Bibliographic Instruction:
Are Government Documents Being Included? Or Overlooked?

INTRODUCTION

Librarians may not realize the information being overlooked if government resources are not incorporated into their instruction programs. In addition, not all librarians may be comfortable using and/or providing instruction for government resources.

The authors wanted to investigate the use of government resources in library instruction at institutions of higher education. For this project, library instruction is defined as in-person or online lectures, but not for-credit library skills courses. Institutions of higher education included offer instruction to programs ranging from certificates to doctoral/professional degrees.
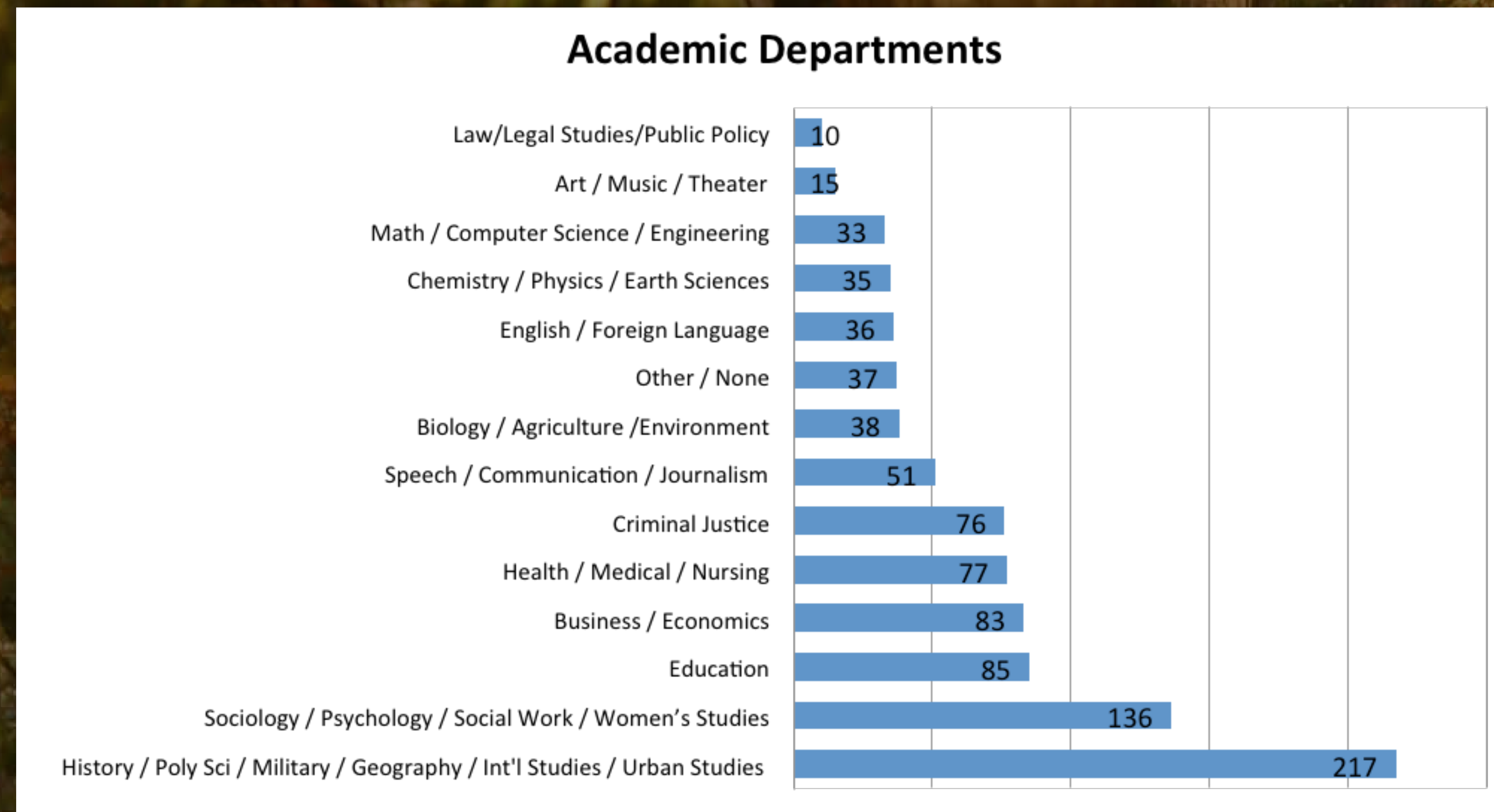
A literature search revealed no previous studies addressing the inclusion of government resources in library instruction, other than "how to" pointers for specific agency publications/databases/websites, or the Superintendent of Document classification system.

SURVEY

The authors designed a 19-question survey that was administered via SurveyMonkey® in the summer of 2012. Respondents were asked a mixture of multiple choice and open-ended questions. The authors were interested in how government resources were incorporated into instruction programs and who provided such instruction. A question was also asked about the comfort level of librarians presenting government resources in the classroom. The remaining questions addressed academic subjects that received instruction in government documents and which specific agencies/websites were included in those classes.

Participants were recruited through five (5) electronic mailing lists:

1) American Library Association (ALA) Information Literacy Instruction Discussion List (ILI-L)

2) Kent State University General Library Reference Discussion List (LIBREF-L)

3) Arkansas Library Association (ArLA) Discussion List (ARKLIB-L)

4) ALA Government Document Round Table Discussion List (GOVDOC-L)

5) ArLA Government Documents Round Table Discussion List (ARKDOC-L)

Academic Departments

Department	Value
Law/Legal Studies/Public Policy	10
Art / Music / Theater	15
Math / Computer Science / Engineering	33
Chemistry / Physics / Earth Sciences	35
English / Foreign Language	36
Other / None	37
Biology / Agriculture / Environment	38
Speech / Communication / Journalism	51
Criminal Justice	76
Health / Medical / Nursing	77
Business / Economics	83
Education	85
Sociology / Psychology / Social Work / Women's Studies	136
History / Poly Sci / Military / Geography / Int'l Studies / Urban Studies	217

Given the wide range of topics offered in response to the question about which academic departments received government information instruction, related subjects were groups together to allow for a simplified graph.

Top 10 Agencies

In determining the top ten departments mentioned by respondents, the tally was assigned to the appropriate executive or legislative branch department if a specific database or sub-agency was mentioned. The researchers chose to use Congress as an overall agency because most of the references were to Congressional databases like Thomas or Congress.gov rather than a specific committee within the House or Senate.

1. Commerce
2. Health and Human Services
3. Congress
4. Justice
5. Labor
6. Education
7. Interior
8. Defense
9. State
10. Agriculture

SUMMARY

A total of 237 respondents completed the survey. Nearly 75% of the respondents were from federal depository libraries. But, half of the respondents were not specifically government information librarians.

Interestingly, but pleasantly, 69% of respondents were very comfortable or comfortable with providing instruction on government information. However, this suggests that there are still opportunities for further continuing education. The researchers were surprised at the low levels of usage in the hard sciences, biology, environmental sciences, and agriculture given the large Number of agency databases and websites covering those fields.

These numbers generated a new set of questions for possible future research:

1 How are materials and databases being promoted? Could the quality of such work improve?

2 Are depository selections being discussed with appropriate instruction librarians and selectors?

3 Do librarians have too much to cover in instruction sessions with classroom faculty downplaying the value of government information?

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