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Jeanne M. Brown

University of Nevada Las Vegas, jeanne.brown@unlv.edu

J. Cory Tucker

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, cory.tucker@unlv.edu

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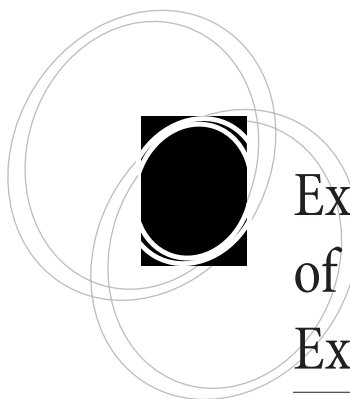
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Expanding Library Support of Faculty Research: Exploring Readiness

Jeanne M. Brown, Cory Tucker

abstract: The changing research and information environment requires a reexamination of library support for research. This study considers research-related attitudes and practices to identify elements indicating readiness or resistance to expanding the library's role in research support. A survey of faculty conducted at the University of Nevada Las Vegas (UNLV) finds that although a high percentage of faculty rate the library as important or very important to research productivity, perceived importance of specific support functions drops markedly, except for functions related to buying or providing access to resources.

Introduction

The infrastructure surrounding faculty research – including open access, scholarly communication, data sets, resource discovery tools, and institutional repositories – has undergone considerable change in the last five years, and continues to do so. In a 2010 national survey, library directors rated library support for faculty research to be both important and an area for which they anticipated the library's role changing in the next five years.¹ We are well into that five-year period. Has the library's role changed? Is it still changing? Are librarians ready for an evolving role in research support? Are faculty ready? Do current research practices suggest a need for specific support services?

In order to examine these issues and collect benchmark data to document the current research support environment, the authors surveyed University of Nevada Las Vegas (UNLV) faculty in 2011 regarding research practices and perceptions of the importance of both current and upcoming library research support services, including collections. The authors hoped to gain insight into faculty receptivity to a heightened level of librarian involvement in faculty research.

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Although UNLV is classified as a research institution and is trying to expand its research capacity, the university's primary focus has been general education reform during the last several years. The library has responded to this institutional imperative by pursuing instructional collaborations and expanding the library's role in student education. As a result, the library's perception of the subject librarian's role has changed. Librarians have been encouraged to evolve from a traditional tripartite reference, instruction, and collection development role into an embedded librarian role supporting the institutional mission.

Librarians at UNLV have not yet reformulated their research role as they have their educational role. Nonetheless, the progress made in collaborating with faculty in

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instruction may be a springboard to becoming more involved with research endeavors. Can the library build on those instructional contacts with faculty in order to contribute the credibility necessary for a more robust role in research collaboration and support? Faculty perceptions of librarians

have changed in connection to the instructional functions. Will these perceptions carry over into their view of current and potential research support services?

Literature review

The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) publication *Value of Academic Libraries: A Comprehensive Research Review and Report*, the seminal document by Megan Oakleaf, has focused academic libraries' attention on documenting value to stakeholders. In the section of the *Value Report* summarizing the literature on library value to faculty productivity, the preponderance of the literature cited relates to the importance of the collection to faculty productivity.² However some articles cited indicate a possible shift in the library's role.³ Oakleaf's literature review on research support beyond collections makes note of multiple roles: "libraries serve as research consultants, project managers, technical support professionals, purchasers, and archivists."⁴

In the area of collections as research support, a recent focus of the literature has been on the return on investment (ROI) method for demonstrating tangible value. Carol Tenopir et al.'s "University Investment in the Library, Phase II" and the Institute of Museum and Library Services grant-funded research encompassed in the Lib-Value project are excellent examples of this literature.⁵ Oakleaf, in the section of the *Value Report* suggesting further research, notes that "librarians have investigated the impact of collections on faculty productivity, but much work is left to be done in the service sector."⁶

The surveys developed by the non-profit strategic consulting and research group Ithaka S+R provide data on faculty and library director perceptions of library services and roles.⁷ Their faculty survey, repeated at three-year intervals starting in 2003, looks at three roles for the library: gateway, archive, and buyer. Over the years the number of respondents rating the library's role as a buyer of materials as "very important" has

increased, while the number of those rating the other two roles as “very important” has decreased. In 2009, ninety percent of faculty rated the buyer role as very important.

