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Increasing the Visibility of the Library within the Academic Research Enterprise

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Abstract

Academic libraries support their universities' goals of developing and maintaining successful research programs. As the information landscape and researcher practices change, recognition of the library's role in supporting research may be diminishing. This article will explore some aspects of the academic research enterprise and identify opportunities libraries can use to position themselves as key members of the research enterprise as well as increase their visibility among the research community. Successful initiatives implemented at Wayne State University will be highlighted to illustrate strategies librarians can use at their own institutions.

Introduction

University libraries have long been key players in the academic research enterprise. A large portion of a library's acquisitions budget is spent on journals and databases that support research activities. However, recognition of the importance of the library in supporting research may be waning among researchers (Schonfeld & Housewright 2010). Researchers now access journal articles without using the library as a gateway and may not recognize how much content is provided by the library (Research Information Network 2007a). Librarians have fewer opportunities to promote library resources and services to researchers because they rarely visit the library (Research Information Network 2007b). Librarians have also reported that developing liaison relationships with researchers is difficult because researchers prefer to work

independently, access information remotely and are satisfied with their information searching abilities (Grefsheim & Rankin 2007; Haglund & Olsson 2008; Haines et al. 2010; Research Information Network 2007a).

A report from the Research Information Network (2007a) suggests that a lack of understanding of library contributions to research on the part of researchers and university administrators may affect libraries when they seek support from their institution. An environmental scan performed by the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) maintains that the next several years will "present unprecedented challenges and concomitant opportunities for research libraries" (Lowry et al. 2009). OCLC Research recently published an academic library manifesto positing that "libraries can retain their position as critical partners in the research enterprise by anticipating, understanding and addressing the challenges and opportunities inherent in new research practices" (Bourg et al. 2009). The goal of this article is to explore some aspects of the academic research enterprise and identify opportunities libraries can use to enhance their visibility among researchers and university administrators. Where applicable, successful initiatives undertaken at Wayne State University (WSU) will be described to highlight possible strategies librarians can use at their institutions.

Opportunities within the Division of Research

Research at universities requires a complex infrastructure of people, facilities, and equipment (Berdahl 2009). Most university research is directed by faculty members and staffed by graduate students and postdoctoral scholars. For faculty in many disciplines, the development of a successful research program is necessary for promotion and tenure. To support research activities, universities must provide an infrastructure that carries out a variety of activities including administering grants, ensuring compliance with government regulations, and assisting faculty with protection of intellectual property. These activities are frequently arranged within a single unit commonly known as the division or office of research. Sponsored program administration, institutional review boards and technology commercialization are all research support services frequently found under the division of research umbrella.

Wayne State University is a doctorate-granting university classified as having very high research activity by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (2009). In 2008, WSU Libraries began a collaboration with the Division of Research that has led to several new avenues for increasing the visibility of the Libraries among the research community. This collaboration came about during discussions regarding cost-sharing of database subscriptions. During these conversations, members of the Division of Research and WSU Libraries recognized that the two organizations had intersecting goals and began exploring opportunities for collaboration that would advance the missions of both units. Several avenues for increasing the visibility of the Libraries were identified. For example, the Division of Research holds professional development seminars for faculty, graduate students and postdoctoral researchers. Topics covered in these seminars include locating funding opportunities, grant writing and successful mentoring. WSU Libraries were invited to participate in these seminars and provide expertise on topics such as locating funding opportunities, using current awareness tools and grant writing resources. Participation in these seminars enabled the Libraries to promote resources, services and expertise directly to researchers. In addition, these seminars expanded the reach of the Libraries because they were well-

attended and reached university staff outside traditional library communication channels.

