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A Study of Pepperdine Faculty Research Practices: Report for Faculty

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Overview

During fall semester 2014, Pepperdine University Libraries conducted a participatory design study using ethnographic methods to address the question, “How do Pepperdine University faculty members conduct research?” We wanted to better understanding the research, teaching, and technological needs of faculty. To achieve this, we conducted nine 45-minute, semi-structured interviews of faculty members which were videotaped in their own offices.

We asked faculty six questions to start a conversation, such as “Tell us about your current research project” followed by “Where do you work on this project?” We didn’t ask about the library directly. Instead, we listened as faculty articulated their research practices. Through this type of inquiry, we can achieve a deeper understanding of user behavior. We can gather rich data that is embedded within a larger set of activities.

The nine interviews represented 6 of 8 divisions at Seaver College and 3 graduate programs. After reviewing and coding the interviews, we derived categories of data from both the open-ended questions and from the conversational answers (e.g., systems for organizing research material and preference for reading print vs. electronic materials, respectively).

Results

1. **Projects.** Most faculty are involved in multiple, simultaneous research projects.
2. **Locations.** Most faculty use their campus office for research, some conduct research at home, and some write in a variety of places (on a laptop). For a few respondents, research also required travel to a specialized library or archive. Some respondents indicated that work locations depended on childcare schedules.
3. **Collaboration.** For collaborative work, most faculty use email to contact others, while some use social media, phone calls, and face-to-face contact. Some expressed an interest in using shared document editing software like Google Docs and Dropbox, while a few are actively using these products.

4. **Discovery.** Faculty indicated a variety of means of discovering materials: specific databases, Google/Google Scholar, the library catalog, mining bibliographies, social media, visiting a bookstore, publisher email, direct contact with authors/colleagues, and Research Now (online research company). Access to materials was provided through interlibrary loan, from the library, directly from the author, and from other university databases.
5. **Reading.** Most have a hybrid approach when it comes to print vs. electronic. Some sample quotes:
 - a. “It’s all on the computer now, right?”
 - b. “I still love paper. I have a really hard time not having the paper article and reading it, and working it up. And I have a tablet I can do that on, but I just don’t think I understand the work unless I’m actually reading a physical piece of paper.”
 - c. “There’s something about the smell of dust and old leather that is really pretty intoxicating.”
6. **Organization.** Faculty use a wide variety of methods and technologies to organize materials. Most use some kind of citation software (such as RefWorks, Mendeley, or Zotero), while others thought they should be using one. One quote:
 - a. “There are a ton of different options, so it’s almost like information overload on how to organize your information.”
7. **Teaching.** Direct integration of their own research with teaching was not widely indicated. When asked if they use materials in their teaching, faculty mentioned both tools and resources: Sakai, online databases, books/textbooks/e-books, library materials, primary and secondary sources, InfoGuides, CDs/streaming, current articles, video tutorials, and PowerPoint.
8. **Keeping current.** Some faculty use social media for communication and staying current. Others mentioned staying current by attending conferences, reading journals (both print and electronic), editing a journal, being a reviewer of a journal, conducting research/publication projects, writing grants, and joining a listserv. One quote on staying current with e-journals:
 - a. “You’re reading *history* when you’re reading a book...I couldn’t live without electronic journals.”
9. **The Office.** We asked each faculty member to give us a tour of his or her office. Faculty explained the organization of their shelves, cabinets, and desks. They described the materials they use for research and teaching, which ranged from books and journals to posters and objects. Many offices contained art objects from travels or from student projects. The tours provided an enlightening and personal look into a professor’s life.
10. **Magic wand.** When asked what they would wish for with a magic wand, many faculty responded “more time.” Other responses varied, including a desire to have nearby colleagues, ways to discover faculty interested in similar research subjects, and the ability to speak and understand all human languages.

11. **Facilities.** There was little mention of using library facilities; the exception was a request for a coffee shop in the library.

Needs

Faculty expressed various needs:

- a) Web-based data collection site
- b) Better tools for online collaboration
- c) Help with citation software (*workshops planned for FY2016*)
- d) Improved communication about library workshops
- e) Podcasts (like TED talks) curated by the library (*investigating options*)
- f) Access to a better microform reader (*implemented*)
- g) Automated notification when resources become available
- h) A coffee shop in the library (*planned for FY2017 library renovation*)
- i) Alumni access to library resources (*some are licensed for alumni*)
- j) Electronic access to the Economist and the Wall Street Journal (*investigating costs*)
- k) Use of reserve books outside of the library (*implemented for one faculty member*)
- l) Access to a specific database (*implemented*)
- m) In-person workshops on using databases (*planned for FY2016*)
- n) The means to learn new languages for research (*Mango Languages available online*)
- o) Ways to discover faculty with similar research subjects (*symposium planned for FY2016*)

Conclusions

The results of this study provided invaluable insight into faculty culture as well as data to improve library services, spaces, and technologies. As indicated, some suggestions have already been implemented.

The results of this study also confirmed the presence of trends found in other academic libraries:

- a. In an increasingly digital environment, library services intersect with multiple points of the scholarly research cycle, including support with citation software, data management and preservation, data mining, and new publishing or dissemination opportunities.¹

¹ Dempsey L., Malpas C., and Lavoie B. 2014. "Collection directions: The evolution of library collections and collecting". *Portal*. 14 (3), p. 399.

- b. Research increasingly occurs in networked environments utilizing social media, discovery platforms, and electronic communication that enable faculty to collaborate and share their work within and across institutions and disciplinary communities.²

The process of visiting faculty in their offices and discussing their needs strengthened our interpersonal and professional relationships in a way that defies metrics. We are very grateful to the faculty who opened up their doors and contributed their time for this participatory design study.

² *NMC Horizon Report: 2015 Higher Education Edition*. 2015. Austin Texas: New Media Consortium.