The 2009 Ithaka survey also asked faculty to rate the importance of the library’s role in supporting research. The “research support” item in the Ithaka study was phrased thusly: “The library provides active support that helps to increase the productivity of my research and scholarship.” It is possible to interpret this in several ways, including both resources and services. Slightly less than sixty percent rated that role as very important (about the same number as rated the gateway role as very important).

The report further notes that “significantly more faculty members who consider themselves as ‘more of a teacher’ rather than ‘more of a researcher’ rate both the library’s teaching (67 percent vs. 45 percent) and research (62 percent vs. 51 percent) support roles as valuable. And faculty members at the very largest research universities are less likely to appreciate the library’s research and teaching support roles.”⁸ The report speculates that this may be due to liaisons leveraging teaching support to build relationships. In an analysis by discipline, the Ithaka results show 66 percent of faculty in the humanities rating research support as important, with 61 percent in the social sciences and 48 percent in the sciences rating it as important.⁹

In 2010, Ithaka began a new survey for library directors. The percentage of directors rating library support of faculty research as very important (5 or 6 on a 6-point scale) was considerably higher than the percentage of faculty rating it as very important: 86 percent of academic library directors compared to 58 percent of faculty. An even higher percentage of directors felt this role would increase in the coming five years: 93 percent, slightly fewer than those predicting the teaching facilitator role would grow.¹⁰ However only 35 percent of the directors agreed with the statement “My library has a well-developed strategy to meet changing user needs and research habits.”¹¹

Craig Gibson and Jamie Wright Coniglio suggest a “redefined” research support role for library liaisons, linking it to “changing patterns of scholarly communication, changing research practices focused on collaboration, and the impact of digital and distributed technologies.”¹² Nonetheless they point out that the “traditional role continues to be reinforced by faculty responses to such surveys as LibQual+ (with cross-institutional findings showing priority for faculty, of some elements of the ‘information control’ dimension of that survey), and to locally designed surveys eliciting faculty priorities regarding their libraries.”¹³ Despite the persistence of the traditional role, they see mounting pressure on liaisons, noting that “new” for liaisons “is a combination of an unsettling sense of urgency, heightened professional expectations, and an intense pressure to get directly involved in learning and research.”¹⁴

Ithaka S+R, in addition to collecting faculty perspectives through their surveys, has in the last few years begun investigating changing faculty research needs and practices through interviews with research practitioners and support personnel. The first two disciplines examined in their Research Support Services for Scholars program (<http://www.sr.ithaka.org/research-publications/research-support-services-scholars>) were history and chemistry. Their recommendations relating to history research relate primarily to collections; they also urge libraries to “develop new research support models that address historians’ related needs for expertise at a sub-disciplinary level and for assistance in discovering and accessing primary source material.”¹⁵ Similarly, for research in chemistry,

they identify several services through which libraries can respond to perceived needs and make valuable contributions, such as data management, exposing current research, and dissemination of research.¹⁶ No one model of library research support is identified or recommended; rather suggestions are provided based on disciplinary research needs “to inspire innovation.”¹⁷

Despite there currently being no single model of research support, libraries are beginning to report specific innovative approaches. For example, Jake R. Carlson and Jeremy

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R. Garritano note that Purdue is supporting research by putting subject librarian skills to work on such issues as data curation. Institutional repositories are part of their approach to research support. The Purdue Library has also engaged in reorganization to better mimic academic departments

(for example, setting up a research center), and as a visible sign of a paradigm shift to reimagine their roles. Their goals are addressed not only through reorganization, but by bringing in new staff with skills outside the library field. One example of this is embodied in the hiring of a data research scientist.¹⁸ Carlson, writing more recently with Ruth Kneale, puts the Purdue Library’s research support in perspective, saying that since “embedded librarianship in the research context is still an emerging model, the pathways to engagement and the criteria for success are not yet fully defined, though efforts are being made to do so.”¹⁹

Both Barbara Fister and Wendy Lougee draw attention to the library role in supporting faculty in the creation and use of knowledge. Fister highlights several possibilities raised by University of California vice provost Daniel Greenstein, including pre-publication assistance, identifying publication venues, and managing datasets.²⁰ Lougee details a project at the University of Minnesota to investigate user behavior and design an environment that supports scholarly endeavor, for example, customizing delivery of resources by discipline, creating social mechanisms to share scholarship, and providing tools such as tutorials on authors’ rights.²¹

As a whole the literature points to the lack of a single accepted model for library research support, changing attitudes of both librarians and higher education administrators concerning the role of the librarian in research support, and a range of activities that are or could be undertaken in support of a redefined role.

