Traditional Library Services and the Research Process: Are Humanities and Social Sciences Faculty Getting What They Need?

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INTRODUCTION

With emphasis on implementing the virtual library at the University of Virginia, staff, dollars, and space are being directed to highly visible electronic initiatives, and are being diverted away from traditional reference and instructional services. User surveys, observations, and informal conversations indicate that information technology is changing the nature of research and teaching in a positive way. What is not apparent, however, is whether or not faculty still perceive a need for the more traditional library activities and resources in order to effectively teach, conduct their own research, and supervise the research of their graduate students. Are faculty noting an erosion of these traditional services? Are they receptive to the trade-offs between traditional services and new technologies? We set out to answer these questions by interviewing our own faculty. We focused our attention on the traditional services relating to research and reference, instruction, and the physical library vs. the virtual library.

BACKGROUND

The University of Virginia Library, fourteen libraries serving all areas of undergraduate and graduate study with the exception of graduate business, the health sciences, and law, has been reorganizing, reengineering, and restructuring itself around direct customer needs with a focus on technological initiatives to meet those needs. Electronic centers for text, digital image, social science data, geographic information, digital media and music, and special collections attract international attention. The library's user education program was strengthened with the appointment of a library-wide coordinator and the initiation of a Short Course Series offering frequent sessions on topics from Internet Basics to Advanced HTML. Two library classrooms with electronic capabilities for teaching and hands-on practice are in use much of the semester.

At the same time that we are promoting new technologies, we are seeing trade-offs. Like other research libraries, we face a continuously declining budget for materials, coupled with increases in materials costs, especially for serials. Our stacks are crowded, and some public reading and study areas have been converted into electronic centers. To address the dilemma of diminishing resources and the cancellation of a large number of serials approximately five years ago, the library created a campus-wide delivery service, LEO--Library Express On-Grounds. LEO delivers books and photocopies of journal articles both owned by the library and requested on interlibrary loan directly to faculty in their academic departments. Turn around time is often no longer than forty-eight hours. An off-site stacks was built two years ago and now holds over five hundred thousand volumes of infrequently used materials with its collection growing as rapidly as staff can identify, prepare, and transport materials. The effort of retrieving and returning titles to that building is labor intensive, and although the facility addresses overcrowding, it also reduces the ability to browse for materials in the library's main collection. In order to begin to assess services and collections from a user viewpoint, large-scale surveys of faculty and students have been conducted over the past three years, with a new faculty surveynow underway. A student advisory group meets regularly with library administrators and public service department heads.

With user directed goals of additional transparency and more rapid response time during busy periods, Alderman Library services to the humanities and social sciences, its primary clientele, have been restructured. The former reference and circulation departments were combined to include most of the front-line services in the building. The reference desk and a small ready reference collection were moved to the library's main lobby which also houses the circulation desk and many Internet/Web, networked CD-ROM, and OPAC workstations. The reference room no longer houses a reference desk. The space formerly occupied by that desk now is used for public workstations and staff offices. Cross training of staff involved in providing information, reference,

and circulation services is ongoing. Circulation periods have been liberalized and standardized to include an unlimited loan period and number of volumes that can be checked out to faculty. Recognizing the importance of tying materials selection more closely to academic user groups and strengthening links between the collection building program and academic departments, collection development functions were restructured to create two new departments, Humanities Services and Social Sciences Services. Previously these areas of the collection had been built by geographic area with professional bibliographers whose primary function was selection. Now department level teams focus on user education and electronic information services in addition to their selection responsibilities. Approval plans now are used extensively.

