

Research practices and support needs of
Language and Literature faculty
at the University of Utah

A study conducted in conjunction with Ithaka S+R
under the sponsorship of
the Modern Language Association
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Introduction

This report presents the findings and recommendations of a study conducted in the Spring semester of 2019 at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City, a Research 1 (R1) institution as defined by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. The University of Utah was one of 14 colleges and universities invited to participate in this study to examine the research practices of faculty in the fields of Language and Literature, broadly defined, and to identify areas where these researchers need further support. It was organized and coordinated by Ithaka S+R under the sponsorship of the Modern Language Association (MLA), and is the tenth such study in Ithaka S+R's ongoing Research Support Services program.¹ The local study was conducted by a team from the Research and User Services division of the University of Utah's J. Willard Marriott Library: Robert Behra, liaison to the French, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, and German programs in the Department of World Languages & Cultures; Darby Fanning, leader of the library's International College and Interdisciplinary Team and liaison to the Department of Linguistics and the Russian program in the Department of World Languages & Cultures; Marie Paiva, liaison to Asian Studies; and Lis Pankl, liaison to Latin American Studies and the Department of English.

Following a brief description of the research methodology utilized, our findings are presented under the themes of Discovery, Resources & Services, Scholarly Outputs & Evaluation, and Networking & Social Media. Our recommendations suggest ways to improve library support for the research needs of Language and Literature faculty at the University of Utah. A copy of the semi-structured interview guide used for this study is included at the end.

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Methodology

The Marriott Library team members individually completed Institutional Review Board (IRB) training at the University of Utah before attending Ithaka S+R training at Georgetown University in November 2018. IRB approval for the study was received in December 2018, followed by Technology & Venture Commercialization (TVC) approval and contract in June 2019. Both IRB and TVC were provided the research methodology along with purpose and use of outcomes for a local report, as well as a final report from Ithaka S+R, and potential use of outcomes for improvement of current library services and consideration of new services based on the participants' overall research support needs.

Study participants were solicited from the College of Humanities, home to seven departments, eight programs and nine centers.² Many of these faculty members are transdisciplinary in their

¹ For links to the other studies see <https://sr.ithaka.org/our-work/research-support/>.

² The University of Utah has 17 colleges and schools, 98 academic departments and 32 interdisciplinary programs. Enrollment figures for the last full academic year showed 24,735 undergraduates and 8,251 graduate students, for a

methodology. They are often based in the departments of English, History, and World Languages & Cultures (where 23 different languages are taught), and may have dual appointments with the Asia Center, the Middle East Center, or the Latin American Studies program, all in the College of Humanities, or with the divisions of Ethnic Studies or Gender Studies in the School for Social and Cultural Transformation.

An initial list of over 100 potential study participants identified between November 2018 and January 2019 was narrowed down based on a close review of information found in the University of Utah's Faculty Activity Report database, with e-mail invitations being sent out to 20 faculty members in February 2019. Interviews were scheduled in February and March 2019 with the eight who agreed to participate (a mixed group with the ranks of associate professor, assistant professor, and professor, hereinafter referred to as scholars). We had hoped for a higher positive response rate, but when further acceptances were not received we prevailed on a library colleague who also does research and publishes in this area to join the pool. Interviews were conducted in the Marriott Library's audio studio and recorded with the technical expertise of Robert Nelson, Assistant Head for Audio Visual Studios and Associate Librarian in the Creativity and Innovation Services Department.

Ithaka S+R provided a semi-structured interview guide. Use of this format ensured a degree of consistency across the interviews conducted by each of the 14 teams nationwide, while also allowing the conversations to be tailored to capture the unique experiences and perspectives of the individual interviewees and maximizing in terms of breadth and depth what could be learned in a single interview.

Temu.com, a web-based transcription service, was used to transcribe the recorded interviews. Team members then listened to the recordings and corrected where the transcription failed to capture speakers' exact words. Individual team members manually coded the transcriptions using systematic open coding. Once consensus had been reached about the major themes in the data, the writing of the report was begun.

