

## Mobile Services in Academic Libraries:

## Current Issue Paper 7

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It only takes a glance around a public place to see that mobile technology has become ubiquitous. The vast majority of college students have one mobile device or another that they use to connect to the internet. The library edition of the *NMC Horizon Report* (Johnson, Adams Becker, Estrada, & Freeman, 2015) states that this prevalence of “mobile technology has transformed library patrons’ expectations of when and where they should be able to access content and services” (p. 18). Libraries must respond to this user expectation in order to remain relevant -- and many are.

Liu and Briggs (2015) surveyed and explored the websites of the top 100 universities’ libraries in the United States to determine which mobile services those libraries are providing and plan to implement soon. They focused on these eight mobile technologies: eBooks (92.6% of the top 100 have this), mobile catalog (88%), mobile databases (81.7%), mobile website (81.6%), text messaging (such as text-a-librarian reference service) (77.2%), QR codes (58.7%), library app (29.2%), and augmented reality (5%). All of these leading libraries offered at least one of these mobile services and 83% were offering between four and six of these services at the time they were surveyed. Though they were not looking for these services, they also noted that mobile book renewals (41.18% of the top 100 have this), delivery of instruction (32.35%), and interlibrary loan (20.59%) were commonly offered. This research makes it clear that academic libraries are already engaged in offering mobile services of some kind.

Liu and Briggs's (2015) research also reveals a trend toward using mobile devices as part of library instruction. Of the libraries who responded to the survey portion, 62% percent plan to add mobile instruction services. This seems to primarily take the form of using mobile devices create and view/listen to audio and video, either recorded or in real time, though the authors only briefly mention this. The original wording of the survey questions was not included with the published article, so I do not know if responding libraries selected "library instruction" from a list of options versus self-disclosed, or whether the researchers guided them in defining this at all. It is possible that the libraries had a wide variety of things in mind when they reported upcoming mobile library instruction services, especially considering that virtually everything libraries do can be considered an instruction activity (and often is for library faculty seeking promotion and tenure).

As libraries consider their current and potential services, they must consider the mobile options that may or may not be possible. For example, when determining what the Consortium Library's tutorial videos will look like, what tool is used to create them, and where they live online, I need to consider how these tutorials will work on mobile devices and factor that into my decision-making process. That said, mobile incompatibility may not be so weighted a criteria that it kills an otherwise great online library instruction project like mine. The *NMC Horizon Report* (Johnson et al., 2015) points out a need for additional research about student behaviors, expectations, and desires as there are indications that people prefer to do extensive research on desktop or laptop computers rather than on phones or other small screen devices.

Thinking about mobile services is best addressed in an organized fashion, with libraries developing strategic plans, policies, and procedures regarding their mobile services (Johnson et al., 2015). And when should libraries begin making these organized efforts? Liu and Briggs (2015) are clear: You must begin as soon as possible because, if you are not already offering the most common mobile services with plans to expand, you are already behind.

References

Johnson, L., Adams Becker, S., Estrada, V., and Freeman, A. (2015). *NMC Horizon Report: 2015 Library Edition*. Austin, Texas: The New Media Consortium.

Liu, Y. Q., and Briggs, S. (2015). A library in the palm of your hand: Mobile services in top 100 university libraries. *Information Technology and Libraries*, 34(2), 133-148.