A MULTI-DIMENSIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR ACADEMIC SUPPORT

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
LIBRARIES

Wend Pradt Lougee, wlougee@umn.edu
Date: November 2006

ABSTRACT

The University of Minnesota Libraries and College of Liberal Arts (CLA), with the support of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, have assessed the full range of research needs and practices of Humanities and Social Sciences faculty and graduate students. Our goal was to better understand how scholars do their research: What materials do they use, collect, and preserve; what services and tools are useful or lacking; what kind of technological development is necessary; and where does the need for expertise lie? The data collected from interviews with faculty, graduate student focus groups, and a survey of over 1,100 researchers allows us to identify gaps in the research process and to develop new tools and services for successful research. Key focus includes:

- Interdisciplinary research materials and methods
- Collaborative research
- Archival research
- Collection, organization, and storage of research materials by scholars

CURRENT CONTEXT FOR RESEARCH SUPPORT:

Campus resources that support scholarship and research reflect a complex, uncoordinated, and distributed array of assets. Depending on the characteristics of a discipline, the essential requirements can encompass content resources, technologies, tools, laboratories, graduate student support, and facilities that provide a venue for interaction among peers.
Project data reveals a need for services and tools that address:

- The diversity and distribution of information resources
- The desirability of electronic access
- The importance of physical context
- Accessibility and proximity of resources

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

Identify and Respond to:

- Research Practices: Methodologies used; major trends; ideal research environment
- Interdisciplinary & Collaborative Research: Unique information/data needs of each "discipline"; in interdisciplinary research; in collaborative research
- Library Research: Role of libraries in research processes; needs for expertise
- Resource Organization and Storage: Research materials collected and preserved by researchers

RESEARCH PLAN:

Target audience: Graduate students and Faculty in 16 Humanities and Social Sciences departments.

- Interviews with Faculty
- Graduate Student Focus Groups
- Survey of over 1100 faculty and graduate students (50% response rate)

A MULTI-DIMENSIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR ACADEMIC SUPPORT

HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

MAJOR FINDINGS:

- As a result of the highly interdisciplinary nature of faculty and graduate students' work (more than 90% of faculty consider their work interdisciplinary), as well as the diverse types of materials and media they consult, scholars need better methods of addressing the specificity and uniqueness of their research topics.
- Faculty find their methods only adequate when it comes to identifying obscure sources, keeping up with their field (and various fields), and organizing the materials they do acquire.
- Faculty and graduate students are extremely comfortable with electronic sources for their research (from articles to artifacts) and with electronic forms of communication (email).
- Despite the preference of electronic research materials, archival research is one of the top three research methodologies employed (after textual analysis and historiography), and nearly 80% of faculty consider browsing shelves at the Library to be extremely or somewhat important. (Although, almost 75% of faculty report that they browse Library stacks only monthly or occasionally.)
- Graduate students report a pronounced need for training in research practices, especially in the areas of archival research methodologies and grant funding opportunities and procedures.
- Faculty report that it is easier to identify needed research materials and sources than it is to actually acquire them (23% vs. 42%).
- Graduate students nearly the same amount of difficulty identifying materials and acquiring them (35% vs. 32%).
- Humanities and Social Science researchers have been slow to embrace electronic or web-based programs for managing citations (Refworks) and prefer word processing methods (although there is greater adoption among social scientists).
- Faculty and graduate students report having inadequate methods for organizing and storing their research materials.
- Researchers amass unique and potentially valuable research collections that are inaccessible to other researchers.
- Faculty are aware that they need innovative ways to manage their research collections. A few engage in scanning activities, but methods are generally haphazard, idiosyncratic, and dependent on word processing-based lists.
- 93% of faculty would use assistance with acquiring materials. 70% would use assistance with general organization and preservation of research materials.
- Nearly 69% of faculty say they work collaboratively.
- Over 70% of faculty who participate in collaborative research work indicate this is with colleagues at other institutions. The number one obstacle to working collaboratively is distance from colleagues (45%).
- Nearly 80% of both faculty and graduate students consider the Libraries as playing an important role in the development of technology.
- Approximately 66% of faculty and graduate students would use assistance with creating presentations.
- Graduate students would benefit from a stable physical space within the Libraries where they can work collaborative and individually
- Faculty consider themselves very effective at disseminating their research.
- Graduate students find dissemination challenging. Only a third considers their methods effective.
- Most faculty and graduate students rely on email or face-to-face interactions to share ideas.

FOCUS FOR FUTURE:

- Identify and pursue changes in physically-based services (e.g., book deliveries, use of library spaces)
- Identify areas of potential collaboration between CLA, Libraries, and Office of Information Technology with respect to research support services
- Create programs that can serve as a catalyst for interdisciplinary and collaborative work
- Identify "primitives" –i.e., tasks that are common to disciplines. Develop tools (or associated programs) to address these primitives with ability to customize by discipline or interdisciplinary scholarly community
- Identify tools that enable discovery and exploration within other disciplines
- Develop discipline-specific "Scholar's Collectives" (i.e., online services) that incorporate content, tools, and services configured to meet expressed needs
- Explore the potential for "social tools" in scholarly contexts to facilitate community as well as enhance research productivity

University of Minnesota Libraries · · http://www.lib.umn.edu/about/mellon