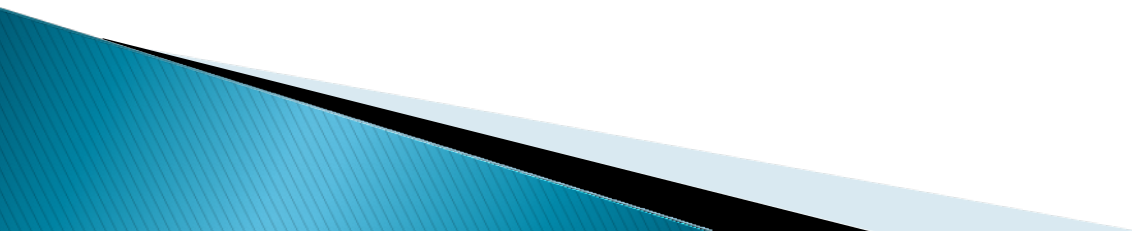


# Finding Context: Student Approaches to Research

Faculty Development Day  
September 2, 2009  
Julie Gilbert & Anna Hulseberg

# Overview of this session

- ▶ Discuss two studies that investigate the research practices of college undergraduates:
    - Project Information Literacy Project Report
    - Research Practices Survey
  - ▶ Explore how these studies might inform our own approaches to research assignments.
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# Information literacy

- ▶ Information literacy is a set of abilities requiring individuals to "recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information."

Source: Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education, Association of College & Research Libraries

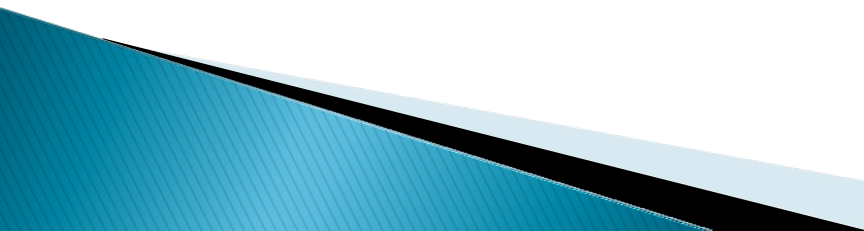
# Project Information Literacy (PIL)

- ▶ National study about early adults and their information-seeking behaviors, competencies, and the challenges they face when conducting research in the digital age.
- ▶ Investigates how students on different college campuses conduct research for course work and how they conduct "everyday research" for use in their daily lives.

