

Reading in the Social Sciences
Findings from Instructor and Student Surveys
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Jan. 20, 2016

Faculty – 38 respondents from ten Social Science disciplines (ten from History)

Students – 506 respondents from 18 classes in ten different Social Science disciplines.
Distributed in the last three weeks of the Fall 2015 semester.

Caveat (esp. for social scientists): The surveys are not definitive. They do not show causation, and even some apparent correlations might be explained in a number of different ways.

Trends:

Language spoken at home: English is the primary language at home for about 79% of surveyed students.

Types of Readings: Instructors assign readings from a variety of sources. From most used to least used (in order) they are: articles, texts, primary sources, websites, readers, non-fiction, library sources, and novels.

Reading Aids: Instructors use a variety of techniques to encourage and guide their students' reading. From most to least they are: reading guides, reading questions, in-class quizzes, online quizzes, vocabulary lists, and journals.

Print or online? A large majority of students report that they prefer to read paper copies rather than using a screen. However, when cost is factored in many more students prefer the option of reading on a screen.

Hours/pages per week: On both measures, faculty estimate that students are spending more time and reading more pages than students report.

Reading skills: Faculty and students both thought most students were prepared to be successful readers. Students at higher rates than faculty.

Importance of reading for course success: Faculty thought reading was more important than students did in order to pass a course.

Costs: Faculty do try to keep costs down. Still, students reported that books cost more than \$100 for a course at about twice the rate of instructors' estimates. More than one-third of students reported NOT purchasing books for their courses.

Teaching of reading skills: More faculty thought they taught reading skills than their students, most of whom reported that their teacher did not teach reading skills as part of the course.

Analysis of student responses

Efficacy of Quizzes: Students more frequently rated [reading] retention as bigger challenge in classes that did not use quizzes as a way to check up on out-of-class reading. And online quizzes don't seem to work as well for alleviating retention challenges than in-class quizzes.

Relationship between amount of reading and comprehension: Students in classes that required the most reading, and rated the need to complete reading as "extremely important" to passing the class, found retention and comprehension less of a challenge than students in classes who read less, and didn't see the reading as important in passing the class. This was strongest in classes that used quizzes and integrated reading instruction into class time.

Do time limitations impact students' reading habits? Students in classes that required the most reading, and rated the need to complete this reading as "extremely important" never rated "time" as the most important challenge they faced when reading. And in classes where students read the most but also reported less comprehension and retention problems, "time" was a very insignificant challenge for them.