 in art) and 61 social science researchers (24 anthropologists, 12 librarians, 8 specialists in education, 8 geographers, and 9 historians) were surveyed.

Twenty-nine percent of the humanities scholars surveyed hold a doctorate, whereas only 13.7% hold a doctorate in social sciences, even though many researchers were in the process of obtaining it. Both areas show a high percentage of the respondents who speak two foreign languages (English and French). In the humanities, 44.8% of those in literature are fluent in four languages (English, French, Italian, and Portuguese). Respondents tend to work in research teams, and they included directors, assistants, grantees, and researchers.

### Accessing Information

The questionnaires differentiated between the search for information that is necessary to conduct research and that which is essential for being up-to-date. Importance was given to establishing a differential nuance between the formal and informal channels because such information-seeking behavior as consulting a colleague is not tantamount to tracing citations in specialized journals, attending congresses, browsing through bookshops, or examining the catalogs of publishers. Table 2 provides a classification of the formal, semiformal, and informal channels of accessing information as indicated by the humanities and social science researchers surveyed.

**“With the exception of two interviewees in the humanities and another two in the social sciences, all stated having used the library as a source of information.”**

With the exception of two interviewees in the humanities and another two in the social sciences, all stated having used the library as a source of information. Even if both groups claimed to go once or twice a week, this percentage is higher in the humanities (66%) than in the social sciences (49.8%). Although 32.5% in social sciences registered a frequency of less than once a week, humanities measured 12.1%. A total of 5.3% in social sciences did not know or answer how often they visited the library against 18.9% in humanities who go three or four times a week. Humanities scholars exhibit a more intensive use of the library.

How do interviewees access the information for their research projects? The majority consult colleagues and specialized literature. No differences were detected in the use both groups make of formal bibliographic tools for their research. It is a question specifically of retrospective searches to initiate and update the state-of-the-art of the topic under analysis. The majority of either area do not use bibliographies (72.7% for humanities and 77.1% for social sciences).<sup>30-32</sup> Humanities specialists prefer to examine journals and then to consult with colleagues for current awareness purposes. The inverse holds true for social scientists, first colleagues and then periodicals.

Bibliographies play an intermediate role in the current awareness process for

either area. However, on being questioned about consulting bibliographies, the large majority of researchers referred to consult citations in books or journals, and not to use formal accessing tools for specialized literature. This was corroborated in the questionnaire: The majority of researchers did not mention any title when asked to list the bibliographic tools they had used. To a lesser degree, the subsequent preferences for both fields were distributed in publishers' lists and catalogs, courses, and workshops and only 10.2% consulted libraries.<sup>33-35</sup> It can be deduced that the bibliographic reference works are not all that common to either field, even less so in social sciences than in humanities, and that both disciplines practically dismiss them as a tool for current awareness.

These responses were confirmed during the interviews with librarians. Researchers turn to the library for material recommended by colleagues or cited in journals, but generally ignore the library catalogs or available bibliographic tools for a subject search. The most important obstacles that researchers in the humanities and social sciences admit to confronting are not only the lack of a sufficient stock of books and journals but also the loss of material (e.g., theft, mutilation, and destruction). In the third place, humanities researchers signal the amount of time between the request for material and its reception. Fourth comes finding and obtaining books and journals. For social science researchers the third obstacle is misplaced books followed by overdue material (see Table 3).

### Format of the Material

This section is based on three data sources: the researchers (according to surveys), the librarians (according to the in-

**Table 3**  
**Means of Accessing Information**

	Humanities	Social Sciences
Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Consultations with colleagues</li> <li>● Reading and scanning journals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Consultations with colleagues</li> <li>● Reading and scanning journals</li> </ul>
Current awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Reading and scanning journals</li> <li>● Consultations with colleagues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Consultations with colleagues</li> <li>● Reading and scanning journals</li> </ul>
Use of library	Main purpose: To obtain previously identified material  Frequency: three to four times a week, 18.9% one to two times a week, 66% less than once a week, 12.1% no answer, 3%	Main purpose: To obtain previously identified material  Frequency: three to four times a week, 8% one to two times a week, 52% less than once a week, 35% no answer, 5.3%
Use of bibliographies and secondary services	27%	23%
Barriers to access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Lack of sufficient stock of books and journals</li> <li>● Loss of material</li> <li>● Lengthy delay between request and reception of material</li> <li>● Serious difficulties in locating and obtaining material</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Lack of sufficient stock of books and journals</li> <li>● Loss of material</li> <li>● Misplaces books and journals</li> <li>● Excessively long home loans of material</li> </ul>