The Division of Research and WSU Libraries jointly subscribe to two research profile databases; these databases are useful for identifying expertise within the university, promoting research accomplishments, identifying collaborators for research projects, and matching funding opportunities with researchers. Staff from the WSU Libraries and the Division of Research partnered to hold training sessions to promote use of these databases. As with other events sponsored and promoted by the Division of Research, these sessions were well-attended and provided increased visibility of WSU Libraries and their resources. The Division of Research also invited the WSU Libraries to include a section on library services in their Faculty Orientation Handbook and to participate in their Faculty orientation sessions. The WSU Libraries have also been able to promote resources and services to researchers in an online newsletter published by the Division of Research. Collectively, all of these initiatives allowed the Division of Research and the WSU Libraries to successfully work together to enhance the research mission of the university.

Institutional Review Boards. All research institutions have Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) that oversee compliance with government regulations in a variety of areas including environmental health and safety, humane treatment of animals, and protection of the rights and welfare of human research subjects. Evaluating research protocols requires various types of expertise and members of an IRB may need additional information to effectively evaluate a research proposal. Robinson and Gehle (2005) reported on the experiences of an IRB librarian at Eastern Virginia Medical School. At the request of IRB members, the librarian conducted literature searches and provided relevant articles as well as citations for additional information. In addition, an IRB may need help locating drug safety information, patent information, federal regulatory information or information on study sponsors. Participation in IRBs provides librarians with opportunities to participate in an essential research activity, increase the visibility of the library, and reinforce the value of the library among the research community.

Technology commercialization. The protection, marketing and licensing of intellectual property developed by university researchers has dramatically expanded in the past 30 years. Prior to 1980, federal law granted the federal government title to inventions developed with federal funds. The 1980 Bayh-Dole Act authorized and encouraged federal funding recipients to apply for patents on results of federally funded research (Lieberwitz 2007). Since 1980, patent applications from universities have increased dramatically: In 1979 universities obtained 264 patents while in 1997 universities obtained 2436 patents (Rai & Eisenberg 2003).

Universities have expanded in-house technology commercialization services to meet the need for increased intellectual property protection. These services provide guidance and assistance to faculty in the complex processes involved in protecting, marketing, and licensing inventions. Typically, technology commercialization personnel evaluate a researcher's invention to determine its commercial potential through patent searches, market analysis and analysis of competitive technologies. At WSU, the Office of Technology Transfer contacted the WSU Libraries to learn about the resources and services the library could provide that would support its activities. Following a discussion with technology transfer staff about their needs, a librarian

provided staff training in accessing journal articles and using library resources. This librarian was subsequently assigned as liaison to this office and provides assistance with searching databases, locating information and obtaining articles.

Opportunities within other Organizations

Organizations outside the Division of Research may also provide opportunities for libraries to increase their visibility and provide key services to researchers. Below, organizations serving two essential components of research teams, postdoctoral scholars and graduate students, will be discussed with a focus on potential outreach activities and collaborations.

Postdoctoral Organizations. Postdoctoral scholars engage in temporary periods of mentored research and scholarly training; this experience is usually a prerequisite for academic careers in the life sciences, chemistry, and physics (National Academy of Sciences 2000b). In recent years, the opportunities for postdoctoral scholars to move into tenure-track faculty positions have become limited (National Academy of Sciences 2000b) and greater interest is now being placed on the mentoring and career development of postdoctoral scholars. Federal funding agencies such as the National Institutes of Health and the National Science Foundation have recognized the need for career development opportunities for postdoctoral scholars and have begun adding mentoring requirements to their funding opportunities (National Postdoctoral Association 2009)

Interest in the professional development of postdoctoral scholars has led to the development of postdoctoral offices and/or postdoctoral associations at research universities. Typically, postdoctoral offices are established to develop and monitor postdoctoral policies and serve as knowledge bases for postdoctoral scholars (National Academy of Sciences 2000a). These offices may also provide orientation programs and professional development opportunities. Postdoctoral associations are frequently volunteer organizations staffed by postdoctoral scholars and may have varied functions such as improving communication among postdoctoral scholars, functioning as a liaison between postdoctoral scholars and university administration and providing professional and social activities (National Academy of Sciences 2000a).

