

2009

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Citation

Wong, Shun Han Rebekah. "Incorporating audio-visual materials in university teaching: Results of a faculty survey and corresponding actions of the Library." *New Review of Academic Librarianship* 15.1 (2009): 35-52.

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This document is the **accepted version** of the following published article:

Title: Incorporating audio-visual materials in university teaching: Results of a faculty survey and corresponding actions of the Library

Author(s): WONG, Shun Han Rebekah

Journal: New Review of Academic Librarianship

Year: Apr 2009

Volume: 15

Issue: 1

Page: 35 - 52

DOI: 10.1080/13614530903106620

Publisher: Routledge (Taylor & Francis)

Received: March 27 2009

Revised: April 23, 2009

Accepted: April 27, 2009

Incorporating audio-visual materials in university teaching: Results of a faculty survey and corresponding actions of the Library

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(Received 23 April 2009)*

This article presents the results of a faculty survey conducted by the Hong Kong Baptist University Library regarding faculty attitudes and comments on the use of audio-visual materials for teaching. Results showed a fairly high level of AV material use for teaching, overall satisfaction regarding material content, and overall dissatisfaction regarding content currency and content variety. The article further discusses the Library's corresponding actions, including VHS conversion and relocation projects, revisiting AV collection development policy and procedures, a video-on-demand service for scholarly events and local TV programs, a new visual and audio search page, and the media consultancy service.

Keywords: faculty survey; audio-visual materials; teaching and learning; user behaviour; library changes

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Incorporating Audio-Visual Materials in University Teaching: Results of a Faculty Survey and Corresponding Actions of the Library

The availability of moving images and audio resources can be used in many ways to enhance teaching and learning experiences. On top of their effectiveness in illustrating concepts, showing examples, inspiring discussion and enhancing language skills, more importantly, these materials can provide a more exciting way of teaching and learning than a straightforward lecture or tutorial (McNaught, 2007). Several recent studies have provided empirical data to prove the continued and increasing popularity of media resources in instruction (Laskowski, 2002/03; Houston, 2000) and its tremendous success (Moreno and Ortegado-Layne, 2008) in the college and university level across different disciplines. Research further shows that university students prefer multimedia to traditional lectures (Hallett and Faria, 2006).

Despite these trends, utilization of audio-visual (AV) materials to enhance teaching and learning is not obvious at Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU), even though the Library has strong faculty involvement in AV collection development, and provides various teaching support services. The purpose of the current study is to (1) gauge the use of HKBU Library AV materials by teaching staff for teaching, (2) better understand faculty attitudes and needs, (3) get direction on how our AV collection could be improved, and (4) gain insight into how we could better deliver our AV resources to users.

Background

HKBU is a medium-sized university providing broad-based education with distinctive research contributions. The University has eight faculties/schools: Faculty of Arts (ARTD), School of Business (BUSD), School of Chinese Medicine (SCM), School of Communication (COMD), Faculty of Science (SCID), Faculty of Social Sciences (SSCD), Academy of Visual Arts (AVA) and School of Continuing Education (SCE), a school primarily providing part-time evening courses and full-time associate degree programs. Demographic data in 2007/2008 showed 566 full-time and 1,027 part-time academic/teaching staff, plus 7,843 university-based and 38,212 SCE-based students (HKBU, 2009). The HKBU's Main Library basically serves the whole university community, with the exception of SCE non-degree students.

The Multimedia Learning Centre (MLC) of the Main Library has a collection of around 71,000 AV items, comprised of various formats such as DVDs, VCDs, CDs, CD-ROMs, VHS, and cassette tapes. Compared with a 2002 national survey conducted in the United States (Laskowski and Bergman, 2004), we have very strong faculty involvement in AV collection development through our Library Coordinator Programme. A faculty member of each department is nominated to serve as the Library Coordinator who collects and coordinates order requests from the corresponding department. More than 80 percent of our purchased AV items come from this programme. Also, in response to faculty requests, we have off-air recorded local documentary-type television programs since 1985.

The MLC also values teaching support services. In 2007, we introduced the AV Advanced Booking Service to help teaching faculty secure needed items for a particular class on a specific date. To address faculty complaints regarding the lack of appropriate playback equipment in classrooms, we also provide a Portable DVD Player Loan Service for use in classes and tutorials.

Although the 2007/08 AV check-out statistics of faculty members increased by 13 percent over the previous year, we were not satisfied. We envisaged that an even stronger integration of AV materials in teaching activities could reverse the gradually declining student usage of the collection.

Methodology

In November 2008, all HKBU professors, scholars, fellows, and lecturers (whose names were listed in the University's 2008/09 Communication Directory) received an email inviting them to participate in the online survey, with the exception of SCM. Discipline-specific AV materials for SCM are housed and managed separately by a branch library. Over the next two weeks, we sent out two follow-up emails as a reminder. We also communicated the message through the Dean's Office of each faculty/school, the Library Coordinator Program, the University's e-announcement channel and the Library's web site.

The questionnaire was assessed by the Head of the Department of Sociology, and then a pre-test was done by three faculty members coming from different educational areas. The survey contained nine questions falling into three major themes. The first two multiple-choice

questions asked about faculty's usage of AV materials for teaching in the Fall semester of 2008. The next three multiple-choice questions invited comments on our AV collection. Respondents were allowed to make free-text comments to supplement their multiple-choice responses. The last four questions were open-ended, optional questions seeking suggestions for future improvement and for the potential online video service.

