Review of Pew Research Center

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The Pew Research Center is a non-profit and nonpartisan organization that provides the “numbers, facts and trends shaping your world” through global public opinion polling, demographic research and other empirical social science research (“About,” 2014). The center might be best known to librarians for its Pew Internet Project, which has examined extensively how Americans view and utilize the nation’s libraries.

But Pew has much more to offer than that. Information on the home page is broken into the main themes of study: U.S. Politics, Media & News, Social Trends, Religion, Internet & Tech, Hispanics and Global. These areas make the Pew Research Center an excellent place for insight on what other Americans are thinking about major issues such as gay marriage, health care, student loans, and intervention in Russia. Thanks to the Pew Internet Project, the site is a crucial source of statistics for technology adoption, whether the student’s interest is social media, cellphones, smartphones, ebooks, or internet access. New polls are released weekly, so current information is readily available. Reports are extensive, spanning several pages with multiple charts and graphs to illustrate main points. Often the reports are accompanied by shorter summaries that break out a handful of key findings and the website points toward related stories that trace trends in opinions over time. Search directly for a topic or browse the topics tab for an alphabetical list of what has been studied.
Besides their reports, Pew has embraced alternative ways to share data with a wider audience. This includes data visualizations, infographics, databases, slideshows, maps, videos, and even quizzes that frame your views against other Americans. These quizzes might provide an engaging introduction into an information literacy instruction section, with topics like Do You Know More About Science and Technology than the Average American? (from April 2013) and Where Do You Fit? The Political Party Quiz (from August 2012).

The Pew Research Center also holds appeal for faculty and researchers, making most of its datasets available to the public no later than six months after initial publication. A complete list of the sets available can be found under Data (http://www.pewresearch.org/data/download-datasets/); some datasets do require registration before downloading. Users also have the option to search the site’s poll questions for any keyword, such as Pinterest or the Gulf War, and receive every question in Pew’s database that mentions the desired term. Results can be downloaded by question or by the full report that incorporated the answers.

In short: The Pew Research Center is an ideal tool for sharing with first-year students researching controversial topics. It provides reliable, unbiased and free data on current social issues both domestic and abroad. And because Pew is experimenting with the methods it uses to communicate data, students should be able to find credible polling information that is both appealing and understandable.

*Highly recommended*

References