INTERVIEWS

To become more familiar with faculty needs for traditional library services, we talked to twenty faculty members in humanities and social sciences departments. We selected faculty who we know to be users of at least some of the services we were interested in researching. The group included department chairs, graduate advisors, departmental library representatives, and both tenured and junior faculty. We sent each faculty member, in advance, our proposal for the Finding Common Ground conference, along with an outline of the topics we wanted to cover in our discussion. By way of introduction, we asked them what they need from the library for their research, teaching, and supervision of their graduate students, what they see as the library's role in supporting their work, and how the library measures up to their expectations. Then we sought comments on their needs in the following specific areas: research and reference service, staffing, telephone service, instructional activities, physical and space needs, ambiance, comfort, library hours, and virtual library and technology, but we did not restrict their comments to these areas. The talks were strictly informal. We met either in their offices or in the library, and each interview lasted approximately one hour. We both participated in each interview. In the discussion with the Chair of the Anthropology Department, he suggested that our research was like Ethnography, and that these interviews were our field work.

FACULTY'S DESCRIPTION OF THEIR WORK AND THE LIBRARY'S ROLE IN IT

As one of the historians said, if the documents are not there, we can't do history. Faculty talked to us about what they need to do their work. The History faculty are reliant on primary sources which are not yet digitized, and still must travel to manuscript repositories for their research materials. The classes that they teach are often driven by what is in print, and they place a higher value on microforms than on Web or Internet sources. They frequently teach from microfilm sets, and sometimes an entire class is using the same set for their course assignments. History graduate students are still choosing traditional research topics, and with the highly efficient Interlibrary Loan service that the library now enjoys, students can successfully embark on significant semester-long projects, and be assured of getting the materials they need on time.

The philosophers said they spend more time with periodicals, and less time with books. Economics is not a library-using department, according to one of its members. They use preprints

and personally subscribe to the journals they need. The sociologists said they need statistical data sets and related government information sources. The Web is of great value to students and faculty in Government and Foreign Affairs, and offers them access to constitutions, treaties, and documents. My research demands that I get ideas, said a Religious Studies professor, and I can't get them from a computer. An awful lot of what faculty do, claimed an English Department faculty member, can be done sitting in a room with a book. Another member of the English Department expressed his need for the physical book as artifact, complete with book jacket, covers, etc., and his concern that important elements of the book were often lost when it went through preservation microfilming or binding. An art historian said his work is with books and slides, and that the digital image is becoming significant to him. He also said that he wants less information so that he can think, and that he finds the fanatical futurism at the library to be an impediment to his scholarship.

Many faculty talked about the interdisciplinary nature of their work, and how important it is to have an accessible collection of books, periodicals, and reference sources for browsing and consulting outside their areas of specialization. Some found that our decentralized system made this difficult in areas such as family research, human evolution, and history of the mind. They stressed their reliance on having a "real" library with a "real" collection when they are starting research in new areas, as well as for graduate students for whom, presumably, most research is new. It was often mentioned that the ease of doing electronic bibliographic searching frees up time for other aspects of research, and replaces the need to maintain and archive personal bibliographies, which now can be generated and updated frequently by doing a search of the OPAC or a CD-ROM. With all of these electronic tools and access, there is now no excuse for reinventing the wheel, and for writing articles that have already been written.

We heard predictions that the nature of the Academy is changing, with an increasing emphasis placed on undergraduate education, and a decreasing emphasis on publishing. Faculty are now forced to produce books to justify their tenure, and libraries are forced to buy them, although these books are not necessarily the tools of anyone else's research or scholarship. Departments, such as English, are concerned about the unavailability of jobs for their graduates and are looking at the World Wide Web as a way of enhancing their students' skills. They are using the Web as a pedagogical tool, and are requiring use of it in their students' projects. The Ph.D.degree is overkill for anything beyond academia, but coupled with Web savvy, students become more marketable. The Web will get people jobs, it was suggested.

Faculty perceive the library's role as supporting the university's mission of producing and disseminating knowledge. It is seen as the key institutional unit, with its strong role in building and maintaining the research collection; in providing efficient means to access it; and in providing the instruction needed to utilize it fully. The center of what we all do is the library, it was said, and for that reason the faculty must be involved with it. The library is seen as a culturally rich significant place, but also a place where technology is being taught and learned. It was said to be the crown in the recruiting process.

