



Reading  
Matters:  
Examining  
the Role of  
Recreational  
Reading in  
Academic  
Libraries

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ALA 2009



## The project:

- 1) explore conflicting concepts of books and reading
- 2) identify barriers to recreational reading on college
- 3) investigate ways that academic libraries might promote reading

## Hypothesis:

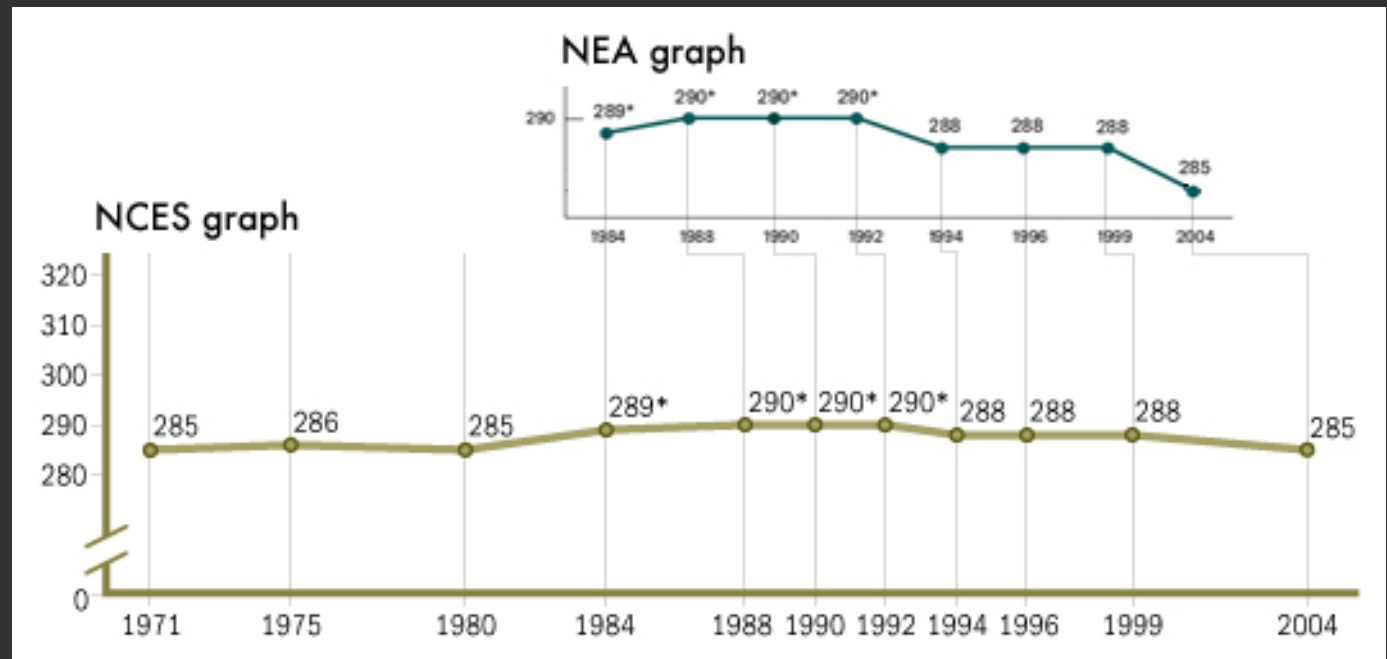
- 1) undergraduates have a higher regard for books and the pleasures of reading than is generally acknowledged
- 2) colleges unknowingly erect barriers to voluntary reading
- 3) unexamined cultural differences between popular reading practices and academic approaches to reading have an impact on how students approach reading for pleasure during the college years



## NEA Report: To Read or Not to Read (2007)

“There is a general decline in reading among teenage and adult Americans . . . It is a serious national problem. If, at the current pace, America continues to lose the habit of regular reading, the nation will suffer substantial economic, social, and civic setbacks.”

