



*Evidence Summary*

**Nutrition, Food Science, and Dietetics Faculty Have Information Needs Similar to Basic and Medical Sciences Faculty – Online Access to Electronic Journals, PubMed/Medline, and Google**

**A Review of:**

Shpilko, I. (2011). Assessing information-seeking patterns and needs of nutrition, food science, and dietetics faculty. *Library & Information Science Research*, 33(2), 151-157.

**Reviewed By:**

Mê-Linh Lê  
Health Sciences Librarian  
Health Sciences Library, University of Saskatchewan  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada  
Email: [me-linh.le@usask.ca](mailto:me-linh.le@usask.ca)

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**Abstract**

**Objective** – To determine the information needs of nutrition, food science, and dietetics faculty members by specifically examining how they locate and access information sources and which scholarly journals are consulted for teaching, research, and current awareness; and identifying any perceived information service needs (e.g., training).

**Design** – Online survey questionnaire.

**Setting** – Four senior colleges within the City University of New York (CUNY) system.

**Subjects** – Nutrition, food science, and dietetics faculty members.

**Methods** – Using institutional websites and the assistance of relevant affiliated librarians, 29 full-time and adjunct nutrition, food science, and dietetics faculty members were identified at Queens College, Brooklyn College, Hunter College, and Lehman College (all part of the CUNY system). A survey was emailed in June and July 2007 and had 14 (48.4%) responses. The study was temporarily halted in late 2007. When resumed in January 2009, the survey was re-sent to the initial non-respondents; five additional responses were received for a final 65.5% (n=19) response rate.

**Main Results** – The majority of respondents held a PhD in their field of study (63.1%), were full-time faculty (no percentage given), and female (89.5%). Information sources were

ranked for usage by respondents, with scholarly journals unsurprisingly ranked highly (100%), followed by conference and seminar proceedings (78.9%), search engines (73.6%), government sources (68.4%), and information from professional organizations (68.4%). Respondents ranked the top ten journals they used for current awareness and for research and teaching purposes. Perhaps due to a lack of distinction by faculty in terms of what they use journals for, the two journal lists differ by only two titles.

The majority browse e-journals (55.6%) rather than print, obtain access to e-journals through home or work computers (23.6%), and obtain access to print through personal collections (42.1%). Databases were cited as the most effective way to locate relevant information (63.1%); PubMed was the most heavily used database (73.7%), although Medline (via EBSCO), Science Direct, and Academic Search Premier were also used.

Respondents were asked how they *preferred* to obtain online research skills (e.g., on their own, via a colleague, via a librarian, or in some other way). The linked data does not answer this question, however, and instead supplies figures on *what types* of sessions respondents had attended in the past (44.4% attended library instruction sessions, while others were self-taught, consulted colleagues, attended seminars, or obtained skills through their PhD research).

**Conclusion** – Strong public interest in nutritional issues is a growing trend in the Western world. For those faculty members and scholars researching and teaching on nutrition and related areas, more work on their information needs is required. This study begins to address that gap and found that nutrition, food science, and dietetics faculty share strong similarities with researchers in medicine and the other basic sciences with regard to information needs and behaviours. The focus is on electronic journals, PubMed/Medline, and online access to resources. Important insights include the fact that print journals are still in modest use,

researchers use grey literature (e.g., government sources) and other non-traditional formats (e.g., conference proceedings and electronic mail lists) as information sources, and training sessions need to be offered in a variety of formats in order to address individual preferences.

### Commentary

This study contributes to our understanding of the information needs and behaviour of nutrition, food science, and dietetics faculty members – a fairly understudied group in the literature. Specific areas of interest such as the top journals in the field, the use of grey literature, web-based search engines, and personal journal subscriptions will be valuable to liaison librarians when planning services and ordering resources.

Overall the study is a fairly straightforward and well-done information needs survey. However, the article would have benefited from more detail concerning the survey instrument and data collection. Very little information is given on the instrument, such as how it was developed, the survey tool used (e.g., Survey Monkey), the number and types of questions, the wording employed, or how data analysis was performed.

With regard to data collection, the author does not state whether upon resumption of the study in 2009 (the study was halted from late 2007 until early 2009), any attempts were made to determine if any new faculty members had been hired in the interim. If so, including them could have increased the relatively small sample size. Additionally, there is no discussion on whether some demographic information (rank and credentials) and information preferences may be skewed towards full-time faculty and adjuncts. No mention is made of sessionals (staff hired to teach on a contract, i.e., non-permanent, basis), who are not always listed on departmental websites or may not make use of liaison librarians (from whom the author retrieved her contact lists). As

sessionals are typically younger researchers at the beginning of their careers, responses from older, more established researchers could have a significant impact on the data concerning the types of resources used (e.g., older researchers may be more inclined to use print-based personal library collections than their younger colleagues (Connaway, Radford, Dickey, Williams, & Confer, 2008)). Future updates of this study may want to consider additional means of collecting complete contact lists, such as by contacting the department secretary.

A further area requiring clarity is the issue of private vs. library journal subscriptions. Shpilko argues that faculty value, and make high use of, their personal journal subscriptions, resulting in fewer visits to the physical library. She also notes that few faculty use library computers to access e-journals, instead preferring to use their work and home computers. While this is one argument that can be made based on the data, another is that faculty members are unable to distinguish between personal and institutional e-journal access. Many institutions now provide access to their e-resources via IP ranges that provide a seamless way of obtaining online resources anywhere on

campus. In many cases users may not realize that the access is coming via the library system. Since the survey instrument is not provided, there is no way of knowing how the original question(s) on private journal subscriptions were phrased. The article also makes no mention of how e-resources are accessed in the CUNY system (e.g., via IP ranges).

While the author recognizes some other limitations of her study, specifically the small sample size and lack of clarity for survey questions on intended journal use (i.e., research and teaching vs. keeping up to date), her suggestions for future research would both minimize these limitations and increase the external validity through the surveying of faculty in other subject areas and in clinical settings.

## References

- Connaway, L. S., Radford, M. L., Dickey, T. J., Williams, J. d. A., & Confer, P. (2008). Sense-making and synchronicity: Information-seeking behaviors of millennials and baby boomers. *Libri*, 58(2), 123-135.