Changes in Library Usage, Usability, & User Support

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4th Northumbria International Conference
August 12-16, 2001
The Assessment Problem

- Libraries are changing
- How & why?
- Traditional measures are inadequate
- Assessing HOW library use is changing, will not explain WHY library use is changing, or HOW libraries are or should be changing in response to changes in library use
Like a Ship on the Sea of Change

We experience, but do not control, the changing sea & weather around us.

Understanding is crucial to navigating the changes & staying afloat.
The DLF Initiative

- Study usage & usability assessments
- Study assessment priorities

Facilitate future research
What data are being gathered & analyzed?
Why, how, & by whom?
Who uses the results?
Why, how, & to what effect?
What are the issues, problems, & lessons learned?

### Usage & Usability Assessments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SURVEY</th>
<th>Contacted</th>
<th>Participated</th>
<th>Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>24</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Purpose of the Study

To identify trends in leading digital libraries that are likely to inform library practice

Not to be exhaustive, representative, or predictive

- Common ground
- Why to conduct assessments
- Instructions to use popular methods
- Issues, problems, & lessons learned
- Bibliography
- Appendices
  - Sample instruments
  - Other methods & measures
Common Ground

- Focus on (diverse) users
  - Useful & usable Web user interfaces
  - Guidance for undergraduates
  - Continuous marketing of library resources

- Focus on assessment
  - Inputs, outputs, & composite measures
  - Service quality & user satisfaction
  - Usability, outcomes, & impacts
  - Cost effectiveness & cost benefits
How & Why to Conduct . . .

- Surveys
- Focus groups
- Usability tests
- Transaction log analysis

What the methods are good for. What they’re not good for. What to look out for.
Issues That Cross Methods

- Sampling – cost-benefit analysis
- Permission & Privacy – informed consent & working with the Institutional Review Board
- Observational research – what to observe, how to record it, & training the observer
- Study design – start early, use multiple methods to identify problems, figure out how to solve them, & verify they’ve been solved
Assessment Challenges

- Defining & measuring things that are changing
- Collecting meaningful, purposeful data
- Acquiring the requisite knowledge & skills
- Managing the data cost effectively
- Organizing the library appropriately
Critical Problems

- **Useless data collection**
  - Individually, libraries aren’t organized internally to collect, analyze, or use data strategically.

- **Duplicated efforts**
  - Collectively, libraries haven’t developed the methods, standard definitions, & guidelines needed.
Assessment Priorities

- Survey aims, audiences, & methods
- Identify highest priority
- Design & facilitate research to fill gaps

Academic Library Directors
Colleges, mid-size & large universities
Assessment Aims

- To meet user needs & expectations
- To allocate expenditures to meet user needs & expectations cost-effectively
- To validate expenditures of existing funds & strategic planning requests for more funds
- To recruit & retain competent librarians & staff

Many audiences
Top Priority Assessment

- Study information use in a broader context
  - What resources do students & faculty use?
  - How do they locate, evaluate, & use them?
  - Do the resources & activities differ across user groups, disciplines, or type of institution?
  - What needs are not being met?

- Target for report – February 2002

DLF & Outsell, Inc.
Purpose of the Study

- Provide context for interpreting usage trends
- Evaluate the library’s current role
- Focus efforts appropriately
- Improve planning
  - Strategies
  - Organization
  - Human resources
  - Financial resources
Tentative Plans

- Survey aims, audiences, & methods of librarians in different departments & different levels of the organizational hierarchy
  - Commonalities may suggest areas for collective effort
  - Discrepancies may suggest areas for improved communication, coordination, & planning
Smoother Sailing
On the Sea of Change