Postdoctoral organizations may provide new opportunities for librarians to reach postdoctoral researchers. The literature provides little information regarding the information needs of postdoctoral scholars. As many postdoctoral scholars are preparing for academic careers, they may welcome opportunities to learn about topics such as current awareness tools, locating funding opportunities and grant writing resources. In addition, some postdoctoral scholars are likely to be new to the university and may need basic orientation to library resources and services. Postdoctoral organizations may provide opportunities for libraries to participate in orientation events, be included in orientation materials or become involved in professional development events. In addition, attending postdoctoral events such as poster sessions or science fairs may be an effective way for librarians to network with postdoctoral scholars and learn more about their needs.

Graduate School. Graduate students arrive on university campuses with varied backgrounds and levels of preparation for dissertation-level research (Williams 2000). Opportunities for librarians to teach library research skills to graduate students vary

widely among departments and programs. A study of agricultural and biological sciences graduate students at Iowa State University found that most students had never attended a library instruction session and were unaware of the availability of subject liaisons (Kuruppu & Gruber 2006). At WSU, librarians have found that working with the Graduate School can provide new opportunities for reaching graduate students.

In 2009, WSU's Graduate School began offering scholarly communication workshops to promote the development of writing and presentation skills in graduate students. Workshops cover a range of topics including poster preparation, developing a literature review, and avoiding plagiarism. A librarian attending meetings of the Graduate Council, the policy-formulating body for the Graduate School, learned that the Graduate School was planning to offer these workshops and approached the Graduate School about participation. The Graduate School welcomed the WSU Libraries' involvement and requested a workshop on "effective library research from your desktop." This two-hour workshop was well received and reached students from many different departments. Librarians observed that having the Graduate School sponsor and promote the workshop resulted in greater attendance than similar workshops offered by the WSU Libraries alone.

Following the success of this workshop, workshop presenters were contacted by the Director of the School of Library and Information Science about placing the content of the workshop online to meet the needs of online students. Librarians are currently translating the workshop into online learning modules. The WSU Libraries plan to include the Graduate School in the marketing of these learning tools because its communication channels are very effective in reaching this audience. Thus, WSU librarians found that collaboration with the Graduate School can be a successful strategy for reaching a wider audience of graduate students and may lead to additional instructional opportunities within the university.

Conclusion

Recognition of the role of the library in supporting research may be declining among researchers. To garner the support needed from their institutions to support research activities, libraries may need to better market their resources and services to the research community. Working with a variety of campus organizations has proven to be a successful strategy at WSU to better market library services and resources to members of the research community. Working with these organizations has enabled the Libraries to gain access to new communication channels and become involved in new programs during the planning stages. In addition, WSU librarians have observed that sponsorship and promotion of events by campus partners is an effective means for reaching target audiences. These observations are consistent with those of Kuruppu and Gruber (2006), who found that the communication channel is an important factor in how the message is received by faculty and graduate students.

The academic library manifesto published by OCLC highlights the roles academic research libraries can assume to better support the research enterprise (Bourg, et al. 2009). This manifesto includes a call to action for academic libraries to understand the work patterns and needs of researchers, embed library content and services within researchers' workflows, and find ways to demonstrate the value of library services to university administrators. The strategies discussed here are first steps to augmenting

the relationship between the library and the research community and enhancing the library's profile within the university. Libraries will want to continuously monitor the changing workflows, information needs and information-seeking behavior of researchers so that they are able to effectively meet their needs and provide valued services. Establishing relationships with a variety of campus organizations that work with researchers can position libraries to better understand and meet the needs of researchers. In addition, these relationships can provide the library with increased awareness of campus initiatives and opportunities to become involved in new projects that will increase its visibility (Dewey 2004). It should be noted that OCLC Research has developed a working group to explore the desirability of services that libraries can provide to support researchers (OCLC 2009). Academic libraries will want to monitor the results of this working group to learn about trends and strategies for meeting the needs of researchers at their institution in the future.

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