E-Books in the Sciences - Gauging Faculty and Graduate Students Needs

Abstract

E-books at York University Libraries are available through consortia agreements from different publishers, content aggregators as well as selecting title-by-title. Given the financial commitment that our libraries are making to acquire these e-books there is a need to understand our student and faculty preferences – what features they want to see in e-books, how they access e-books and the future of e-books in Science, Technology & Medicine.

Scope
This paper will discuss the results of an e-books survey conducted for science faculty and graduate students at York University, Toronto, Canada. It will highlight some of the e-book tools and features currently available from various publishers and e-book aggregators. Based on the survey results, it will emphasize what features were helpful to faculty and graduate students in their research and teaching. It will also explore novel 2.0 tools the university has adopted in promoting e-books within the academic community.

Results and Conclusion
Graduate students are more likely to use e-books compared to faculty members. Both groups would like librarians to promote e-books and lack of awareness of our electronic collection could be one of the important factors in e-book uptake. Users appreciate the ability to create permanent links to book chapters, 24x7 access, access from off-campus, capability to plug data into tables, and chapter downloading features. An understanding of our user needs that relate to accessibility, discoverability and promotion will have a bearing on the use and popularity of e-books.

Pointers to key issues

1. High level of interest in e-books with graduate students

- Graduate students have used some form of e-book and are aware that the University subscribes to e-books. Students and faculty use the library catalogue as the portal to find e-books. Many faculty members are not aware that the library subscribes to different e-book packages.

2. Online reading behaviour and features desired

- Graduate students and faculty spend minimal time reading an e-book on the computer screen. Some of the very important functionalities needed in e-books are the ability to download, print and e-mail chapters. Citing, exporting to bibliographic management software, and highlighting searched text are some of the important features required by our users.

3. Some bottlenecks in the system

- Faculty are not aware of the value-added features available in e-books. Need to increase e-book promotional activities.
- Compatible MARC records from e-book publishers/third party vendors required.
  Access problems - downloading proprietary software and time taken to access e-books is a deterrent to their use.
- Difficulty in reading from the screen over prolonged usage.

1. Introduction

Coyle (2001) describes an e-book as the electronic form of a literary work, Anuradha (2006) considers an e-book to consist of both digital content as well as physical devices, such as handheld e-book readers. E-books are comprised of texts published in electronic form as well as physical books converted into digital form, and also books in computer file format, or an electronic file of words and images of monographic character, all of which can be displayed on a desktop, notebook computer, or portable device, including dedicated e-book readers (Rao, 2003).

Primary Research Group. (2008) completed a survey for the library use of e-books and reported that U.S. academic and public libraries had spent an average of 25.4% more money on e-books in 2007 than in 2006 and non-U.S. libraries showed a dramatic increase of almost 90%. Their study included only one Canadian University. Although complete figures for the growth of the market in Canada are not currently available, an analysis of electronic monograph titles held and purchased by The Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL) libraries demonstrates both the growing importance of e-books to CARL libraries and also the importance of libraries to the e-book market. Expenditures on electronic monographs have grown from $1,127 372 in 1999-00 to $6,048 491 in 2006-07- a staggering 436.5% increase. In the past year alone, CARL libraries have acquired 2, 890 369 electronic monograph items. Electronic monographs currently represent approximately 13% of total monograph titles held by CARL libraries, and that number is expected to continue to grow over the next several years (Owen et al., 2008).

York University, Toronto, Canada has been at the forefront in acquiring e-books from different publishers and content providers. At present our University subscribes to electronic content from NetLibrary, Ebrary, EBL, Oxford Scholarship Online, Oxford Reference Online, MyiLibrary, Safari, Springer, Oxford University Press, Knovel, Books24x7, Synthesis Engineering E-books, Books@Ovid and some other publishers that are available through Ebrary platform. As our Library diverts substantial amount of its budget for e-books, librarians need to evaluate if these e-books are being used at the university. The e-book format at York University can be viewed as complementary to print rather than as a replacement for it, as it offers a different reading experience to the traditional paper volume.

