Faculty Motivations: An Exploratory Study of Motivational Factors of Faculty to Assist with Students' Research Skills Development

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

This article reports the findings of a qualitative study which sought to uncover the motivational factors of faculty to address the library research skills of students. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted in the fall semester of 2004 with teaching faculty, users and non-users of library instruction, at the University of Guelph. Participants were asked to discuss their use of course-integrated library/research instruction. In its absence, faculty were asked how (if at all) did they assist students to learn to do research. Transcripts were analyzed using grounded theory methodology. Findings may be useful to instructional librarians seeking to enhance collaboration with faculty. One finding is a suggestion that faculty are motivated by their desire to produce independent learners with transferable skills. Scholars look to potential students for the next generation of scholars – graduate students. They see a link between the development of research skills and readers – scholarly community, an audience for their work. Some participants who had not previously collaborated with a librarian described their own methods of integrating research skills development into the curriculum.

Keywords: Faculty/Librarian collaboration, information literacy, research skills

Introduction

Fifty years ago Patricia Knapp asserted the importance of librarian-faculty collaboration: "If we wish the library to function more effectively in the college…we must direct our efforts toward the curriculum, working through the faculty" (831). Since then, a prevalent perspective of information literacy (IL) has emerged which situates library instruction at the crossroads between the

classroom and the library, "where the library research methods and materials are developed in response to particular disciplinary needs"(Hutchins, Fister and MacPherson 4). Research has continued to show that, to be successful and effective, an information literacy program should be:

1. integrated with the curriculum;
2. provided at point-of-need;
3. supported by faculty (Leckie & Fullerton 1-2).

Access to students by librarians during class time is mediated by faculty. LIS Library and Information Science (LIS) scholarship has explored factors which influence the faculty-librarian relationship and faculty adoption of course-integrated information literacy instruction. These include:

- faculty attitudes toward library research instruction;[1]
- the nature of faculty as a distinct culture (Hardesty 1995);
- faculty attitudes towards, and perceptions of librarians.[2]

Knowledge of these factors has better equipped librarians to educate faculty on the importance of information literacy. However, there is little research into what benefits, rewards or incentives may exist to motivate faculty to assist with the development of their students' research skills.

This paper reports on exploratory research which investigates possible factors that may motivate faculty to address their students' research skills. The study is concerned with the motivating factors of faculty regardless of previous use of librarian-led instruction. The intention is to provide a more detailed and elaborate appreciation of the thoughts and reasoning which faculty bring to their decision regarding their use or non-use of information literacy instruction.

Literature Review

LIS literature, focusing on the intersection between faculty and library/librarians, has uncovered many areas of relevant interest. Much attention has been given to the nature of the relationship between faculty and librarians. Hardesty's seminal work on faculty culture explains that librarians value the research process itself in contrast with faculty where the emphasis is on the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge (348). The approach taken by librarians to engage with faculty must reflect the faculty member's values and motives and not those of the librarian.

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[1] Key papers include: Maynard 1990; Cannon 1994; Thomas 1984 & 1994; Leckie & Fullerton 1999.

[2] Hutchins, Fister and MacPherson 2002 ; Feldman & Sciammarella 2000; Christiansen, Stombler, & Thaxton 2004.

A sociological analysis of the relationship between faculty and librarians reveals an asymmetrical disconnection between librarians and faculty (Christiansen et al.). While librarians seek out connections with faculty and are aware of the work they do, faculty are not aware of what librarians do and do not make efforts to interact with them (118). Given the disconnection between faculty and librarians and the evidence that successful information literacy programs hinge on collaboration, it is essential for librarians to better understand faculty.

Studies on faculty attitudes toward IL instruction are few in number and primarily employ quantitative measures. According to Maynard 94 percent of faculty agreed that library instruction was important yet 53 percent of faculty surveyed had never requested library instruction because of a perception that it was not needed (71-72). A survey of science and engineering faculty, disciplines not heavily focused on essay writing, found that over 60 percent believed that information literacy was important for their students (Leckie & Fullerton 5). Gonzales (201) found that faculty lacked confidence in their students' research skills. In spite of this knowledge and stated importance of IL, in 1991 IL was not found to have spread across academic institutions (Farber 3) and still in 2006 had not yet become a priority for faculty (McGuinness 580).