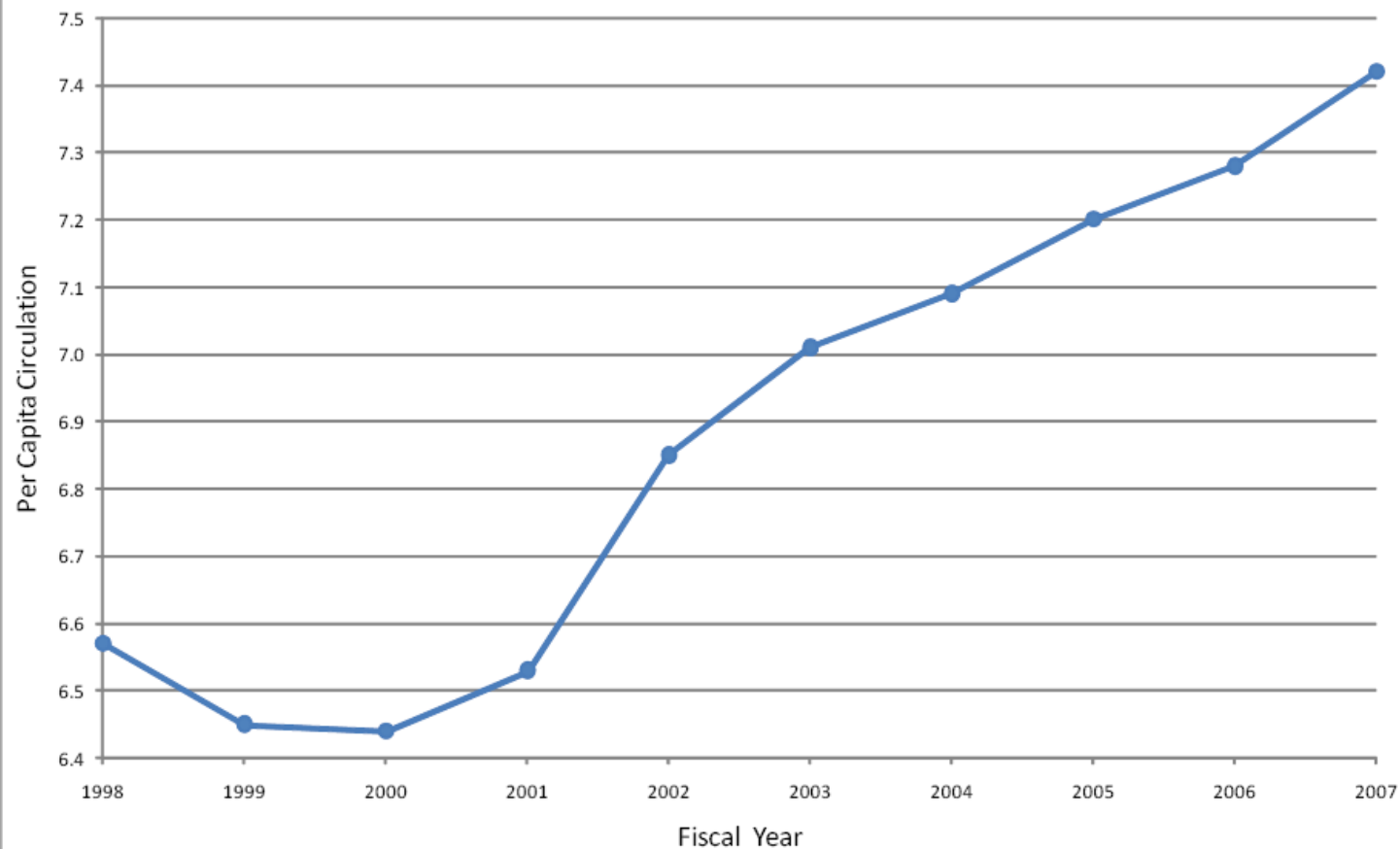
Nancy Kaplan:  
*What trend?*



If:book



**Figure 1: Per Capita Circulation in Public Libraries in the US,  
FY1998-FY2007**




Source: Public Library Survey, FY1998-FY2007, Institute of Museum and Library Services/National Center for Education Statistics



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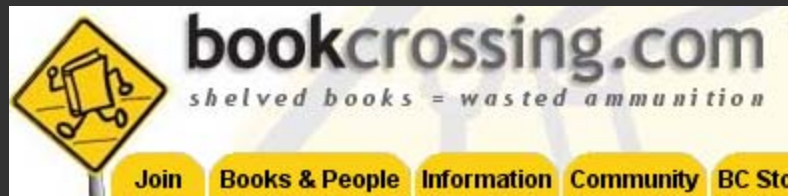


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# Surveys

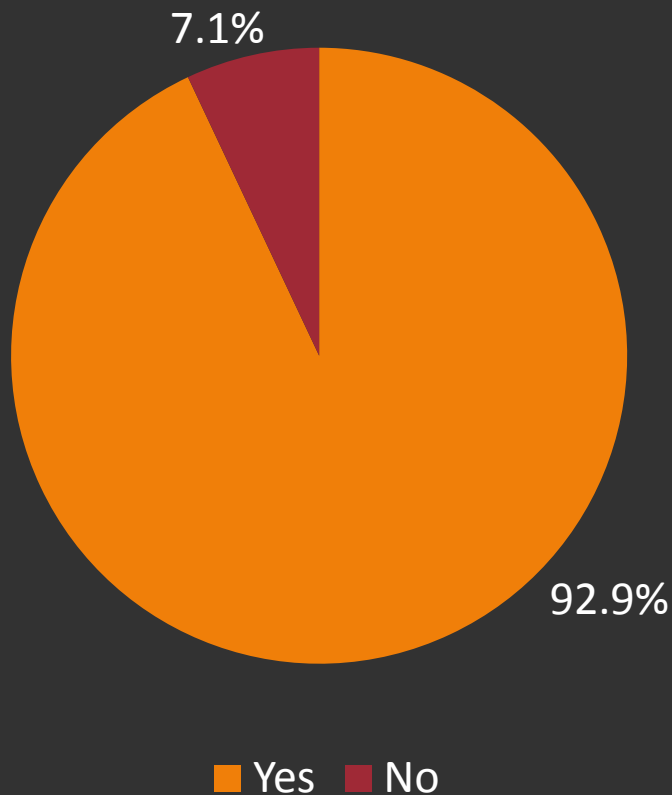
- Student survey
  - Responses from over 700 Gustavus students
  - Range of class year, major
  - Coordinated by undergraduate scholarship recipient
- Librarian survey
  - Responses from over 300 academic librarians
  - Range of institutions