terviews), and the citations (data derived from their analysis). The preference of the researchers for books and journals was questioned indirectly as the survey asked how they would distribute the budget for library acquisitions. The allotted percentages reflect the greater or lesser importance given to each format. So, 43.1% in the humanities prefer books to journals; 23% favor journals; and 33.9% declare equal preference. Meanwhile, social sciences percentages show 31.4% for more books, 40.5% for more periodicals, and 28.2% for equal preference.

The citation analysis evidences a wide

preference for books over articles in periodicals in both disciplines: humanities, 62% versus 22.2% and social sciences, 47.1% versus 30.4% (see Table 4). The citation of primary sources is important, independently of the format in which it is registered. For the humanities, the citation of sources is 35.7% of the total references cited and social sciences is 21.3% (see Table 5).

#### Age of the Material

Use studies highlight that material utilized by humanities scholars are older than that used by social scientists. This

study has confirmed a similar trend. It is important to clarify, though, that among the citations to study the age of the material, the sources, that is the primary documents that are the objects of the researchers' analysis and study, were omitted.

Citations of secondary documents (other research and theoretical and critical contributions) are concentrated largely in the 20th century and the rest in the 19th century. This is verified in two periods: 1900 through 1949 and 1980 through 1995. Taking each period as a whole, there is a greater percentage of humanities

**Table 4**  
**Format of Material Used**

Format	Humanities	Percent	Social Sciences	Percent	Total	Total Percent
Books	497	62.0	1,143	47.1	1,640	50.8
Articles in journals	178	22.2	738	30.4	916	28.4
Newspapers	44	5.5	139	5.7	183	5.7
Conference presentations	15	1.9	114	4.7	129	4.0
Reports	24	3.0	46	1.9	70	2.2
Other	43	5.4	245	10.1	288	9.0
Total	801	100.0	2,425	100.0	3,226	100.0

**Table 5**  
**Source-Bibliographic Relationship in Material Cited**

	Sources	Bibliography	Total	Sources (%)
Humanities	317	572	889	35.7
Social Sciences	<u>546</u>	<u>2014</u>	<u>2560</u>	<u>21.3</u>
Total	863	2586	3449	25.0

**Table 6**  
**References Cited by Period (in percentages)**

	Total References Cited		References Cited without Sources	
	Humanities	Social Sciences	Humanities	Social Sciences
Before 1900	6.1	14.5	0.7	2.0
1900–1949	29.2	10.2	12.5	7.0
1950–1979	28.2	25.0	36.3	29.5
1980–1995	<u>36.5</u>	<u>50.3</u>	<u>50.5</u>	<u>16.5</u>
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

citations in the former, whereas the latter percentage is higher in the social sciences. In between, 1950 through 1979, percentages remain relatively even in either area (see Table 6).

#### Cited Subject Matters

The subject analysis of the references explored the frequency of citations of the same discipline (percentage of discipline autocitation) and of others (percentage of discipline allocation). To examine the subject matter of the cited references, certain decisions had to be made: first, to utilize general subject categories; and second, to determine the specialties to be included in each area. Three were considered in the humanities: art (fine arts, performing arts, and music), philosophy, and language and literature. Literature and linguistics were grouped together as both are

specializations within the same program. Five were encompassed in the social sciences: anthropology, embracing sociocultural anthropology, archeology, biological anthropology and folklore; history, education; as well as two hybrid fields,<sup>36</sup> ethnohistory and ethnolinguistics. Because of the very nature of the last two cases, autocitations in the former were based on those from ethnohistory and from anthropology and history, whereas the latter were based on those from ethnolinguistics and from anthropology and linguistics.

Generally, discipline autocitation is more prevalent in social sciences. Humanities shows an average of 38.7%. Philosophy represents the highest percentage whereas art amounts to the lowest. Literature is in between (see Table 7). Discipline autocitation in social sciences is

50.7%. All of the disciplines near this measurement, save ethnolinguistics that is 82% (see Table 8).

