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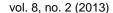
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Abstract

In this article, the authors describe a grassroots model for research support and explore the success and evolving directions of this model based on three iterative needs assessments administered by the Librarian and Archivist Research Support Network (LARSN) Steering Committee at The University of Western Ontario. Needs assessments were identified as a critical tool to ensure that LARSN programming is relevant to librarians' and archivists' changing research needs. In the first four years of LARSN, three needs assessments were administered: in fall 2007, fall 2009, and spring 2011. The iterative needs assessments aimed to capture how the environment and research needs were

evolving over time and the ways in which LARSN might continue to support a healthy and productive research environment. LARSN is faced with challenges that include a diversity of needs within its community, inconsistent participation levels in LARSN initiatives, and the inability to be all things to all people at all times. Still, LARSN is well received overall and rated positively by its community members. This is, in large part, because it has stayed true to its original mission to be needs-driven and responsive.

Keywords

practitioner-researcher; research supports; faculty status; academic librarians

Introduction

The strategies for supporting academic librarians in their research endeavours have long been discussed in the library literature. The questions of whether librarians have the skills to complete quality research (Kennedy and Brancolini 433) and what supports and assistance they need (Fox 2-22; Clapton 15; Schrader, Shiri, and Williamson 147-148; Berg, Jacobs, and Cornwall 566-568) have been explored. However, the literature on scholarship by librarians is limited to investigating the needs of, and supports for, librarians at one particular point in time. What is absent from the literature is a discussion of how the supports can evolve over time in response to the changing needs of librarians. In this paper, we address this issue by presenting the findings from three iterative needs assessments which have provided a framework for the development of Western's evolving research support: the Librarian and Archivist Research Support Network (LARSN). This framework may serve as a model for initiating and maintaining evidence-based supports for research at other academic libraries.

The University of Western Ontario is a large, research-intensive university with 27,500 undergraduate and graduate students in eleven faculties. Approximately 50 librarians and archivists (L/As) work at Western; most work in Western Libraries, and three librarians are also employed in faculty-based libraries. In 2006, L/As at Western gained academic status[1] under the University of Western Ontario Faculty Association – Librarians and Archivists Bargaining Unit. This transition into the faculty union added research and scholarly activity to the professional requirements of Western's L/As for the first time[2]. L/As at Western

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[1] Academic status is often used interchangeably with faculty status; academic status reflects the fact that librarian and archivist guidelines or procedures with respect to appointment, permanence, promotion, salaries, leaves, etc. are not identical to those for faculty. For a fuller description of the differences, see Leckie and Brett (3-4).

[2] At The University of Western Ontario, research and scholarly activities for librarians and archivists are termed "Academic Activity". Academic Activity is defined as "some or all of: a) the creation of new knowledge, including understanding or concepts; b) the creative application of existing knowledge; c) the organization or synthesis of existing knowledge; that is relevant to librarianship or archival practice." (UWOFA 192-193).

now have a normal workload balance of 80% Professional Practice, 10% Service, and 10% Academic Activity. The first collective agreement also introduced the possibility for L/As to take Professional Leaves, including Academic Activity Leave. The second collective agreement in 2009 added an Academic Activity Support Fund which has continued through the present, and applications for funding are open to any L/A with a permanent appointment. L/As are also able to apply for Western internal grants and have access to all services offered through the university's research support office, Research Western.

Literature Review

Although research as a formal requirement for librarians and archivists at The University of Western Ontario was introduced relatively recently, the expectation for many librarians in North America to participate in research and scholarship is not new. As early as 1974, the Association of College and Research Libraries issued the *Joint Statement on Faculty Status for College and University Librarians*, specifying that librarians should go through the same evaluation process and be held to the same evaluation standards as other university faculty.

The expectation that librarians will engage in research and scholarship has been viewed as a mixed blessing. Through their research endeavours, many librarians derive personal and professional satisfaction, increase their professional profile, enrich their relationships with faculty, and improve their professional contributions to the academic mission (Clapton 14; Perkins and Slowik 153). At the same time, the pressure to publish has been cited as a major source of stress for tenure-track librarians (Hoggan 437-438; Lewis; Neville and Henry 86; Tysick and Babb 95-99). Much of the anxiety surrounding publication is attributed to librarians' lack of research training, grant-writing skills, and release time to pursue scholarly activities (Sapon-White, King, and Christie 407). Course-based graduate programs in library and information studies tend not to be research-intensive and place little emphasis on scholarly writing or conducting research. As a result, many librarians can enter academia with little or no experience in scholarship and no familiarity with scholarly communities (Sapon-White, King, and Christie 407; Tysick and Babb 94).

The ability of librarians to produce the quality and quantity of publication necessary for academic status has been questioned in the literature for decades (Robbins, Engel, and Kulp 517); however, in the last five years, a more positive and promising discussion about librarian scholarship has emerged. Librarians' level of engagement and level of publication is not being criticized, but rather commended. Hildreth and Aytac acknowledge that while the research conducted by library practitioners has been considered inadequate and mediocre (236), there have been many improvements in the quality of published literature by librarians (254). More specific examples include Schrader, Shiri, and Williamson's exploration of the research environment at a Canadian university library, which provided "evidence of [librarians'] engagement in research and scholarship at very high levels" (158), and the evidence from Coker, van

Duinkerken, and Bales (413) that academic librarians are publishing at levels comparable to faculty.

More and more, the value of practitioner research is being recognized. Wirth, Kelly, and Webster examine the ways in which librarians at Oregon State University demonstrate the value of librarian scholarship and highlight that "librarians are contributing in a meaningful way to the profession" (521). Fennewald explores the factors leading to publications by librarians at Penn State University and concludes that promotion and tenure is not the sole motivation for taking part in research, but rather that librarians see research as a worthwhile and enjoyable endeavour (107). Overall, recent publications suggest that librarians are embracing research and scholarship as a core part of their professional responsibilities.