# Do students enjoy reading for fun?

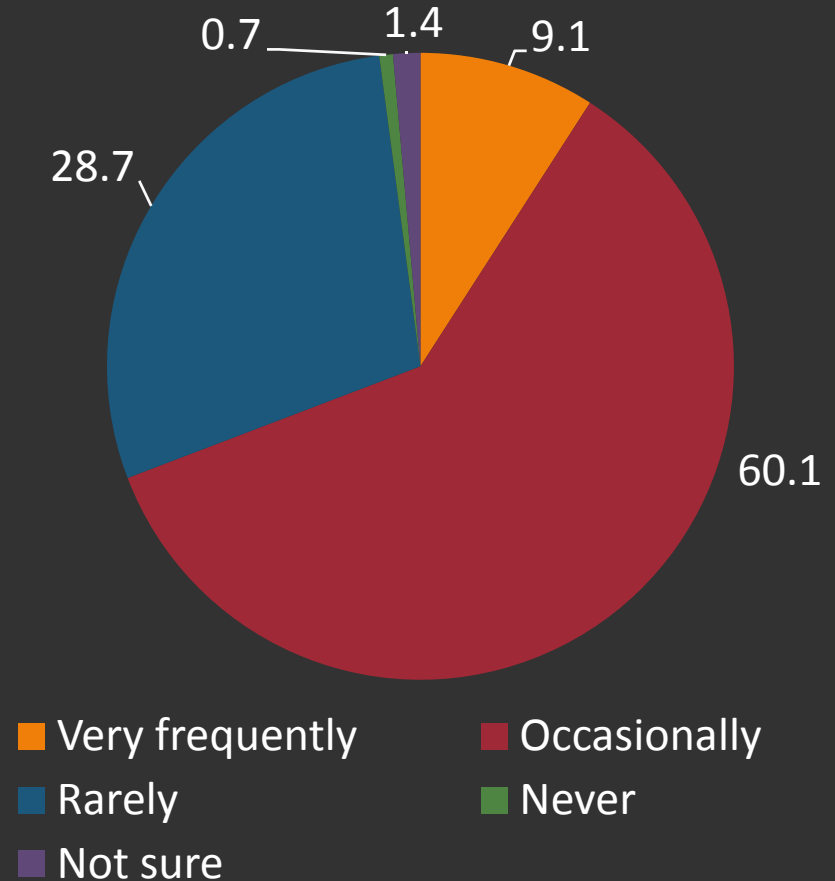
## Gustavus Students:

Do you enjoy leisure reading?



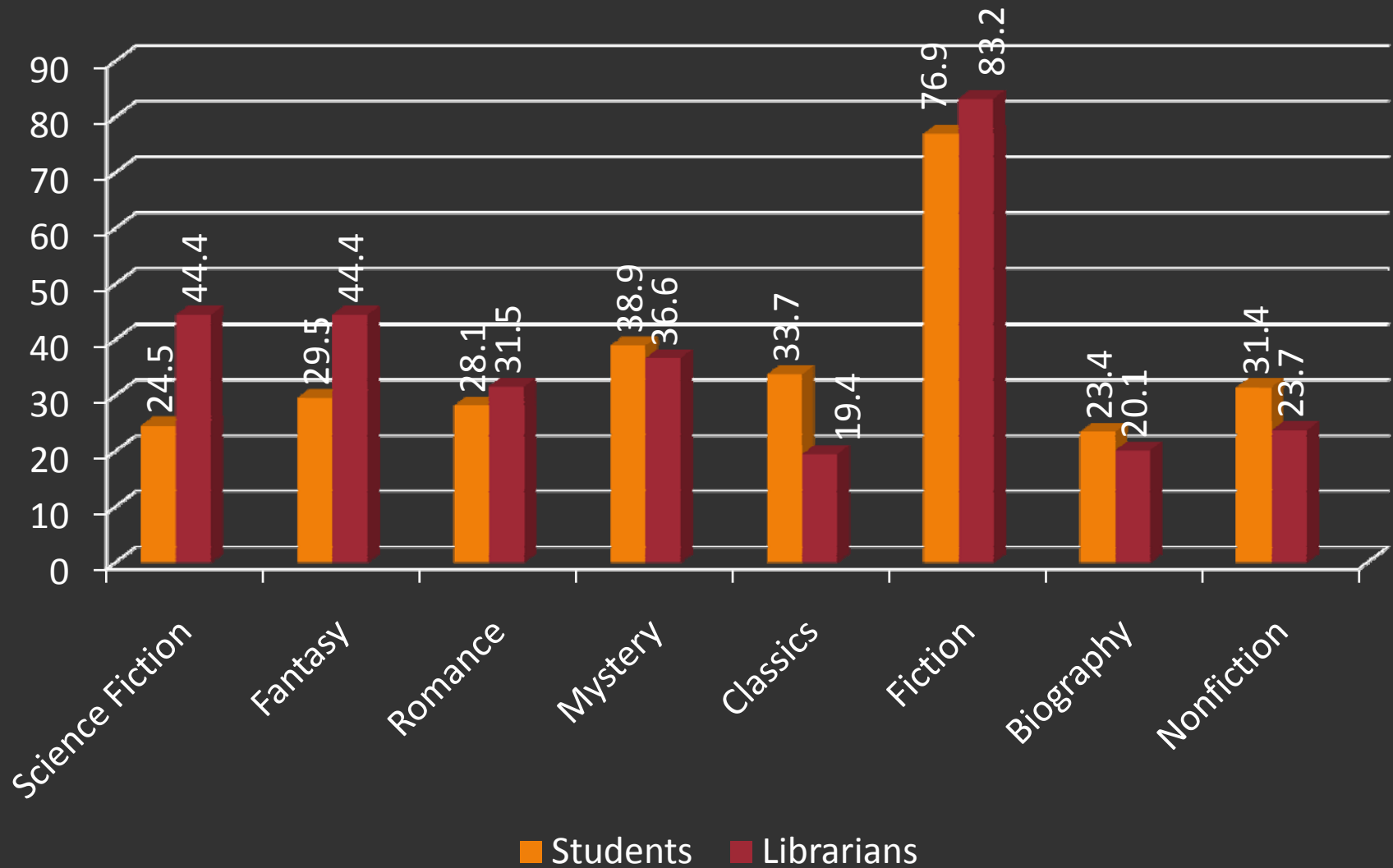
## Academic Librarians:

Do students come to your library looking for leisure reading materials?





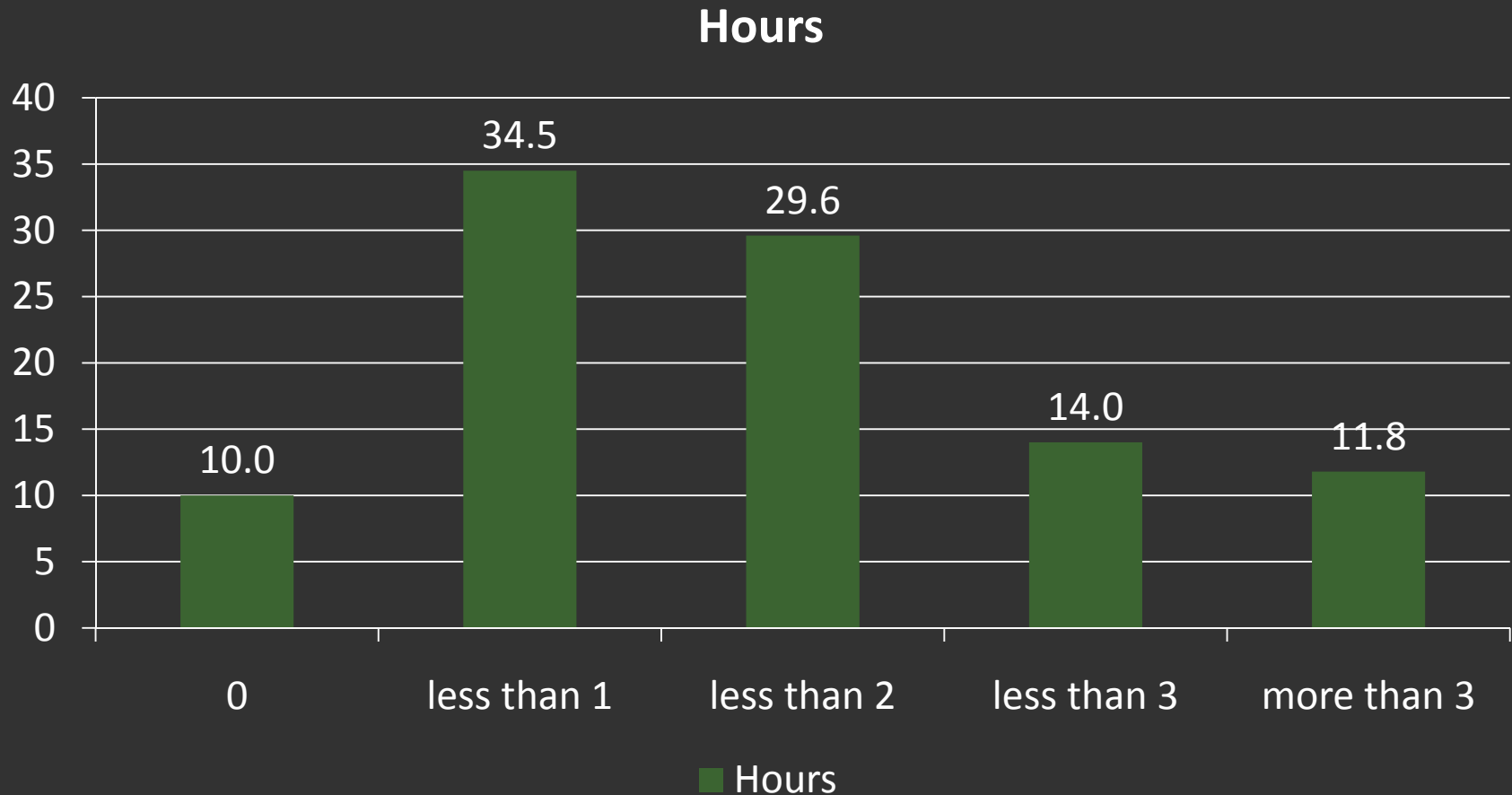
# Students' leisure reading patterns





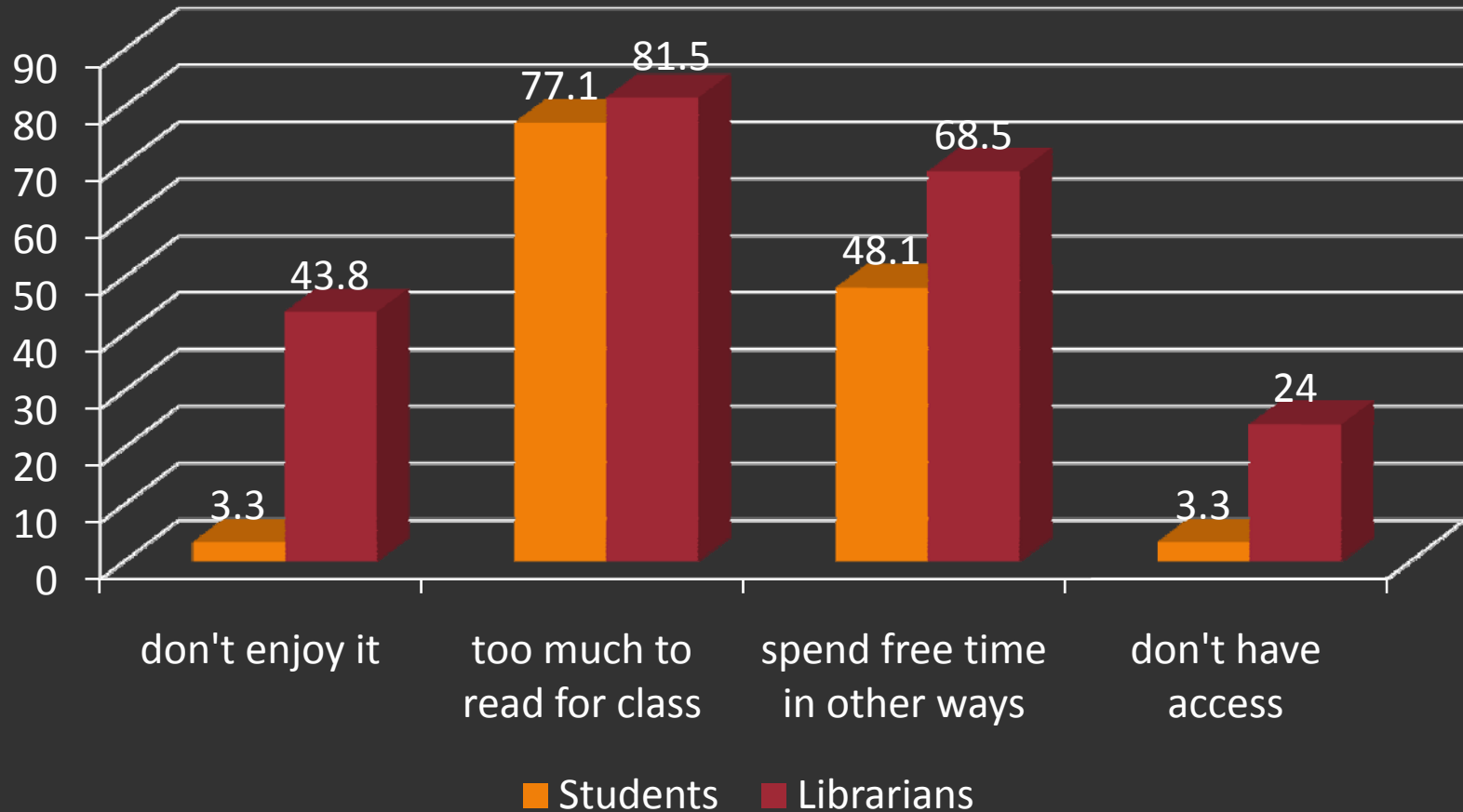


# How many hours do Gustavus students read for pleasure each week?



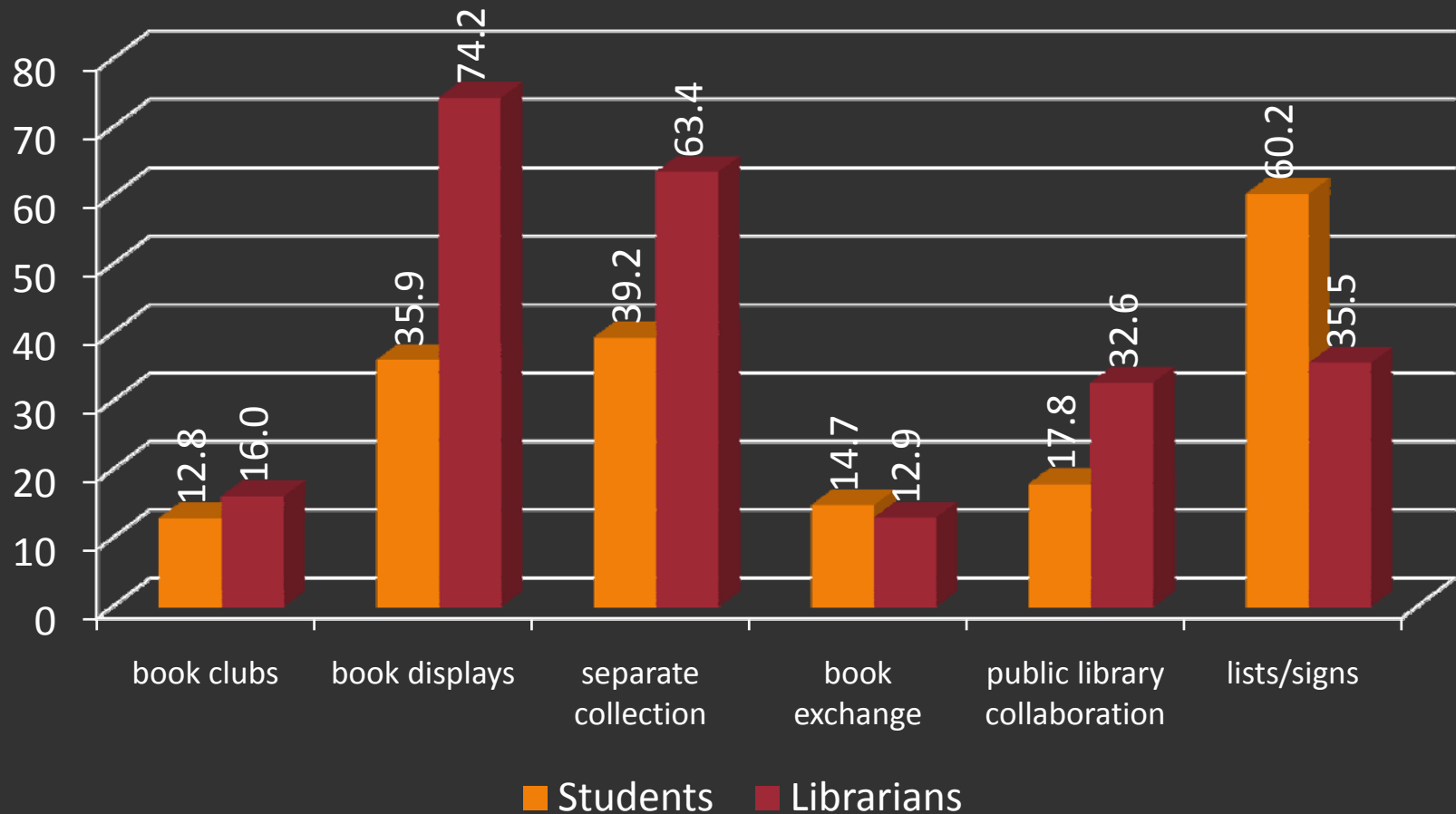


# Barriers to Leisure Reading





# Addressing the Barriers



# January Term Course: Books & Culture

- Experiential
- Intensive
- Explore different kinds of books: zines, graphic novels, rare books, e-books
- Write personal reflections
- Conduct field work
- Create a book





# Project Disclaimer:

This project was inspired, in part, by the Nick Hornby book/ John Cusack film High Fidelity. However, ironically enough, this film did not make it on to the top 5 list of movies based on books. The book/ movie's main character owns a record store and he constantly goes around proclaiming his top five favorite break up songs, or other things like that. So I thought that I would do the same thing, only focused on books and literature. So here goes:

My Top 5 favorite books as a child.

5 Where the Sidewalk Ends

Shel Silverstein

4 Courduroy

Don freeman

3 My Book About Me

Dr. Seuss

2 Good Neighbors

Diane Redfield Massie

1 Alexander and the Terrible,

Horrible, No Good, Very bad Day

Judith Viorst and Ray Cruz

