Completing assessment projects when it is only part of my job

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North Campus Research Community Study

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Charles E. Young Research Library pre-renovation
Current Stacks Study Space
Challenges and questions

- Many more undergrads in the building
- Complaints from graduate students about being pushed out
- Group work areas not being used for group work
- Piecemeal, reactive interventions might not solve problems
- How is research being conducted on North Campus?
- What do graduate students need from the library?
- What support and resources are students getting elsewhere?
- How can we position the library to be most relevant?
North Campus Research Community Study (NCRCS)

Data Collection:
Fall 2012-Spring 2014

- Questionnaire
- Behavioral observation
- Headcounts
- Faculty interviews
- Graduate student focus groups

Team members
- Allison Benedetti, project manager
- Zoe Borovsky
- Marta Brunner
- Diane Mizrachi
- Jennifer Osorio
Who’s doing group work?

**Observation:** more group work happening in study rooms than in pods

**Survey:** ~50% of graduate students do group work, other half not at all.
Faculty Interview Themes

- Students enter with a wide range of skill sets
- Group work vs. individual work varies
- Student funding challenges
- “Generation gap”
  - Grad students have different expectations of support than their faculty members did as grad students.
- Space
  - Some departments provide offices, others cannot.
  - TAs have different resources than the other students.
Focus Groups: Key Themes

- **Space**
  - Quiet, secure area desired
  - Graduate students want own place
  - Departmental resources vary

- **Teaching training**
  - Syllabi
  - Assignment design
  - Using course sites

- **Writing & Presentation Skills**
  - Discipline-specific styles
  - Posters and PowerPoint
  - International student needs

- **Communication**
  - Hard to learn about things outside of 1 department
  - No central clearinghouse of information/events
Actions taken and planned

Quick Wins

- Reservation system
- Communication/marketing of existing services
  - Signage
- Tailor workshops and other programming to specific needs/demographics

Longer Term Ideas

- Graduate student workspace
- Crowdfunding for design contest and demo space
- Build campus partnerships for grad student programming/activities
Assessing the Research Needs of Graduate Students, 2008-2013

Keith Weimer
University of Virginia
Case Study:

2009: Semi-structured interviews with 96 students from Arts and Sciences, Architecture, Education, Commerce
The Interviews: Methodology

• Influenced by George, et. al. (2006) Carnegie-Mellon University librarians

• 96 interviews with graduate students from all disciplines represented at U.Va. (46% humanities, 34% science and 20% social science – U.Va. has a liberal arts focus)

• 60-90 minute interviews – asked more open-ended questions, including questions about network and professional involvement
Methodology, cont.

- IRB-SBS approved protocol
- Constant comparative method
- Code for similar themes (NVIVO)
Challenges

• Different interviewers – sometimes lines of questioning were not pursued
• **Open-ended questions** – sometimes resulting in time crunch or certain topics not covered
• Learning **qualitative analysis** with NVIVO
• **Time to transcribe** (5+ hours per interview, 2009-2011)
• Interpretation
  – ex., if they didn’t mention a space we can’t assume they don’t use it
  – ex., multiple connotations of “work,” or “research” (information-seeking, analysis/study, entire graduate research process)
• **Wealth of detail**; hard to know where to follow up, and especially to try and write up results for publication
Where We Ended Up

• Big picture based on large sample (n=73)

• Proportional representation among academic disciplines; clear patterns emerged

• Decided to present findings and plan services in response to findings
Results
Results, cont.

