Leveraging the Library Consortium
to Conduct Local Ethnographic User Needs Assessment

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Overview

Small to medium-sized private colleges and universities with limited resources often lack the opportunity on their own to conduct student behavior research. However, by working with a shared pool of resources through a regional library consortium, we were able to develop an efficient and cost effective model of ethnographic research to investigate the research habits and needs of this group of users.

Collaborative Toolkit

In order to conduct our study, we designed a consortial toolkit for the project. This digital toolkit provided all the documentation and information needed to perform the study. A geographically dispersed team consisting of librarians and library consortium staff supported host schools with Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, recruiting, testing, coding, & reporting. Two or three schools participated each semester. Testing was conducted on-site at host schools by members of the research team. Data was compiled using JotForm and coded in Dedoose, ArcGIS, and Carto. A final report from each test site was published as a publicly viewable Google Doc.

Pieces of Our Toolkit

https://bit.ly/INAPtoolkit

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	Project Team	Voices from across the consortium, led by consortium staff.
	Research Questions	Things we wanted to learn; divided by faculty, spaces, and study habits.
	Institutional Review Board (IRB)	Provided templates and standard language for each campus's unique IRB approval processes.
	Demographic Forms	Developed as an online form in JotForm for easy compilation across sites.
	Methods	Five pre-selected, easy to implement ethnographic tests.
	Items for Testing Days	Checklists for materials needed for testing days: recruitment, signage, etc.
	Implementation	Local staff, along with visiting consortium staff, conducted onsite testing.
	Coding and Reporting	Completed by project team and consortium staff for consistency.
	Completion	Ten schools tested across four years. Included final report. http://bit.ly/palni-inap

Strengths

- Task Force approach providing a rich learning environment and accountability.
- All schools could participate without learning ethnographic methods.
- Library directors were appreciative of the process and the results!

Pitfalls

- Major learning curve due to our inexperience with ethnographic methods.
- Institutional Review Board (IRB) required unique paperwork for each campus.
- Student recruitment was sometimes challenging.
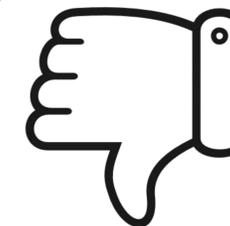
Key Takeaways

1. Collaboration was key to the success of this program. Without our initial large task force and smaller project team, it would have been impossible to conduct this study.
2. Consortial staff provided consistency and leadership for the project.
3. A project toolkit provided one central location to find everything connected to the study.

Study of Student and Faculty Habits project team. (Left to right) Amanda Starkel, James Bell, Ruth Szpunar, Eric Bradley, and Megan West

References

Bell, J., Bradley, E., Halquist, C., Leonard, K., Sicken, E., Starkel, A., Szpunar, R., Wagner, S., & West, M. (2017). *PALNI information needs assessment toolkit*. Google Drive. https://bit.ly/INAPtoolkit

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