Institutional Background

Prior to this survey, several projects offered feedback related to library-provided research support at UNLV. The library conducted a faculty survey in 2008, administered the LibQual+ survey in 2009, and engaged library liaisons in discussions in spring 2011. The first two projects delivered relevant information on faculty perceptions of the library research role. The last explored current and anticipated value librarians bring to the research process.

2008 Faculty Survey

A 2008 faculty survey focused on the importance of the library and the use and adequacy of its resources for both teaching and research. The survey explored research elements such as faculty reliance on grant funding, areas of research, use of databases and other types of library resources, use of Google as a gateway, and format preferences. Results showed that faculty respondents considered library resources valuable to their research, with 93 percent of the 122 faculty respondents rating it very important and an additional five percent rating it somewhat important. Use of library resources was weighted more to research than teaching for all disciplines except fine arts. There was only one indicator of an interest in enhanced research support: a suggestion from one respondent that the library provide assistance in finding and gaining access to secondary datasets for analysis.

LibQual+

The 2009 administration of LibQual+ at UNLV (with 148 faculty responses) included several items relevant to library support of faculty research. Satisfaction and perceived performance ratings for those items range from 6.47 to 7.6 (10 scale), which is better than average but not exceptional. The last item, concerning journals, confirms that collections are the most highly desired of services.

- the library aids my advancement in my academic discipline: 7.11 (satisfaction)
- the library enables me to be more efficient in my academic pursuits: 7.31 (satisfaction)
- the library helps me stay abreast of developments in my field(s) of interest: 6.47 (satisfaction)
- employees who have the knowledge to answer user questions: 8.17 desired, 7.6 perceived
- teaching me how to access, evaluate, and use information: 7.15 desired, 6.7 perceived
- print and electronic journal collections I require: 8.6 desired, 7.19 perceived

Liaison feedback on research support functions [B head]

Several discussion sessions, triggered by the publication of Oakleaf's *Value Report*, were conducted with library liaisons in February 2011 to explore their perceptions of the value the library could bring to faculty research. Notably, most of the suggestions revolved around the potential of the institutional repository, not yet fully employed at that time.

Emerging from the discussion was an awareness that the extent of current support varies markedly, depending both on the librarian and the faculty being served. At the low end, for example, a liaison might respond to a request to obtain a title for a research project. At the high end, a liaison might participate in a grant-funded project by supplying a literature review.

Even given their willingness to incorporate the repository into their thinking, liaison perceptions of what they were doing or could do in the area of research support primarily reflect their past experience and their individual interactions with faculty. Most liaison librarians see their contribution to the research mission of the university as

providing resources and communicating with faculty, although other sources of value such as drawing attention to interdisciplinary research and bringing a different skill set to the table were mentioned.

Methodology

A twenty-four question survey was created, with some of the questions drawing on the 2009 Ithaca faculty survey. The UNLV Institutional Review Board (IRB) granted the necessary approval prior to administration. The survey was administered via *Survey Monkey*, an online survey questionnaire tool, and widely marketed. The survey was open for approximately four weeks, with a reminder sent out during the second week.

Results

There were 134 respondents, although not all respondents answered every question. The question asking for an indicator of college or department had 133 responses. The largest number of respondents came from the colleges of Liberal Arts, Sciences, and Urban Affairs. Liberal Arts made up 36 percent of the total respondents, Urban Affairs fifteen percent and the Sciences fourteen percent. The lowest number of respondents came from Engineering and Law (four percent each). Respondents to the 2008 UNLV faculty survey showed a somewhat different breakdown although the highest and lowest response rates were repeated: the highest percentage of respondents was from Liberal Arts (sixteen percent), Health (fifteen percent), and Hotel (fifteen percent), and the lowest percentage of respondents was from Business (six percent) and Engineering (five percent). The responses from the three colleges with the highest response rates have been included in the tables to highlight similarities and differences in perspectives, both among the three colleges and in comparison with UNLV faculty as a whole.

Overall, faculty consider the library important for their research. In answer to the question "please rate the importance of the library for your research productivity," 93 percent rated it important or very important. The 2008 survey of UNLV faculty found the same percentage rating the library as very important to their research. But what exactly do faculty consider important? The authors attempted to explore that issue through several questions, some of which come from the 2009 Ithaca survey.