Findings

Discovery

Discovery is a term used to characterize the information-seeking phase in the research process. Our scholars use a wide variety of tools for discovery. Because they are based at the University of Utah, the first place most of them turn to begin this phase of their research is the Marriott Library catalog. Their opinions of this tool vary, with one saying that she is often able to find everything she needs through the catalog. Another reported:

total enrollment of just under 33,000. There is a strong focus on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). Just under 8% of enrolled students were in the College of Humanities.

"I find our catalog here quite challenging. I feel... well, now I've had enough librarians come into my classes to show me how to use that catalog more efficiently. But without that, I think the catalog is just a confusing mess, right? It wants to be Google but it's not. [...] I just don't find it efficient for the type of research I do. My research is quite targeted."

This scholar felt that searches in the catalog return too many results, that it requires using multiple filters to uncover what is actually being sought, and that it has nothing close to Google's ability to respond appropriately to queries posed in natural language.³ A third scholar, though, had a diametrically opposed view, wishing that the federated search would include even more of our online resources.⁴

The database mentioned most frequently by the scholars was WorldCat, with several of them saying that they start with WorldCat rather than the library catalog. One mentioned the EBSCOhost platform (and sometimes found it "hard to use"), while another two mentioned the MLA International Bibliography and a third the Bibliography of Asian Studies (two of the 93 separate EBSCOhost databases available here); one mentioned the ProQuest platform and another the ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global database; JSTOR was mentioned by one and another mentioned Project MUSE. Several scholars mentioned databases not available through the library, focused primarily on languages other than English, one of them volunteering to assist the library with writing a grant proposal to obtain such resources. One scholar also used the catalogs of major libraries in the country on which her research is focused. Google was mentioned by several, Google Books by one, and Google Scholar by another, while one acknowledged not really being familiar with Google Scholar. Several of our scholars did not mention use of any particular database or search engine.

One of those we interviewed felt quite strongly about the need for researchers to understand that the processes behind which results are returned by a search engine and in what order, behind the controlled vocabulary assigned in databases and library catalogs, and behind the acquisition, curation and presentation of the collections of libraries and archives are all implicitly biased. She impresses on her students the subjective nature of these major components of the information environment they have to navigate in the hope of making them more discerning researchers. Three other scholars raised related issues, two talking about the special challenges faced by researchers using Western library tools to locate materials in languages with non-Roman scripts, while another remarked on the inconsistent application of subject headings in WorldCat, all emphasizing the need for researchers to be aware of the potential for inherent weaknesses in the tools they use.

One scholar is in the library regularly and, aware of the increasing tendency among his students to rely entirely on online resources (Google chief among them) insists that they come to the library, requiring that at least two of the sources cited in their papers be physical books found on the shelf

³ Subsequent to the interviews, but unrelated to the feedback provided by our scholars, the library's catalog has been modified to alter the way initial search results are presented.

⁴ The library's catalog, from ExLibris, uses the current version of Alma for our integrated library system with the current version of Primo as our discovery tool, and the Primo Central Index, which provides access to article-level commercial and open-access content, currently 387 searches collections.

in the library. He hopes in this way to introduce them to the serendipity possible while browsing the stacks and thus share with them one of his own discovery methods.

Another method of discovery mentioned by some of our scholars as often being crucial to their success when visiting an unfamiliar repository was consultation with librarians, curators, or archivists, either in person or through correspondence.

General barriers in the discovery process mentioned by the scholars include libraries that lack an online catalog, or whose online catalog contains only a portion of the library's holdings; archives whose finding aids are not available online, or with incomplete or incorrect finding aids, or completely without finding aids, problems that are compounded when members of the staff are not fully familiar with the collections; archives that require all materials to be requested days in advance of intended use and/or that impose a limit on the number of requests that can be made per day regardless of the size/extent of the item being requested; archives with limited hours; poor quality control for digitized images, either those available online or those made expressly for the use of an individual researcher; and poor condition of materials. Several of these factors present serious impediments to research when scholars have made a trip expressly to visit a repository and have limited time.