A comedy about fear of commitment, hating your job, falling in love and other pop favorites.

## John Cusack High Fidelity



One of my earliest memories of books was of my mom reading my sister and me bedtime stories at night. I remember Dr. Seuss's My Book About Me, and that I had so much fun filling in all of the information about myself, like how tall I was or how many freckles I had. Books have always played an important role in my life, and from the moment I could read for myself I always seemed to have a book in front of me.



## The first time she ever had a book

It was the year of 1991 and the house and bookshelves were filled with words waiting to be read. However these words were not read out loud to the little 2 year old girl as most books are to kids at this age. They were instead dragged around the house by this young reader everywhere as her mother observed and read her own stories from the blue spotted couch in the small living room. Books went everywhere with her; to the bathroom as she sat on the training toilet, in bed with her and to the couch on a spot next to her mother. As her mother, would say "She didn't want to be read to. Even though she didn't understand the words, she would want to read the books anyways. She knew her letters early so she would try to read them."



It was an ordinary place in our house growing up, but it became magical every night  
when my mom would sink into the soft cushions with a book in her hands. My younger sister  
and I would sit on either side of her resting our heads against her arms, peering at the  
illustrations that transformed our living room. My mom's voice would decode the black  
squiggles on the page into words, into a story. My first memory of books comes from this  
spot in our living room. My mom would read to us from our children's bible every night  
before we went to bed. Her voice flowed over the words as angry, dark clouds began to  
cover the living room ceiling, blocking out the light and bringing torrents of rain that





Prompt: earliest memory of a library

On a cool fall morning the kids of Ms. Doray's first grade class stumbled, bright-eyed and enthusiastic, of the bus in front of the red brick Waupaca Public Library. Excitement filled the air. This was the day that would change the way we view and obtain books. It was field trip time. As we crowded through the front double doors a librarian met us. We were then led past rows of brightly colored books of all shapes, sizes, and textures. The tall shelves seemed to stretch on forever. Once downstairs in the children's section we heard about the workings of a library. Then it was time to explore. Books of all kinds, puzzles, games, and tapes filled every nook and cranny.