We conducted an online e-book survey in 2008 and this paper collates the responses from science graduate students and faculty members and tries to answer some of the questions mentioned below:

- How are e-books perceived at our Institution?
- Do faculty members and students know and use e-books? More specifically do they use the e-books subscribed by the libraries?
- How do they access e-books?
- What are the difficulties faced when using e-books?
- What are the features in e-book platform that are being used by our academic community and that may help us in further promoting e-books?

2. Literature Review

ebrary conducted global surveys involving faculty members to understand the usage of e-books in research and instruction, attitude towards e-books, and their perceived strengths and weaknesses (Ebrary 2007). Some of the strengths faculty and students identified with e-books were related to accessibility, usability and the fact that they were less expensive. However both groups mentioned that they were less readable, difficult to highlight, copy, paste or download chapters. Copyright restrictions, limited selection of e-books in their subjects, and difficulty to cite were the other key concerns. Students wanted more multimedia capabilities and better training on using e-books (Ebrary 2008).

A limited number of surveys have examined issues related to e-book usage, user awareness from the perspective of librarians, academics and end-students. Armstrong et al. (2002) surveyed librarians in the United Kingdom about the academic library provision of electronic books. The survey revealed some factors accounting for non-provision of e-books including a lack of perceived demand, ignorance as to the potential qualities of the medium, issues surrounding licensing and economic models, and problems associated with bibliographic access. Chu's (2003) study showed "around the clock availability" and "searchablity" as the most favourable features of e-books and "being hard to read and browse" or "need for special equipment" as reasons hindering use of e-books.

During the last two years, the JISC national e-books observatory has collaborated with universities in the UK, gathering real time evidence on how course text e-books are actually used by students and teachers (Milloy, 2009). The 2009 survey findings from more than 48,000 respondents, point to a growing acceptance of e-books by the academic community, with both teaching staff and students making greater use of e-books through their university library. Around 65% of the students studying Engineering, Medicine and Business Management indicated that they use e-books at their Institute. Around 52% said that they had accessed the e-book from the library website. 44.8% of the medical teachers replied that they did not actively encourage students to use e-book materials and 30.2% of the engineering teachers did not promote e-books.

To better understand faculty perceptions and experiences with e-books, Carlock and Perry (2008) conducted a focus group of six faculty members at Arizona State University. Faculty experiences had not been positive and they expressed concerns about the reliability and accessibility of e-books, particularly in cases where there were a number of concurrent users.

Abdullah and Gibb (2008) investigated e-book awareness and usage at the University of Strathclyde and participants included undergraduate and postgraduate students. Majority of students (22%) were from the sciences and 2% of them were studying within the humanities. Their survey found that 57% of students were not aware of the availability of e-books from the library and 60% of them had not used an e-book. Levine-Clarke (2006) at the University of Denver conducted a survey of 2067 students, faculty, and staff to discover more about how and why they use e-books. 51% of the respondents reported having used e-books, and of those 10.3% reported frequent use of e-books. Most of the users of e-books reported reading a chapter or few pages, rather than the entire book. Faculty members were task-oriented when

they used e-books. They read a chapter or article (47.9%) or a single entry or few pages (42.5%) instead of reading an entire e-book (9.6%). Focusing specifically on undergraduate use of e-books, Hernon et al (2007) interviewed 15 students in economics, literature, and nursing. By closely observing the search behavior of the students they noted that the students browsed or scanned the content, rather than reading it entirely.

Findability of e-books is key for their usage and different surveys on e-book access have shown that bibliographic records for e-books need to be integrated into library catalogue (Abdullah and Gibb, 2008). In a study at the University of Rochester, NetLibrary usage increased from 397 accesses in a five-month period to over 3,000 accesses in the five months following the addition of cataloguing records – an increased usage of 755 percent (Gibbons, 2001). More than 58% of the participants in Ebrary's 2008 student survey mentioned that the library catalogue was their starting point to access e-books.