In order to assist librarians in their scholarly endeavours, institutional supports for those endeavours have been implemented in many North American libraries. Structures of support for academic librarians' research and scholarship transpire in a variety of ways, including, but not necessarily limited to, writing support groups (Tysick and Babb 97-99; Campbell, Ellis, and Adebonojo 17-20; Fallon 12), formal forums for research conversations (Miller and Benefiel 262-263; Sapon-White, King, and Christie 411-413), and mentoring programs (Miller and Benefiel 263; Novara, Brown, and Williams 267; Cirasella and Smale 98-106). Attributes of support that increase effectiveness include a clear plan, proper evaluation, and an environment of collegiality and overall openness (Gratch 980; Fennewald 111-112; Wirth, Kelly, and Webster 521).

Background: The Research Support Network

Soon after L/As at Western gained academic status, Selinda Berg (2006) proposed the development of a grassroots research support network to the library administration. It was recognized that a new network, created at the onset of research requirements, was in the unique position to make use of the evidence and experience from other North American academic libraries in helping to support and develop the research capacity of Western L/As. Using the past experience of other institutions as a guide, through extensive literature reviews and informal conversations, L/As at Western set out to create a support network based on the specific research needs of their colleagues.

The goal of LARSN is to assist Western's L/As to be successful in their research and scholarly endeavours. It was seen as critical that L/As themselves were involved in defining what supports were needed and deciding how supports would be developed, although continued support by administration was also recognized as necessary (Schrader, Shiri, and Williamson 151). LARSN therefore set out to define ways to meet the research needs of L/As by developing a formalized structure of support at the grassroots level. As a framework for such support, the initial proposal for LARSN clearly outlined that

"[t]he Research Support Network will be needs-driven and flexible, in order to meet the requirements of the diverse cohort of librarians and archivists" (Berg 1).

Whereas it was conceived of and initially developed by one librarian, LARSN is now directed by a Steering Committee of two to three L/As and one Educational Researcher. Regular calls are made for interested L/As to join the Steering Committee. In this way, LARSN is intentionally driven and led by peers, although it also has clear support from library administration. The Educational Researcher is affiliated with the Teaching Support Centre at Western, and his role is to support faculty members, librarians, and archivists in performing original research on the effect of teaching innovations on student learning.

Methods

Conducting an assessment of user needs is a well-established practice in libraries for identifying any existing gaps in library services and resources. In addition, the results of a needs assessment study will provide a framework for future planning and delivery of appropriate information services. It is recommended that needs assessments be conducted regularly to identify ongoing and changing needs of the user community (Clougherty et al. 573; Mi and Gilbert 32). Schrader, Shiri, and Williamson (158) also suggest that any new initiative requires a follow-up study to serve as an assessment of both the progress and the value of the initiative. Similar to faculty development programs which require ongoing needs assessment (Lipetz, Bussigel, and Foley 143), programming in support of librarians' research activity should be considered a dynamic process in which the evolving roles and priorities of the programs' users are evaluated regularly, and impact is measured to indicate the success or shortcomings of the programming.

Over the first four years of LARSN, three needs assessments were administered: in fall 2007, fall 2009, and spring 2011. These iterative needs assessments aimed to capture how the environment and research needs were evolving over time and the ways in which LARSN might continue to support a healthy and productive research environment. In order to demonstrate the responsive and flexible nature of LARSN, we also describe the actions taken by the LARSN Steering Committee in response to the three needs assessments.

Prior to embarking on the needs assessment in 2007, the Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) of The University of Western Ontario was consulted about obtaining ethical approval to conduct the needs assessment and disseminate the findings. The NMREB categorized this project as quality assurance within the mandate of the organization and, as such, deemed it unnecessary for the authors to submit an ethics application. Because the three needs assessment surveys were created for the purpose of evaluating LARSN programming, the questions were not designed as rigorously as would be the case in a formal, longitudinal research study. The questions provided the

information we needed for our purpose; however, further implications of this design are discussed below under Limitations.

To provide context for the needs assessments, we will describe here the motivation for each one. Under Results, we will present the key findings from the needs assessments, followed by a description of the LARSN Steering Committee's response to each.

Needs Assessment #1: Designing the Librarian and Archivist Research Support Network

The first needs assessment survey was distributed in the fall of 2007 (Appendix A). Through an extensive review of the evidence and expository writings found in the published literature (e.g., Gratch; Lee; Miller and Benefiel; Sapon-White, King, and Christie; Tysick and Babb), six areas of research support commonly developed in libraries were identified: advocacy, physical space, development opportunities, networking opportunities, web presence, and connections to existing supports. Building on this preliminary literature review, the initial needs assessment aimed to gain a greater understanding of the environment at Western. Specifically, it attempted to capture L/As' level of experience and enthusiasm to engage in research, the desired research supports of Western's L/As', and the desired method of delivery for development opportunities.

This survey consisted of eighteen questions designed to determine L/As' research-related needs. The survey contained five sections: demographics, support, current research activity, collaboration, and program delivery.

Needs Assessment #2: Targeting a Specific Need

The second needs assessment survey was distributed in the fall of 2009 (Appendix B). In the summer of 2009, LARSN offered a session on writing and publishing presented by an LIS faculty member from The University of Western Ontario's Faculty of Information and Media Studies. This session was very well received by L/As, and several of them requested more programming focused on academic writing and getting published. Steering Committee members had also been receiving suggestions and informal feedback about LARSN programming in general. Therefore, the second needs assessment was developed in the fall of 2009 to confirm that writing and publishing was a topic of interest to L/As and to help the LARSN Steering Committee plan programming in that area, as well as to gauge the level of interest in the other programming suggestions we had received.

This survey consisted of ten questions related to L/As' research needs, with an emphasis on identifying stages in the research and publication support that LARSN might target for programming. The survey was divided into three sections: writing activity, research activity level, and programming needs.

Needs Assessment #3: Refining a Mature Program

The third needs assessment survey was distributed in the spring of 2011 (Appendix C). Between the 2009 and 2011 surveys, the LARSN Steering Committee continued to prepare programming based on feedback from the second needs assessment as well as comments received at LARSN events and through emails and conversations. Although we aligned the programming as closely as possible to expressed needs, the number of participants continued to dwindle for most sessions. That said, those who participated in these events responded very positively.

