Exploring the Information Needs of Life Sciences Researchers

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Objectives

To determine the needs of bioscience researchers in a **newly established, multidisciplinary center** designed to facilitate collaborative research.

Because the center houses researchers from different departments traditionally served by separate libraries, the University Libraries formed a **task force** to evaluate the information needs of this group as a whole.

The creation of this task force has presented a unique opportunity to look at information needs beyond the boundaries of traditional library services.

Methods

Three **focus groups**:

1. Graduate Students (n=7)
2. Junior Faculty (n=10)
3. Senior Administration (n=3)

Questions asked were deliberately broad:

1. What's your information environment in a typical day?
2. How do you manage your information environment?
3. What gaps do you find in your information environment?

Conclusions

❖ Because of the diverse nature of the research, focus groups were an appropriate way to explore the information needs of these researchers.

❖ Meeting with researchers in their building let them know that the Libraries were serious about making new connections.

❖ Asking questions about the information environment—as opposed to information use—successfully broadened the conversation, indicating that the Libraries can be an integral part of their information environment.

Task Force Members

❖ Librarians from the main campus library, the health sciences library, and the veterinary medical library

❖ Research Consultant focused on evaluation of new services

❖ Fellows from the Departments of Health & Medical Informatics and Computer Science

Findings

❖ Not surprisingly, full-text electronic journals are of paramount importance.

❖ Print lab notebooks remain crucial: "The information we use comes to use in electronic format, but what we do with those data is recorded on paper."

❖ Information "guru" in lab changes with subject and over time.

❖ New graduate students and faculty rely on previous institution's library Web site.

❖ Use of **EndNote** is widespread, and many researchers expressed interest in instruction.

❖ **A designated librarian should be the contact point for all those in the Center.**

❖ Researchers prefer that librarian come to the Center to provide services.

Immediate Follow-Up

❖ EndNote training sessions
❖ Journal access questions answered
❖ Meetings with interested faculty on available library services

Future Directions

❖ Move from "breadth" interviews (e.g., the junior faculty) to "depth" interviews (e.g., all members of a single lab) to further characterize the information environment.

❖ Investigate models for providing a "bioinformatics librarian."

Task Force Charge

Create a **systematic approach** to information services delivery for persons engaged in life sciences research on the MU campus, beginning with personnel working at the Bond Life Sciences Center. This approach should include: **exploration of the scientists' needs**; creation of **outreach services** tailored to their needs; and development of **uniform services** to all life sciences library users.