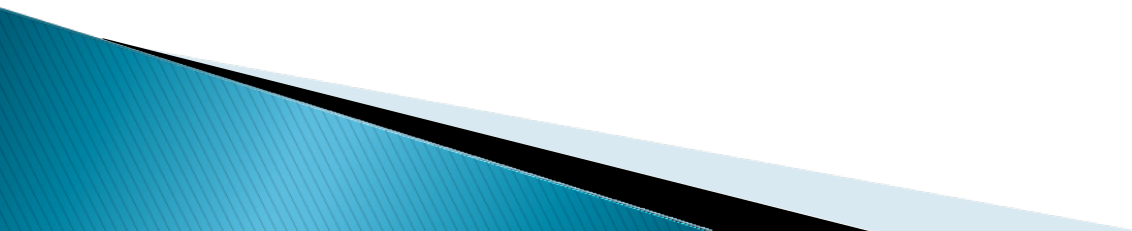
Source: <http://projectinfolit.org/>



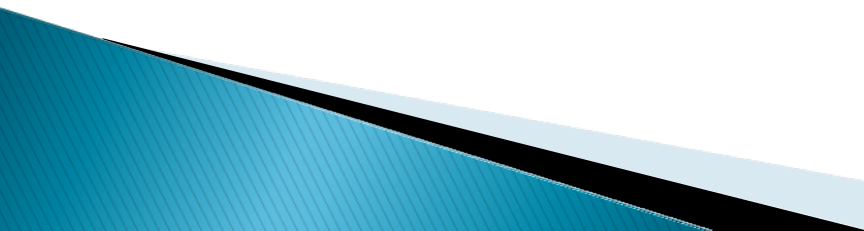
# PIL Progress Report

- ▶ Reports preliminary findings from 11 student discussion groups held on 7 U.S. campuses in Fall 2008.
  - ▶ Sample: 86 full-time second-year, junior, and senior students studying humanities and social sciences.
  - ▶ Campuses: public universities, private colleges and universities, and community colleges.
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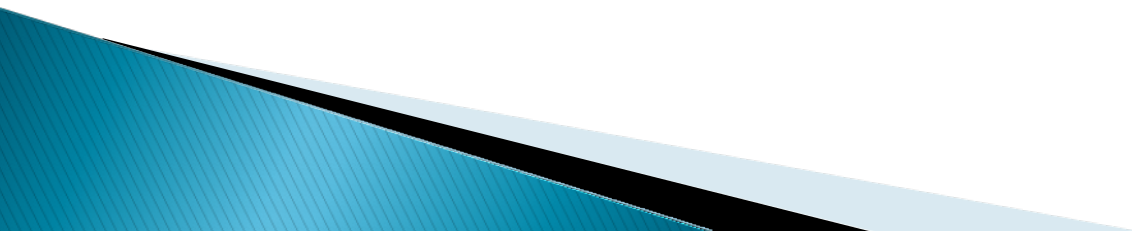
# PIL: Project overview

- ▶ Year One (2008–2009): Qualitative data from discussion groups informs student survey, Spring 2009.
  - ▶ Year Two (2009–2010): Large-scale online survey across many U.S. community colleges, public colleges and universities, and private colleges and universities, and a content analysis of professors' research assignment handouts.
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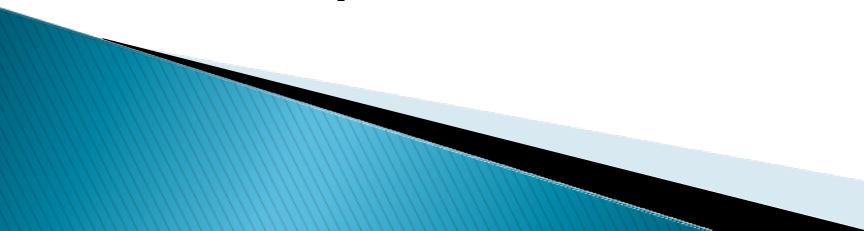
# PIL Project Report : Student frustrations with research

1. Information overload (e.g., the more you know, the less you know; it's depressing)
  2. Too much irrelevant information, can't locate what is needed from online results
  3. Beginning and getting started on an assignment
  4. Trying to find the "perfect source"
  5. Not knowing what to look for, yet still sifting through articles that might fit
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# PIL Project Report : Student frustrations with research

6. Trouble finding books needed on library shelves
  7. Can find the citation online, but cannot find the full-text article in a database
  8. Scholarly databases or library books are out-of-date
  9. Finding statistical information online
  10. Having to change and refine how to write a research paper from class to class
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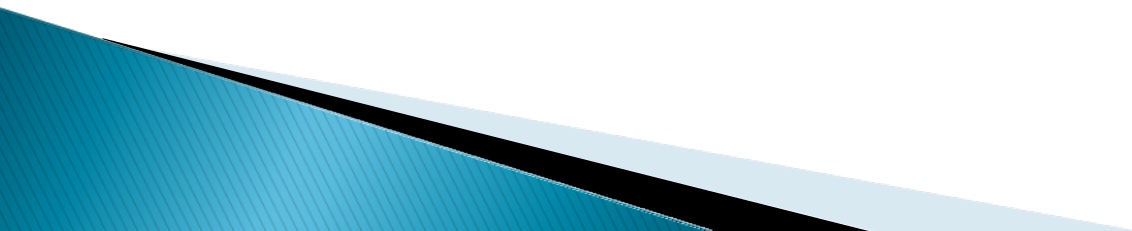
# PIL Project Report : Student frustrations with research

11. Not having access to same materials as professors (e.g., rare documents)
  12. Having to buy a source unavailable on campus
  13. Trying to find the .05% of things of interest not on Web
  14. Feeling that nothing new is being said and feels like the same information again and again
  15. Conducting research to meet another's expectations
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# PIL: The need for “context”