Respondents

A total of 168 teaching staff completed the survey. Based on the latest Communication Directory, there were 593 teaching faculty members not including SCM. A 28.3 percent response rate was recorded. The bivariate correlations (r) between respondent percentages and population percentages were 0.91 in the faculty/school level and 0.72 in the departmental level. These very high correlations meant that the profiles of the respondents were closely matched with that of the population; therefore, the sample was highly representative. As sample representativeness is more important than sample size (Thompson, 2000), we believe that this survey is very likely to provide an accurate reflection of our faculty. Nevertheless, we noted that our SCID sample tended to be somewhat less representative (figure 1). The comparatively low response rate of SCID could be explained by the phenomenon that nonusers are more likely to decline to participate in a survey as they have little understanding of the services or collections that they have not recently accessed (Thompson, 2000).

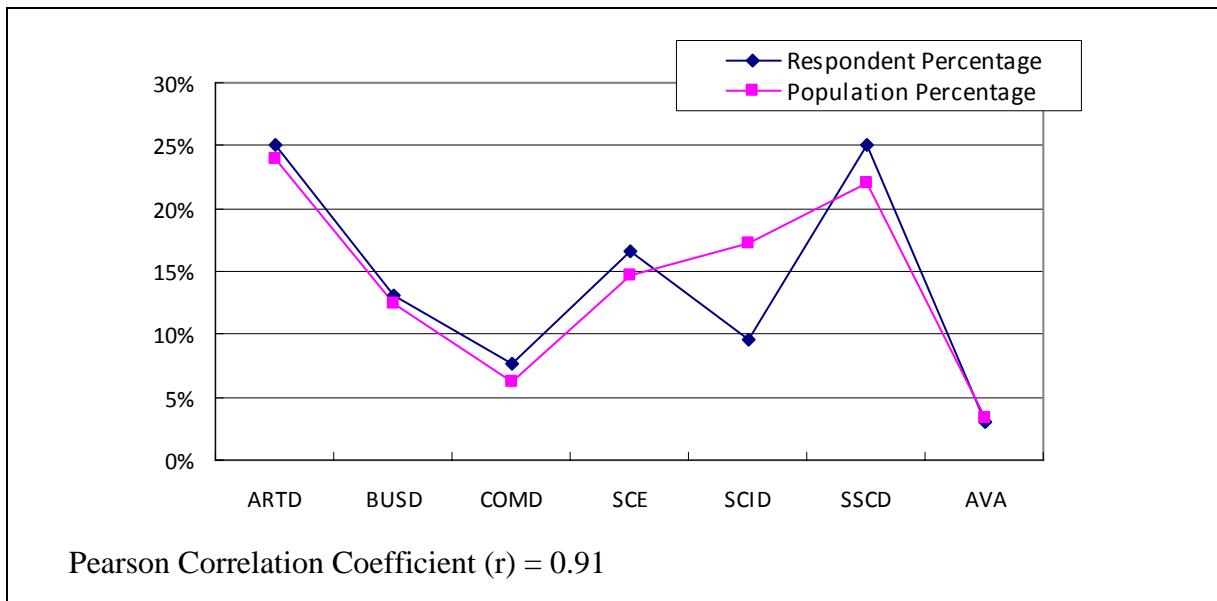


Figure 1. Respondent Percentage vs. Population Percentage (by Faculty/School)

Results and Discussion

Use of AV Materials for Teaching

The survey results indicated a fairly high level of use of AV materials for teaching in the Fall semester 2008. An encouraging 68 percent indicated that they were users, with 25 percent saying that they were heavy users who “almost always” or “often” used our AV materials as teaching aids. The frequency of use of respondents varied greatly by faculty/school. ARTD teachers were most likely to integrate AV materials in teaching, while SCID teachers were least likely to do so (figure 2).

Q: In the current semester (Sep – Dec 08), how often did you use our AV materials for teaching?

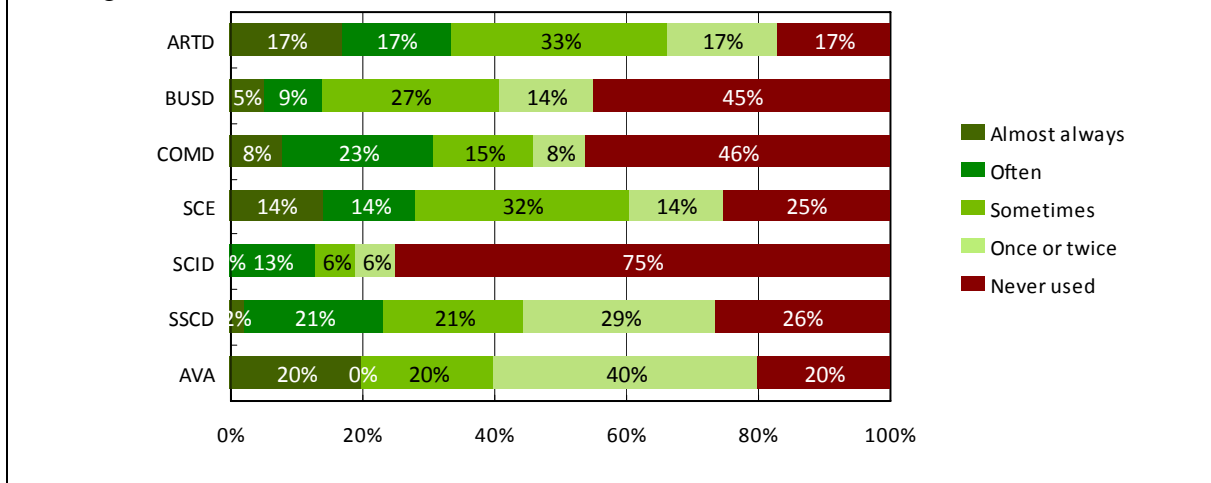


Figure 2. Frequency of Use for Teaching (by Faculty/School)