Outagamie Waupaca Library System  
Nicolet Federated Library System



This card is good at participating libraries  
throughout Northeastern Wisconsin

In the middle of the large room stood every kid's favorite part of the library, the Reading House. We stared in awe as the girls thought of life size doll houses and the boys couldn't wait to play on this indoor jungle gym. With stairs on the right and a slide on the left, a small reading room with two tiny chairs sat in between. This became a haven for small children to explore between pages, expand creativity, and let their imagination take them to great heights through reading. At the end of the trip we lined up and received our own plastic card. I treasured it and couldn't wait to go back to the library soon.





My earliest memory of the library was of story time at my hometown public library. The head librarian's name was Mrs. Pease. She would sit and read to us while we crowded around her in a certain spot in the library to hear a wonderful story told in her animated voice. I remember being very anxious for the children's story time to come; sitting in the lunch room with my friends and our moms. I remember the little shelves with colorful books placed on top and in the shelf. I remember a huge teddy bear we all fought over while Mrs. Pease sat in her big wooden rocking chair as she read. I felt very comforted by the readings she read to us because that is what my family members always did with me. I was happy while sitting and being read to.



6

Wheel of Time series by  
Robert Jordan

In eighth grade, while walking home from school, I got into a discussion with my friends Luke and Alex about who read the longest books. Luke had read the entire series, each book being around six hundred pages long, and clearly won. Somehow, Alex and I ended up racing to read the series. Whoever finished one book first got the next from Luke, and the other had to try to get it from the local library or buy it.



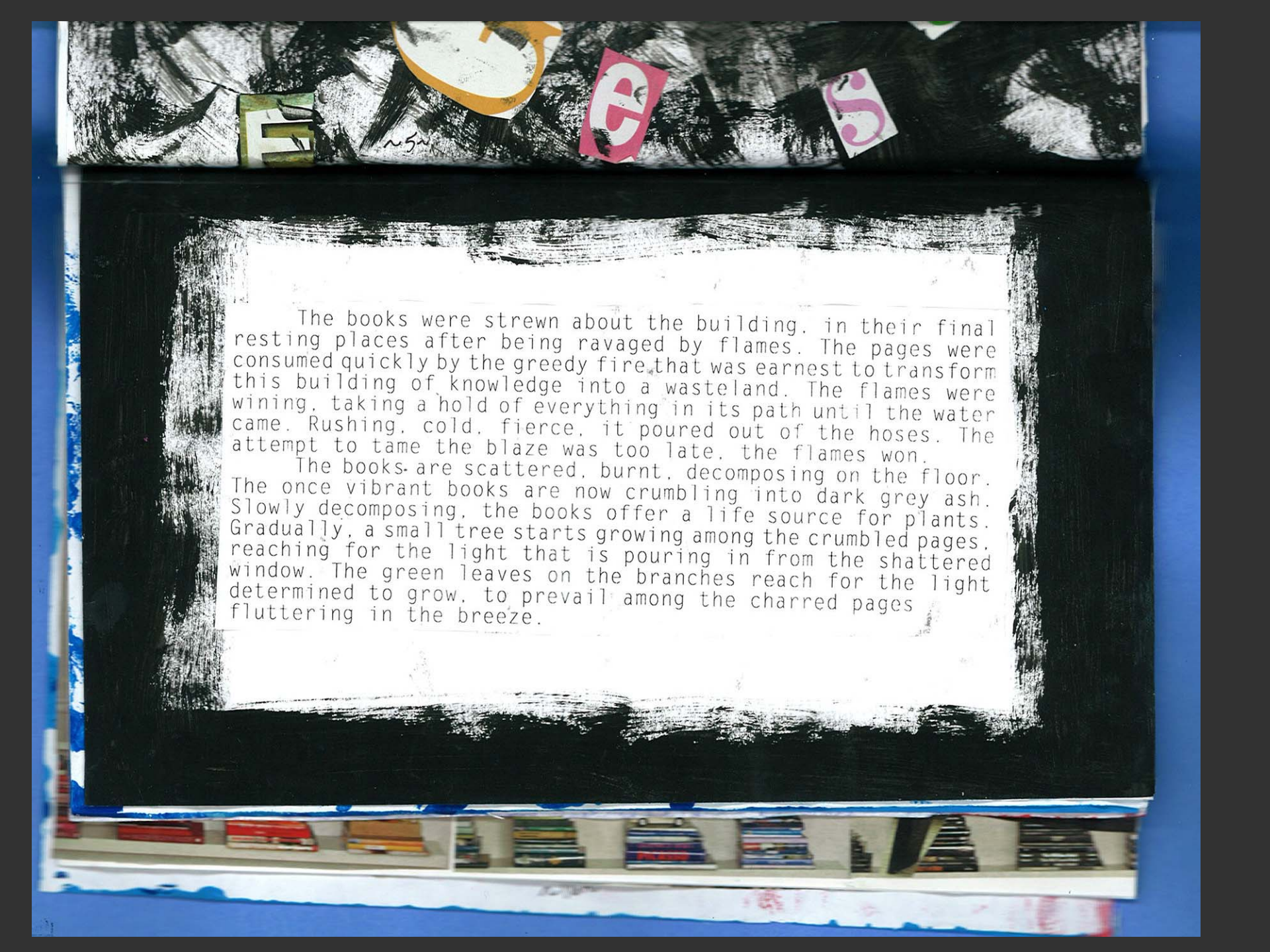
This was my first experience of reading EVERYWHERE: in classes, at dinner, even while walking home. That last one wasn't a great idea, by the way. I would even bring the next book in the series to school with me in case I finished the one I was reading. I'm sure some of it was the competitive spirit, but I have never wanted to read so much as I did the three or so months of our race.







