

# The Library is Our Lab: The Case for Print Books in an Academic Library



Peggy Ellis and Fran Gray, Research and Instruction Librarians, Western University

## Abstract

Humanities researchers consider the library to be their laboratory, and its print collections their essential research equipment. In spite of anecdotal evidence that both students and faculty in the Humanities prefer print materials over e-books, academic libraries are allocating a steadily increasing proportion of their acquisitions budgets toward the purchase of e-books across all disciplines.

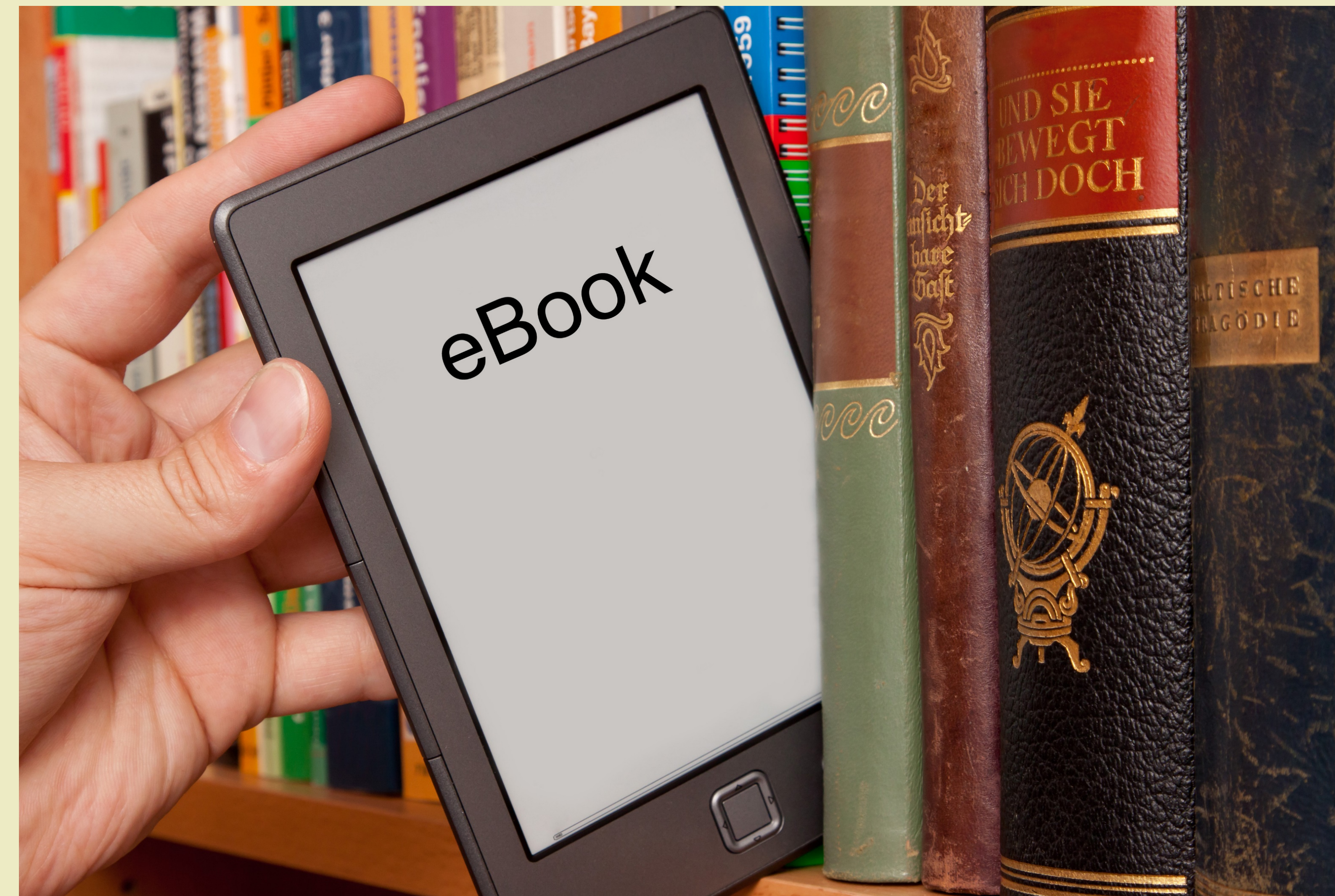
At Western University in London, Ontario, Peggy Ellis and Fran Gray surveyed Arts & Humanities faculty members and graduate students to gain a better understanding of their attitudes toward e-books. The objectives of our research are three-fold: to determine whether researchers in the Humanities departments prefer print over e-book formats; to identify issues that may negatively impact on research and teaching activities based on book format; and to determine what features would enable researchers to make optimal use of e-books.

## Methodology

- ◆ Received approval from Non-Medical Research Ethics Board to conduct an online survey .
- ◆ Sent survey consisting of 16 questions to all faculty members and graduate students in the faculty of Arts and Humanities and in the History department at Western University.
- ◆ Open-ended respondent views were solicited through comments boxes at the end of most questions.
- ◆ Analyzed responses.