This survey was aimed at verifying quantitative and qualitative aspects of graduate student and faculty awareness (or non-awareness), acceptance (or non-acceptance), usage levels (or non-usage) and usage patterns of electronic books (e-books). We also wanted to know the effectiveness (or lack of it) of different communication and outreach campaigns used in promoting e-books. The survey would highlight some of the important e-book platform features required by our users.

3. Method

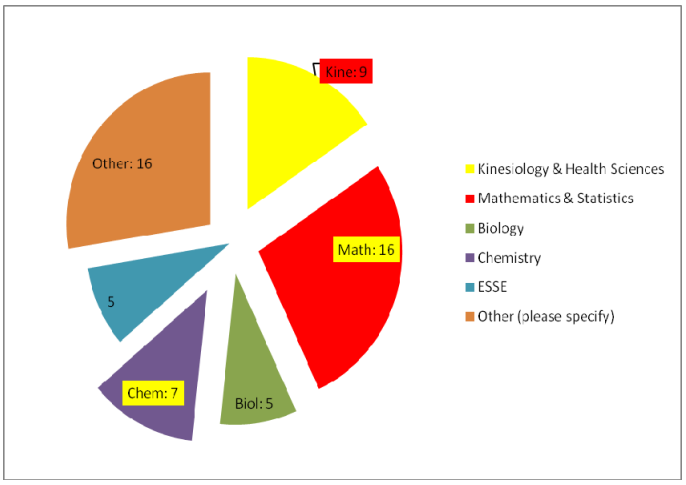
The online E-book survey was administered using the survey monkey tool available from www.surveymonkey.com. The survey was kept open for one month from mid-October to mid-November in 2008. The survey questions for graduate students and faculty members differed slightly (Appendix 1 & Appendix 2). We had three part-time students and fifty-five full-time students participating in the survey. The survey link was e-mailed to full-time and part-time faculty members, thirty-six full-time faculty members participated in the survey.

The online survey link was sent via an e-mail to Graduate Program Secretaries and they were requested to forward it to graduate students. There were no prizes or draws so it can be assumed that the participants had a genuine interest in e-books or that they had used an e-book at some time and wanted to share their experiences. The usual confidentiality part was mentioned to the participants and their e-mails were not collected as a part of the study.

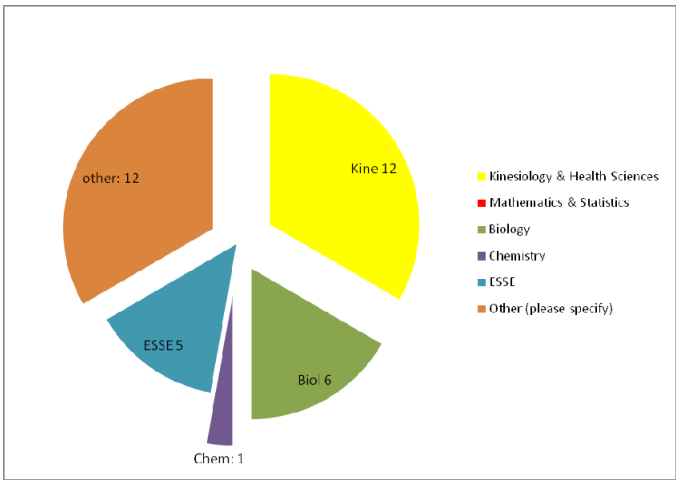
4. Results & Discussions

4.1 Population Distribution

We had a total of 94 completed responses comprising of 58 graduate students and 36 faculty members from different departments. The response rate was considerably more than we had expected considering that there were no incentives at the end of survey completion. Out of the 58 graduate students, 27% were from Mathematics and Statistics, 15.5% from Kinesiology & Health Sciences, Chemistry (8.6%), Biology (8.6%), Earth Sciences (8.6%) and around 27% from other departments including Computer Science & Engineering, Nursing, and Physics (Figure: 1).