Why is there a disconnection between a belief in the importance of research skills and demonstrated behavior? What is the relationship between attitude and motivation as manifested by the pedagogical practices of faculty? Why do some faculty members use librarian-led library research instruction while others do not? Moving beyond recognition of an attitude to an understanding of the motivations that underlie behaviour may assist with the promotion of information literacy on university campuses.

The study of motivation from a psychological perspective examines the initiation, intensity, and persistence of behavior (Geen 12). It is influenced by rewards, satisfaction, goals and values, which are both internal and external stimuli. McKeachie's (1997) 'cognitive expectancy-value theory' understands motivation as "a function of the expected value or a goal or incentive to be obtained by successful implementation of the behaviour" (20). Extrinsic and intrinsic motivators are, respectively, the rewards gained from completing an activity successfully and the satisfaction from the activity itself (Deci & Ryan 78).

Instructional librarians have limited opportunities to influence extrinsic motivational factors such as tenure and promotion. This study focuses on intrinsic motivators for faculty in higher education which may assist instructional librarians in their outreach efforts. Csikszentmihalyi's examination of intrinsic motivation and effective teaching identified two main systems which provide rewards for faculty (85-86). The first reward is derived through the educational process; teaching itself is seen to have an impact on the students' performance. The second intrinsic reward they experience is through their subject matter; new advances or developments are continually integrated into the curriculum.

Methodology

A non-probabilistic sampling method of 'purposive sampling' was used to intentionally seek out participants who fit predefined criteria for inclusion. Fifteen subjects participated. This sample was not controlled for demographic characteristics of participants since the study was intended to generate exploratory qualitative data. All major disciplines were represented: arts, sciences, humanities, and social sciences.

Two participant groups were identified for this study. Group A was identified by their repeated use of librarian-led IL instruction. Email requests were sent to thirty-one faculty members identified by librarians as fitting the above criteria. It was not considered a bias to interview only those identified by staff and who presumably had a good relationship with the library, since satisfaction was not an area of investigation. A total of eight interviews were conducted from this group.

Group B was identified by their non-use of information literacy instruction. IL instruction is more likely to be useful to students in courses with a greater focus on research and where essay(s) are the method of assessment. Online course syllabi were used to determine courses that fit the above criteria. Reference interviews were also used to identify participants. When students requested research help for an essay assignment and reported no in-class IL instruction, the faculty member responsible for the course was contacted. E-mails were sent to twenty-five faculty members, and seven interviews were conducted.

An exploratory approach was selected as the best fit for this study in the absence of research in the area of faculty motivation and IL. Grounded theory methodology was selected for its ability to generate theory through the systematic gathering and analysis of data (Glasser and Strauss 1967). The theory that emerges is 'grounded' in the data. This method does not test previously conceived theory but rather allows for theory to emerge from the data. The emergent research method allows for the pursuit of insights and hunches as the study progresses.

This study was conducted with undergraduate teaching faculty at the University of Guelph. Located in Guelph, Ontario, this medium-sized university with 17,000 students (at the time of the study) offers both undergraduate and graduate programs. An in-depth, phenomenological interview structure was chosen for its ability to allow for behavior, the observed reflection of one's motivations, to be understood in context and provide insight into actions (Seidman 9-20). The intention was to engage faculty in a conversation where they might feel comfortable reflecting on their experience. Interviews were guided by, but not limited to, questions surrounding research skills, student ability, faculty efforts to assist research skill development, and the perceived value of research skills. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Theoretical categories emerged from a line-by-line analysis of the data and were not predetermined. A

theoretical model of motivational factors was developed through a "constant comparison method" (Glaser and Strauss 101-115).

A challenge for this study is reflected in the larger debate over the merits of the term information literacy. For this research study, it was assumed that this language is not well understood by those outside of librarianship. Instead, "research skills instruction" was used with participants to discuss the skills and aptitude that an undergraduate education develops.