The Steering Committee was also aware that the research landscape for L/As at Western was changing. There appeared to be a widening range of research skills and expertise among L/As; some were beginning to publish their work, and others were still in the early stages of their research. In 2007, almost all L/As had been at the same research stage, and we were able to learn together. It appeared that this was no longer the case. We sensed that L/As wanted support at their point of need. At the same time, we still heard a call for workshops: for example, a session on quantitative data analysis.

With lower turnouts and the focus appearing to shift from group to individual needs, we decided to conduct another assessment of research support needs. The 2011 survey covered similar content to the first assessment in 2007 and investigated changing research needs.

This survey consisted of eighteen questions designed to assess L/As' needs for specific types of supports, with many of the questions closely aligned with those from the first survey. The survey contained four sections: support, current research activities, program delivery, and programming evaluation.

Participants

For each of the three surveys, an invitation to participate was emailed to all L/As at Western. The surveys were anonymous. Table 1 presents the complement of L/As at Western in the years the needs assessments were conducted. Although the staff complement has changed over time, the mean for years of professional experience has remained relatively stable. This is, in part, because Western has attracted L/As with experience to replace those who have left. At the same time, the standard deviation has changed more dramatically as L/As with long careers in the profession (up to 40 years) began to retire.

Table 1. Librarian and archivist complement at Western

Year	Number of Librarians and Archivists	Mean Years of Professional Experience	Standard Deviation
2007	54	14.1 years	11.50
2009	54	12.4 years	8.92
2011	49	12.8 years	7.60

Response rates for the three surveys were: 59% in 2007 (32 respondents), 28% in 2009 (15 respondents), and 35% in 2011 (17 respondents). The higher response for the first survey is not surprising given that research was new to L/As that year and many were striving to understand the research process. This response rate may reflect their interest in navigating this new territory. Two and four years after the integration of research into the L/As' workload, the needs assessments had response rates fairly typical for online surveys (i.e., approximately 33%; e.g., Nulty, 303; Shih and Fan, 257).

Results

Needs Assessment #1: Designing the Librarian and Archivist Research Support Network

Results are presented here for the four categories of support, current research activity, collaboration, and program delivery.

Support. The survey asked respondents about their perceptions of the current level of support they received as well as the types of supports that they would like to have.

Available Supports. Respondents were asked to rate the level of available supports they currently received from 1 (no support) to 5 (a great deal of support). Respondents felt that they received little support from the university for their research ($M = 2.40$, $SD = 0.814$). Those who noted some level of support from the university community and/or from outside that community indicated that the support came from fellow L/As, individual supervisors, faculty members, professional associations, and conferences. This perceived lack of support for research at the time empirically validated the anecdotally recognized need for the research support network being developed.

Required Supports. Respondents were asked to indicate the level of support that they required for 11 research activities from 1 (no support) to 5 (a great deal of support). As outlined in Table 2, respondents indicated that they needed moderate to "a fair bit" of support for seven of the 11 research activities highlighted, again reinforcing the need for the LARSN programming and

providing direction on the session topics that the Steering Committee would organize.

Table 2. Mean required support

	n	Mean	Standard Deviation
Writing a funding proposal	32	4.09	1.088
Advanced quantitative analyses	31	3.71	1.270
Developing an ethics proposal	32	3.63	1.385
Developing a research design	32	3.62	1.185
Analyzing qualitative data	32	3.47	1.135
Writing a research manuscript	32	3.28	1.198
Basic quantitative analyses	31	3.06	1.289
Non-research scholarly writing	31	2.84	1.214
Developing a research question	32	2.69	1.120
Presenting at a conference	32	2.50	0.842
Performing a literature search	32	2.09	1.058

When asked to rate the importance of various resources from 1 (not at all important) to 5 (extremely important), respondents also indicated that the most important resource that they required was dedicated time to do research (see Table 3). Other resources that were moderately to quite important were a dedicated office space in which to work, computer software (such as NVivo), and research funds.

Table 3. Mean rated importance of resources in achieving research goals

	n	Mean	Standard Deviation
Dedicated time to do research	32	4.59	0.560
Office space to work in	31	3.77	1.146
Computer software	22	3.32	1.427
Research funds	24	3.17	1.167

In response to an open-ended question, respondents indicated that they required funding for travel to conferences, formal and/or informal learning communities, release time from other duties, a mentor, access to library-related databases,

partnerships with librarians within the institution and at other institutions, and clarification of the collective bargaining agreement as to what does and does not constitute research.

Current Research Activity. Respondents were asked to rate their level of enthusiasm about doing research from 1 (not at all enthusiastic) to 5 (very enthusiastic) as well as their current level of research activity from 1 (not at all active) to 5 (very active). Respondents indicated that they were moderately to quite enthusiastic about doing research ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 1.160$); however, they had only been minimally active in research in the last year or the last five years ($M = 2.22$, $SD = 1.157$ and $M = 1.91$, $SD = 1.058$, respectively). This low level of involvement is not surprising as the survey was conducted shortly after librarians joined the faculty association and research became a requirement of their role, but their enthusiasm is promising and would provide a good foundation on which to build LARSN programming.

Collaboration. A minority of respondents preferred to do their research as part of a group (32%), with many having no preference (42%) or preferring to work alone (26%). Because working with a team can be engaging and can help reduce the individual workload, the Steering Committee saw this as a means of increasing enthusiasm and engagement in doing research. The results suggest that a majority of respondents were at least open to the possibility of partnering with colleagues on a research project.

Program Delivery. Respondents were asked to rate the effectiveness of eight delivery methods from 1 (not at all effective) to 5 (very effective). Respondents generally felt that in-person programming such as interactive workshops, mentoring, and discussion groups would be more effective in supporting their research goals than online and print-based resources, with the exception of documents that could be accessed via the internet.