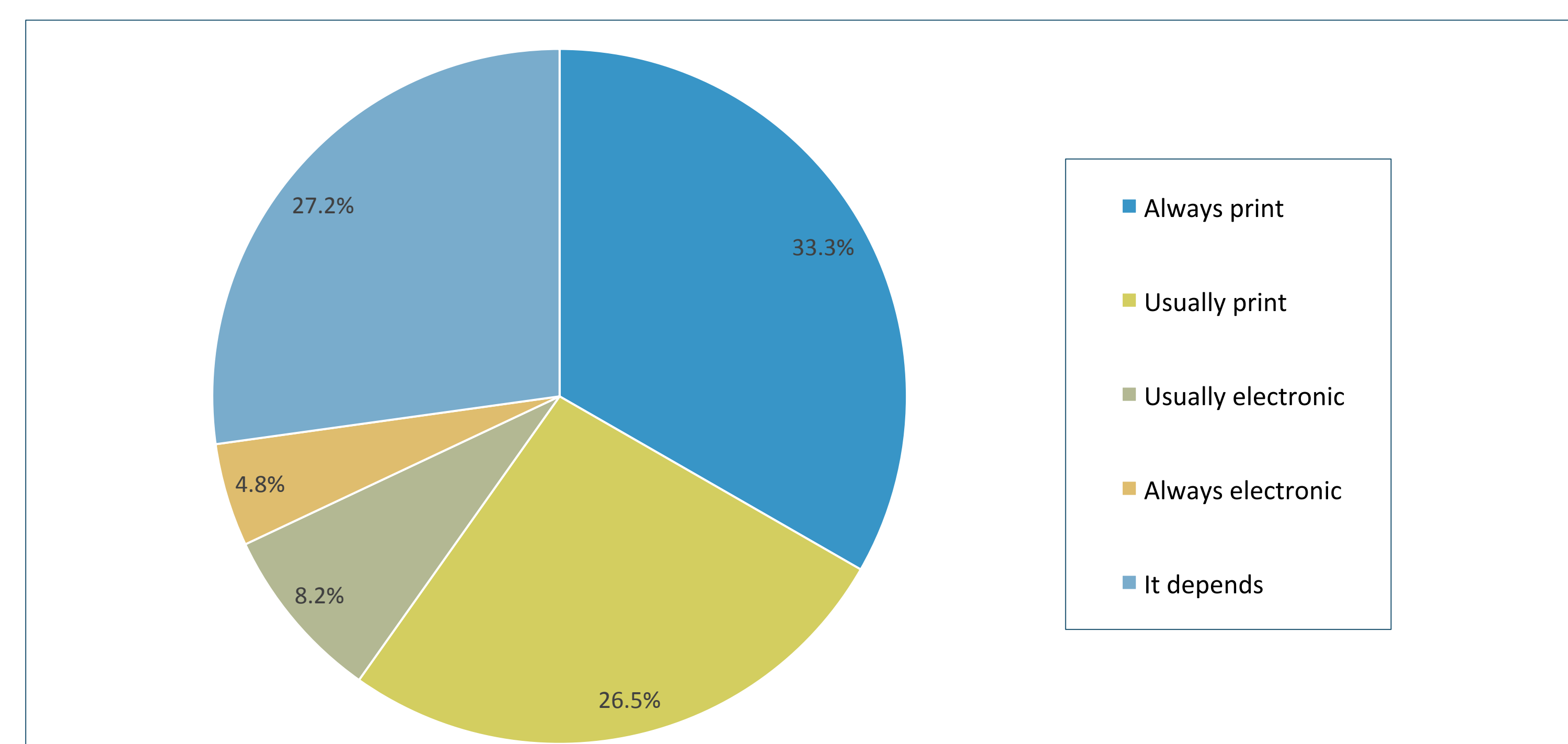
## References

1. Brunvand, Amy. "Taking Paper Seriously: A Call for Format Sensitive Collection Development." *College and Research Library News*, 76.7 (2015) 360-1.
2. Corlett-Rivera, Kelsey and Timothy Hackman. "E-Book use and Attitudes in the Humanities, Social Sciences and Education." *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 14.2 (2014): 255-86. Web
3. Dahl, Candice. "PDA and the Humanities." *The Electronic Library* 31.6 (2013): 745-52. Web.
4. Levine-Clark, Michael. "Electronic Books and the Humanities: A Survey at the University of Denver." *Collection Building* 26.1 (2007): 7-14.
5. Muir, Laura and Graeme Hawes. "The Case of E-book Literacy: Undergraduate Students' Experience with E-books for Course Work." *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 39.3 (2013): 260-74. Web
6. Shelburne, Wendy Allen. "E-book Usage in an Academic Library: User Attitudes and Behaviors." *Library Collections, Acquisitions and Technical Services* 33.2(2009): 59-72. Web.