REFERENCE SERVICE AND SUPPORT

Reference is the heart, the nerve center, the gateway to the library, we were told. On the whole, faculty reported to us that they need and use reference service and are satisfied with the results. We found little difference in the opinions and patterns of reference use among the various

departments. Most commented that we have a knowledgeable and helpful staff, seen as enjoying their search for information, described by one faculty member as detective work. Another said that reference was a great secret, and that he hadn't known what reference librarians would do for him until he watched a colleague receive extensive reference assistance. A few told us that they do not make use of reference service at all.

Faculty offered many reasons for seeking reference assistance. These included seeking help with factual or verification questions, locating a specific known item, and conducting elaborate data searches that they either cannot do in their offices or do not have the expertise to do. They especially need reference librarians for help in negotiating the information highway. Reference is the place some come to find out about new services and products in their areas of research. One faculty member said she wants to tell a reference librarian what information she needs for her research, and be told where the information resides, and what's the quickest route to get to it. Some faculty indicated that they try to take care of their own research needs and consult reference staff only in areas outside their specialization.

Faculty also mentioned some obstacles to using reference services and materials. One said he doesn't ask many questions because he doesn't think he should, and he compared his behavior to men not seeking directions. A similar comment was not wanting to admit ignorance in an area in which the faculty member is supposed to be an expert. One sociologist said his use of reference service is hindered because he no longer knows the reference staff the way he used to when he practically lived in the library, before the days of remote access. There was also mention that staff just look too busy to take questions. The reorganization of the reference department and reference room resulted in a number of major shifts of the reference collection. Some faculty who know their way around the reference room find these changes to be bothersome and disorienting. Don't keep shifting the reference books around, we were told. The perceived spirit of religious zealotry over computer technology in the reference department was seen as offputting to one faculty member who claims he has been forced to use computers by the scruff of his neck.

Even faculty who use reference services only infrequently, or not at all, do encourage their students to use them. They want the reference staff and collection to be a resource for their students. A history faculty member mentioned that graduate students don't seem to have the research skills they used to have, and she suggests that they go to reference staff for help. Some faculty structure assignments to ensure that their students, who may be too embarrassed or intimidated to ask questions, consult with librarians on their projects. It was suggested that graduate students can feel like they're cheating if they ask reference questions. For the most part, they say their students who do seek service are treated well and are satisfied with the help they receive. One faculty member, whose students don't use reference resources, teaches from primary sources and doesn't require them to use the library at all.

It's the staff that makes this library great, said one senior English department faculty member. The effectiveness and strong customer service attitude of staff were mentioned frequently, and in an overwhelmingly positive way, by faculty in all disciplines. More than ever they see a need for sympathetic helpful humans at the reference desk. A number said we need well trained staff and a better system of referral for in-depth research questions than we now have. Some faculty have determined that certain staff are more effective in providing knowledgeable assistance, and they make a point of seeking out those staff with their own research level questions and also refer their students to them. If the most knowledgeable person in an area isn't present, most will ask informational queries of anyone at the desk rather than taking the additional time to seek out a specific librarian or returning at another time. The accessibility of reference service is important to these faculty, and they want staff present at a service desk without having to seek them out.

Faculty value the availability of staff at the reference desk and don't want to see it diminished. It may be arrogant on my part, said one, but I am used to it and still want it. One suggested that more and more people in the library should be directly involved in giving customer service. People tucked away in offices should also be dealing with the public and finding out what they need. Faculty members perceive the camaraderie, the cooperative spirit, and the dearth of hierarchy in the library as positively contributing to the good service they receive.

For many years the Alderman reference staff has included doctoral graduate student assistants with significant teaching and research background in the humanities and social sciences disciplines. For the most part faculty seem pleased with the assistance these students provide. Even so, a noticeable difference in the level and quality of reference service between full time staff and these student assistants was noted. Some said that late evenings and weekends, when their students are most likely to do their work, are often the times when they will receive the least knowledgeable service since these are the hours that the desk is normally staffed by graduate student assistants. It was suggested that student assistants need more training.