[Sweet juniper's photo stream – Detroit book depository](#)



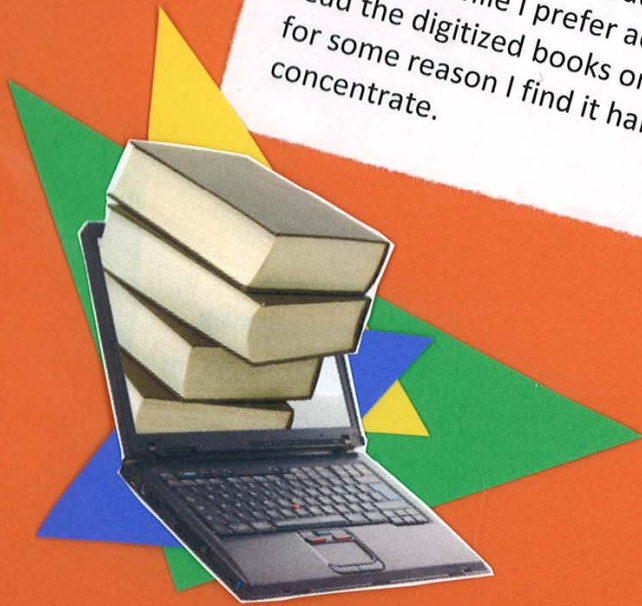
The books were strewn about the building, in their final resting places after being ravaged by flames. The pages were consumed quickly by the greedy fire that was earnest to transform this building of knowledge into a wasteland. The flames were wining, taking a hold of everything in its path until the water came. Rushing, cold, fierce, it poured out of the hoses. The attempt to tame the blaze was too late, the flames won.

The books are scattered, burnt, decomposing on the floor. The once vibrant books are now crumbling into dark grey ash. Slowly decomposing, the books offer a life source for plants. Gradually, a small tree starts growing among the crumbled pages, reaching for the light that is pouring in from the shattered window. The green leaves on the branches reach for the light determined to grow, to prevail among the charred pages fluttering in the breeze.



Prompt: "...for decades to come."  
digitized books

I like to read books the old-fashioned way. Something about reading small print through a glass screen and having to scroll down every few paragraphs doesn't sound appealing to me. The texture, smell, and sight of each book's individual pages can help make or break the story buried inside. Being able to "see," gives a sense of history, how well read it is, or add suspense in a mystery. While I prefer actual books, I can read the digitized books on a computer but for some reason I find it harder to concentrate.





# Future of Books

We will always be traveling down two roads simultaneously. I completely agree with this statement in reference to the future of books. I simply can't see printed books being completely extinct with the recent advances in the process of digital books. I can't imagine that there will ever be a time when everyone will prefer digitized reading to that of a physical book. Transferring books to digital form will definitely convert some people to reading everything on a computer, but there will always be people who prefer the complete experience that comes with a real book in hand. It's nice to have the option of reading a book digitally, and this method is likely preferred when doing research. I think that this advance in book technology is a good addition, but should not be treated as a substitution.



# Field Work Project Results - Fiction Survey

- 77% of students surveyed preferred fiction to non-fiction
- Over half didn't know where fiction was located in our library
- Over half of students got books from friends and family; less than 20% used our library as one of their top three sources for pleasure reading

# Additional thoughts - Students

- Encourage reading via competition and prizes
  - Free pizza, ice cream, beer, etc.
- Provide better access to materials
  - Book lists (to be used in house or taken home)
  - More signs and displays
  - “Do something” about LC system
- Recognize that time is a major barrier
  - “Tell profs to lighten up on the workload. Haha!”



# Additional thoughts - Librarians

- Programs and incentives
  - Book rental programs (like Baker & Taylor)
  - Promote popular DVDs and CDs as well
- Access
  - Tight budgets provide constraints and opportunities
  - Library of Congress system makes browsing hard
- Culture
  - Institutional support from faculty and administrators

# What we'll be doing

- Creating an experimental fiction collection and studying circulation patterns
- Setting up reading “nooks” in the current periodicals collection to encourage browsing
- Creating reading lists and recommended lists
- Collaborating with our friends group on a book blog – recommendations from “friends”

Credits:

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Books & Culture students:

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