When broken down to the departmental level, a few unusual cases were found. All respondents from Music, Religion, Cinema & Television, Education (SCE), and History departments expressed that they had used our AV materials for teaching in the Fall semester, while all respondents coming from Economics, Communication, Computer Science, Mathematics, and Physics departments indicated zero usage.

Five ways of using library AV materials for teaching were listed in the questionnaire.

1. For class preparation
2. Encouraged students to use as viable resources
3. Assigned as course reserves / essential course materials
4. Played the whole / part of the materials during class time
5. Other (please specify)

Respondents tended to use AV materials in diverse ways to enhance teaching. Although SCID respondents showed a simpler approach (only options 1 and 3 were indicated), the ways of using library AV materials in teaching were consistent across all

faculties/schools. Playing the materials in class was the most popular use (76 percent), followed by class preparation (54 percent). See figure 3.

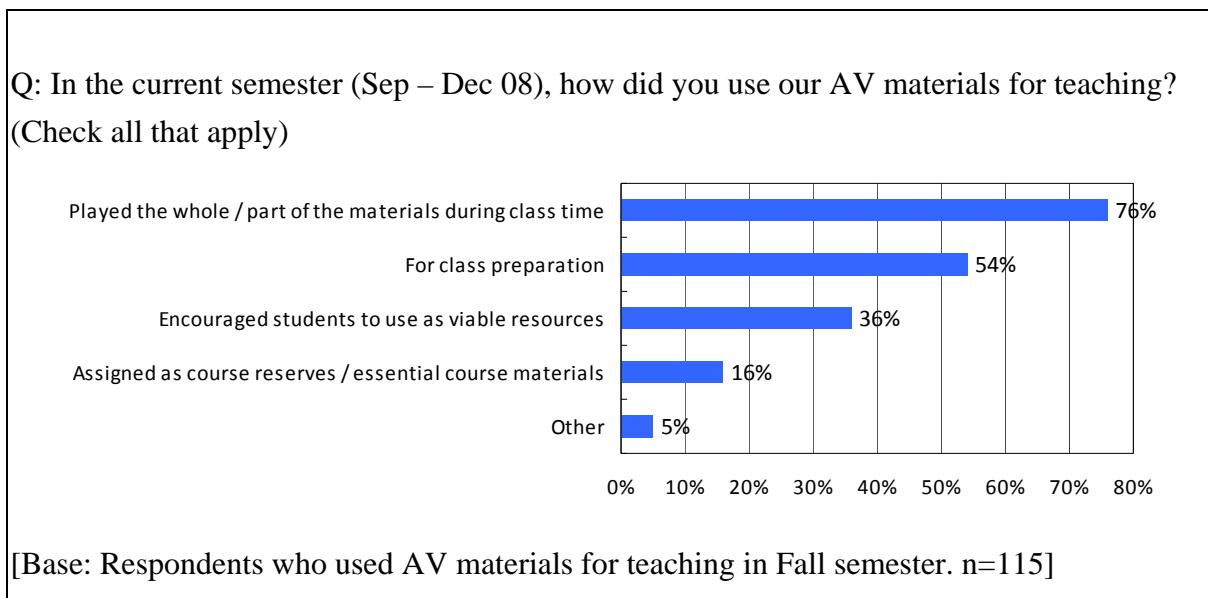


Figure 3. Use for Teaching (by Total Respondents)

Topics Matched Teaching Needs

The next question asked respondents to indicate their level of agreement with the statement: “Topics of the library’s AV materials match my teaching areas.” Responses were on a 4-point scale, from 1 (strongly agree) to 4 (strongly disagree), plus an additional “Don’t know” option.

Respondents generally agreed that topics of library AV materials matched their teaching needs. Based on the ordinal data of the 4-point scale, the median category, which is used to show central tendency, was “2.” However, among the 131 respondents who gave ratings, only 55 percent agreed with topic suitability; 45 percent disagreed. From figure 4, we

may see that this distribution was somehow affected by the unfavorable ratings of SCID respondents.

COMD and ARTD respondents showed the highest level of satisfaction regarding content suitability of the AV collection for teaching. Among those who gave ratings, the percentages of agreement reached 70 and 65 percent respectively. With only 23 percent agreeing, SCID respondents showed the lowest level of satisfaction. SCID was also the only department scoring a median category of “3.”