In agreement with the approximately 3,000 faculty respondents in the 2009 Ithaca survey, UNLV faculty ranked the buyer role as the most important library research support role. Diverging from Ithaca

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respondents, however, UNLV faculty (both overall and for each of the three colleges with the highest response rates) perceive the gateway function as the second most valuable role. Active support places last, as it did with the Ithaca respondents. Among all the response groups in the table, the College

of Sciences is notable for the low percentage rating active support as being important (fifty percent). One comment reinforces the emphasis on resources and access to resources:

"Spend the money on getting stuff. We'll figure out how to use it!"



Table 1.
 Percentage Rating Roles Important, Ithaka Faculty Survey
 Respondents Compared to UNLV Faculty Respondents

Library roles	Ithaka	UNLV – all respondents	Liberal Arts	Sciences	Urban Affairs
Active support (helps increase researcher productivity)	58%	75%	75%	50%	71%
Buyer (pay for resources)	90%	92%	100%	89%	90%
Archive and preserve	70%	81%	91%	61%	76%
Gateway or starting point for locating information	58%	87%	94%	78%	81%

More specific insight into faculty perception of library roles is provided in responses to items that give examples of the active support role and the buyer role (including access to resources). Responses rating concrete services reinforce findings for the four role categories overall.

For specific active support functions, the highest percentage of UNLV faculty rating any of the items important is 76 percent, approximately the same percentage of UNLV faculty rating the category of active support for research productivity as important. Other items found less support, although for all items except assisting with copyright issues more than half the faculty overall, as well as Liberal Arts and Urban Affairs colleges, rated the functions important. Once again, the College of Sciences was notable in comparison to UNLV as a whole and the other colleges in the area of active support practices. The Sciences rated each item in the active support category lower than UNLV as a whole and lower than Liberal Arts and Urban Affairs. In fact, for five out of the eight items less than fifty percent of respondents in the Sciences rated the item important. Comments on these items are mixed, with most pointing to perceptions of library limitations:

“Keeping current in my field is probably beyond the library;”

“I think that the department would like to be contacted so that we can supply knowledge about what we need or don’t;”

“Faculty can keep on top of their own area of expertise, can figure out how to use databases, etc. on their own – but they do need access to the major journals.”

One Hotel College respondent did contribute a positive comment:

Table 2.
Active Support Practices –
Percentage of Respondents Rating Important or Very Important

	UNLV	Liberal Arts	Sciences	Urban Affairs
Help the researcher keep current in their field	65%	73%	47%	76%
Help the researcher find information in related fields or new areas	73%	73%	61%	76%
Selects research materials	69%	82%	61%	71%
Provides subject librarians who offer reference and research assistance	68%	77%	45%	62%
Provides faculty training in new databases and research tools	65%	64%	33%	66%
Monitors new databases for relevance to faculty research	73%	75%	33%	62%
Offers technical support for accessing library online resources	76%	76%	55%	67%
Assists with copyright issues	47%	53%	33%	47%

“The changing nature of research makes it more challenging to keep up with current trends. Especially those in allied fields. I see the Library’s role in this as critical.”

Results suggest, however, that even the traditional responsibilities of liaison librarians such as selecting materials and providing reference assistance are not uniformly recognized as valuable by faculty, with 69 percent and 68 percent respectively rating those functions important.

Table 3.
Buyer & Access Functions –
Percentage of Respondents Rating Important or Very Important

	UNLV	Liberal Arts	Sciences	Urban Affairs
Provides materials electronically whenever possible	96%	87%	94%	95%
Forms partnerships with other institutions in order to increase the availability of research resources	96%	90%	95%	91%
Obtains materials not held by the library	89%	83%	89%	86%
Purchases research materials	86%	96%	78%	90%
Provides databases with an alert capability	71%	84%	45%	62%

Items reflecting buyer and access functions were rated, for the most part, as important by high percentages of respondents both overall and in the three colleges. Directly related to the concept of buyer, items on providing materials electronically and purchasing research materials found substantial agreement on importance. The large number rating “forms partnerships with other institutions in order to increase the availability of research resources” important would seem to reflect a fairly sophisticated awareness of the value of consortia. Somewhat surprising is the large percentage of College of Sciences respondents rating this item important (95 percent). More than eighty percent of Liberal Arts respondents rated all five items important. For both Sciences and Urban Affairs, a high percentage of respondents rated all items as important, except “provides databases with an alert capability.”

