
Tapping your local campus resources

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Some suggestions on how research in librarianship can be made as painless as possible.

Over the years, both of us have observed that when discussing with other librarians the need or desirability of librarians doing research several common observations are made. Perhaps the first and most frequent claim is that there is no time for such activity. After working a 35–40 hour week and with all one's personal, home and other professional responsibilities, where does one find the time?

Librarians are a busy group, there can be no doubt about that. However, we suspect there are quite a few who use that as the excuse when the real problem is to be found elsewhere. This problem is sometimes verbalized, but often not. We think there are many who believe they do not possess the requisite skills or have access to the resources necessary to do acceptable research. This concern is intensified by another observation often made regarding the poor quality of the literature found in the professional library journals. The reluctance to participate in such activity is bolstered by the feeling akin to "if I can't do something great, I won't do anything at all."

Some of the blame for this situation can be laid at the feet of our library schools where there is much concentration on developing practicing librarians while little attention is devoted to teaching research skills. Most library masters degrees take only two to three semesters to complete and few require a thesis. As such, most librarians, unless they have a doctorate, a second master's that requires a thesis, or an exceptional undergraduate education, have not acquired solid research skills.

Regardless of whether the library schools ought to accept any of the blame, if we are willing to recognize our weaknesses, by use of available resources, they can be overcome. It is ironic that in a profession where academic reference librarians never hesitate to refer researchers to other experts or printed sources for aid with their projects, they seem not to be as resourceful with their own interests. We can refer students and faculty to appropriate sources but often do not seem to be able to follow our own advice.

All respectable academic institutions offer courses in statistics and research methodology. Often these colleges do not charge their own staff registration fees so all that is required is an investment of time and energy. Respectable campuses also have faculty who are trained in the use of statistics and research strategy. An observant librarian should soon be able to identify those who would be interested in a joint project with each making equal, or nearly so, contributions. What if we have no interest in taking such classes or pooling our efforts? What are the alternatives?

At a recent conference, we were comparing notes on this problem of what local resources are available to librarians interested in research. Quite independently each of us had become aware of the rich and often untapped resources available on our respective campuses. There seems to be no reason to believe that our institutions are unique and that other colleges and universities do not have similar services available. These offices and services may go by different names, but since they are essential

to the success of the research of other faculty and institutional research, rest assured that they exist and most will aid librarians as well. You may have to be a bit assertive if no librarians or other support staff have preceded you in seeking help, but remain undaunted. Like librarians, these offices are there to help. Like librarians, some may be less than jubilant at first at the prospect of servicing requests from quarters not formerly anticipated.

What are these sources of local assistance that can be tapped? There are many and their functions are varied, but the ones we each in our own separate research endeavors found useful are the Office of Institutional Research/Study, the Testing Center, Media Development Center, Duplicating Center, Computer Center, Office of Financial Aids, and others.

Selecting the data collection instrument

Once one has determined the subject of the intended research and formulated as specifically as possible what the project is to be, the first step should be the Office of Institutional Research. At UW-Eau Claire this is called the Office of Institutional Studies. Regardless of the name, it is usually staffed with individuals well-versed in surveying, testing, and research methodologies. They can provide advice as to the definition of goals and objectives, focusing the scope of the study and identification of the most appropriate and effective method of gathering the required data. The OIR/OIS is especially useful for obtaining advice regarding projects that involve statistical analysis and data collection surveys. They will help with the construction of the questionnaire, phrasing of the questions, and at UW-Eau Claire they helped construct the survey instrument in such a manner as to allow for machine tabulation of the responses. At UW-Oshkosh, the Testing Center provided the latter help. These offices will also direct you to the best reading or individuals for further consultation.

Aesthetic design

A step that should be considered is the aesthetic design of the instrument. There are a number of techniques one can utilize to make the data collection device more attractive and understandable, thereby increasing the number that will be returned. The more professionally designed, the better will be the response. At UW-Oshkosh, this was done at the Testing Center, while the same service was performed at UW-Eau Claire Office of News and Publications. At other institutions it may be the Media Development Center staff who should be approached. Wherever done on your campus, the extra attention to aesthetics will be well repaid so such service should be sought.