Even discipline allocations pertain to the humanities and social sciences fields, indicating a strong interrelationship. Certain fields of anthropology (e.g., archeology, biological anthropology, and medical anthropology) constitute special cases as citations refer to other natural sciences.

#### Language of the Material

Respondents claim to be fluent in foreign languages: from two to four in humanities and two in social sciences. Without doubting the veracity of these data, the analysis of the citations evidenced a preference for Spanish: humanities 76.5% and social sciences 73.4%. The second language varied by discipline: Italian and French for the former and English for the latter (see Table 9).

#### DISCUSSION

Unlike the humanists, social scientists make less use of the library. This is understandable considering the other techniques social scientists employ to compile data outside of the library (e.g., fieldwork). Nevertheless, over 70% of both groups consider that libraries make an important contribution to their work (see Table 3).

**“Unlike the humanists, social scientists make less use of the library.”**

The most serious obstacles to accessing information, such as the dearth of books and journals, are derived from budgetary deficiencies. But the remaining problems (e.g., material on loan to faculty for lengthy periods, and the time lag between request and reception) originate in

**Table 7**  
**Discipline Autocitation and Allocation in Humanities**

Discipline	Discipline Autocitation	Discipline Autocitation Percent	Discipline Allocation	Discipline Allocation Percent	Total	Total percent
Art	52	21.1	195	78.9	247	100.0
Philosophy	72	58.5	51	41.5	123	100.0
Language and Literature	<u>181</u>	<u>43.3</u>	<u>237</u>	<u>56.7</u>	<u>418</u>	<u>100.0</u>
Total	305	38.7	483	61.3	788	100.0

**Table 8**  
**Discipline Autocitation and Allocation in Social Sciences**

Discipline	Discipline Autocitation	Discipline Autocitation Percent	Discipline Allocation	Discipline Allocation Percent	Total	Total Percent
Anthropology	617	52.2	564	47.8	1,181	100.0
Ethnohistory	55	52.9	49	47.1	104	100.0
History	195	46.2	227	53.8	422	100.0
Ethnolinguistics	51	82.3	11	17.7	62	100.0
Education	<u>180</u>	<u>45.6</u>	<u>215</u>	<u>54.4</u>	<u>395</u>	<u>100.0</u>
Total	1,098	50.7	1,066	49.3	2,164	100.0

the libraries own organizational defects and can easily be rectified. Indeed, neither area shows substantial differences in accessing modes, either in researching or in current awareness actions and the methods coincide with those described in other studies.<sup>37-40</sup> There exists a marked preference for informal and semiformal channels, and the library is used as a recourse to obtain material that is unavailable elsewhere.

Although the respondents manifested a preference for the book format or equal preference in the humanities, respondents in the social sciences favored periodicals. However, humanities scholars and social scientists cite books over articles in journals in their papers although a small difference exists: less than one-fourth of the citations in humanities refer to articles in journals, whereas slightly over 25% do so in social sciences. At the same time, the primary sources of the object of study are used more in humanities than social sci-

ences. This does not tacitly indicate which format is favored because books and journals fulfill diverse functions. That books are cited to a greater degree than journals does not mean that the latter are used less often, but rather that they satisfy other needs: tracing citations and current awareness.

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**“. . . researchers, either independently or through research subsidies, acquire recently published books and do not subscribe to journals.”**

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Nonetheless, librarians corroborate a greater use of periodicals. This is because libraries tend to prioritize the acquisition of journals over books. This has led to a core of updated periodicals but not mono-

graphs. Therefore, researchers, either independently or through research subsidies, acquire recently published books and do not subscribe to journals. Reference to these is carried out in the research library and results in librarians' impressions and the preference by researchers. However, the citation analysis confirms a marked leaning to the book format over the article when it comes time to writing a paper.

It can be deduced that the journal mainly serves as a source of current awareness and bibliographic tool in humanities and social sciences because it can be used to trace relevant citations in the articles and the section on book reviews. Nonetheless, this major use of periodicals need not necessarily be reflected in the citations, where books have proven to hold a predominate role. Once again, data derived from citation analysis must be taken with great caution before deciding on library acquisitions<sup>41</sup> because these studies do not take into consideration the diverse purposes for which the study and research material is being used.