A question on frequency of behaviors involving interaction with the library provides additional insight into the perceived value of librarian assistance. The two items with the greatest number of respondents reporting infrequent behavior concerning services were “consult with librarians on research-related topics” and “request the library purchase materials.” 79 percent of the respondents in the Sciences consult with librarians “infrequently” or “never” compared to 64 percent of Liberal Arts respondents. Table 4 shows a more detailed breakdown of responses to the research consultation item.

Table 4.
Percentage of Respondents Consulting with Librarians on
Research-related Topics – By Frequency

	UNLV	Liberal Arts	Sciences	Urban Affairs
Daily	0%	0%	0%	0%
Weekly	7%	9%	0%	0%
Monthly	25%	28%	11%	29%
Infrequently	49%	47%	61%	67%
Never	19%	17%	18%	4%

Responses on the frequency of faculty access behaviors, that is, how they find information and obtain resources, create an understanding of practices that relate to and have implications for the active support role. The question turned up a few surprises, and reinforced some expectations. As with the 2009 Ithaka study, the top two practices reported by UNLV respondents were “searching electronic databases that enable reading of full text online” and “following citations from other journal articles.”

The use of Google was down somewhat from our 2008 faculty survey. In 2008, 58 percent used it daily, 37 percent used it weekly, compared to 54 percent and 15 percent who reported in the 2011 survey that they used it very often or often.²² Approximately the same percentage of respondents report using Google Scholar and the library’s online catalog often or very often (seventy percent). Compared to the 2009 Ithaka study, ten to fifteen percent fewer UNLV respondents reported using book reviews and online tables of contents for information discovery.

Related to interdisciplinary modes, there was a markedly higher percentage of faculty who read journals in their field frequently or very frequently (83 percent), compared to those who read journals related to their field (64 percent). This pattern is also reflected in the responses from Liberal Arts and Urban Affairs. However, the pattern is not seen in the Sciences wherein the two practices were performed often or very often by roughly equal percentages of respondents. The ambiguity of the question, as regards “in” their field versus “related to” their field, allows for the possibility that its interpretation may have differed among the faculty of the three colleges.

The authors explored the factors that faculty consider as they choose publication venues. As might be expected, the top two considerations were journal reputation (rated important by 98 percent of respondents) and journal impact factor (86 percent). Topical focus (81 percent) was third in importance. Prominent factors in the scholarly communication debate, such as open access and ability to retain copyright, were rated



Table 5.
Buyer & Access Behaviors –
Percentage of Respondents Performing Often or Very Often

	UNLV	Liberal Arts	Sciences	Urban Affairs
Access library's electronic resources	81%	88%	88%	86%
Request library purchase materials	5%	4%	0%	0%
Borrow books from LINK+	8%	26%	0%	0%
Borrow materials through Interlibrary Loan	12%	26%	6%	5%
Visit the library to obtain print materials	20%	39%	11%	5%
Follow citations from other journal articles	89%	93%	89%	90%
Search electronic databases that enable reading of full text online	94%	96%	89%	95%
Use Google	69%	70%	50%	65%
Use Google Scholar	70%	81%	58%	65%
Browse for articles in online table of contents	67%	77%	50%	60%
Read or skim the important journals in the field	83%	87%	61%	90%
Read or skim the important journals related to the field	64%	68%	59%	57%
Read book reviews	41%	62%	22%	35%
Search the Library's Online Catalog	70%	85%	45%	64%

This manuscript has been peer-reviewed, copyedited and accepted for publication, portal 13.3.

Table 6.
Percentage of Faculty Rating Publication Venue Factors Important

	UNLV	Liberal Arts	Sciences	Urban Affairs
Journal reputation	98%	90%	89%	95%
Journal impact factor	86%	85%	83%	95%
Open Access	39%	35%	22%	31%
Ability to retain copyright	27%	18%	11%	20%
Topical focus	81%	79%	66%	76%

important by lower percentages of respondents (39 percent and 27 percent respectively), with the lowest support for importance found in the Sciences.