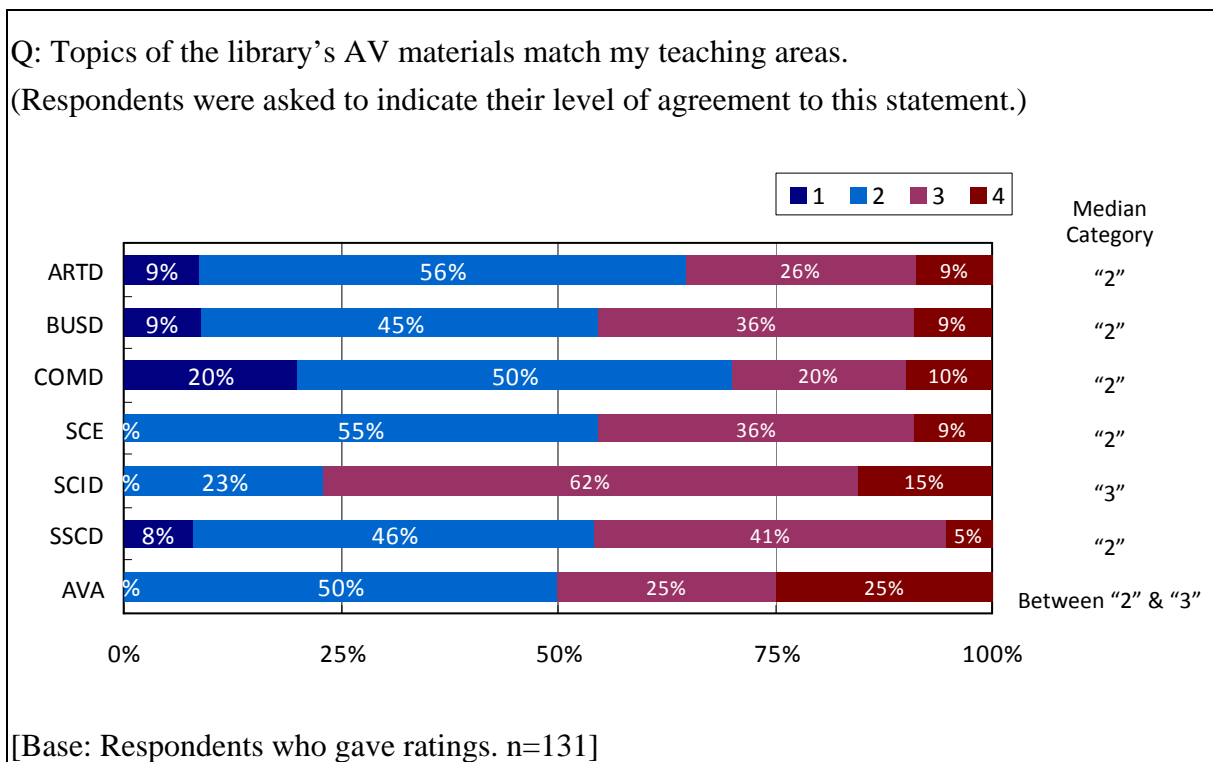


Figure 4: Evaluating Content Suitability (by Faculty/School)

Twenty-nine respondents further elaborated on their choices by written comments. Most of them (40 percent) wrote down their specific needs based on their own teaching areas, such as a particular AV title or a particular disciplinary area that needs more AV materials.

Thirty percent were compliments, and the remaining 30 percent were miscellaneous comments or sharing.

In contrast to other faculties/schools, all SCID comments came down to the same two messages: (1) current AV materials are too elementary; and (2) AV materials are not needed for teaching. In fact, throughout the survey, responses of SCID participants seem to be different from all other respondents, including their library use pattern, attitudes towards using AV materials in teaching, and comments on the AV collection. We should be more attentive to the needs of SCID faculty. It is necessary for us to gain a better understanding of their teaching and research patterns and the kinds of library support they prefer. At the end of the survey, there was a question asking if the respondents would like to further discuss their thoughts regarding our media services and collections with us face-to-face. Among the 16 SCID respondents, 2 of them checked “yes.” However, due to scheduling conflicts, such personal visits are still under arrangement.

Content was Out-Dated?

Another question asked respondents to indicate their level of agreement to the statement, “Content of the library’s AV materials is updated enough for my teaching,” again by a 4-point scale.

Teachers tended to disagree that the content of library AV materials was updated enough for their teaching. Among the 127 respondents who gave ratings, 38 percent agreed and 62 percent disagreed, having a median category of “3.” However, from the written

elaborations of respondents, it seems that many respondents associated the term “updated enough” with the physical format of the materials and turnaround time. It was unclear if the ratings were actually reflecting their opinions on the currency of material content.

With 50 percent of respondents agreeing, COMD indicated the highest level of satisfaction regarding AV content currency. COMD also got the best median category, lying between “2” and “3.” All other faculties/schools showed a central tendency of “3”, disagreeing with the statement. BUSD and SCID, with only 27 percent of respondents agreeing, indicated the lowest level of satisfaction with the currency aspect. See figure 5.