Graduate students (n=58)



Faculty (n=36)

Figure 1: Population Distribution of participants in the e-book survey

Thirty-two students were completing their Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) and twenty-five students were completing the Masters program (Appendix: 3, Slide: 1). One of the reasons for higher percentage of Mathematics and Statistics, Kinesiology students participating in the survey could be because of constant promotion of e-books to these group of students as compared to students from other departments. Two of the part-time students were completing their Masters degree and were aware of e-books and had used it at some time during their program. Similarly we had a higher percentage of faculty from Kinesiology & Health Sciences (37%) which was followed by Biology (16.7%) and Earth Science (13.9%). Faculty from Mathematics, Nursing, Bioinformatics, Computer Science & Engineering, Physics, & History of Science comprised the remaining 29 % of the sample (Appendix: 3, Slide: 10).

4.2 Awareness & Usage

While a majority of the graduate students were aware of e-books and 76% of them had used e-books, only 44.5% of the faculty members used e-books and half of the faculty members in the survey were aware that York University Library subscribed to e-books (Table 1).

Specific Audience	Graduate students	Faculty
Do you use e-books?	76%	44.5%
Are you aware that York University Libraries subscribe to e-book packages from different content providers and/or publishers?	65.5%	52.8%
Do you recommend or actively encourage your students to use e-book materials?	50%	20%

Table 1: Percentage who answered *Yes*

Bennett and Landoni (2005) reported that 46 per cent of their respondents were not aware that there were e-book holdings in the library. Similarly, Abdullah and Gibb's (2008) reported that 72% of the participants from the University of Strathclyde were familiar with e-books however 57 % said that they were not aware of the e-books from the library. Rowland et al (2007) conducted a survey at the University College of London found that students at the Masters' level (41%) were more aware of e-books than academic staff (24%).

The main channel for finding e-books was by using the library catalogue (Appendix: 3, Slide: 6). Although more than 50% of the faculty taking the survey were aware of e-books available from different publishers, only 20% of the faculty encouraged the use of e-books (Figure: 2). Faculty members at York who have large classes were not sure if users were allowed unlimited access at the same time. They had questions related to 24/7 access policy, copyright and downloading issues. Some commented that they would promote e-books on a larger scale but were not aware of the electronic content in their subjects. Other faculty presumed that the library did not have enough e-books in their subject.

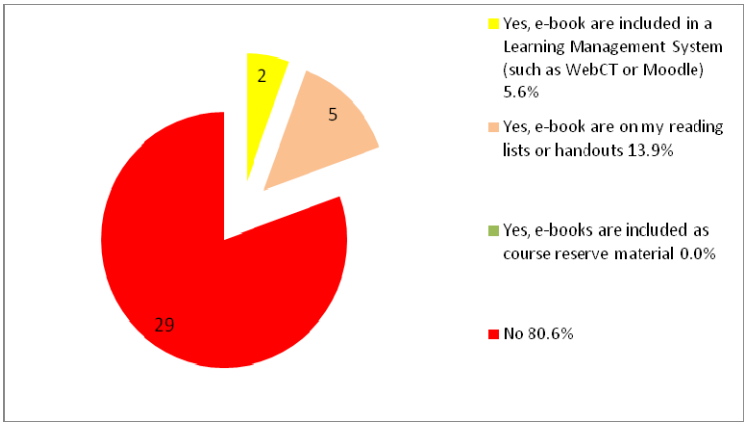


Figure 2: Faculty response: *Do you recommend e-books to your students?*

eBrary, a major ebook content provider, conducted the Global faculty eBook Survey in 2007, with respondents from over 300 individual higher education institutions worldwide. Only 36% of the faculty members in their survey said that they did not integrate the use of e-books in their courses while 42% faculty encouraged students to use e-books as a viable resource and 16.6% linked to e-books from their course management system (eBrary, 2007).

