Feeling Like a Third Wheel? Leveraging Faculty-Student-Librarian Relationships for Student Success

Methodology

A variety of ethnographic research methods were used to gather data in these two research projects, as shown in this diagram.

Research Sites

Ethnographic Research in Illinois Academic Libraries Project
http://www.erialproject.org

- DePaul University
- Illinois Wesleyan University
- Northeastern Illinois University
- University of Illinois at Chicago
- University of Illinois at Springfield
- Public and private, urban and suburban, residential and commuter
- Undergraduate enrollment: 2,000-20,000
- Interviewed 49 librarians, 75 faculty, and 156 students
- Over 600 total participants

Andrew Asher
Bucknell University
aasher@bucknell.edu

Sue Miller
miller_t1@eiu.edu

This research was supported by a Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) grant from the Illinois State Library.

Feeling Like a Third Wheel? Leveraging Faculty-Student-Librarian Relationships for Student Success

Faculty act as gatekeepers to the student-librarian relationship

- Students are more likely to utilize librarians when directed by faculty.
- Faculty don’t know how librarians can help students or what services the library offers.
- Faculty see librarians as generalists and not as subject-area experts or research collaborators.
- Librarians are often frustrated by their under-utilization and faculty members’ lack of appropriate expectations.

Connecting through library instruction

- Students often have little prior experience with research; faculty may be frustrated by or unaware of students low levels of information literacy.
- Faculty may not know that research and information literacy instruction is available to support them and their students.
- Institutions may not have a coordinated plan to ensure that students graduate with information literacy competencies.

Connecting at the reference desk

- Librarians can use their reference desk space to help students start a research project and to teach them research skills.
- Librarians can help students develop a research strategy and help them understand the possibilities of what they can do to improve their research.

Conclusions

Our ethnographic research provided a diverse set of findings, of which only a sampling is provided here, yet we found many common weaknesses. These include a lack of relationships between librarians and faculty, a lack of relationships between students and librarians, and a lack of relationships between students and faculty. We found that the relationship between student, faculty, and librarian that we had imagined to support the research process was not always in place; instead research was at times supported by a relationship between students and faculty only. Exploration of these difficulties resulted in a stronger grasp of how exactly they occur and what consequences they entail, as well as provided opportunities for librarians to consider how to leverage these relationships and improve the student research process.