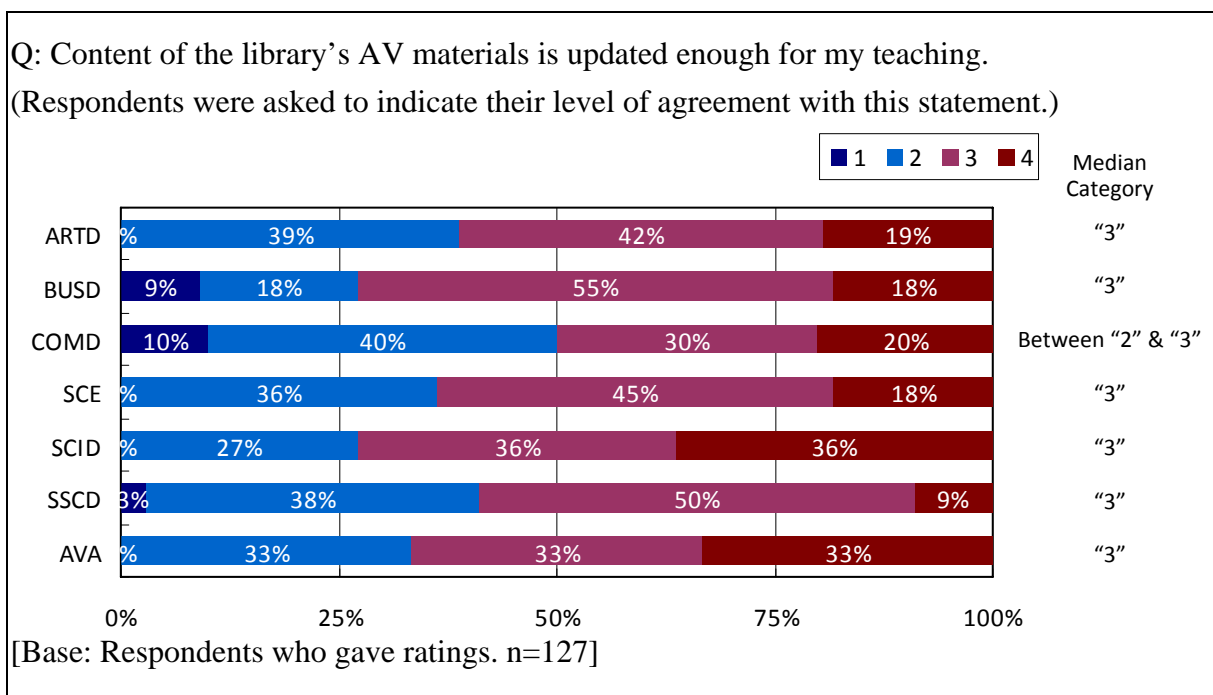


Figure 5: Evaluating Content Currency (by Faculty/School)

Forty respondents gave additional written comments for this question. Thirty percent of these comments simply re-emphasized the out-dated issue without any elaborations. Twenty-five percent commented about content currency related to different areas of concern,

another 25 percent about the physical format, 10 percent about turnaround time, 5 percent were compliments, and the remaining 5 percent were miscellaneous. We will further look into the particular comments regarding content currency with the Acquisitions Librarian and see how we might improve.

Get Rid of VHS

“We can't use the Video cassettes in our classroom anymore. There aren't many CDs and DVDs!” states a teacher of the Language Center. “Many materials are still in VHS format, which is more difficult to operate for classroom teaching purposes when compared to DVD format,” written by another teacher from the Education Department. In fact, after the invention of VCDs and DVDs in the 1990s, the Library already set these formats (especially DVDs) as the preferred video formats and kept the purchase of VHS minimal. We also purchased DVD copies of the existing VHS collection as replacements. So, what else can we do to meet users' needs for newer formats?

The easiest task should be related to the off-air recorded local television programs. We had around 2,100 cassette tapes storing more than 8,800 episodes broadcast from 1985 to 2000. Television programs broadcast after 2000 are already in DVD format. Due to the license agreements with local television companies, the Library has the full right to transform these materials into different formats for teaching and learning purposes as long as we follow the restriction of on-campus use. In the beginning of 2008, we started a pilot project by selecting 550 tapes that were easier to handle, and outsourced the format conversion (from

VHS to DVD) to an external company. After 5 months of conversion and follow-up work, which included quality control, content verification, bibliographic record modification, and technical processing, we found the pilot project successful. By the time this survey was organized, we were just beginning the second phase of the conversion project that dealt with all remaining 1,550 tapes. This project is expected to be finished by the end of August 2009. We are also planning to prepare an additional online format for these materials and provide access through a video-on-demand service.

However, format shifting of purchased AV materials is not easy in Hong Kong. Although the Hong Kong Copyright Ordinance allows libraries to make a copy from any item in the permanent collection for preservation purpose (The Government of HKSAR, 1997), it is unclear if we could undergo format shifting for this purpose. Last year, the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region attempted to consolidate opinions and needs of local university libraries regarding format shifting and further discussed the issue with local media producers. However, as of today, no concrete agreement has been made.

Fortunately, the written comments collected by this survey helped us rethink this issue from a new angle. It is true that faculty members are asking for more materials in newer formats, but their feeling of inadequate DVDs or VCDs may be mistakenly affected by the disproportionate amount of shelving space that VHS items occupy. In MLC, the ratio of our DVD/VCD items to VHS items is 1 : 1.26, but the ratio of their shelving space is 1 : 2. DVDs/VCDs occupy 49 bays, all with 7 tiers. VHS occupy 98 bays, each with 6 or 7 tiers.