In another study a professor mentioned that he did not promote e-books to undergraduate students since he was never certain whether students could get into the e-book in a timely manner (Carlock et al. 2008). Cox (2004) found that faculty were least sure about downloading, printing, bookmarking, and emailing content, and 22% of the faculty at the Indian Institute of Science stated that e-books were hard to read and browse (Anuradha & Usha, 2006). Some faculty reported that having a larger collection of e-books (55.8%), the ability to download (52.4%), and the ability to print and copy with fewer restrictions (49.9%) would give them an incentive to promote e-books (Ebrary 2007).

4.3 Book Discovery Process

Library catalogue remains the most popular way to find e-books. (Table: 2).

e-book discovery route	Graduate students	Faculty
Library Catalogue	67.2%	41.7%
New books blog	1.7%	-
New books title list	1.7%	2.8
Peers	8.6%	2.8
Library orientation	1.7%	5.6
E-mail notification from the library	10 %	5.6
Posters & promotional material	-	2.8
Library newsletter	5.2%	-
Subject research guide	10.3%	2.8
This survey	17.2%	30.6
Other	13.8%	33.3

Table 2: How do you usually find and access E-books?

Faculty were using Google Scholar and NCBI bookshelf to access health science e-books. A small percentage also browsed the New books title list on the library home page and discussed with colleagues to find e-books in specific subjects (Appendix:3, Slide: 6). Library posters and other promotional material were not the best means for promoting e-books to graduate students and library newsletter and books blog were not used by faculty for finding e-books (Table: 2). This survey also served as a means to inform faculty and graduate students about e-books. Including the complete MARC records for easy findabilty and increased uptake of e-books is of utmost importance.

4.4 Online Reading Habits

Graduate students and faculty were asked how much time they spent reading a book online during a typical session (Table: 3).

Answer	Graduate students	Faculty
More than 20 minutes	41.4%	22%
11-20 minutes	20.7%	11.1%
6-20 minute	13.8%	11.1%
3-5 minutes	6.9%	5.6%
Less than 3 minutes	8.6%	5.6%
Other	8.6%	44.4%

Table 3: In a typical session, how long do you spend reading an e-book from the screen?

Faculty members prefer spending less time reading e-books on the screen and only 22% of them spent more than 20 minutes reading material on the screen. 44% of them responded that they never read a book online (those replying *Other*) and a faculty member commented that it was easier to print and read at leisure. The results were markedly different for graduate

students where 41.4% had spent more than 20 minutes reading a book online (Table: 3).

Answer	Graduate students	Faculty
Whole book	3.4%	None
Several chapters	19.1%	16.7%
One whole chapter	12.1%	13.9%
Less than one chapter	36.2%	33.3%
Browsed through the book	29.3%	36.1%

Table 4: How much of that e-book did you read online in one sitting?

Only 16.7% of the faculty said that they had read several chapters, 33.3% of the faculty read less than one chapter and 36% had browsed through the book (Table: 4). The numbers were similar for graduate students: 36.2% had read less than one chapter in one sitting, 29.3% had browsed through the book and 19% had read several chapters. None of the faculty members had read a whole book while two graduate students had read the whole book in one session (Appendix: 3, Slide: 8). Physics students said that they preferred having the book chapter printed on paper which would give them an opportunity to scribble on it. A Computer Science student had a similar response and said that it is easier to jot down points on printed paper and share it with colleagues. A significant number of students were not aware of the ability to annotate and highlight features that are now available in e-book packages. This could be one of the marketing points that can be used while promoting e-books to our students.

Science faculty at our institution prefers to read print books and a significant number mentioned that eye-strain prevented them from reading an entire e-book or many chapters from the computer screen. Faculty tend to read a chapter or article (47.9%) or a single entry/few pages (42.5%) instead of reading an entire e-book (9.6%) and students and faculty commented that eye-strain was one of the reasons why print books were preferred over e-books (Levine-Clark 2006). Findings from the global survey of faculty conducted by Ebrary (2007) are also in synchrony with our results where 79% of faculty stated that they prefer the portability of print books when reading the entire book or extensive sections in it. Graduate students are hampered in the use of e-books because of the restrictive policies of some e-book providers.

