

# Researchers say the darndest things!

Using semi-structured interviews to uncover the unique information behaviors of basic sciences researchers in an academic health center.

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**Who?** Basic science researchers

**What?** Information-seeking behavior

**Where?** College of Medicine, University of Vermont

**How?** A qualitative study using semi-structured interviews

**Why?** A research team was created to examine the unique information-seeking characteristics of basic sciences researchers, with the ultimate goal of designing a suite of library services that would better meet their needs.

## Searching Information Resources

"Google gives you so much information that it's hard to pull out the good stuff."

"You'll find a couple of publications that are exactly what you want and use them to find references."

"I like Wikipedia, not that it's necessarily authenticated per se, but it has a lot of general information."

**"PubMed. We use it all the time, every day, for 99.9% of our research."**

**"Our topic is so specific that I don't get a lot of junk even with plain Google."**

"I actually use PubMed very seldom."

"I am particular about only citing primary references when I can."

*How they keep up to date...*

"Badly... it's kind of sporadic... I'll go and check out what's been published in the last couple of months."

"I have a robot set up through the UVM Bidesktop. It searches the literature, and it sends me a list of the titles of about 100 papers per week."

## Work Environment

*Importance of Colleagues*

"The other way [of keeping up to date] is just by talking to people on the phone."

"I have passwords from several universities. That's what everyone does. For my PhD, if I needed a paper, I would send out a mass email and people would send it to you."

"[Grad students] get most of the information from other people in the lab or from other grad students in the department, and each department is so different in what their needs are."

*Lack of Centralization on Campus*

"It's a shame. For whatever reason, it's really two different campuses [the College of Medicine and the rest of UVM] and they don't really share things and I don't know why."

"I'll go to a poster session and find that somebody is sending something out to be done and it's costing 10 times more than we [a UVM CORE facility] would charge to do the same thing, and we do it faster. They didn't know we existed!" [laughs]

**"I've been here 19 years and every year goes by I know fewer and fewer people doing research around here."**

## Potential Library Services

*Institutional Repository*

"I think it's good for an institution to know what's happening inside its doors. It's a good recruitment tool."

**"That's a great way of finding out what someone else is doing."**

*Centralized List of Scholarly Activities*

"It's sort of crazy, but as far as we can tell, the institution doesn't have a list [of Grand Rounds] like that. Having all of that in one place and having the Library being in charge of it, that would be nice."

**"Often you're working with collaborators here on campus and you want to be able to figure out what they're doing."**

## Current Library Services

*Reference*

"I go straight to the person at the desk, rather than walking around the library looking for something."

**"I'm embarrassed to say this is the first time I've set foot in here."**

*Literature Searching*

"I'd rather do it myself, because I can finesse the search by changing keywords"

"I've never actually done that here. Now my work is so focused that I just know the research in the field"

*Communication Preferences*

**"Email. Email is always best."**

"What works best for me is a print flyer that I'd receive in my mailbox. I'm much more likely to read that than an email."

*Workshops & Classes*

"I tend to be more a self-taught person, so when it comes to learning ... I pretty much teach myself."

"There are probably a lot of databases that I never use, but don't know that I need them, so I wouldn't think of going to a class about them."

## Practical Implications for Dana Library

*Try to...*

- Communicate through administrative assistants
- Use both email and print flyers to communicate
- Pursue an institutional repository
- Offer courses in advanced searching and *EndNote* to graduate students

*Avoid...*

- Promoting literature searching services to this group, as they tend to do their own searching
- Offering alerting services; most keep up to date just fine through conventional and unconventional ways
- Marketing classes by just using the database name; instead, explain its usefulness and put it in context

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