

Grey Literature in Special Libraries: Access and Use

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Abstract

Patrons of special libraries are considered heavy users of grey literature. However, little is known about the actual use and users of grey literature in these libraries. This paper explores who grey literature users are in special libraries and why they use grey literature. Also discussed are the specific types of grey literature most often used and how these items and collections are organized and accessed. In this study, only items that librarians physically collected were included in the definition of grey literature; online resources were excluded.

Fifteen librarians from fourteen organizations were interviewed over the course of approximately eighteen months. Four librarians worked at government libraries, four at corporate libraries and five at specialized academic libraries. The interviews concluded with physical tours of each library, so that librarians could present grey literature *in situ*. Tours also allowed the investigator to see how grey literature was physically organized and to identify items that may have been overlooked in the interview.

The amount of grey literature found in each library and in each type of library (academic, corporate or government) was analyzed. Also determined was the size of the grey literature user population in each library and each type of library. The different kinds of grey literature found in each type of library were compared by size and frequency of use.

Among the libraries studied, it was found that grey literature comprises anywhere from less than one to over 95% of total collections. There was less grey literature in the corporate than in the academic and government libraries. Academic libraries reported the widest range of percentages of grey literature in their collections.

Reports, conference proceedings and newsletters were the types of grey literature most often found in special libraries and were also the kinds used most often. Corporate librarians reported that their patrons use conference proceedings more than reports or newsletters, but academic and government librarians reported the opposite.

The special libraries studied made their grey literature accessible through paper and electronic catalogs. Over half of the electronic catalogs were accessible over the internet. While the academic and government libraries studied made their grey literature available to all, either in the library or by interlibrary loan, the corporate libraries made grey literature available to employees only. A wide range of description occurred: librarians cataloged grey literature at the item level or the series level but some items were not cataloged.

Half of the special libraries reported less than forty percent of patrons used grey literature. Of the grey literature users, many used it to generate their own grey literature. They also used it to create commercial and personal writing.

In conclusion, the reasons grey literature is not used by more patrons are discussed; possible factors include the lack of complete description and catalog access, and lack of visibility. It is recommended that special libraries contribute to grey literature depositories, create more cataloging records, make those that exist more complete and more accessible, and cooperate with other special libraries to accomplish these goals.

Introduction

Grey literature has been studied and discussed since the 1970s but users are rarely mentioned. This paper summarizes knowledge gained from interviewing librarians who deal with both the grey literature in their collections and the patrons who use it. Possible improvements and barriers to making grey literature easier for people to find and use will be discussed. Also proposed is the possibility that a lack of widespread and consistent cataloging negatively impacts grey literature use.