

Supporting the Future of Academic Libraries: Refreshing Research Support Services

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Abstract

As technology continues to change the academic landscape, so do the researchers' information needs. Academic libraries must keep current with new technologies and procedures as they find the correct services that will work for their institutions. Research Support Services that correlate to the Research Lifecycle will help create institution wide understanding of research while providing the necessary modern options that today's researchers need.

Keywords: Research Support Services, RSS, Academic Libraries,

Introduction

While objectives change from location to location, most academic libraries strive to provide access to materials and services that will support their patrons. The majority of this demographic is the researcher. Traditionally most services are geared to supporting the undergraduate and graduate student researcher, conversely faculty members, non-teaching researchers, postdoctoral researchers and doctoral students may be overlooked (Koltay, 2016). As technology continues to advance and research techniques and needs rapidly change, it is vital that academic libraries update the services they provide.

Background

It's expected that academic libraries provide access to traditional resources such as academic journals, articles, databases and books. However the world continues to become more connected and the academic landscape is transformed by increased amounts of information. We are truly in the era of Research 2.0. Researchers now need access to new tools, a wider range of information including data sets, and the services that will allow them to keep up with these new varied needs. Das & Banerjee argue that "providing the effective support services for research is [now] the main motto of the libraries of any university." (2021)

Research Data Services and Research Data Management are becoming a mainstay of the research library. The impetus in this changing landscape is the deluge of information precipitating from the raise of new technologies. This driving force is pushing towards understanding and mastering data and knowledge. Specifically quantitative data and knowledge coming from the sciences. On a bit of a side note; from a monetary standpoint, currently humanities research receives significantly less funding than that of science research. This isn't to say that humanities research is less important or that humanities research isn't also changing as

well, just that most institutions will probably be focused on implementing more services that are geared towards science related research.

Proposed Solutions

Current trends favor a holistic approach that addresses researchers' information needs while reinforcing the Research Lifecycle (Si et al., 2019). This cycle follows the research from conception to implementation to dissemination. Even though there are multiple interpretations of the Research Lifecycle, most variations have similar key points (Cox & Tam, 2017). A well rounded, easy to understand interpretation comes from the [APH Quality Handbook](#) and will be referenced in this paper. Using the research lifecycle is beneficial in understanding what types of services are needed and when they are useful.

Figure 1

Research Lifecycle



Note. From APH Quality Handbook, 2003.

Types of Services & Where they Fit in the Research Lifecycle

Design, Plan & Propose

The beginning phase of research involves picking a subject, finding support, and creating a plan. During this phase services to consider include research consultations, research guides, creating a Data Management Plan (DMP), or certain workshops that can help the researcher understand different tools and methods at their disposal (Si et al., 2019; Das & Banerjee, 2021, Yu, Deruble & Morgan, 2017).

Set-up & Conduct

The middle phase is what most people think of as “research.” Here the research is putting together the necessary elements and conducting research. Newer services that will be used during this stage seems to be that of Research Data Management Services (RDMS): in the form of accessing research tools, help with data analysis, data collection, or data transfer activities (Koltay, 2016; Das & Banerjee, 202; Yu, Deruble & Morgan, 2017).

Reporting, Review & Knowledge Utilization

This last direct phase is all about external dissemination of gathered information. Here researchers may need services to help with the writing or publication process, citation management, copyright services, or things dealing with preservation and curation of their data and finished works(Si et al., 2019; Das & Banerjee, 2021; Mannheimer et al., 2019). This is where researchers may consider using Open Access options, whether by their own choice or in order to comply with local regulations.

As with most new procedures, it may take some time to understand how your institution will leverage these tactics to its advantage. [An example of how in-depth this connection between RL and library can get, see the [University of Central Florida](#).]

Koltay points out that while the majority of RSS are aimed at younger researchers, they are not the only ones in need of assistance(2016). Faculty and other non-student researchers often get overlooked, however due to the rapid changing nature of technology it is imperative that these services are accessible for them as well. A way to reach these individuals may be to lean into a personalized or concierge type service (Das & Banerjee, 2021).

3 Ways to Bolster Research Support Services

Interdepartmental Collaboration

Some higher education institutions are developing new departments geared toward research support, while others institutions are hiring specialists; either way the library should ensure there is sufficient communication and collaboration with these entities (Yu, Deuble & Morgan, 2017). Establishing that services aren't overlapping or overlooked. Duplicated or conflicting information from departments may cause confusion for researchers or deplete funding. Furthermore, technologically heavy services such as RDMS specific services may require outside support from the IT department.

Outreach

Creating new services can only be successful if the researchers know about them. By opening the lines of communication directly with the researchers, the library can keep them up to date in terms of the services they are currently providing. This may also allow the library to gain feedback on what needs to be improved or added. Concierge services potentially could be used with great effect for older researchers (such as Faculty or Post Doctoral researchers) while creating a connection that would allow for this type of communication.

Internal Review

By looking at how research is conducted locally at the institutional level, the library staff will have a stronger understanding of their researchers' informational needs. This can be assessed through review of internal practices. As with the University of Central Florida, it could be that your institution already provides many services, but without understanding where they are being provided the services may go underutilized (Beile & Gause, 2013). When done in conjunction with faculty input, results reflect what is actually being done, and can then inform what still needs to be done.

Conclusion

Academic libraries provide more than just access to materials; they create the bases of the research environment. In the ever-evolving academic landscape, expedited by the relentless onslaught of information, research libraries need to step up their game. By providing modern services with the researcher in mind, the academic library can continue to advance academic scholarship into the future.

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