- ▶ Students seek “contexts” to help them operationalize and prioritize their research activities
- ▶ Typology of contexts:
  - Big picture
  - Language
  - Situational
  - Information gathering

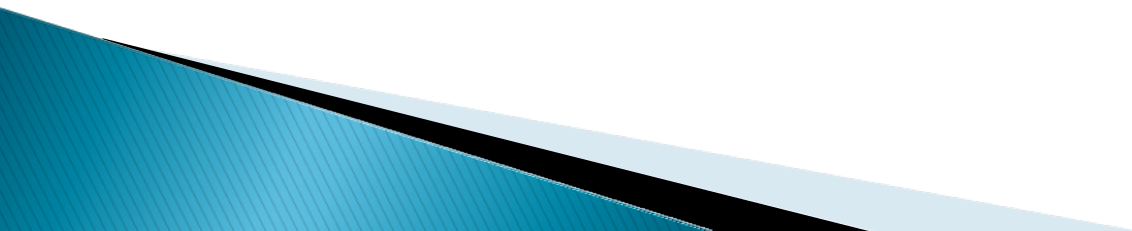
# PIL: Big picture context

- ▶ Selecting and defining a topic
  - ▶ Understanding multiple sides of an argument
  - ▶ Figuring out how the topic might best fit into the course curriculum
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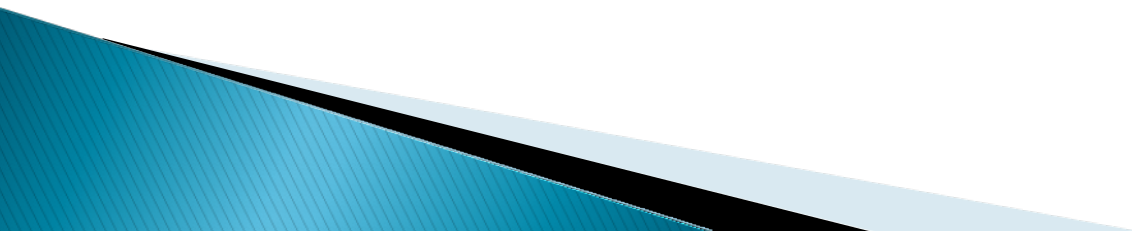
# PIL: Big picture context – the waiting game

- ▶ Reflective phase
- ▶ Procrastination
  - More than 80% of students procrastinated on more than 80% of their course-related assignments
  - More procrastination at research institutions
  - Procrastination as motivation to get working
  - Procrastination and anxiety

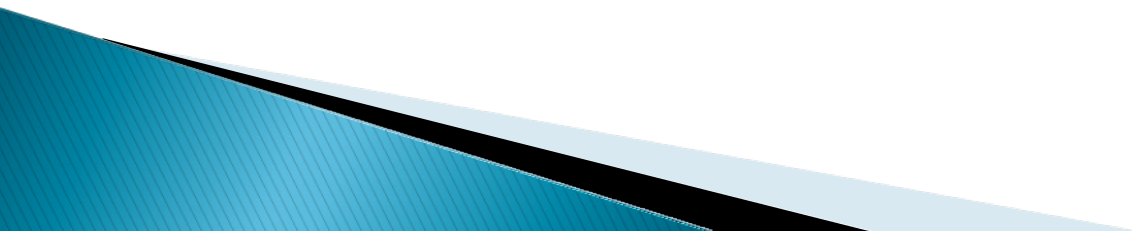
# PIL: Language context

- ▶ Becoming more comfortable with the language, terms, and discourse of a topic area.
  - ▶ Necessary for formulating search terms.
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# PIL: Situational context