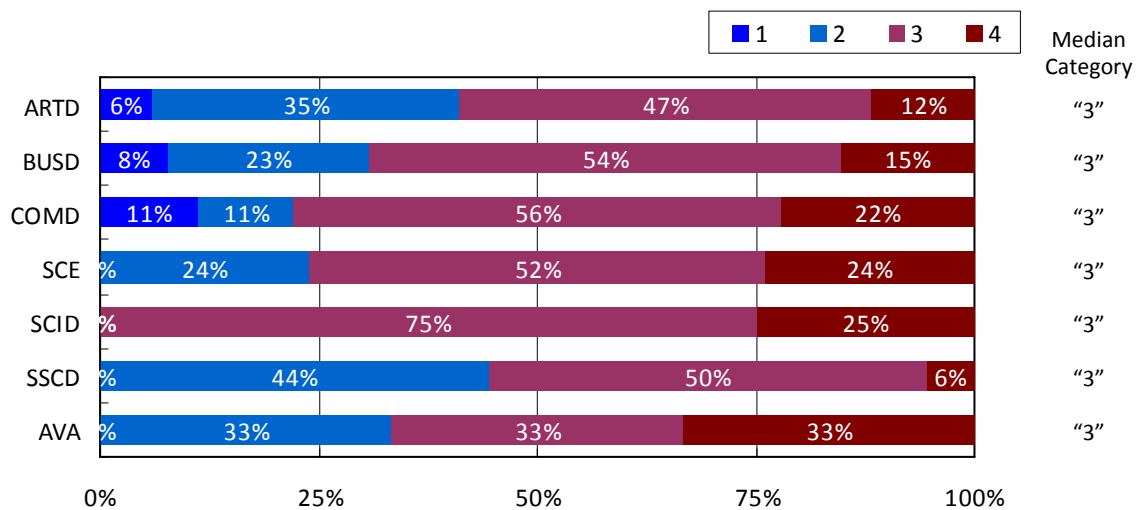
Because of the space they take, these 98 “giants” – bays of VHS – could easily attract the attention of our users. In view of this, we are planning to remove rarely used VHS tapes from the open collection to the in-storage area, so that we could have more and more attractive space to display our DVD and VCD collections. We hope we can free up 20 to 30 bays this summer.

Content Variety was Not Enough

When asked if they agree to the statement “When interested in one topic, the library can provide me with an adequate variety of AV materials to choose from,” the majority of respondents disagreed, at 67 percent of respondents who provided ratings to this question. The median category was “3.”

In fact, the median categories of all faculties/schools were “3.” Forty-four percent of SSCD respondents strongly agreed or agreed to the statement, showing the highest level of satisfaction. However, no SCID respondents agreed with the statement related to content variety, showing the lowest level of satisfaction. See figure 6.

Q: Content of the library's AV materials is updated enough for my teaching.
 (Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with this statement.)



[Base: Respondents who gave ratings. N=132]

Figure 6: Evaluating Content Variety (by Faculty/School)

Twenty-three respondents provided supplementary comments. Forty-three percent shared a particular area of interest that needs attention regarding content variety, 35 percent re-emphasized this issue, 9 percent were compliments, and the remaining 13 percent were miscellaneous. One of the respondents gave a telling comment, stating that “So far we do not have a systematic way of developing our AV collection. Purchases seem to be ad hoc.”

Revisiting Collection Development Policy and Procedure

Although a collection policy statement for MLC is in force and strong faculty involvement is ensured through the Library Coordinator Programme, AV purchases are still treated case by case, item by item. At present, the Library prepares a budget allocation guideline for each faculty/school for acquiring library materials, tailored to the nature and price of resources that they need. This guideline is revised and updated regularly. The two major categories in this

guideline are: (1) Serials and (2) Books and AV. Since books and AV materials are treated as one category, many departments tend to spend most of this allocation on books and overlook individual faculty members' need for AV materials. One faculty member in the English Department wrote, "The department does not have a separate budget for purchase of AV materials. We have to rely on other means (e.g., Teaching and Development Grants) to develop AV collection."

This situation becomes even worse for the departments where disciplinary-related AV materials are expensive. A faculty member in the Chemistry Department stated, "I know that AV materials are expensive and for science, technology and environmental topics, for which I am mostly interested in, they get outdated very quickly... I have no solution for the problem." Similarly, a faculty member from the Geography Department wrote, "Part of the problem is that the Department has limited resources for purchasing AV materials."

Like most libraries, the HKBU Library implements approval book plans, collaborating with several book publishers, to help faculty members and librarians evaluate and choose new books, and speed up the ordering process. However, at present, we do not provide a similar service for purchasing AV materials. "The library does not connect with the major publishers of video materials in film studies for direct/timely acquisition," states a teacher in the Cinema and Television Department. Another teacher from Marketing Department wrote, "When we want to purchase some AV materials, I think it would be appropriate that we can have a preview of the material." It is difficult to evaluate the

suitability and quality of an AV item simply from a product catalogue, so faculty cannot judge if the purchase is justified.

Unfortunately, we have no single and quick solution for this concern. It is always difficult to establish a collection building policy that balances the needs of all, and a collection building procedure that is convenient and cost-effective. Nevertheless, we will pass these comments to the Technical Services Division for further investigation and consideration.

More Documentaries, Movies, and Drama Series Needed

An open-ended question in the survey asked respondents to suggest any AV resources / services that we currently do not provide that would increase their use of AV materials for teaching. Seventy-five respondents replied with valid suggestions.

