COLLABORATING ACROSS CAMPUS TO ARTICULATE THE VALUE OF RESEARCH CONSULTATIONS

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An informal conversation between members of Northwestern's Office of Fellowships and the Northwestern University Library's User Experience department led to planning for an assessment project that could:

- Obtain observational data on how students utilize research tools to discover sources
- Articulate the value of the pairing of a research consultation with a research fellowship
- Create enhanced CTEC data for the program's self-evaluation
- Create data to support the continuation of funding for university programs
FINDING WAYS TO UNDERSTAND OUR USERS, 2012-2013
RESEARCH CONSULTATIONS

Definition

“…a reference service in which the librarian meets with a student in a scheduled session away from the reference desk.”

DEFINING TERMS

Posner & Davee Summer Fellowships

- The program is aimed at students who are rising sophomores in Weinberg College of Arts & Sciences. Nominations of students from underrepresented backgrounds are solicited from faculty. The students spend eight weeks in the summer shaping a scholarly project from beginning to end with the help of a faculty mentor.

The Proposal

- The students would provide an initial working bibliography, which they would bring to a Research Consultation with a library subject specialist. Students would spend a few minutes literally searching online while the librarian observes where they're going and how they're searching; then the librarian would ask and record questions about the logic of searching and then make some suggestions.

- Individual specialists and the Coordinator of Research Consultations would deliver the data to me, so that I would not have any personally identifiable information to maintain.

- Then, later in the summer, the students deposited their bibliographies into a folder which will be viewed by the librarian in order to put together an aggregate list of sources.
WHAT THEY HAD FOUND

14 students brought sources to the Research Consultation

Articles from Scholarly Journals made up less than half of the total sources
Instructor recommendations and Google were the dominant methods of discovery. Looking at the total number of sources showed a diversity of students' searches.
However!

Searching in more than one area was unusual, and success with multiple tools was nearly nonexistent. Only one student successfully found a Scholarly Journal article and a News Article using two separate searches (Google and a database). Others tried to use the Library Search Tool, but reverted to Google when results were deemed “overwhelming.”
THE FINAL BIBLIOGRAPHIES CONTAINED MULTIPLE TYPES OF SOURCES (YAY!)

Of the fourteen bibliographies that I was able to access, only four of them provided just one type of source. All four solely utilized scholarly journals, and actually provided some of the clearest final bibliographies.
This confirms our hope that, after meeting with a librarian subject specialist, students would be able to discover more types of high-quality sources than the single type that they had found previous to the Research Consultation.
This fellowship, paired with the Research Consultation, steered students towards a vastly increased usage of scholarly journals and authoritative websites. But the assessment confirmed our suspicion that undergraduates have a great level of difficulty successfully utilizing two or more types of source-finding tools on their own.

One of the most advanced users of library resources was the sole student who volunteered the information that they had learned how to find scholarly articles during a library instruction session in their freshmen seminar.

Faculty feedback component needed, awareness of Google feedback loop/research impediments, new institution poses new challenges.
This project continues at NU Library

- The pieces have changed, but the Posner Research Consultation Assessment project continues on at Northwestern, with faculty and Associate Dean expressing desires for the project to be repeated.
- Before I left, I passed on my contacts and activities to the Head of User Experience, the Outreach & Community Services Librarian and the Assistant Head of Research and Information Services (who coordinates RC requests).

Launching Research Consultation at IIT

- Co-coordinator of Liaison Renovation Group
- Provided post-RC survey
- Using new service as part of template for outreach and engagement of faculty
- In talks with History faculty and Digital Humanities program to identify possible curricular touchpoints and best opportunities for broader RC assessment
- Working with IIT IRB for expedited approval of new process, project for publication.
- Reinsfelder, Thomas L. “Citation Analysis as a Tool to Measure the Impact of Individual Research Consultations.” *College & Research Libraries* 73, no. 3 (May 1, 2012): 263–77.

MORE READING ON RESEARCH CONSULTATIONS
(SOURCES!)
THANK YOU!

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