The physical environment in which reference service is provided was a topic in many of our discussions. When reference service moved into the main lobby to join circulation, the original reference desk, an imposing presence in the Reference Room since 1938 when Alderman was built, was dismantled. Relocating reference service received rave reviews from some faculty while others opposed the decision. Even within the same academic department there were varying opinions on the usefulness of the new service point. For some, moving reference to a central busy area put the service at the place where it is needed, making it more visible and more accessible, with staff more readily available to spot bewildered people who need help. Others disagreed mentioning that staff are now physically distanced from the reference room collection, and are no longer well located for just pointing people to resources. Although they do take researchers into the reference room while assisting them with a query, the impression is that it is a problem for staff to leave the desk unattended. The dignity of reference service has been diminished by the rearrangement of the service area, it was said; it's now betwixt and between, and it is more difficult to find a librarian now that you're out in the hall.

Although remote access to reference service is available, telephone reference service is used by only a few faculty and e-mail reference is used by even fewer. In the instances in which telephone service was said to be used, it was reported to be very satisfactory. One person told us that when he is asking a question at the desk and the telephone rings, staff seem to be unclear about which service has priority. He expressed strong sentiment that telephone reference service shouldn't have priority over someone standing at the desk. If the telephone cannot be picked up on first ring, have the call diverted elsewhere, he suggested.

PHYSICAL LIBRARY AND VIRTUAL LIBRARY

I'd sleep better at night knowing that the library was building and strengthening its collections, one faculty member told us. Clearly, the purchase and maintenance of our print collection of books, journals, and microforms is of the utmost importance to the scholars we interviewed, and faculty take pride in the strengths of the collection. Although we had not suggested the library's general collection as a topic of discussion, the faculty were eager to talk about it. Some were unhappy that we no longer can collect at the level we formerly did, and are finding holes in the collection that were once not so evident. One said he doesn't want to see incomplete runs of

journals in the stacks; the library should make a strong effort either to fill in the gaps or remove the bits and pieces. When journals must be canceled or we are unable to subscribe to new titles, provide adequate table of contents access to them and publicize that service. There was recognition that although there is a cost to the collection in shifting the library's emphasis to electronic, the cost is a bargain. For many, the collection remains viable in support of their work. The erosion of service was also mentioned in relation to the collections. A sociologist told us that he would not want a first class collection if it meant that he would get only third class public service, whereas a government professor said he would be willing to sacrifice library hours, staff, and technology in the interest of maintaining a first class collection.

For some the trade-off between purchasing books and providing rapid efficient interlibrary loan and delivery is a reasonable one. Others said that ILL is not an effective trade-off because books obtained this way cannot be kept long enough to meet their research needs, and a high level of borrowing activity reduces the library's image. Not owning books was seen as more serious than not owning journals, because through table of contents and indexing and abstracting services, faculty said they could see what is inside a journal without having to hold it in their hand. They could then receive photocopies of the articles through LEO and not have to return them. The LEO service for the delivery of materials was spoken of in laudatory, almost reverential terms. It makes the process of obtaining needed resources transparent and allows increased time for actual research.

The process of selecting materials for purchase is one in which some faculty want to participate, while others simply want the books to be on the shelf when they need them. They do want to be consulted about possible serial cancellations. Some have found the bureaucracy of the library's collection development process daunting and don't know whom to approach in the library when they want to have a book purchased. Others seem pleased with the relationship they have established with a particular bibliographer.