Resources & Services

Many of the resources identified by our scholars during the discovery process can be accessed at the Marriott Library, either as part of the library's existing physical or electronic collections, through the Suggest a Purchase service (most faculty requests for books and audio-visual materials are honored), or through Interlibrary Loan (ILL). As the library's collection development policy for books currently prefers electronic over physical format, one scholar expressed the hope that we would continue our willingness to acquire a physical copy if she determined from consultation of the electronic version that the book merited greater scrutiny. Several of the scholars appreciate e-books for the ease of casual use, while one finds it difficult to read online and prefers the physical format in all cases.

As a mid-range member of the Association of Research Libraries, the Marriott Library's collections and resources are more extensive than those of many other libraries (including one mentioned by one of our scholars from his undergraduate days), but pale in size and depth when compared to those of Harvard, Yale, the University of California, Berkeley, or the University of Washington, all mentioned by our scholars.⁵ We compensate in part by having an efficient and resourceful Interlibrary Loan and Document Delivery department. Most of the scholars we interviewed mentioned ILL, several of them remarking on its importance in their research process, with one scholar who needed to consult all of the many dozens of published editions of a text, both

⁵ According to the 2017/2018 Association of Research Libraries *Rank order tables for university libraries* the University of Utah libraries rank 41st for titles held, 63rd for volumes in library, 82nd for total library materials expenditures and 56th for total items borrowed (interlibrary loan/document delivery), out of 116 member libraries.

in the original language and in translation, finding it indispensable: "Certainly would not have been possible without that resource."

The research of most of the scholars we interviewed is largely focused outside the United States, and several of them publish in languages other than English. While 14% of the physical titles in the library's collections are in a foreign language, such materials can sometimes be difficult for the library to purchase or borrow. One scholar wishes that the network of libraries from which we are able to borrow were larger (we currently borrow only from American and Canadian libraries, and the British Library), as it has sometimes been challenging to find materials from the country on which her research is focused. Three others reported similar issues, one of them frustrated that the library was unable to acquire materials that this scholar knew to be readily available commercially in the country of origin, and unable to reimburse her if she were to make the purchase herself on behalf of the library during a research trip.

The Marriott Library's Special Collections Division is used regularly by three of the scholars we interviewed. Two of them have developed a close collaboration with the head of Rare Books and bring their students to the library to work with original editions or facsimiles related to particular courses, and one mentioned a current PhD candidate whose dissertation grew out of a visit to Rare Books in one of her classes. A third scholar, working with the Special Collections Reference Librarian, often brings classes in to use manuscripts and other materials related to what they are studying. She expressed a wish that the Special Collections Division would do even more in the way of collecting materials related to the specific local ethnic group that is the focus of her research. In this way these three are sharing with their students an aspect of their own experience as researchers. In the view of one of them, Rare Books is the one area that continues the role of scholarly archive, which she feels the library as a whole has abandoned: "The library sees itself as a meeting space and no longer a repository for books."

Most of the scholars mentioned interactions with the library's liaison to their program/department, usually in the context of helping them find materials or teaching information literacy sessions to their classes. However, two noted that the ability of these library employees to assist them or their students in their research is limited, one of them concerned by the fact that there are no longer individual librarians dedicated to a single language program, and regretting the lack of "somebody with really in-depth knowledge of the resources". Another said it would be nice to have, at some point, a liaison to her program with a reading knowledge of the language on which her research is focused.

Our scholars all travel for the purpose of conducting research in other libraries and archives, in the United States and in other countries, when the resources they need cannot be accessed at the Marriott Library. Some of them also travel to conduct field research. As such trips can be expensive, researchers may not be able to go as often as they would like. Libraries and archives that have made digital images from their collections available online can reduce the need for scholars to travel to consult the originals. When digital images are not available, libraries that permit researchers to take photographs of archival materials make it possible to get more done in a limited time. One scholar said that she would benefit from a workshop on how to manage the photos taken during such a trip.