Needs Assessment #2: Targeting a Specific Need

Survey questions were divided into four sections: level of research activity, writing activity, programming needs, and types of research support.

Level of Research Activity. Respondents indicated that they had been a little to moderately active in their research in the last year ($M = 2.65$, $SD = 1.169$). This level of activity may reflect the fact that research is only a small percentage of L/As' prescribed workload (i.e., 10%).

Writing Activity. As outlined in Table 4 below, the majority of respondents were writing a manuscript for submission to a peer-reviewed journal, preparing for a conference presentation, or deciding where to submit a manuscript at that time. In the following six months, a near majority of respondents anticipated engaging in those activities as well as writing for a professional journal or making revisions to a manuscript submitted to a peer review journal. These findings suggest that

respondents were making considerable progress in their research generally and academic writing more specifically.

Table 4. Frequency and percentage of respondents working on writing activities currently and during the next six months

	Current		In Six Months	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Writing a manuscript for a peer-reviewed journal	13	87	11	73
Preparing for a conference presentation	9	60	7	47
Deciding where to submit a manuscript	8	53	9	60
Writing for a professional journal	5	33	7	47
Writing a grant proposal	4	27	4	27
Making revisions after submission to a peer-reviewed journal	3	20	6	40

Programming Needs: Respondents were asked to indicate their level of interest in participating in a reading group, writing group, or mentorship program. The majority of respondents were interested in participating in all three activities. Of those interested in participating in a mentorship program, all but one wanted to be a mentee and not a mentor.

In 2009, LARSN initiated informal discussions about research interests in the form of "Lunch and Learn" sessions which took place in the campus Grad Club over the noon hour. Forty-four percent of respondents indicated that they had attended at least one of the two recent Lunch and Learn sessions. Respondents were also asked what type of structure and content they would like to see included in the Lunch and Learn programming. While some respondents were satisfied with an informal meeting and unstructured discussion of research, others preferred a more formal structure in which respondents could provide and receive practical advice about research, present research projects, and discuss articles.

Types of Research Support: The final question on the second needs assessment asked what other suggestions respondents had about how LARSN might support their research. Responses included providing opportunities to ask the LARSN Steering Committee members research-related questions, sessions on time management, dedicated space to work, more guest speakers, hands-on

sessions on selecting a journal for publication, and an opportunity to review one another's work.

Needs Assessment #3: Refining a Mature Program

Results are presented here for the four categories of supports, level of research activity, program delivery, and programming evaluation.

Supports. As in the first needs assessment, we asked respondents to rate how supported they felt in their research endeavours from 1 (not at all supported) to 5 (very supported). Respondents felt somewhat supported by the university in doing their research (M = 3.06, SD = 0.659). University supports that they highlighted included LARSN programming, their supervisors, online resources, their colleagues, some funding, time, and dedicated space. Supports from outside the university community that were mentioned included colleagues at other institutions, external grants, and conferences. A majority of respondents were engaged in professional development activities such as professional reading and attending conferences and workshops (see Table 5), which underscores that L/As were taking an active role in developing their research capacity.

Table 5. The number and percentage of respondents who accessed other supports to develop research skills (n=15)

	Number of Respondents	**Percentage**
Professional reading	15	100
Attended sessions at conferences	11	73
Attended workshops in person	10	67
Followed blogs	7	47
Attended online workshops/courses	6	40

Respondents were also asked to indicate their perceived need for support from 1 (no support) to 5 (a great deal of support) and indicated that they needed at least moderate support in six of the nine areas assessed (see Table 6). This may suggest that, although there is an increasing feeling of support, there continue to be areas where help is required. Specifically, these areas generally involved academic writing, including writing for publication and writing an ethics or funding proposal, and data analysis, both quantitative and qualitative. Respondents were also asked to indicate what research activities they had performed in the last two years. Those who had participated in specific research activities generally reported a lower level of support needed for that activity.

Table 6. Participation in research activities and desired support

	Reporting Activity in Last 2 years		Mean Level of Support	
	n[1]	%	Mean	SD
Writing for publication	7	41	3.71	0.985
Analyzing quantitative data	5*	31	3.53	1.007
Developing a research design	9	53	3.41	0.939
Writing a funding proposal	8	47	3.35	1.057
Analyzing qualitative data	7	41	3.29	1.105
Developing an ethics proposal	6*	38	2.94	1.144
Presenting at a conference	8	47	2.59	1.121
Formulating a research question	12	71	2.53	0.800
Performing a literature search	17	100	1.65	0.862

[1] The number of respondents for these questions was 17, with the exception of the reported activities marked with an asterisk where there were 16 respondents.

When asked what other areas of programming would be helpful, respondents emphasized sessions in which L/As present their own research, sessions on tools for analyzing data, and programming that inspires and motivates attendees to do research.

Level of Research Activity. Respondents were asked to rate their enthusiasm for engaging in research activity from 1 (not at all enthusiastic) to 5 (very enthusiastic) and indicated that they were moderately enthusiastic about doing research ($M = 3.06$, $SD = 1.298$) and had been moderately involved in doing it in the last two years ($M = 3.06$, $SD = 1.197$).

Program Delivery. As in the first survey, respondents indicated that in-person programming, such as individual consultation, in-person workshops, and discussion groups, would be more effective in supporting their research goals than online or print-based resources.

Programming Evaluation. Respondents were asked to rate the value of LARSN programming from 1 (not at all valuable) to 5 (very valuable). Respondents' evaluation of four types of LARSN programming revealed that the panels in which L/As shared their research were perceived to be moderately to quite valuable whereas the other sessions were only a little to moderately valuable (see Table 7).

Table 7. Mean rated value of other LARSN programming (n=16)

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Librarian and archivist panels	3.63	1.204
Introduction to research tools sessions	3.00	1.317
Lunch and learn sessions	2.88	0.957
Informal discussion groups	2.53	1.125

For evaluation of the LARSN intranet site, 88% of respondents indicated that they visited the site once every six months or less often. Suggestions for improvement included sending a reminder email when new content is posted and creating a page listing people who would be willing to serve as research coaches.