We asked our faculty, who now have the potential for increased remote access to our services and collections, if they still value coming to the physical library and working in it. For many it remains a rich cultural center, a delving place, a community of scholars. Faculty are often isolated by the nature of their work, and even more so by use of the virtual library, and they value the social and scholarly intercourse of humans taking place within the physical library. Browsing the stacks is still seen as very pleasurable and important for locating material for new courses, learning about an unfamiliar topic, and finding books on the same subject as a known item. Browsing leads to interesting discoveries, they said, and they fear losing this ability. Some of them who once spent a great deal of time in the library find themselves coming there less frequently, thereby browsing in the stacks less frequently, as well. They regret this, but also enjoy the ease of locating specific titles in the catalog from their own desktop and requesting the items to be delivered. Others do not see browsing through a call number or subject index in the catalog as a comparable alternative to browsing in the stacks because there is value in actually opening the books on the shelf. Browsing was also seen by many to be less productive since our off-site closed stacks became operational.

In addition to browsing the stacks, faculty said they enjoy "hanging out" in the current periodicals room and the special collections reading room. However, the library is increasingly becoming a place for "lightening strike" visits to pick up a fact or a book when there is not enough time to wait for a LEO delivery. It was noted by some that the library is starting to look different and have a different feel to it. It looks increasingly like an equipment-driven place with fewer books and staff in evidence, and fewer study and lounge areas. It was suggested that we need a coffee stand, more plants, more couches, better climate control, more comfortable chairs, more study carrels

and work areas, better light in the stacks, more short term parking, better drive-up access to book drops, and longer hours during intersession. The resources and comforts of the physical library, it was pointed out, are even more important for graduate students who frequently "live" in the library.

Most faculty are acutely aware of the positive things that the virtual library offers them, and are enthusiastic that the library is "cutting edge" in so many areas. The Academy is experimental right now, and it is expected that the library should be as well. There was a strong desire voiced, however, to keep things in perspective. Dissatisfaction was expressed with the mindless rhetoric, hype and posturing surrounding technology, and the fact that increased information and access could not take the place of critical thinking. There was also concern with access issues. Many of the CD-ROM databases networked from the library are not accessible in faculty offices. The Web is still seen as slow, unpredictable, and barren by many. As more faculty are putting their courses on the Web and requiring class participation through the Web, the library and the computer labs are hard pressed to meet the demands for high end student workstations. Although the faculty are excited about full-text being delivered to their desktops, they still want to read print journals from comfortable chairs. There was nostalgia expressed for the library of the past (the way you have nostalgia for LP's or typewriters, said a young assistant professor), but most accepted that trade-offs are necessary, and that technology is here to stay and has significant positive impact on scholarship and teaching.

USER EDUCATION

Librarians will inherit the earth since they can teach others how to retrieve and filter information, was the way one faculty member put it It is the opinion across departments that need for library instruction is significant. With technology on the one hand presenting increased opportunity for access to information; for many it also presents a challenge in learning new methods which are frequently changing, and in dealing with personal workstations not always equipped to take advantage of these new technologies. I don't have time for change, was the way one woman stated her problem, and many despaired that they don't even have sufficient time to learn about change. Everything is a problem in the computer world, said another. Many of the faculty who had sought help with technology from our university's computing facility were disappointed, and felt that they were given the runaround, or that the help desk staff were so technical that it posed communication problems. As one complained, they can't even figure out what we don't know. A number of University-wide opportunities for faculty to learn how to use technology in their research and teaching have been set up in the hopes that faculty would return to their departments as missionaries and spread their new knowledge and skills to their colleagues. This "seed" method of teaching technology is not working as well as had been hoped. We heard that often the few in each department who are sophisticated in their use of technology are too busy to teach the others, and that it is difficult to communicate with colleagues who have left "the world of the book".

To some it seems as though there is a world out there with no set of instructions. The Information Superhighway is seen as vast and disorganized, and the library is seen as an invitingplace to get help using it. Faculty value a versatile library staff, well trained in new technologies, but also conversant with traditional print sources. Many revealed that they don't like to admit their ignorance, or to appear incompetent. Ideally they want individualized help with technology where and when they need it, and would particularly appreciate instruction at their own workstations in

their own offices, rather than instruction out of context, such as attending classes or reading documentation. Some no longer have the time or the skills to help their students with their library research, and appreciate the library's instructional role.