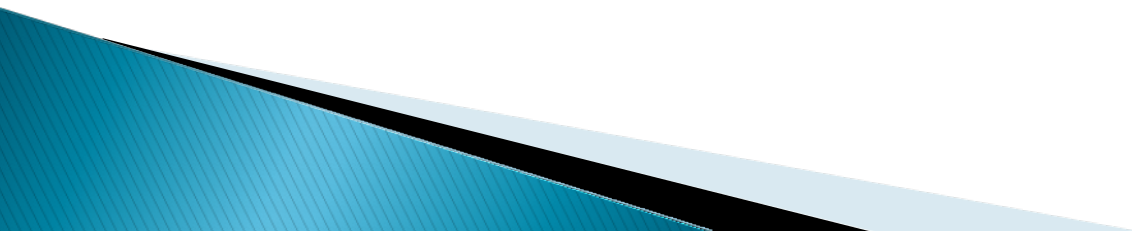
- ▶ Setting the parameters of a research project, especially in terms of expectations and a set of surrounding circumstances.
  - ▶ Meeting the expectations of an instructor who is assigning a grade.
  - ▶ Good situational context at teaching-focused institutions.
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# PIL: Information gathering context

- ▶ Finding, accessing, and securing relevant research resources that satisfy research needs.
  - ▶ “Findability” was often the most intimidating part of course-related research.
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# PII: Approaches to finding context

## – Libraries

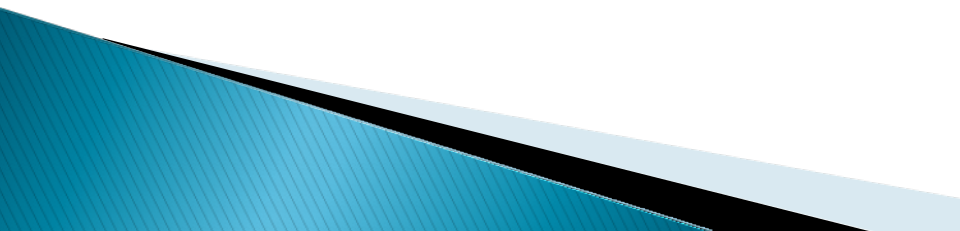
- ▶ Libraries help students find information-gathering context.
  - ▶ Library instruction sessions need to be well-timed.
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# PII: Approaches to finding context

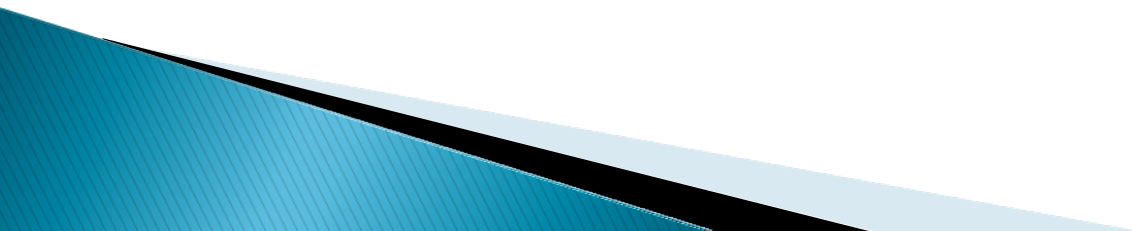
## – Wikipedia

- ▶ Wikipedia helps students find big picture context and language context.
- ▶ In 8 of 11 discussion groups, students agreed that their research process began with Wikipedia.