Respondents were also asked if there was anything else they would like to share about LARSN programming, and the majority of comments affirmed the importance of the sessions.

LARSN Steering Committee Responses and Actions

The Steering Committee responded in various ways based on the findings of each needs assessment. The resulting initiatives and changes to programming are described below.

Needs Assessment #1: Actions from 2007 – 2009

The Steering Committee responded to the findings of the first needs assessment with initiatives that addressed the categories of support and program delivery. We secured funding from Western Libraries for five licenses for the NVivo software. We also secured a dedicated office space that was equipped with desks and could be used by L/As who wanted to work away from their usual workspace. The lack of office space was especially an issue for those without individual or private offices.

With respect to program delivery, the Steering Committee planned several in-person lectures and interactive workshops and hosted opportunities for researchers to come together and discuss issues related to research. We also created an intranet site with links to external resources as well as PowerPoint slides and other resources related to the in-person sessions.

Over the next two years, LARSN programming continued to focus on in-person workshops. We also registered for online webinars that were open to any L/A to attend, and we began to schedule more informal Lunch and Learn discussions about research interests. The Lunch and Learn format had been initiated by another Western Libraries committee, so there was a precedent for that format.

Needs Assessment #2: Actions from 2009 – 2011

The findings of the second needs assessment prompted the Steering Committee to respond by modifying existing programming and investigating new options.

We repeated the desired workshops, reminded L/As of the previously secured dedicated office space, and publicized the opportunity for them to consult with Steering Committee members on their research. We adjusted the format of the Lunch and Learns to provide more structure; for example, we distributed a research-related article to prospective attendees in advance of the meeting and prepared discussion questions based on the article. Attendance at the revised sessions continued to be low.

In order to address the particular need that prompted this assessment, we organized sessions on writing for publication, including selecting a journal for publication, that were delivered by a professor from the Faculty of Information and Media Studies. These sessions were very well-attended and favourably received.

We also attempted to organize reading and writing groups; however, they did not receive adequate take-up. We discussed in detail setting up a mentorship program, but a lack of qualified mentors prohibited its implementation. These unsuccessful initiatives highlighted the disparity of L/As' needs and preferences for supports and programming.

Needs Assessment #3: Actions from 2011 – 2013

The LARSN Steering Committee presented the survey results at an in-person session in order to gather feedback on our proposed programming as well as to generate new ideas and suggestions before we finalized our plan for moving ahead. Based on this meeting and the findings of the third needs assessment, the Steering Committee responded by changing the focus of programming and of online support.

We continued to focus on in-person workshops, with increasing emphasis on hearing from L/As about the research that they were conducting rather than instructing L/As in particular skill sets such as data analysis. As we scheduled sessions, we considered the feedback we had received with respect to their timing. We also re-emphasized the availability of individual or small group consultation so that L/As could receive personalized, point-of-need support. The consultation services have increasingly been used by L/As, and the LARSN Seminar Series that we started has been consistently well-attended and well-received.

In 2012, we replaced the LARSN intranet site with a more interactive and potentially more dynamic wiki. The wiki allows L/As to add their own content (e.g., interesting research articles, resources they found helpful), and they can

subscribe to updates to be notified of new content. Further assessment of the wiki is needed in order to determine its usefulness and effectiveness.

Discussion

As more L/As identify research as a core part of their professional responsibilities, it will be increasingly important that L/As take an active role in developing their own research environment. A healthy and productive research environment cannot depend solely on the actions and supports initiated by library administrators, such as release time, funding for travel to conferences, or study leaves. The value of seeking support from peers is demonstrated in the LARSN needs assessments and is echoed in the literature. As Schrader, Shiri, and Williamson note, "[c]ommitment to a culture and climate of research and scholarship among academic librarians is two-pronged, with factors touching both institutions and professionals" (151). As L/As, we need to be directly involved in the development of the supports and structure we need to do research.

The iterative needs assessments administered by LARSN helped to create a grassroots research support network that evolved with L/As' research needs. The surveys guided the LARSN Steering Committee to make changes in programming in order to best meet the needs of L/As. As demonstrated in this paper, LARSN has continually been responsive to the feedback provided through the needs assessments.

In addition to guiding the LARSN programming, the needs assessments were able to identify a slight change in the degree to which L/As felt supported in their research endeavours. In 2007, the mean level of support for respondents was 2.40 with a standard deviation of 0.814, and in 2011, respondents indicated that they felt slightly more supported with a mean response of 3.06 and a standard deviation of 0.659. With respect to the types of support that respondents said they needed, support for scholarly writing was a higher priority in 2011 than in 2007. In 2011, support for writing for publication had the highest mean for desired support; however, in the first survey in 2007, writing a research manuscript and non-research writing had the sixth and eighth highest means, respectively. This may indicate that, over time, respondents found scholarly writing more difficult than originally anticipated and/or that more respondents were moving into the dissemination phase of their research.

Other changes to note between the first and third surveys are related to enthusiasm and activity. The mean level of enthusiasm decreased from 3.41 in 2007 to 3.06 in 2011. Although this drop in enthusiasm is not statistically significant ($t(47) = 0.958$, *ns*), we feel it would be important to explore the possible causes of this decline in future research as it could have important implications for the types of support L/As need. While enthusiasm waned slightly between the first and third surveys, the level of activity increased substantially. In 2007, the mean level of activity was 1.91 in the last five years, and 2.22 in the last year. In 2011, when respondents were asked to indicate their level of activity

in the last two years, the mean level of activity had increased to 3.06. This decrease in enthusiasm and concurrent increase in activity may demonstrate L/As' increased understanding of the challenges of research.

Although we would have liked to see higher participation rates in LARSN programming, other literature also shows low participation rates for research supports among librarians (Cirasella and Smale 103; Edwards, Jennerich, and Ward 82, 86; Fallon 23; Fox 12; Sapon-White, King, and Christie 413; Tysick and Babb 99).