When asked about involvement with UNLV's institutional repository, only fifteen percent of respondents indicated they had deposited any research or publications in the digital commons. This is not surprising since the institutional repository was still in its initial stages at the time of the survey. The response to the question of whether faculty members plan to participate in the institutional repository in the future is of more interest. Only 10.5 percent of respondents replied no, signaling an apparent willingness to reconsider participation at some point. As one respondent noted, "I don't yet see a real value in it but over time I suspect it will be helpful in providing me evidence of how often my research is accessed."

College involvement with the institutional repository reflects participation overall, with seventeen percent of Liberal Arts faculty and eleven percent of Sciences faculty having deposited research in the Institutional Repository. Urban Affairs faculty have a somewhat higher involvement (23.8 percent) as a result of an urban sustainability initiative and library efforts to solicit those materials for the repository. The percentage of faculty who plan to deposit research into the institutional repository is similar to that currently participating: 19 percent of faculty in both Liberal Arts and Urban Affairs considered the repository a viable option, compared to 16.6 percent of faculty in the Sciences.

Discussion

The composition of the respondent pool provides some indication of areas of greater and lesser readiness for an expanded role for librarians. For both the 2008 and 2011 surveys the highest response rate was from Liberal Arts and the lowest response rate was from Engineering. Responsiveness to library requests for feedback on collections and research support may be an indicator of the importance that a college or discipline places on library research support. Anecdotal feedback from faculty in the Sciences suggests,

for instance, that the high response rate was motivated by a strong interest in protecting “their” resources. Colleges with the highest response rates are those with a strong interest in research, judging by the number of graduate programs and amount of grant activity. According to UNLV’s Office of Institutional Analysis and Planning, the colleges of Education, Urban Affairs, Business and Health Sciences have the largest populations of Master’s students.²³ For Doctoral students, the largest populations are in Liberal Arts, Education and Health Sciences.²⁴ The colleges of Sciences, Engineering, Health Sciences and Education had the highest dollar amount of award funding, and Hotel and Fine Arts had the lowest level of funding.²⁵ The lack of a high response rate from Business, Engineering, Health Sciences, and Education is of concern because of their involvement in graduate education and grant activity, and indicates the need to investigate further.

Comparing responses for the three highest responding colleges with each other and with UNLV overall provides several indicators that Liberal Arts has a relatively stronger interest in research support functions. Liberal Arts (the history and psychology departments were strongly represented in the respondent population) had a higher percentage than either UNLV overall or one or both of the other colleges rating the following as important:

- all four roles: buyer, active support, archive, and gateway
- library contributions to research productivity
- the library helping the researcher keep current in their field
- the library providing databases with an alert capability that assists the researcher in keeping informed of new publications
- selecting research materials
- subject librarians who offer reference and research assistance

As shown in Table 5, Liberal Arts faculty more frequently used a variety of library-provided resources or services. They borrowed materials on interlibrary loan and visited the library to obtain print materials more frequently. They searched library resources more frequently, whether by Google, Google Scholar, or the library’s online catalog. They read journals in related fields and book reviews, as well as used online table of contents, more frequently. The most positive indicator that Liberal Arts is a possible starting point for modeling an enhanced research support role is that nine percent of Liberal Arts respondents consult with librarians on research-related topics weekly, with an additional 28 percent doing so monthly. Urban Affairs faculty show receptivity as well, though to a lesser degree. They had, as did Liberal Arts and UNLV faculty overall, a high percentage of respondents rating the item “Help the researcher find information in related fields or new areas” as very valuable or valuable (76 percent).

The results show possible signs of resistance to an active library support role from College of Sciences respondents. Of the four roles, 89 percent of Sciences faculty rated the access/buyer role important while only fifty percent rated the active support role important – a much higher variance between roles than that of faculty overall or of the other two colleges. In the active support role, few Sciences respondents rated “provides subject librarians who offer reference and research assistance” as important (only 45 percent). In addition, College of Sciences faculty had the lowest percentage of respondents indicating importance for the library helping researchers keep current or find



information in related fields. This could stem from a variety of reasons, including a lack of confidence in the librarian, self-assurance in their own expertise, or limited awareness

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of the research skills the librarian can provide. Clearly this is an area that will have to be explored further, with Sciences and other colleges as well. Another area calling for more study is the low percentage of Sciences faculty rating “selects research materials” as important. Does this mean that faculty are content with the current research collection provided by the Libraries?