Data manipulation

The campus Computer Center will usually perform this service if the data has been collected and transferred to a machine readable format. The

staff at these centers are well-versed in the manipulation of data and which packages would be the most useful. The major service received here will be the computer time and perhaps some assistance with the interpretation of results. However, once you have your results, the OIR/OIS and Testing Centers will aid with interpretation.

Any extra attention to aesthetics will be well repaid.

Funding

Several local sources should be considered. Often the library administration will provide assistance, such as student help, photocopying, telephone and postal expenses, travel expenses, or release time. Others such as the Financial Aid Office, Graduate School, and many academic departments may have special funds and students they would be willing to make available for a good educational research project.

Most universities have funds available for researchers and librarians should feel free to compete for them. They are usually called faculty develop-

Papers on popular culture sought

The Theory and Methodology Section of the Popular Culture Association has called for proposals for papers and special sessions on theory, methodology, and documentation for the Association's annual conference, to be held in Louisville, Kentucky, April 3-7, 1985.

Popular culture is studied in many disciplines and is significant to a variety of theoretical perspectives on behavior and culture. The Theory and Methodology Section of the Association seeks to promote dialogue on ideas, approaches and information regarding popular culture. Of particular interest to librarians are proposals for papers and special sessions on bibliographic control of primary and secondary information.

Proposals should be in the form of a 200 word abstract and accompanying letter, and must be submitted by November 1, 1984. Send written inquiries and proposals to Larry N. Landrum, Department of English, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824; (517) 355-0346.

ment grants, curriculum improvement grants, or faculty research grants and may have some size or subject limitations. Faculty and/or administration committees commonly review the proposals and make recommendations, so if you are the first librarian to submit a proposal on your campus expect suspicion and maybe questions. However, always remember, "nothing ventured, nothing gained," and submit your proposal anyway. If you have no experience with proposal writing, the above mentioned offices, especially the OIR/OIS, will provide tips for success.

Another local resource is the office which acts as the clearinghouse for funding proposals to outside agencies. The staff of this office will suggest the best bets for funding and may well provide practi-

cal advice and guidance in writing the proposal. This valuable assistance should not be ignored.

Many faculty have become adept at grantsmanship and the full exploitation of the services available on the local campus. There is no reason why librarians cannot do the same. Our experiences show that there is much assistance and funding available for the asking, if one has a good research proposal. We believe similar services are available elsewhere, thus negating the notion held by many of our colleagues that they cannot do research. Our individual experiences also prove that the often heard lament that "they" will not share the resources with librarians is just not true. They will, and happily. ■■



A new *C&RL News* column

By Sharon Rogers

ACRL Vice-President/President-Elect

The Research Forum originating in this issue of *C&RL News* will be an occasional feature of ACRL's professional communication for the next year or so. Its inception arises from several discussions and speculations about the role played in scholarly communication of the contributed papers at national conferences, the quality and variety of methodologies and viewpoints selected by authors of contributed papers, and, therefore, the quality and variety of scholarly communication in academic librarianship.

In the Research Forum, ACRL members will be asked to describe the conceptualization and development of their research projects, to explain the sources of research ideas, to suggest ways of locating methodological and financial support on local campuses and within ALA. We also want to describe model programs that libraries have devel-

oped to assist librarians in conducting research.

The stimulus for some of the current discussion of research in academic librarianship was the ACRL National Conference Wrap-Up Session presentation of a comparison of the first, second and third national conferences within a common conceptual framework. The conceptual framework for categorizing the production of scholarly inquiry was developed by Robert J. Silverman¹. The Silverman model, briefly, is based upon the interaction of previous works by Mitroff and Kilmann² and

¹Robert J. Silverman, "Journal Manuscripts in Higher Education: A Framework," *Review of Higher Education* 5, no.4 (1982):181-96.

²I. Mitroff and R. Kilmann, *Methodological Approaches to Social Science* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1978).