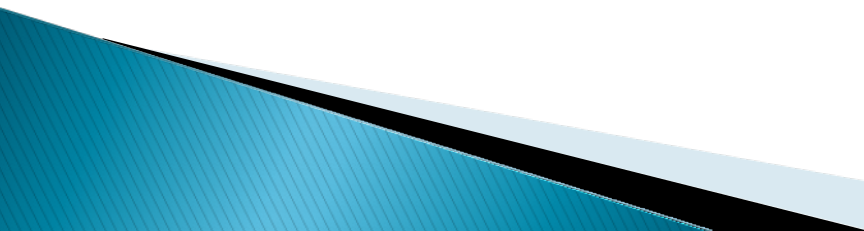
# PIL: Implications

- ▶ Research seems to be far more difficult to conduct in the digital age than it did in previous times.
  - ▶ Students' greatest challenges are related to their perceived inability to find desired materials.
  - ▶ Students are challenged and often inexperienced with “finding contexts” that can help them conceptualize and operationalize the research process.
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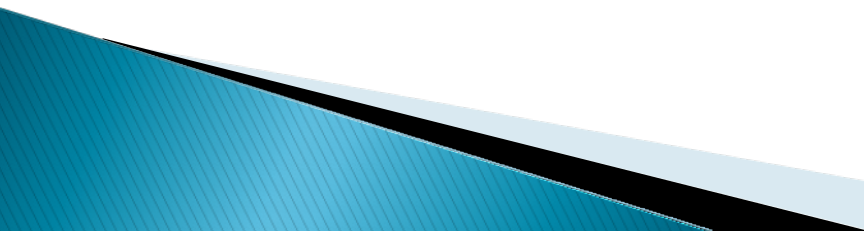
# PIL: How can we use the typology?

- ▶ Inside view of the student research process can help identify some of its “pain points” and help those of us involved in transferring and teaching information literacy competencies to students.
  - ▶ Faculty: big picture and language contexts
  - ▶ Librarians: information-gathering context
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# Research Practices Survey

- ▶ 15-minute online questionnaire
  - ▶ Developed by and for liberal arts institutions
  - ▶ Assesses undergraduate students' research behavior & experience
  - ▶ Survey conducted 2008–2009 academic year
  - ▶ Overall sample: 6,273 students at 44 institutions
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# RPS at GAC

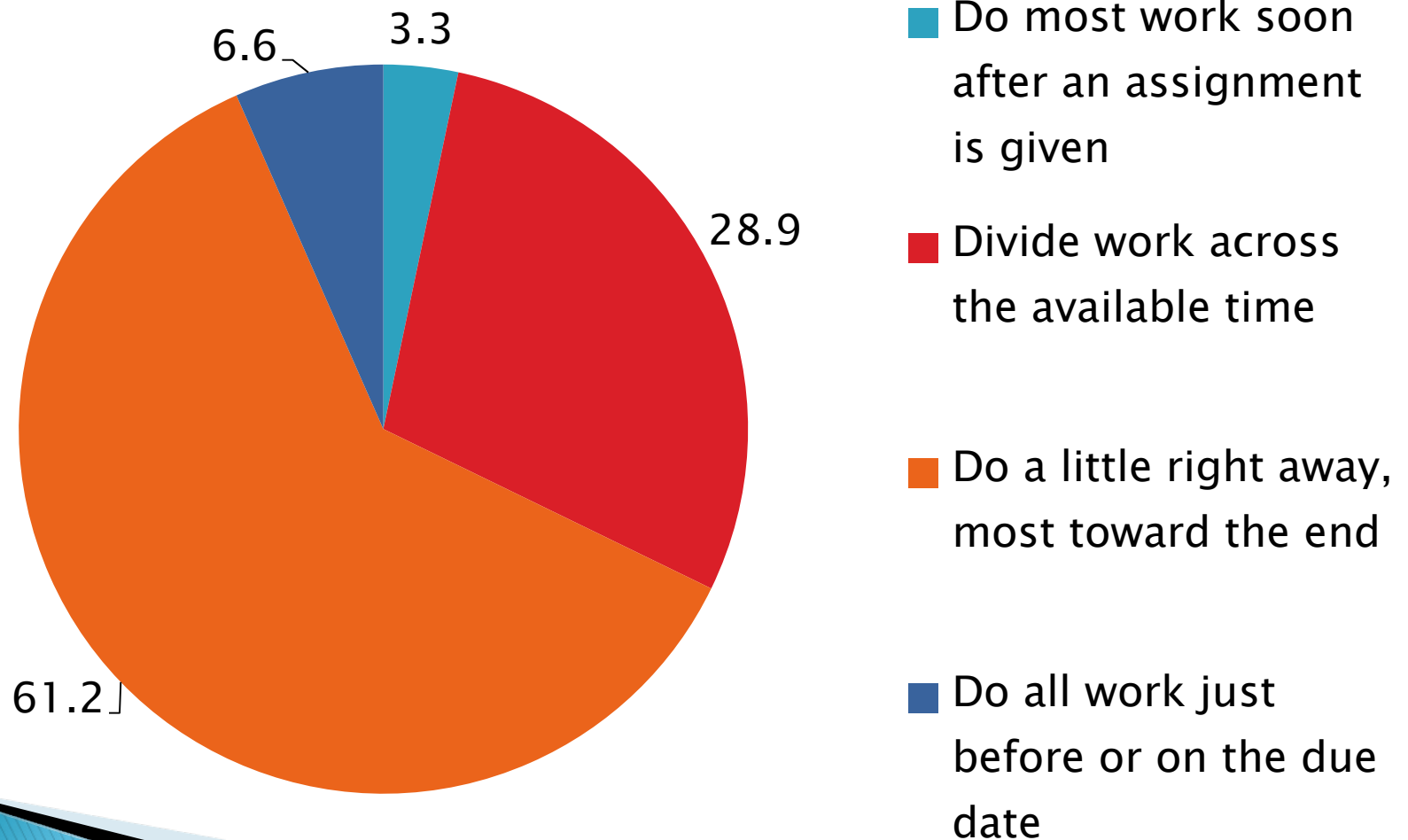
- ▶ Administered the RPS to first-year students in fall 2008 and spring 2009
  - ▶ Fall 2008 data give insight into research experiences, attitudes and skills first year students bring to Gustavus
  - ▶ Spring 2009 data measure changes in those skills over the first year, including library impact
  - ▶ Sample size: 178 respondents Fall 2008, 121 respondents Spring 2009 (75 students took both surveys)
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# Research Challenges