Competitive grants and other forms of financial research support were mentioned as essential to fund this travel. One scholar emphasized the challenges inherent in this model, along with the reduction of time available for research due to bureaucratic duties and service obligations:

"...having the time to actually do this work is really difficult. I guess I would just say time, you know, funding for the humanities. I just applied for an NEH [National Endowment for the Humanities grant] and they funded 9% of the applicants. I also applied for the ACLS [American Council of Learned Societies grant] and I don't know what their rate is, they didn't tell me, but the bureaucratization of academic life and the way that universities have pushed stuff down on faculty, paper pushing stuff, just sucks up people's time and it's hard to think."

Whether for items in our own collections or those obtained through Interlibrary Loan, several of the scholars make regular use of the library's campus delivery service, which saves them a trip to the library. Other Marriott Library services that were mentioned by the scholars include various forms of technical training or assistance, which in most cases pertained to their teaching rather than their research activities. Two of the scholars suggested that the library should be doing more of this sort of work, and should do a better job of advertising such services and its resources in general. When asked what sorts of training the library might offer in the future that would benefit their research or that of their students one scholar suggested that his graduate students would benefit from training on how to distinguish between legitimate journals and "junk" journals "just out for a buck".

Scholarly Outputs & Evaluation

Our scholars' most commonly published research products are books and journal articles. They had different responses when asked about the relative weight given to these formats in their departments and disciplines. Several said that a book was required for tenure, but there were also indications of a shift to a more flexible situation, as this comment suggests: "I think in my department in particular there doesn't seem to be a strong preference. Our tenure and promotion guidelines for junior professor to get promoted to associate, the standard is kind of either a book or six articles." Another scholar mentioned an expectation of one article a year or a book every three years, and while she publishes both she was grateful to have the option. A third reported that her department and others were trying to figure out how to convince faculty members that they would receive the same credit and respect for producing only articles, highlighting one of the problems of changing existing expectations: "But I think it's hard when a certain set of faculty have moved through with a certain set of requirements and then they feel like to change them would be lowering their standards or something, or unfair in the sense that they had to do this one thing and then they're saying that other people can do this other thing."

One issue of concern connected to getting published is the lack of financial support for the participation in publication costs that may be required either to get a book published with a university press or to publish in an open-access journal. In particular, one scholar noted:

"So the subsidy now comes out of people's research funds, people's private funds, right? So in order to have your book published, you are asked to subsidize the publication by

\$2,000 or \$1,000, whatever it is. [...] And so authors now do the labor for free and are paying to get their stuff published. [...] It's a joke. Everybody asks for subsidy now because the universities have stopped supporting their university presses at the level they need to be supported. But at the same time to get a book out with a university press is required for tenure in several of our departments.”

Such charges are not universal among American university presses, but may be required by some to cover costs associated with color illustrations, indexing, and/or unusually lengthy text, or may be required for a book to be published open access.

Some issues of concern regarding the evaluation of their scholarly outputs were raised by those we interviewed. One is the lack of clear standards for evaluating anything other than a physical book published in the United States by a university press or an article published in a peer-reviewed print journal: electronic publications, for example, either a born-digital book, an article in an open-access online-only journal, or a website; a chapter in an edited volume; books, articles or contributions to edited volumes published outside the United States in a language other than English. One scholar felt that this forces untenured faculty members to limit the scope of their creative output in order to avoid jeopardizing their career prospects.

All of our scholars who responded to the question about impact factor as an evaluation criterion agreed that it is not pertinent for the humanities, though it is discussed in their departments. One scholar noted:

“What they usually do is they use words like a peer-reviewed journal and a high-impact journal or a top tier journal. Nobody defines that, nobody has any idea what they're really saying. It's like we all recognize it when we see it or we recognize it when we want to recognize it, but it's not quantified like in the social sciences. And I don't... I think that stuff has too much influence on the way we publish and the way we work. I think it's nonsense, but whatever.”