The Short Course Series in electronic information offered by the library got good reviews, although some suggested that the courses would be more beneficial if directed more specifically to skill levels or subject areas, and that they would like to see more short courses created for individual departments or disciplines. Course-related instruction is regarded as invaluable for demystifying the library and for acquainting students with possibilities for research. It is also valued for facilitating good relationships between the students and the highly qualified library staff, and for letting students see the relationship the library has with the faculty at this university. Many faculty expressed concern that traditional bibliographic instruction of print resources be retained. We need to stress the bifurcation of print and electronic sources in our sessions, as students are too apt to settle for what can be found on a computer, thereby ignoring relevant print sources.

To publicize new products and services, the library typically has been sending e-mail notices and instructions to academic departments. We also use our newsletter, *LIBRA*, which goes out in print to all faculty, and is also available on the Web. Faculty seem pleased that we are providing these services, but are also overwhelmed with the amount of information coming to them from the library and elsewhere. With thirty or forty e-mail messages appearing in faculty mailboxes each day, it was suggested that unsolicited messages start to look like junk mail and can be irritating. People tend to learn ad hoc, and if you don't need the service or product at the time you are reading about it, you don't remember it. A number of faculty mentioned that they learn about new library resources through their relationships with library staff, and often come to the library to learn more about products they have read about through our publicity or their professional reading The advice was to keep the messages brief and to the point, explain why you would consult the new database or service, what the search results would look like, and then offer to demonstrate it. A sociologist told us that eighty percent of all possible uses of a product or service could be met by twenty percent of the product's features, e.g., eighty percent of us use only twenty percent of the functions in a word processing program, and that a maximum of two pages of documentation should be enough to take care of most people's needs. It was also suggested that when products change, or are no longer available, faculty want to hear about it as much as they want to learn about new products.

We are right now in the process of creating library Web pages for each academic department that we serve, and it was agreed that they would be a good venue for announcing and archiving information about new products, for providing documentation and online help for existing services and products, and for offering access to selective relevant Web sites and Internetresources. One professor mentioned that VIRGO, the library catalog system, is the most universal link to the library, and that maybe new services and products should be announced in banners on the opening screen.

CONCLUSION

The faculty that we interviewed still value traditional library activities and resources. Above all else they value the collection and want to maintain its strengths. They see as important personal contact with service oriented staff. They recognize the library's instructional role, and want to continue to receive assistance and support from well-trained librarians familiar with the research

process and traditional sources, and with the new technologies. When they find aspects of the virtual library to be irritating or daunting, they want individualized help, especially at their own workstations, rather than attending classes or reading documentation. They have noticed some erosion in traditional services and in the physical library, but, on the whole, they see the new technologies and initiatives at the library as having positive impact on their work and that of their students. They are not seriously troubled by the trade-offs.

Through our discussions we learned that if the library is to respond to faculty needs, it must sustain traditional services while supporting new initiatives. Our new model of collection development, integrating subject selection with liaison, instructional, and technical support activities, is designed to deliver materials and services to faculty where and when they need them, and should accomplish this goal. Training of library staff, particularly in electronic services, should be ongoing, and public service desks need to be staffed with people who know how to navigate the information network, but who are also familiar with the research process and can communicate effectively with both faculty and students. We need to maintain, if not improve, comfort levels and ambiance in the physical library while at the same time work toward making remote access to the virtual library more transparent and more dependable. What we heard clearly in these discussions is that it is vital that faculty and librarians talk. When we asked an anthropology faculty member what he perceived as lacking in the library, the answer was meetings like these. We recommend ongoing dialogue between the library and the faculty so that well informed decisions about resource allocation can be made, and we can target our resources and services to faculty teaching and research.