The overwhelming majority of respondents (81 percent) suggested new resources, either related to an area of concern or with specific titles. The more commonly suggested resource types were: documentaries, movies, TV drama series, Chinese music/opera, and popular English music videos. According to the notes made by respondents, these kinds of materials can be widely applicable to different disciplines, such as English language learning, Chinese language learning, translation, music, education, sociology, social work, cinema and television, journalism, Associate Degree programs, etc. Most of these respondents, when suggesting new resources, emphasized newer formats, such as DVDs, CDs, or online format.

The remaining suggestions related to AV formats (7 percent), searching capability (5 percent), promotion-related service (5 percent), loan rules (3 percent), acquisitions/budget issues (3 percent), etc.

Video-on-Demand (VoD): Subject-Specific Content

A question was designed to ask respondents what types of videos they would use most for teaching if the videos were provided online, without considering copyright issues at the moment. Ninety-eight respondents provided solid suggestions and shared their views. Most respondents recommended subject-specific content (47 percent), followed by TV programs and documentaries (44 percent). Other opinions included movies, music, and opera.

After going through these survey responses, we asked ourselves what kinds of subject-specific content can we provide that could possibly be applicable to most disciplines. A respondent from the English Department helped us revisit a Video-on-Demand (VoD) project that had been on hold for months due to manpower and budget constraints. That respondent stated, “I would welcome library ownership of multi-media development for eventual classroom/research use. As it is now, teaching staff have to get funding from research grants to develop their own media teaching components on a case-by-case basis.”

Every year, there are an impressive number of public lectures, seminars, and international conferences organized in the University by different departments and research centers. The organizing units usually invite internationally renowned scholars and our faculty members as presenters. These presentations contain broad-ranging, relevant, and current

academic information related to different disciplines. In Jan 2009, we decided to quickly embark upon capturing and providing online access to these presentations. We started the planning process, worked out copyright issues, and liaised with the Information Technology Services Center, another department of the University, for the video production. In the next month, we had a trial run with a 2-day international conference. After this experience, we fine-tuned our approach and workflow, and more importantly we started to contact all other departments and centers in the University for collaborative possibilities.

Another inspiring project is to showcase students' video productions online. "The school of communication has a lot of students who produce TV dramas, news documentaries, animations and so forth and put them on DVD. It would be nice if some of the selected works are kept in the library for the future instructors / students to have a look," wrote a faculty member of the Journalism Department. Nevertheless, we will not kick off this project until the VoD service regarding scholarly events and local TV programs becomes more mature.

Teachers' AV Productions

The last question asked if any respondents have made any AV materials that the Library could circulate to users. Thirteen respondents replied that they had created AV materials by themselves, most of which are the products of research. However, a few of them shared that their "productions" were simply private collections of different resources for their own teaching use without seeking approval from the original producers; in other words, these kinds of "productions" cannot be circulated to other library users.

An attempt was made to see if there is any relationship between faculty involvement in production of AV resources, and their frequency of using AV materials in teaching, taking data in the Fall semester 2008 for calculation. The correlation (r) is 0.04, showing a very weak relationship between these two factors.

Get Me What I Want

On top of the comments that we discussed earlier, one message repeatedly appeared throughout survey responses: “Get me what I want!” In general, there are two types of respondents. The first type would like to be able to effectively search and accurately evaluate needed AV resources by themselves.

Different faculty members suggested different methods to ease their searching and browsing, such as “a trailer or short clip of each video could be accessible from the library website so I could sit in front of my computer and judge whether some video is useful” suggested a Journalism teacher, “Specify the areas near the entrance of MLC, e.g. Phys., Chem, Bio section should be specified more clearly” suggested a Chemistry faculty, and “There needs to be a convenient way to search and review the material by topic (e.g., corporate governance, recruitment, core competence, etc.)” stated a Marketing professor.

Although most of these suggestions require a longer time to explore their feasibility (for example, providing video short clips online may conflict with copyright law, showing movie or drama trailers may involve charges, displaying disks according to departments may

conflict with the arrangement of Library of Congress call number system, etc.), we received a very clear message that something needs to be done immediately to enhance searching.

At present, all AV resources are catalogued in our Innopac System. Through the OPAC, users can limit their search to multimedia resources or even local TV programs (figure 7). In other words, the existing searching system greatly relies on the functions provided by Innopac and the data of our bibliographic records. Consider local TV programs as an example. Since most of these documentaries discuss local social or economic events, the same three Library of Congress subject headings are often used: Hong Kong (China) -- Politics and government -- 1997-, Hong Kong (China) -- Social conditions, and Hong Kong (China) -- Economic conditions. This pattern greatly reduces the distinction between these records and thus increases searching difficulty.