Another commented that his field “is too small for any of those numbers to be relevant and nobody cares about them.”

About the practice of benchmarking, another stated:

“The primary impact that I see of that kind of counting is to make people feel anxious and insecure in the workplace, in an unproductive way. I think that it also makes people wonder, well, if I'm being told to produce x quantity, then I should have the resources to be able to do that, right? So how fair is it to evaluate someone for their academic production or their scholarly production if you don't provide them the resources to go do it?”

Networking & Social Media

All but one of the scholars mentioned specific networking strategies, either for promoting their work or keeping up with current research in their areas of interest. Conferences are a traditional

means of achieving these aims, mentioned by most of our scholars as a way that they were able to network with others in their fields.

Most mentioned Facebook, with two of our scholars singling it out as one of the most effective ways for establishing and maintaining connections with colleagues or potential research contacts in foreign countries. One scholar was very positive about the benefits of judicious use of Facebook for networking, saying that he has “very carefully curated groups” for where he posts content related to his work.

Several mentioned academia.edu, all critical of it:

“Yeah, I use academia.edu, but I am quite aware of the evil nature of this and I have moved away from it..”

“I'm very suspicious of things like academia.edu. I don't like the fact that people will, you know, upload work that's been copyrighted elsewhere.”

“I have mixed feelings about it. I think it's a trap for the naive in some ways that, you know, predatory publishers are, but there are enough advantages that I still do it.”

This last scholar, despite his dislike of the business model, acknowledged that all of his articles are posted there to make them easy for people in his field to find consistently.

Another of our scholars, “not a huge fan of Facebook” and with mixed feelings about academia.edu, felt that something in between the two, “an academic networking space, where that's really all it was about”, would be ideal.

Not all were avid users of social media, though, as indicated by one scholar “not comfortable with social media in the way a millennial is.”

Other networking tools mentioned by individual scholars were ResearchGate, Instagram, Twitter, blog posts (one scholar thought guidance in how to write a “sexy” blog post about one’s own research could be helpful), listservs and journal table of contents notifications.

Conclusions

This study provided the opportunity for an in-depth engagement with a small subset of the Marriott Library’s core user base, allowing us to learn more about their research practices and support needs. The scholars we interviewed are highly engaged with their research projects. While they use many of the same tools for discovery, they use them in different ways and to different effect. Our scholars are able to rely on the library’s resources to meet many of their research needs. The research focus of these scholars also necessitates that they travel nationally and internationally to access resources not available here. Our scholars’ publications consist largely of books and articles written in English, with the expectations in this area for promotion, retention, and tenure varying by department, while criteria for evaluating other forms of publication aren’t spelled out as clearly.

Our scholars network in different ways, including face-to-face interactions during research trips and at conferences, as well as using social media.

While narrowly focused on the research practices and support needs of Language and Literature faculty, some of the findings will be applicable to other fields in the humanities, and we believe we can now be more effective advocates within the library for these researchers.

Recommendations

Although research practices vary widely among our scholars, common areas of need were identified. Based on those needs, we developed specific recommendations to improve library support for Language and Literature faculty at the University of Utah.

- Partner with faculty to obtain grants for foreign-language resources
- Work to increase the number and variety of non-US sources from which foreign titles can be purchased
- Work to increase subject and language expertise of library's departmental liaisons
- Explore options to create library fellowships, perhaps endowed by a donor, for faculty and graduate students that provide funding for national and/or international research trips
- Communicate more effectively with campus faculty about resources and services available to them from the library, e.g. researcher and author services (<https://lib.utah.edu/services/researcher-author>)
- Work with departments to develop graduate student methodology courses with the library

Next steps

This report will be publicly available through University of Utah's institutional repository (USpace). We will share our findings with our colleagues and administration at the Marriott Library, with our interviewees and their departmental and college administration, and with the wider University of Utah community through formal and informal presentations.

We will begin the process of implementing the recommendations listed above. The information gathered during this study has been valuable enough that we intend to conduct similar studies here at the University of Utah, and possibly with regional consortia such as the Utah Academic Library Consortium (UALC) and the Mountain Plains Library Association (MPLA), independent of Ithaka S+R, with research faculty in other disciplines.