Further investigation into Sciences faculty attitudes can help clarify whether responses are indeed signs of resistance. In any case, discussion with faculty will provide an opportunity to explore both their perceptions and areas where librarian expertise can advance their research.

As recognized in meetings with liaison librarians, the Institutional Repository has the potential to increase the library’s visibility in the area of faculty research support, as well the visibility for faculty research. Faculty are most concerned with journal reputation and impact factor when they select publication venues. There is not, however, a direct relationship between visibility and impact factor. Further, the factors that are prominent in the scholarly communication debate, such as open access and ability to retain copyright, ranked very low in importance for publication venue decisions among the colleges and UNLV overall. Although not currently committed to open access, most faculty seemed willing to at least consider participating in the repository at a future date, indicating a receptive area for expanding research support. Educating faculty on scholarly communication issues, including, for instance, the National Institutes of Health public access policy, and the impact these issues may have on their research, would seem to be a productive initial focus, and present an entrée for discussing the repository and its potential for research support.

The fact that more than half of respondents read outside their field indicates a potential interest in interdisciplinary research. If, as some believe, librarians serve as generalists in the specialist-oriented academic world,²⁶ this interest would call upon a strength of librarians that could be a springboard for greater involvement in faculty research. It also bodes well for the value of the Libraries’ fall 2011 implementation of the discovery tool Summon, which is itself a support tool for interdisciplinary research.

Readiness for an expanded research support role is necessary in both the library and among the faculty who are engaged in research. Failing a campus mandate, such as the one that resulted in Purdue Libraries assuming a strong role in faculty research,²⁷ there must be a library commitment to exploring faculty needs for research support, as well as potential research collaborations with faculty. There are faculty who are receptive, as the respondent who noted that ratings were based “on how important I feel the library research support functions would be if they were provided. I don’t see them being provided at present.” Many of the respondents, however, did not rate research support very highly, even in the abstract. In that context, should the library provide what faculty might in the future consider valuable, or only what faculty currently consider

valuable? If the latter, the library can continue in the buyer role with comfort. If not, the library must commit to engaging faculty in discussions aimed at a mutual exploration of what research services librarians can and should provide. Highlighting new services such as patron driven acquisitions, the institutional repository, and the discovery tool Summon, and the contribution of each to research, should provide solid ground for initiating such discussions.

Conclusion

The survey results demonstrate that readiness for library support for faculty research in the current UNLV environment is mixed. There are both negative and positive indicators to consider. One concern is the low frequency with which faculty consult with librarians on research-related topics. Faculty interests in interdisciplinary research and impact factors, however, can be leveraged to provide entrée, becoming opportunities to approach faculty about services that can increase research productivity. The pursuit of a research role will also have to be balanced with the skills of librarians and the time available to pursue this role, although the strategy Purdue employed – hiring for the role – is a viable option to consider.

UNLV faculty (and clearly those at many other institutions, given the congruity of much of the data with that of the 2009 Ithaka study) still consider resource acquisition and access as the most important support the library can provide for their research. Faculty are possibly unaware of other services the Libraries provides or could provide; or, if they are aware of a support service, they have not seen it as being necessary, effective, or valuable. The college analysis supports the general findings that, for the most part, a higher percentage of faculty rate the activities associated with librarians and librarian assistance as not important. The selection of research materials and technical support functions are exceptions to those findings.

This suggests that librarians must not only change the “role” of libraries, but must also convey the image of librarians as knowledgeable about research. A similar process was necessary for librarians as the role expanded in student education. Librarians have developed skills, such as assignment design, and have demonstrated the value of those skills. Indeed, libraries may be at a similar stage of development for the research support role as they were years ago when transforming the education and instruction role. Just as libraries were able to model behavior that contributed to student learning, so must libraries now show how librarians contribute to faculty research productivity.

This is a critical juncture for libraries, given the transitional character of library support for faculty research and the perceptions by academic library directors of the increasing importance of that role. Libraries must engage with their researchers to identify resources and services faculty consider valuable, while at the same time strategically evaluating their current role in supporting faculty research. The faculty perceptions and behaviors that we describe here will need to be addressed – sometimes countered – if libraries are to be successful in expanding their roles in research support.

Jeanne M. Brown is Head of Assessment at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, jeanne.brown@unlv.edu. Cory Tucker is Interim Director of Logistics and Resources Distribution Services at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, cory.tucker@unlv.edu.



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