Undergraduate Scholarly Habits Ethnography Project

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Qualitative Studies of Student Scholarly Habits in Libraries

- University of Rochester

- Project Information Literacy (PIL)

- ERIAL (Five Illinois libraries)
## Research Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantitative</th>
<th>Qualitative</th>
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<tbody>
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<td><strong>Assumption:</strong> variables can be identified and relationships measured.</td>
<td><strong>Assumption:</strong> variables are complex, difficult to measure.</td>
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<td><strong>Methods:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Methods:</strong></td>
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<td>• Seeks the norm</td>
<td>• Searches for patterns</td>
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<td>• Attempts to be objective</td>
<td>• Relies on involvement and empathic understanding</td>
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<td>• Collection and analysis of numerical data to identify statistical relations of variables</td>
<td>• Data from observation, interviews, etc. with a focus on the meanings / interpretations of participants</td>
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The Research Question

How do undergraduates study and do their research?

How do they make sense of their experience?
Guiding Questions

• What are faculty expectations for student scholarly work and assignments?

• How do students study, research, and complete their assignments?

• How do students use the library for their coursework (and, if they don’t, why not)?
Research Preliminaries

- Funding
- Incentives
- Institutional Review Board (IRB)
- Recruitment
Research Methods

Faculty

- Interviews

Students

- Mapping diaries
- Photo surveys
- Research interviews
- Scholarly habits survey
Faculty Interviews

Obstacles to good student work on research-based assignments:

• “We need to instigate parts of [learning to do research and writing] earlier on” in the curriculum.

• Some faculty said: “there isn’t time for hand-holding with the teaching load,” while some “try to maximize their classroom time” for students to work on research assignments.

• Students have many external constraints on their time, e.g., job, family, and other responsibilities.
Faculty Interviews

Perceived student weaknesses:

- “The central weakness [...] is the inability to think and to analyze clearly”
- “Not taking the time to think it through.“
- “Oh so many [...] I would really expect complete sentences.”
- “They really are not willing to put in the labor...in advance, not...the night before.”
Faculty Interviews

Where librarians fit in (or don’t):

• “We send students over with half-formed, half-baked, half-conceived notions of what we want from them.”

• “They don’t use the library—it’s rare that they’ll go see a librarian. They’ll come see me first and I’ll show them the library website.”

• “I actually think there is a disconnect to the library and…I should fix it.”

• Students “said that they find themselves intimidated when they go to the library.”
Preliminary Results: Mapping Diaries
Preliminary Results: Mapping Diaries
Preliminary Results: Mapping Diaries

Most frustrating part of the day
- “having lunch, because I had to have lunch in the train station”
- “homework, because I have to stay here and use their computers“

Parts of the day to look forward to
- “I guess going home”
- “the gym”
- “I like coming [to the library], because when I go home, I get distracted easily.”
Preliminary Results: Photo Surveys

The things you always carry with you
Preliminary Results: Photo Surveys

A place at school where you study
Preliminary Results: Photo Surveys
A place in the library you don’t like
Next Steps: Application

How can what we learn help us improve our library services and the student research experience?
Next Steps: Research & Dissemination

- Data coding/analysis
- Funding: PSC-CUNY & CUNY CIRG
- Phase II research @ CUNY
- Focus groups @ BC and City Tech
- ACRL 2011?
- Publications!
THANK YOU

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