Limitations

The three needs assessments were designed to ascertain the academic activity needs of L/As at The University of Western Ontario, and so the generalizability of the results is limited. Examination of the research support needs of academic librarians and archivists at other institutions is needed to reinforce these findings. Also, although the response rates were typical for online surveys, it is conceivable that the respondents differ from the non-respondents on key characteristics. Because LARSN was developed as a grassroots initiative and aims to meet L/As' research needs by taking direction from the L/As' themselves, without comprehensive responses, it is difficult to anticipate what L/As need in order to be successful in their research endeavours. This could also limit the generalizability of the findings. Finally, the results suggest a developmental trajectory in research knowledge and skill, but it is important to recognize that the respondents and measures employed were not consistent across the three assessments. A longitudinal examination of the research support needs of individual librarians and archivists with consistent measures across the duration of the research is necessary to determine true change over time in knowledge and skills.

Future studies

The LARSN Steering Committee will continue to administer needs assessments at Western. Future studies may benefit from more qualitative methods in order to understand more about L/As' experience of, and feelings towards, their research endeavours. More qualitative data may also provide insight into what factors underlie L/As' inconsistent level of participation in LARSN programming. In addition, further investigation about the nature of research activities and research needs among non-respondents might provide insight about the nature of their research activities and whether they receive research support from other sources.

Although the decrease in L/As' enthusiasm for research was not statistically significant, exploring possible reasons for this decrease would be interesting and could have important implications for the types of support L/As might need.

Since the formation of LARSN, we have observed many changes in the research culture among L/As at Western. Further qualitative studies could investigate how LARSN and other supports contribute to the research culture at Western, including the value placed on research. Finally, it would be interesting to explore the effect of other research support mechanisms available at Western or beyond the institution (for example, the influence of individuals or associations in supporting librarian-researchers).

Conclusion

Establishing effective supports for librarians' and archivists' research activities has consistently been a challenge. With the relatively recent introduction of research to the professional responsibilities of L/As, The University of Western Ontario had the opportunity to develop research supports from the onset of L/As' research endeavours. The LARSN initiative was established based on the experiences and lessons from others; it was set up as a grassroots support network in order to meet L/As' research needs most effectively. A key component of LARSN has been a series of needs assessments, the results of which have informed the development of LARSN programming. The needs assessments presented here suggest that research needs continue to develop and change over time and that a responsive organization can assist in implementing supports that evolve alongside these changing needs. LARSN continues to struggle with the diverse needs of its community, inconsistent participation rates, and the inability to be all things to all people at all times; however, overall, LARSN is well received and rated positively by L/As. This framework may serve as a model for other academic libraries who wish to establish or maintain evidence-based supports for librarian and archivist researchers.

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Appendix A

Library and Archivist Research Support Network
Needs Assessments #1: Designing the Librarian and Archivist Research Support Network

1. Are you a librarian or archivist?

☐ Librarian   ☐ Archivist

2. Other than your Masters in Information and Library Sciences/Studies, which of the following academic areas best characterizes the discipline areas that you studied during your post-secondary education? Choose as many as apply.

	Undergraduate	Masters	Doctoral.	Other
Arts and Humanities/ Music	☐	☐	☐	☐
Business/ Education/ Law	☐	☐	☐	☐
Health Sciences/ Medical Sciences/ Biological Sciences	☐	☐	☐	☐
Physical Sciences/ Engineering	☐	☐	☐	☐
Social Science/ Information and Media Studies	☐	☐	☐	☐

3. (a.) How many years' experience do you have as a librarian/archivist in an academic setting?

_____ years

3. (b.) How many years' experience do you have as a librarian/archivist in a special library setting?

_____ years

4. How many years has it been since you took a university course that focused on research methods?
If you have never taken a university course on research methods, please check "No research methods course".

☐	☐	☐	☐
0- 5 years	6- 10 years	More than 10 years	No Research Methods Course

5. Using the scale below, please rate how enthusiastic you are about doing Academic Activity (as defined by the UWOFA-LA Collective Agreement)?

☐ Not At All Enthusiastic   ☐ A Little Enthusiastic   ☐ Moderately Enthusiastic   ☐ Quite Enthusiastic   ☐ Very Enthusiastic

6. Using the scale below, please rate the extent to which you currently feel supported by Western in doing Academic Activity?

☐ Not at All   ☐ Very Little   ☐ Somewhat   ☐ Quite A Bit   ☐ A Great Deal

7. What, if any, supports do you have at Western for your Academic Activity?
_____
_____
_____

8. What, if any, supports do you have from outside the Western community for your Academic Activity?
_____
_____
_____

9. Would you prefer to do research or other Academic Activity alone, as a member of a group, or do you have no preference?

☐ Alone   ☐ As a member of a group   ☐ No preference

10. If you were going to collaborate as part of your research or other Academic Activity, please rate the likelihood that you would collaborate with the following individuals/groups:

	Highly Unlikely	Unlikely	Neutral	Likely	Highly Likely
	1	2	3	4	5
a) Librarians/archivists at Western	1	2	3	4	5
b) Faculty members at Western	1	2	3	4	5
c) Graduate students at Western	1	2	3	4	5
d) Librarians/archivists at other academic institutions	1	2	3	4	5
e) Librarians/archivists at non-academic institutions	1	2	3	4	5
f) Other (please specify)	1	2	3	4	5

_____

11. What area of Library, Archival and Information Science do you have an interest in pursuing for your Academic Activity? (Please check all that apply)

- ☐ Acquisitions and technical services
- ☐ Collection development
- ☐ Economics of libraries and archives
- ☐ History of library, archival and information science
- ☐ Human resources in libraries and archives
- ☐ Information literacy and library instruction
- ☐ Information organization and knowledge management
- ☐ Information technologies
- ☐ Legal and ethical issues in libraries and archives (e.g., copyright, privacy)
- ☐ Library and information behaviours
- ☐ Organization and management of records and archives
- ☐ Preservation and conservation of library and archival materials
- ☐ Theory development in library, archival and information science
- ☐ User studies in archives and libraries
- ☐ Other (Please specify)_____