Tasks	Easy (%)	No Experience (%)	Difficult (%)
Narrowing your topic	67.8	0.0	32.2
Developing a list of sources to investigate	63.6	0.0	36.4
Revising your search strategy as necessary	59.7	0.0	40.3
Organizing resources into logical unified structure	59.5	0.8	39.7
Developing your main argument/thesis statement	54.6	0.0	45.4

# Procrastination...

## Pacing of Work on Research Assignment



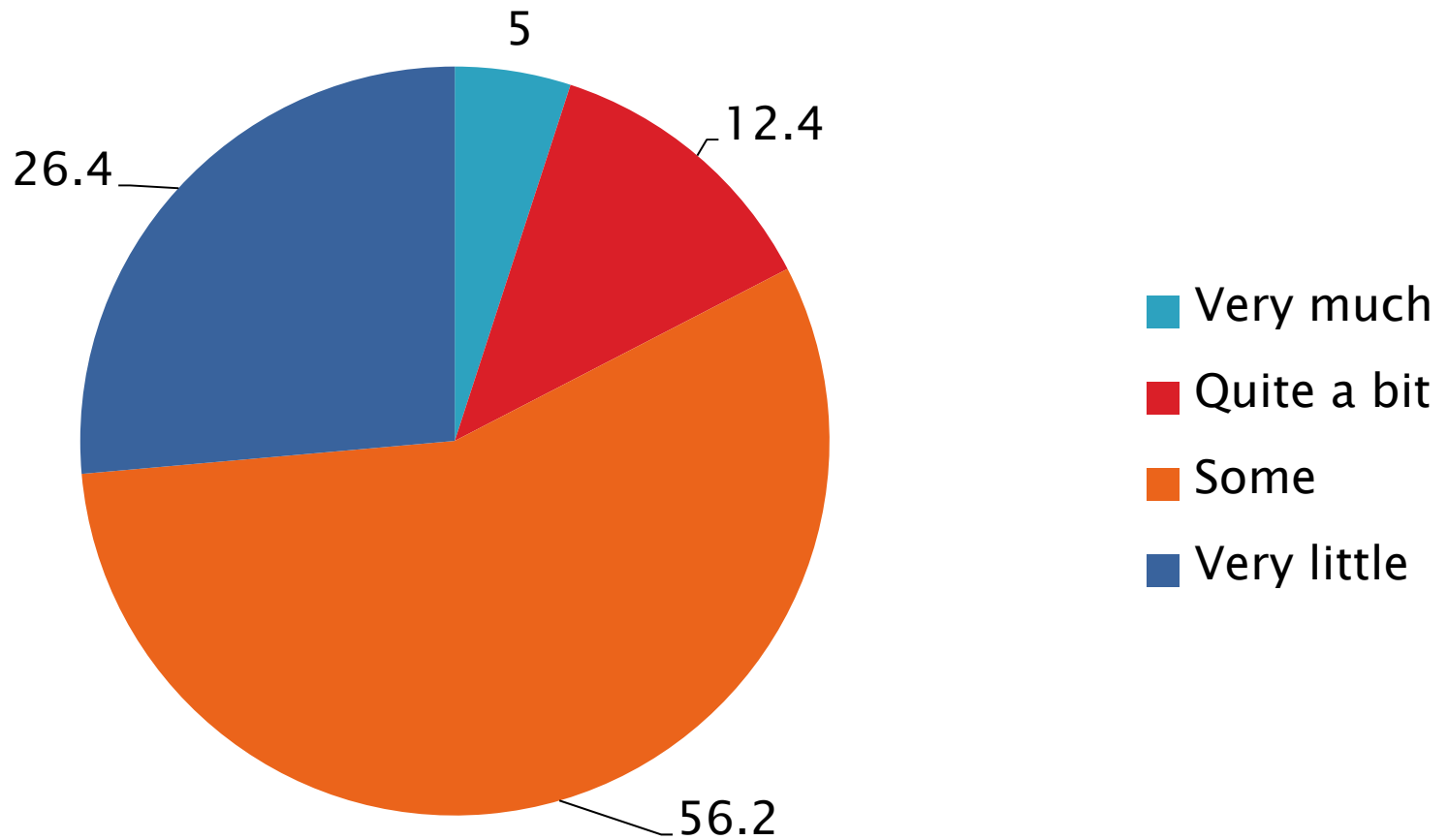
# Challenges Retrieving Sources

Tasks	Easy (%)	No Experience (%)	Difficult (%)
Using a library catalog	78.5	2.5	19.0
Using an electronic index	76.9	18.2	5.0
Physically locating sources in a library	66.1	3.3	30.6
Using a print index	53.7	19.8	26.4
Obtaining materials through interlibrary loan	46.3	28.9	24.8

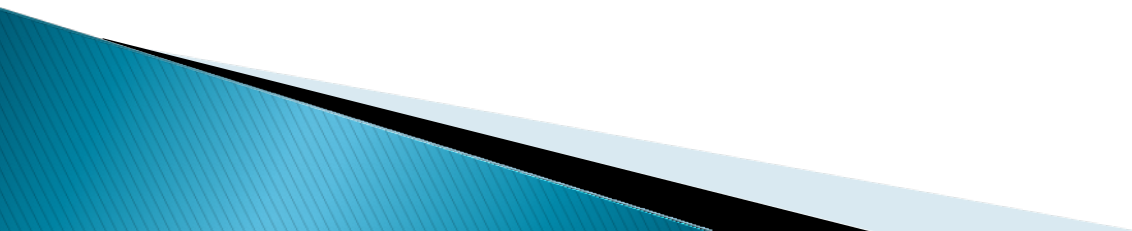
# Challenges Using Sources

Task	Easy (%)	No Experience (%)	Difficult (%)
Determining whether a source is appropriate	83.5	0.0	16.5
Deciding what information from sources to integrate	73.3	0.0	26.7
Knowing how to document a source	70.0	0.0	30.0
Knowing when to document a source	68.6	0.0	31.4

# Enjoyment of Research



# RPS – Where do we go from here?

- ▶ Continue analysis of data to identify implications for instruction program and other library services (website, physical layout, etc.)
  - ▶ Gather additional insights from student focus group
  - ▶ Share results with campus community to enhance student research practices
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# Discussion

- ▶ To what extent do you see these findings reflected in your students?

# Discussion

- ▶ How do these findings help you reconsider your approach to research assignments? Do you find the typology of “research contexts” useful?

# Discussion

- ▶ In what ways could the library partner with you to better support students during the research process, particularly as they seek “information-gathering context”?

# References

- ▶ Higher Education Data Sharing (HEDS) Consortium – <http://www.e-heds.org>
- ▶ Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education, Association of College & Research Libraries – <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/standards/informationliteracycompetency.cfm>
- ▶ Project Information Literacy – <http://projectinfolit.org/>