Ithaka S+R Language and Literature Project

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Research Focus and Methods

Describe the research project(s) you are currently working on.

- Tell me a bit more about how the research for the project has unfolded step-by-step [choose one project if multiple were listed above], e.g. developing the topic, identifying and working with the information needed for the research, plans for sharing the results.
- How does this project and process of researching relate to how you've done work in the past?
- How does this project relate to the work typically done in your department(s) and field(s) you are affiliated with?

Working with Archives and Other Special Collections

Do you typically rely on material collected in archives or other special collections [e.g. rare books, unpublished documents, museum artifacts]? If so,

- How do you find this information? How did you learn how to do this? Does anyone ever help you?
- Where do you access this information [e.g. on-site, digitally]?
- How and when do you work with this information? [E.g. do you use any specific approaches or tools?]
- Have you encountered any challenges in the process of finding, accessing or working with this kind of information? If so, describe.
- To what extent do you understand and/or think it is important to understand how the tools that help you find and access this information work? [E.g. finding aides, online museum catalogues; "Do you understand how database x decides which content surfaces first in your searches?" and, "Do you care to understand?"]
- Are there any resources, services or other supports that would help you more effectively work with this kind of information?

Working with Secondary Content

What kinds of secondary source content do you typically rely on do your research [e.g. scholarly articles or monographs]?

- How do you find this information? How did you learn to do this? Does anyone ever help you?
- Where do you access this information [e.g. on-site, digitally]?
- How and when do you work with this information? [E.g. do you use any specific approaches or tools?]
- Have you encountered any challenges in the process of finding, accessing or working with secondary sources? If so, describe.
- To what extent do you understand and/or think it is important to understand how the tools that help you find and access this information work? [E.g. algorithmic bias, processes for creating and applying keywords; "Do you understand how Google Scholar decides which articles surface first in your searches?" and, "Do you care to understand?"]
- Are there any resources, services or other supports that would help you more effectively locate or work with secondary sources?

Scholarly Communications and Evaluating Impact

How are your scholarly outputs [e.g. books, peer reviewed journal articles] evaluated by your institution and to what ends [e.g. tenure and promotion process, frequency of evaluations]?

- Have you observed any trends and/or changes over time in how scholarly outputs are being evaluated [e.g. shift in emphasis between books and articles, shift in emphasis in the extent to which the prestige or impact factor of a publication is considered]?
- Beyond tenure and promotion, does your institution evaluate your scholarly outputs towards any other ends [e.g. benchmarking your/your departments performance using analytics software]? If so, how, and to what ends?
- What have been your experiences of being evaluated in this way?
- Have you observed these kinds of processes having a larger effect on your department and/or institutional culture?

To what extent do you engage with or have an interest in any mechanisms for sharing your work beyond traditional publishing in peer reviewed journals or monographs? To what ends? [E.g. posting in preprint archives to share with peers, creating digital maps or timelines for students, creating outputs for wider audiences.]

Do you engage with any forms of social networking, including academic social networking, as a mechanism for sharing and/or engaging with other scholars? If no, why not? If so,

- Describe the platform(s) you currently use and how.
- What do you like best about the platform(s) you currently use and what do you like least?
- Are there any other ways the platform(s) could be improved to best meet your needs?

Beyond the information you have already shared about your scholarly communications activities and needs, is there anything else you think would be helpful for me to know about your experiences?

Research Training and Wrapping Up

Looking back at your experiences as a researcher, are there any forms of training that were particularly useful? Conversely, are there any forms of training you wish you had gotten and/or would still like to get? Why?

Considering evolving trends in how research is conducted and evaluated, is there any form of training that would be most beneficial to graduate students and/or scholars more widely?

Is there anything else from your experiences and perspectives as a researcher, or on the topic of research more broadly, that you think would be helpful to share with me that has not yet been discussed in this conversation?