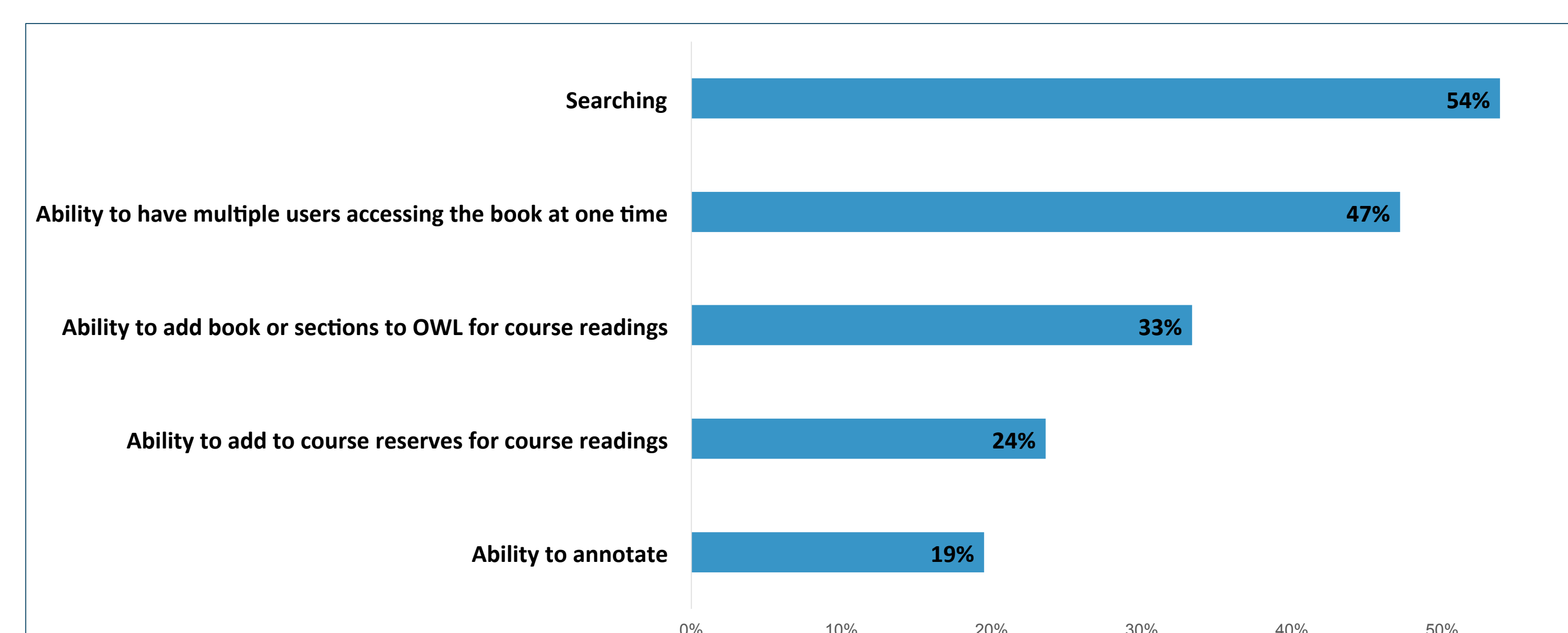


## Survey Results

### Question 7: When you have access to both print and electronic versions of the same book, which would you use?



### Question 10: What e-book features are important to you?



## Factors Affecting Satisfaction with E-Books

- ◆ E-books for arts and humanities disciplines are typically on platforms with significant restrictions on printing / downloading.
- ◆ Inability to use most Western Libraries e-books on commercial e-book readers.
- ◆ Lack of familiarity with available features of e-books.
- ◆ Researchers expect the same functionality that they are used to in e-journals and other digital information resources.

## Notable comments

It depends on whether I need to check something immediately, in which case the access to the e-book is just perfect. If I want to read the book extensively, I'll always choose the printed book.

If I have to read "deeply", I prefer print ...

E-books are a good investment, when they are bought IN ADDITION to the hard cover version. It is indeed easier with an e-book to check references and look up specific things. HOWEVER, e-books are horrible for reading from cover to cover and for browsing.

Where I need to gather information quickly (i.e. find a quotation or an example, get the gist of an argument) , e-book. For cover-to-cover reading I prefer print.

The limitation of not being able to access an e-book that another user is viewing seems to partly negate the point in having online access.

The one I wanted to use didn't have any of the images, which was crucial, so I bailed and haven't really gone back to it.

As an audible learner, I rely on e-books whenever possible, because I can have them spoken to me.

## Conclusions and Implications for Collection Development

- ◆ Results confirm anecdotal evidence that humanities researchers prefer print books over e-books and appreciate having both formats
- ◆ Current e-book formats provided by academic libraries are not meeting user expectations for navigation and flexibility of use.
- ◆ Librarians should find ways to address user gaps in knowledge about e-book features and platforms, and DRM.
- ◆ Librarians need to consider which format is best suited to the intended use and be mindful about book format when developing collections.