Evidence Based Library and Information Practice

Reading Faculty's Research Publications Helps to Determine Which Professors to Target for Data Services

A Review of:
Williams, S.C. (2013). Using a bibliographic study to identify faculty candidates for data services. *Science & Technology Libraries 32*,(2). 202-209. doi:10.1080/0194262X.2013.774622

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Abstract

Objective – The research project examined university faculty's publications in order to find professors with previous data experiences. The professors could then be approached with an offer of the library's data services.

Design – Bibliographic study.

Setting – Department of Crop Sciences in the College of Agricultural, Consumer, and Environmental Sciences at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Subjects – A total of 62 assistant, associate, and full professors.

Methods – The author searched Web of Science and faculty web pages to find each of the subjects' two most recent research or review articles. Altogether, 124 articles were read to check whether data sources were used and shared.

Data sources were defined as sources other than traditional citations to literature for information or ideas, such as data repositories, supplementary files, and weather stations. Data sharing was defined as publicly sharing data beyond that published in the journal article, such as providing supplementary files with the article or submitting data sets to a disciplinary repository (p. 205).

Main Results – Thirty of the 124 articles, which were written by 20 different professors,

referred to additional data that was made openly accessible. The analysis of the articles uncovered a variety of data experiences, such as faculty who utilized repository data, published supplementary files, submitted their own data to repositories, or posted data on their university's website. These 20 faculty members were contacted and asked for a meeting "to discuss their data sharing thoughts and experiences and to ask whether they [saw] a role for the library in facilitating data sharing" (p. 206). The author received a positive response from seven of the faculty members and had a successful meeting with each of them.

Conclusion – A bibliographic study can be employed to select which professors to target for data services. While this method is time-consuming, it allows librarians to gather rich data about faculty research that will help them to create customized, relevant messages to professors about the library's data services. It also allows them to become more knowledgeable about data practices and resources in a particular discipline.

Commentary

According to the author, this study describes a new application of bibliographic study design that is to help librarians determine which professors within a university are likely

candidates for their library's data services. The project description in the article is detailed enough for readers to reproduce the study in their own institutions if they wish, and discusses the pros and cons of using the method described. However, this reviewer feels that there is an important piece missing from the article. The method described in the article is a means to an end, but sufficient details about the end are not provided in the article. Once the author identified the faculty to contact via the bibliographic study, how did the author create the customized messages that asked faculty to meet? What details were in the author's messages to convince them to meet? Only 7 out of the 20 faculty members contacted (35%) responded so it is difficult to judge whether the author was successful or not in the absence of details about the author's communication with her audience. Also, what transpired during the meetings with the faculty who responded? The author states that "a detailed analysis of the interviews is planned for future research" (p. 206), but inclusion of this information would have made the current article stronger and helped convince readers that the effort expended in the bibliographic analysis was indeed worthwhile.