12. In the last year, how active would you say you have been in doing Academic Activity?

☐ Not Active at All   ☐ A Little Active   ☐ Moderately Active   ☐ Quite Active   ☐ Very Active

13. In the last **Five** years, how active would you say you have been in doing Academic Activity?

☐ Not Active at All   ☐ A Little Active   ☐ Moderately Active   ☐ Quite Active   ☐ Very Active

14. Using the scale below, please rate your **current ability level** in the following areas.

Low		Moderate		High
1	2	3	4	5

a) Performing a literature search	1 2 3 4 5
b) Formulating a research question	1 2 3 4 5
c) Developing a research design	1 2 3 4 5
d) Developing an ethics proposal	1 2 3 4 5
e) Writing a proposal for funding	1 2 3 4 5
f) Analyzing qualitative data	1 2 3 4 5
g) Performing basic analyzes with quantitative data (e.g., frequencies, percentages, means, medians)	1 2 3 4 5
h) Performing more advanced analyzes with quantitative data (e.g., t-tests, correlations, Analysis of Variance, multiple regression, factor analysis)	1 2 3 4 5
i) Presenting at an academic/ scholarly conference	1 2 3 4 5
j) Writing a research manuscript for publication	1 2 3 4 5
k) Non-research scholarly writing	1 2 3 4 5

15. Using the scale below, please rate the amount of **support you feel you need** in the following areas to meet your Academic Activity goals?

No Support	Very Little Support	Moderate Support	A Fair Bit of Support	A Great Deal of Support
1	2	3	4	5

a) Performing a literature search.	1 2 3 4 5
b) Formulating a research question.	1 2 3 4 5
c) Developing a research design	1 2 3 4 5
d) Developing an ethics proposal	1 2 3 4 5
e) Writing a proposal for funding	1 2 3 4 5
f) Analyzing qualitative data	1 2 3 4 5
g) Performing basic analyses with quantitative data (e.g., frequencies, percentages, means, medians)	1 2 3 4 5
h) Performing more advanced analyses with quantitative data (e.g., t-tests, correlations, Analysis of Variance, multiple regression, factor analysis)	1 2 3 4 5
i) Presenting at an academic/ scholarly conference	1 2 3 4 5
j) Writing a research manuscript for publication	1 2 3 4 5
k) Non- research scholarly writing	1 2 3 4 5

16. In what other areas do you feel support would be beneficial to help you meet your Academic Activity goals?

_____
_____
_____

17. The LARSN will be providing programming and resources to support the research and academic activities of Librarians and Archivists. We would like to provide these programs and resources in the format that is most effective. Taking into consideration your learning style as well as constraints on your time; for the delivery methods listed below, please indicate your perception of the effectiveness of each delivery method in supporting you to achieve your current research and Academic Activity goals?

Not at All Effective	A Little Effective	Moderately Effective	Quite Effective	Very Effective
1	2	3	4	5

a) Printable/Viewable documents accessed via the Internet	1	2	3	4	5
b) Online workshops	1	2	3	4	5
c) Online discussion groups	1	2	3	4	5
d) Textbooks and other print-based resources	1	2	3	4	5
e) Mentoring	1	2	3	4	5
f) Interactive in-person workshops	1	2	3	4	5
g) In-person discussion groups	1	2	3	4	5
h) Lectures	1	2	3	4	5
i) Other (please specify)	1	2	3	4	5

_____

18. For the following resources, please rate their importance in terms of you achieving your current Academic Activity goals.

Not at all Important	Not Very Important	Moderately Important	Quite Important	Extremely Important
1	2	3	4	5

a) Computer software (e.g., SPSS, NVivo)	1	2	3	4	5
b) Research funds	1	2	3	4	5
c) Dedicated time to do research and academic activities	1	2	3	4	5
d) Office space to work in	1	2	3	4	5
e) Other (please specify)	1	2	3	4	5

_____

19. What concerns, if any, do you have about the Academic Activity requirements as outlined in the UWOFA-LA Collective Agreement?

_____
_____
_____

20. What other professional development opportunities/resources related to the new Collective Agreement would you benefit from (e.g., a workshop on preparing your CV for promotion and continuing appointment)?

_____
_____
_____

Appendix B

Library and Archivist Research Support Network
Needs Assessments #2: Targeting a Specific Need

1. Which, if any, of the following writing & publishing activities have you been working on? (Please check all that apply).

    ☐ Writing a grant proposal

    ☐ Writing a manuscript for submission to a peer-reviewed journal

    ☐ Writing for a professional journal

    ☐ Deciding where to submit a manuscript

    ☐ Making revisions after submission to a peer-reviewed journal

    ☐ Preparing for a conference presentation

    ☐ Other (please specify) _____

2. Which, if any, of the following writing & publishing activities do you anticipate working on the **NEXT 6-MONTHS?** (Please check all that apply).

    ☐ Writing a grant proposal

    ☐ Writing a manuscript for submission to a peer-reviewed journal

    ☐ Writing for a professional journal

    ☐ Deciding where to submit a manuscript

    ☐ Making revisions after submission to a peer-reviewed journal

    ☐ Preparing for a conference presentation

    ☐ Other (please specify) _____

3. In the last year, how active would you say you have been in doing Academic Activity?

☐ Not Active at All   ☐ A Little Active   ☐ Moderately Active   ☐ Quite Active   ☐ Very Active

For the next three questions (4-6), we want to gauge your general interest in initiatives that we are considering coordinating. The exact configuration of the initiatives would be decided by the program participants themselves.

4. Would you be interested in participating in a **Reading Group** (i.e., an opportunity to meet with peers to discuss LIS articles of interest)?

    ☐ Yes

    ☐ No

5. Would you be interested in participating in a **Writing Group** (i.e., an opportunity to receive feedback on your academic writing and provide similar feedback to your peers)?

☐ Yes
☐ No

6. Would you be interested in participating in a **Mentorship Program** (i.e., a program in which a peer with experience in academic activity is matched with a peer with less experience)?