"Most (e-books) only actually allow for a 'skimming' of chapters and will remove your ability to read them after only a few chapters or minutes (the student gave an example of one e-book provider) claiming you are violating their usage policy"

E-book Survey response from one Graduate student at York University.

In Carlock & Perry's survey (2008) a faculty member commented that the limitations imposed on viewing e-books were particularly frustrating since it allowed viewing of a certain percentage of pages at a time and once the time had expired she would have to login only after 24 hours. It was unacceptable to her.

4.5 E-book Packages Used

Both groups were provided a list of e-books from different publishers subscribed by the libraries and the groups had to select the packages they had used (Appendix: 3, Slides: 4, 5). E-books that have been catalogued and are findable through the library catalogue had the highest usage statistics. The Springer series were ranked higher in terms of usage (Table: 5), since a higher percentage of students in our survey were from Mathematics and Statistics (Figure 1) and the complete MARC records from Springer are included in the library catalogue.

Students prefer using online reference material and indicated Encyclopedia Britannica (12.1%), Oxford Reference (6.9%), Wiley Encyclopedia of Life Sciences (6.9%), and CRC Handbook of Chemistry & Physics (5.2%). 22% of the students had not used any of the e-books packages and some students were using Google Books. A relatively small percentage of faculty members were using reference e-books (Appendix: 3, Slides: 5).

Publisher/vendor	% of Gradaute students	% of Faculty
Springer e-books	60.3	25
Lecture notes in Mathematics	20.7	2.8
Safari Books Online	17.2	5.6
Lecture notes in Computer Science	15.5	13.9
Encyclopedia Britannica	12.1	8.3
Books@Ovid	5.2	16.7
CRC Handbook of Chemistry and Physics	5.2	11.1
None of the above	22.4	58.3

Table 5: Top used e-book packages

A faculty member in Engineering had used Morgan & Claypool e-books even though it was not listed in the survey and are not included as yet in the library catalogue. The faculty member had a recollection about the Synthesis (Morgan & Claypool) e-book collection from the e-mail sent by the Engineering Librarian. Graduate students mentioned about e-books from Oxford Scholarship Online (OSO) which is also surprising since content from OSO had not included in the catalogue at the time of this survey. Students knew about this resource from e-mail alerts. E-mail reminders are an important means to get information across to graduate students and faculty about new e-content.

4.6 Preferred features

Some of the very important features for faculty members and graduate students were off-campus access to e-books, ability for multiple users to read the book at the same time, 24/7 access, capability to print and download sections or chapters on their laptops, and capability to search by series. The detailed responses of both groups indicating their preferences is shown in Table: 6 and Appendix: 3, Slide: 11, 12.

Very Important features in e-books	% Graduate students	% Faculty
Ability for more than one student to use an e-book at the same time	70.2	72.2
Ability to email text	41.5	20.6
24/7 access	73.2	74.3
Off-campus access	78.9	80
Formatted citations in APA, MLA etc	31.4	25.8
Capability to print/download sections of content, such as chapter or page range	70.7	52.8
Copying and pasting	53.4	27.8
Downloading to laptop	53.6	47.2
Hyperlinks to citations in books or links to other books	41.1	30.3
Capability to search by series, such as "Lecture Notes in Computer Science"	41.1	40.6

Table 6: *Very important* features desired in e-book packages by graduate students and faculty

Chong et al. (2009) reported that undergraduate and graduate students from the Multimedia University in Malaysia listed bookmarking, highlighting and annotating as some of the most important features in an ideal e-book. Some other important features included were the ability to cross-reference between the contents and index page, orientation clues like breadcrumbs and current chapter, consistent style and colour coding for links, short pages to avoid scrolling, and the ability to search within a book.

Ebrary (2008) conducted the Global Student E-book Survey and some of the features that were listed very important were searching, anytime access, off-campus access, multi user, downloading, copying and pasting, printing, zooming, highlighting, automatic citations, emailing, annotating, book reviews, multimedia, and note taking. In Abdullah and Gibb's study (2008) students said that they used e-books because they had some features that were not present in printed book including hyperlinked table of contents, bookmarks and annotations.