With respect to the age of material, both disciplines are concentrated in the 1980 to 1995 period: 50.5% in humanities and 61.5% in social sciences. The other half (or somewhat less in social sciences) is distributed practically entirely within the 20th century, with a large concentration in the second half and diminishing substantially in the first. Even if the differential percentages amount to 10%, it could be said that critical/theoretical literature is more applicable in humanities. These data will be critical when the Facultad de Filosofía y Letras (UBA) libraries define their weeding, preservation, and conservation policies.

**Table 9**  
**Language of Material**

Language	Humanities	Percent	Social Sciences	Percent	Total
Spanish	671	76.5	1,879	73.4	2,550
English	50	5.7	450	17.6	500
French	63	7.2	109	4.3	172
Italian	70	8.0	40	1.6	110
Portuguese	1	0.1	27	1.1	28
German	10	1.1	19	0.7	29
Multilingual	5	0.6	5	0.2	10
Latin	4	0.5	4	0.2	8
Greek	2	0.2	0	0.0	2
Other	<u>1</u>	<u>0.1</u>	<u>24</u>	<u>0.9</u>	<u>25</u>
Total	877	100.0	2,557	100.0	3,434

The findings of the subject matters cited may help to guide the centralization or decentralization policies of research libraries' collections in the humanities and social sciences as Broadus recommends. Given the physical dispersion of the research libraries of the Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, it would be advantageous for researchers to find the collections under one roof that would thereby facilitate interdisciplinary consulting. This would also help to overcome the logistical inconveniences of inter-institute lending. Setting up a network registering the collections of the diverse centers may resolve the problem of intellectual access to the documents, but not the physical access to them.

The percentages on language preferences are quite similar to Li's 87%<sup>42</sup> for social sciences, and Cullars's 78%<sup>43</sup> for humanities. This corroborates researchers' preferences for material written in their mother tongue or translated into it. In brief, data can guide acquisitions of the units of information. Libraries must buy primary sources in their original language or bilingual editions (when available), and critical, theoretical or historic material preferably in Spanish or good translations from foreign languages.

Despite the fact that citations may vary from field to field, discipline allocations are generally greater in humanities than in social sciences where autocitation and allocation are balanced. At any rate, though this may not be the objective of this article, this point should be fine-tuned by analyzing the discipline citations within the humanities and social sciences as a whole (including citations from other humanistic or social disciplines). Allocation may be exogenous with respect to its own discipline but it could be endogenous within a broader field.

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**"The findings of user/use studies in countries having more advanced information systems and services can be applied to developing countries such as Argentina."**

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#### CONCLUSION

The findings of user/use studies in countries having more advanced information systems and services can be applied to developing countries such as Argentina.

Despite the quality and quantity of resources and dissimilar working environments, there is a common trait to humanities and social science researchers alike. It is how they access information, their preferences and informative needs, independently of where they develop their tasks and the material that is available to them. This characteristic reflects the current trend in the user/use studies within the constructivist/cognitive approach. In turn, this raises the following questions. Is it correct to seek profound differences between individuals because of their association with one discipline or group? No, to the contrary. Information-seeking behavior forms part of a broader process in which information is perceived as a social construction created by the interaction of individuals and messages within diverse social and organizational contexts. As Dervin and Nilan<sup>44</sup> affirmed, the answers lie not in the system, but rather in the understanding that each user's information need is unique.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The research team includes: Susana Romanos de Tiratel, director; María Cristina Cajaraville, Virginia Garrote y Estela Tolsosa. The project, *Modos de Acceso y Utilización de la Bibliografía en el Campo de las Humanidades y las Ciencias Sociales* was subsidized by and incorporated into the Programa de Investigación UBACYT 1994-97 (FI172).
2. The academic structure of the school is constituted by: nine departments responsible for teacher-training and licentiate degrees, a Postgraduate Degree Secretary (PhD's, Master's Degrees, specialization and continuing education); and 20 research institutes that elaborate and carry out projects and research programs. The information centers consist of a Central Library with collections that serve, fundamentally, undergraduate and graduate studies, and 18 Research Libraries housed in the institutes that handle the respective specialized collections.
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