☐ Yes, as a mentee
☐ Yes, as a mentor
☐ No

7. Did you attend any of the previous LARSN Lunch and Learns (in the Grad Club on May 22 or July 24)?

☐ Yes
☐ No

8. If you were going to attend any of the upcoming LARSN Lunch and Learn sessions (planned for every three months), what would you like to have happen during those sessions?
_____
_____
_____

9. Over the last year, a number of LARSN workshops have been offered on the research process (e.g., Developing a Research Idea, Quantitative Research Design, Qualitative Research Design, Planning a Research Project). What, if any, aspect(s) of the research process would you like addressed in future workshops (including repeating any sessions that were previously offered)?
_____
_____
_____

10. What other suggestions do you have for how we might be able to support your academic activities?
_____
_____
_____

Appendix C

Library and Archivist Research Support Network
Needs Assessments #3: Refining a Mature Program

1. Using the scale below, please rate how enthusiastic you are about doing Academic Activity?

Not Enthusiastic at All	A Little Enthusiastic	Moderately Enthusiastic	Quite Enthusiastic	Very Enthusiastic
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

2. Using the scale below, please rate the extent to which you currently feel supported by Western in doing Academic Activity?

Not at All	Very Little	Somewhat	Quite A Bit	A Great Deal
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

3. What, if any, supports do you have at Western for your Academic Activity?
_____
_____
_____

4. What, if any, supports do you have from outside Western community for your Academic Activity?
_____
_____
_____

5. Using the scale below, please rate your **current ability level** in the following areas.

Low		Moderate		High
1	2	3	4	5

a) Performing a literature search	1	2	3	4	5
b) Formulating a research question	1	2	3	4	5
c) Developing a research design	1	2	3	4	5
d) Developing an ethics proposal	1	2	3	4	5
e) Writing a proposal for funding	1	2	3	4	5
f) Analyzing qualitative data	1	2	3	4	5
g) Analyzing quantitative data	1	2	3	4	5
h) Presenting Academic Activity at a conference	1	2	3	4	5
i) Writing for publication	1	2	3	4	5

6. In the past two years, how active would you say you have been in doing Academic Activity?

☐ Not Active at All ☐ A Little Active ☐ Moderately Active ☐ Quite Active ☐ Very Active

7. In the last two years, which of the following have you done?

	Yes	No
a) Performed a literature search		
b) Formulated a research question		
c) Developed a research design		
d) Developed an ethics proposal		
e) Wrote a proposal for funding		
f) Analyzed qualitative data		
g) Analyzed quantitative data		
h) Presented Academic Activity at a conference		
i) Wrote for publication		

8. Using the scale below, please indicate the level of support you would like in the following areas?

No Support	A Little Support	Moderate Support	Quite a Bit of Support	A Great Deal of Support
1	2	3	4	5

a) Performing a literature search	1	2	3	4	5
b) Formulating a research question	1	2	3	4	5
c) Developing a research design	1	2	3	4	5
d) Developing an ethics proposal	1	2	3	4	5
e) Writing a proposal for funding	1	2	3	4	5
f) Analyzing qualitative data	1	2	3	4	5
g) Analyzing quantitative data	1	2	3	4	5
h) Presenting Academic Activity at a conference	1	2	3	4	5
i) Writing for publication	1	2	3	4	5

9. In what other areas do you feel programming would be beneficial to help you meet your Academic Activity goals?

_____
_____
_____

10. In addition to the supports offered on the above topics, we offer other programming. Using the scale below, please indicate how valuable these kinds of sessions are to you. If you do not feel you can rate a session's value, please leave it blank.

Not at All Valuable	A Little Valuable	Moderately Valuable	Quite Valuable	Very Valuable
1	2	3	4	5

a) Librarian/archivist panels to share information about current Academic Activity	1	2	3	4	5
b) Lunch and learn sessions	1	2	3	4	5
c) Nachos and discussion late afternoon at the Grad Club	1	2	3	4	5
d) Introduction (not workshops) to research tools, e.g. NVivo	1	2	3	4	5

11. We would like to provide programming and resources in the format that is most effective. Using the scale below, please indicate the effectiveness of the following delivery method in supporting your Academic Activity.

Not at All Effective	A Little Effective	Moderately Effective	Quite Effective	Very Effective
1	2	3	4	5

a) Online documents	1	2	3	4	5
b) Online workshops	1	2	3	4	5
c) Textbooks and other print-based resources	1	2	3	4	5
d) Individual consultation	1	2	3	4	5
e) Interactive in-person workshops	1	2	3	4	5
f) In-person discussion groups	1	2	3	4	5
g) Lectures	1	2	3	4	5

12. Are there any other delivery methods that you find effective? Please specify.
_____
_____
_____

13. How frequently should LARSN provide programming?

☐ Once a month ☐ Every second month ☐ Once a term ☐ Other, please specify

14a. Would you prefer to have programming on different days of the week and at different times of the day, or at the same time as part of a set schedule, e.g., the last Wednesday of the month in the afternoon.

☐ At a variety of times   ☐ At set times scheduled throughout the year

14b. If you have any other comments about the timing of programming, please provide them in the space below.

_____
_____
_____

15. In addition to the supports we provide, what other opportunities have you taken to develop skills related to your Academic Activity (please check all that apply)?

☐ Attended sessions at conferences
☐ Professional reading
☐ Followed blogs
☐ Attended workshops in person
☐ Attended online workshops/courses
☐ Other, please specify _____

16. We provide Power Point presentations from past workshops as well as links to several other resources on Western Libraries Intranet. How frequently do you visit the LARSN Intranet site?

☐ Every week   ☐ Every month   ☐ Every 6 months   ☐ Once a year   ☐ Never

17. Please provide any comments/suggestions you may have for how we might improve the LARSN Intranet site in the space below.

_____
_____
_____
_____

18. If there is anything else you would like to share with us about LARSN programming, please do so in the space below.

_____
_____
_____