4.7 Promoting E-books

E-book promotion needs to leverage the convenience, searchability and accessibility of e-books as a format. A number of faculty members commented that they were not aware of the various e-book packages and features available within them. They have suggested organizing faculty workshops and other information sessions to inform them about new e-books at York.

Science librarians at York have been promoting e-books using new books blogs, creating public blogrolls for publishers providing RSS feeds, personal communications, creating posters, and informing faculty and students at library open houses. Librarians at York are using innovative Web 2.0 tools like blogs and public blogrolls to promote e-books. Springer, Morgan and Claypool and the Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC) have DOIs for books and book chapters and some science librarians have created proxy authentication links which are embedded in the

publisher's link. Librarians e-mail these massaged URLs when faculty want to promote certain e-books via course reserve materials or course readings.

Rowland et al. (2007) suggest that the most effective marketing channels for e-books for their University would likely to be information on the library web site and e-mail user guides, but more precise targeting for different groups may well pay dividends. Their survey findings suggest that staff and faculty wanted a user guide posted on the library web site.

At Steacie Science & Engineering Library, York University, we have created a webpage that lists all subject specific e-books from different publishers and also created dynamic links to the SIRSI library catalogue to show all e-books available through Springer and EBL.

5. Conclusions

The qualitative and quantitative data was rich enough to give an understanding of reading preferences and challenges faculty and graduate students face while accessing and using e-books. Our survey data points to the fact that while students and faculty are open to the concept of using e-books, their experiences have not been positive in some instances. Some of the challenges they faced were related to findability of e-books and the misperception that there are fewer e-books in their subjects. E-books that are indexed in the catalogue are more likely to be used than e-books that do not have complete MARC records even though they are being promoted via e-mail and other channels. Faculty and students are not aware of many value-added features that are now available through e-books. Librarians will need to promote this information in new and traditional ways to the academic community. Faculty have questions related to copyright policies and accessibility of e-books before they can promote e-books to a wider audience.

More studies would be required to see the differences in the user behaviour and reading habits of distance education students, part-time students and full-time students. There could be differences in reading habits of a newly joined professor compared to faculty who have been teaching for a significant number of years. A larger survey of a more diverse faculty and student population would greatly serve to clarify and expand upon our findings, as well as provide a more representative sample for future research.

As academic libraries increasingly turn to e-books as an alternative to purchasing multiple copies, it's important that we understand how e-books are perceived and used by our faculty. Their endorsement as well as understanding the challenges faced by our student community cannot be underestimated. Faculty mentioned about the importance of DOI in e-books and if they are provided ready to use DOIs or permanent links, they would link chapters or the e-book in their course reading material. Science faculty and students are interested in being able to manipulate and link information in an online environment, for their teaching and learning purposes, and if e-books could incorporate features like the ability to plug in data and interactive graphs there could be a wider uptake of e-books (Appendix: 3, Slide: 11, 12).

As the number of online course offerings and distance learners continues to grow at our University, we anticipate that faculty and teaching associates will increasingly face the need to find new ways of providing course materials and this demand can be met by e-books. In

addition to marketing e-books to faculty and students, academic librarians have a responsibility to advocate the needs of their users to e-book vendors. They will have to address issues related to complete MARC records, digital rights management and agree on a basic set of online searching features desired in an ideal e-book platform. These key issues will need to be considered as Library Consortia work towards an enhanced e-book platform. Without the input of libraries and academic community, e-book vendors' primary clientele, there is no guarantee that the necessary improvements in usability, accessibility, and interactivity would ever be made. E-books have the potential to serve the teaching, learning, and research needs of the academia and together e-book vendors, librarians, faculty and students can enhance the adoption of this product.

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Faculty Survey Questions
Appendix 2: Graduate Survey Questions
Appendix 3: E-book slides (survey responses)

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