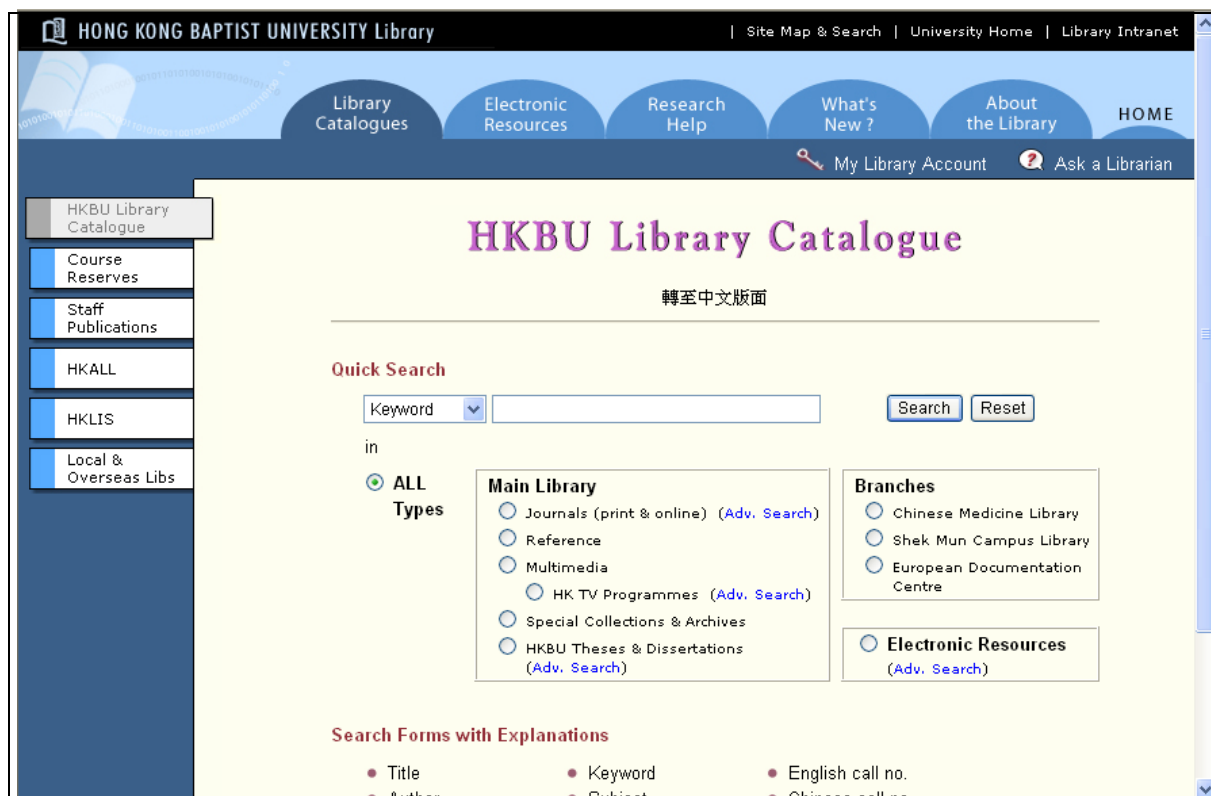


Figure 7: Advanced Search Screen of Current OPAC

We welcome all kinds of the latest technology to enhance the current searching method, including adding a database of synonyms or related words on top of the existing system, building a user-generated search engine, or even implementing visual and audio auto-indexing. But for now, we will first use PHP to build a new visual and audio search page, making use of the existing Innopac functions, in an attempt to increase the ease and accuracy of searching. For example, by using Innopac scoping function for TV programs and adding a note tag of “HKBU Scholarly Events,” the form can help users limit their search to TV programs or university presentations with the search requirement pre-set in the URL. Another example is by adding specific terms in the bibliographic records, such as “VoD,” for videos with online version, users can search within online videos only by clicking a button in the form. This new search page is expected to be launched this Summer following usability testing.

The second type of respondent would like the librarians to tell them what AV resources are available out there and which ones are the best for their needs. A faculty member stated, “I’m, a lot others I supposed, not using any AV materials yet is not the fault of anyone. We’re just too busy to dig the suitable ones out ourselves. Maybe we need to have more regular (not too frequent!) promotion of the AV materials inventory in certain systematic but terse ways.” Similarly, another faculty from the Sociology Department wrote, “enhanced media consultancy for me as well as my tutors.”

In view of these comments, we are planning to launch a media consultancy service in the beginning of next academic year. Through this service, faculty members can tell us their teaching needs, for example a 15 to 30 minute video about Hong Kong unemployment in English language with Chinese subtitles, and we will try to locate and reserve such a video for their use. We will also send out lists of new media resources to faculty members on a quarterly basis.

Conclusion

"Using a single almanac into old age" is a Cantonese saying describing the inappropriateness of adhering to an unchanging almanac as one's action guide for life, and serves to encourage people to adapt to changes. Academic media centers seem to constantly be in a state of change because of changing technology, from phonorecords, video cassette tapes, DVDs, piecemeal online videos, to large-scale systematic video streaming services. Nowadays, we encounter the ever-stronger pressure from digital natives who are growing up with different digital technologies such as web 2.0, mobile phones, MP3, YouTube, etc.

In order to embrace rapid changes in technology and user habits, and enrich our contributions to the University, we should respond to the latest expectations of our users and make quick decisions and actions for change.

Following this faculty survey, we have quickly initiated several major projects and tasks in an attempt to increase the use of our collection in support of the University's teaching and learning activities. Qualitative and quantitative measurements should be taken in the

future, after two or three years time, to assess the effectiveness of the work that has been done. More importantly, we should also prepare ourselves for the future, where more changes are still to come.

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Notes on Contributors

Rebekah Wong joined the Hong Kong Baptist University Library in 2001 as a reference and instructional librarian, teaching university students at all levels. In 2007, she became the supervisor of the Multimedia Services Section to oversee multimedia collections and services. She is also the convenor of the Library's Web Development Team to oversee the Library's public web site.