- Students use library resources (ex., 99% used article databases)
- But used *librarians* mainly for locating specific items -- access NOT discovery.
- Few students used tools like email alerts or RSS feeds to keep up with current scholarship
- Most had graduate-level library instruction, mostly in first year. (77% humanities, 59% soc sci, 45% science).
- Advisor was single most important figure in students’ personal networks, followed by other faculty, and fellow students
- Advisors rarely discussed opportunities for collaboration or career trajectory with students
- Information-seeking process plays a role in academic socialization
Students tended to rank their abilities quite highly no matter how long they had been graduate students:
Focus Groups (2013)

- Originally intended as part of 2009 research project

- Smaller sample of students, (39% humanities, 26% science and 35% social science)

- Focused on students’ research training, use of library space

- But enough similarities in questions asked, open-ended approach to identify similar themes, update and confirm picture obtained from interviews
Methodology

- 2 hrs.: Part I = research training, Part II = space
- Four groups: social science, science, two humanities (to get proportional representation -- (39% humanities, 26% science and 35% social science)
- Multiple note-takers; compared and combined notes.
- Post-it: Group like locations and rate benefits with colored dots
Challenges

- Multiple interviewers (but entire team participated in each group)
- Open-ended questions (but more focused queries = more consistent coverage)
- Interpretation
Results

• Instruction:
  – Mentioned library training more readily than expected, but unclear when to offer
  – “Small groups choose specialized topics” (data management, citation management, statistical tools, databases)
  – Orientation when preparing dissertation
  – Strong interest in archival training, Humanities and Social Sciences

• Space:
  – Library important—even when not primary workplace—“for a change of scenery” or “a quiet place”; 27% of students use library as secondary study space.
  – Near universal use of library physical collections.
  – Near universal aversion to places frequented by undergrads.
Outcomes

• Raised profile of grad students as a user population; increased emphasis on outreach
• Alderman Graduate Study Room, 2011
Outcomes, cont.

Emphasis upon graduate students’ needs in new Areas of Focus (realignment/reorganization of services), Spring 2014

- Modular newsletter to improve communication to grad students
- Research Partners, trying to help graduates “know what they don’t know” (and know what we don’t know)
- Graduate liaisons embedded in departments/programs (library fellowship?)
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RE-USING DATA ACROSS PROJECTS

Kornelia Tancheva
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The Study

- Ethnographic Research
- Graduate Students in the Humanities
- Motivation
- Results
  - Marketing of services
  - Building community
Methodology and Results

- 2CUL project
- Focus groups
- 45 interviews
- What can the library do to support doctoral students in the humanities better
  - Provide space
  - Access to deep research collections
  - Research, information management, and teaching support
  - Building a scholar
Challenges in the Original Project

- Substantial time commitment for team members
- Time management is crucial
- More time to analyze data and discuss results
- Transcription took much more time than anticipated
Takeaways and Opportunities

- Increased interest in assessment and data-driven decision making among staff
- Positive vehicle for staff and organizational development
- Deeper engagement with local academic leadership
- Active, visible contributors in confronting and solving university-level problems
- Re-use of data
Re-Using the Data

- Things we heard over and over again
  - Community
  - Communities of practice

It’s having community. Belonging to your community, having friends that are doing this and feeling that you have something worthwhile to say that other people are recognizing it….If I had had stronger community ties to other students…I would have felt more of a duty and responsibility to my peers and to my community that I finish this [dissertation].

10th year, Comparative Literature

I am really walking alone in the dark here, trying to figure what’s what… (3rd year, Medieval Studies)
Libraries and Community of Practice

- Neutrality
- Meeting spaces
- Opportunities for a shared learning experience outside the classroom
How to create communities of practice
Immersion program bolsters humanities Ph.D. students

04/04/2012
April 3, 2012
Immersion program bolsters humanities Ph.D. students
By Gwen Glazer

As Ph.D. students become scholars in their own right, the mechanics of their original research grow more complex. Through an innovative immersion program designed to help students learn research skills, Cornell University Library developed a series of workshops to contribute to the success of Ph.D. students in the humanities.
Challenges

- Fostering socialization, networks of support
- Organic formation of multiple communities of practice
- Libraries as key players in fostering academic growth as students transition into scholars
Challenges in re-using data

- Is your population the same?
- How much time has lapsed, i.e. what is the life of the data?
- When are incidental comments significant, i.e. when is the information generalizable?
- How valid are the conclusions across the whole population from which the data was originally gathered?
Panel Discussion

- Addressing questions you did not plan for
- Balance with other job responsibilities
- Publishing
- Team composition and training
- Benefits of this type of project
- Lessons learned