Evidence Based Library and Information Practice

Evidence Summary

Engineering Faculty Indicate High Levels of Awareness and Use of the Library but Tend to Consult Google and Google Scholar First for Research Resources

Reviewed by:
Elaine Sullo
Coordinator, Information and Instructional Services
Himmelfarb Health Sciences Library
The George Washington University
Washington, District of Columbia, United States of America
Email: elainej@gwu.edu

Abstract

Objective – To investigate the engineering faculty's information-seeking behaviour, experiences, awareness, and use of the university library.

Design – Web-based survey questionnaire.

Setting – The main campus of a state university in the United States of America.

Subjects – 119 faculty members within 8 engineering departments.

Methods – An email invitation to participate in a 16-item electronic survey questionnaire, with questions related to library use, was sent in the spring of 2015 to 119 engineering faculty members. Faculty were given 24 days to complete the survey, and a reminder email was sent 10 days after the original survey invitation.

Main Results – Thirty-eight faculty members responded to the survey, representing a response rate of 32%. Overall, faculty had a high level of use and awareness of both online and physical library resources and services, although their awareness of certain scholarly communication services, such as data archiving and copyright advisory, was significantly lower. Faculty tend to turn to Google and Google Scholar when searching for information rather than turning to library databases. Faculty do not use social media to

keep up with library news and updates. The library website, as well as liaison librarians, were cited as the primary sources for this type of information.

Conclusions – The researcher concludes that librarians need to do a better job of marketing library resources, such as discipline-specific databases, as well as other library search tools. Because faculty use web search engines as a significant source of information, the author proposes further research on this behaviour, and suggests more action to educate faculty on different search tools, their limitations, and effective use.

As faculty indicated a general lack of interest in integrating information literacy into their classes, the researcher notes that librarians need to find ways to persuade faculty that this type of integrated instruction is beneficial for students' learning and research needs. Faculty were aware of the library liaison program, so this baseline relationship between faculty and librarian can serve as an opportunity to build upon current liaison services and responsibilities.

Commentary

The research addresses a clearly focused issue in terms of a specific population and important, well-defined library resources and services being studied. A number of previous studies have examined engineers' information-seeking behaviour both in the industry and in the academy. Most of the literature referenced by the author cites research that included students and faculty, faculty among several disciplines, or research that included faculty at multiple institutions. The author states an interest in examining the topic based on observations, library statistics, and conversations among librarians that suggest library services are underutilized. As such, this study is an attempt to examine more deeply the issues described in other studies, while at the same time, to try to understand specific library use patterns and faculty awareness of the engineering faculty at Mississippi State University.

The study was evaluated using the CriSTAL checklist (n.d.) for appraising a user study. The study questionnaire is available in the supplemental material on the publisher's website, and therefore makes for a study that could be easily replicated. While the questions were created specifically for engineering faculty, they address library resources and services generally and could be used to survey non-engineering faculty without difficulty. However, the author did not mention if the survey was pre-tested or piloted, so the researcher did not have the opportunity to ensure that the questions made sense to faculty.

Although the survey was sent to 119 faculty members, only 38 responded, representing a response rate of 32%. The respondents were rather evenly distributed among the eight engineering departments and they varied in age, providing a sample of respondents that most likely represented the entirety of the engineering faculty population. Several of the survey questions, as well as the findings derived from the research, appear, at times, to provide conflicting or incomplete evidence. For example, faculty indicate that Google and Google Scholar are the main resources consulted for research, but in response to a separate question indicate that online databases are important and rank them as the second-most essential resource. Furthermore, while 89% of faculty consider library instruction to students as important or very important, the research does not indicate how often faculty actually schedule instruction sessions. The study may have benefited from the use of statistical tests to see whether the survey is uncovering the information that it was intended to discover. The research findings are described in the text and visually represented in graphs, tables, and charts. The author makes several conclusions based on the data, but notes that she hopes to explore the study findings further by conducting focus groups or interviews.

While this research is specific to engineering faculty and their use of library services, the data from the survey may apply to faculty in other disciplines, and therefore could be

valuable to librarians who serve faculty in other academic library settings. This research provides a snapshot of a select group of faculty, but the results can be considered and perhaps even acted upon by librarians in general.

Reference

CRiSTAL checklist for appraising a user study. (n.d.). Retrieved May 26, 2016 from http://nettingtheevidence.pbwiki.com/f/use.doc