Findings

Four major categories emerged from the transcripts which relate to faculty motivation. These include: pedagogical goals; student ability to do research; benefits of good research skills to students and benefits of students' research skills to faculty. These categories represent motivating factors for both of the above identified participant groups.

Csikszentmihalyi's system of intrinsic rewards was used as a framework for the categories and sub-categories. In their roles as educators and academics, faculty experience intrinsic rewards. As educators, their intrinsic reward lies in the facilitation and promotion of student learning. In their role as academics of a specific discipline, faculty experience intrinsic rewards in their observation of students' engagement with the subject area.

Major Themes

Tables 1 and 2 below outline the two broad roles for faculty (educators and academics) with the subsequently defined categories and sub-categories within each. A discussion of the roles, categories and sub-categories follows.

Table 1: Motivation as Educators

Role: Faculty as Educators	Definition
Category 1. Pedagogical Goals	Self defined reasons for delivery of course content.
i. Beyond Content	Course content develops research skills.
ii. Preparation for Employment	Research skills as transferable skills.
Category 2. Student Ability	Student ability to complete research assignment.
i. Gap in Education	Failure to prepare students.
ii. Internet Dependence/Low Library Use	Impact of Internet.

Table 2: Motivation as Academics

Role: Faculty as Academics	Definition
Category 1. Benefit as Scholars	Creation of scholars.
i. Creation of Scholarly community	Research skills are critical.
ii. Knowledge Discoverers	Contradictory information.
Category 2. Benefits to Students	Improved research skills
i. Sophisticated researcher vs. Google-mania	Development of advanced research skills.
ii. Self-directed Learner	Prerequisite for graduate studies.

Faculty as Educators

Category 1: Pedagogical Goals

Participants expressed their motives for the delivery of a course through this theme. Research skills were seen by participants of both groups as intertwined with their perceived overall educational outcome of a course.

Sub-categories:

i. Beyond Content

Repeatedly, participants returned to fundamental questions about their perceived goal for teaching a course.

 "*There are two reasons to teach a course. The first reason is to teach fundamental concepts. The second reason is to teach where to find the rest of the information. Certainly I don't walk around with all the information that's in my textbooks in my head. There's absolutely no point to that – right?*"

This participant works closely with a librarian to develop her students' ability to extend beyond the course content.

Librarians often hear about the pressure to cover and cram as much information as possible into a single semester. The following two participants offer a contrasting perspective.

"*You just can't condense [all the subject contents] into – I don't even know if you can condense that all into a lifetime let alone a semester…*"

 "*…[some] professors tend to stick to very much a lecture style in their courses …because they feel that they have so much to cover that they can't cover any other thing in their course [like research instruction]…[I think] you*

should really think about it in terms of uncovering topics rather than covering topics".

These participants from Group B did not attempt any formal intervention to assist their students' development of research skills yet these are at the very heart of a student's ability to uncover topics. For both, they offered office hours to individuals who required assistance.

While the emphasis on content dissemination is no doubt still prevalent, the statements above may be evidence of the influence of such pedagogical practices as inquiry and problem based learning. This suggests that the perceived lack of time is not as widespread as previous literature has suggested (Hardesty 1995, 352). The findings are perhaps controversial and offer another perspective; one that places content and research skills development as partners and not as competitors for classroom time. The presence of pedagogical support services for faculty since 1989 at the University of Guelph may have had an impact on participants. Group A participants were more likely to demonstrate a familiarity with pedagogical principles and curriculum development than those in Group B.

ii. Preparing for employment

The transferability of research skills to an employment context was a value expressed both directly and indirectly during interviews. This was expressed by participants from across disciplines and particularly for the applied programs such as business and engineering.

"*I think one of the hardest things to do is, assuming that they are either going into industry or academia and actually work in their field, to start learning to do research in a topic that you're not familiar with. And I think really good library skills makes [sic] a difference. It means that you're at least willing to take the plunge into a new area because you know how to look for…information on that. So I think a real comfort level really helps the confidence to develop your own skills kind of thing.*"

Good research skills build confidence and flexibility to tackle the unknown which for this faculty member is a valuable ability in today's economy. This participant explains further.

"*I need them to get to the point where they can say this different subject area is new to me but I'm comfortable learning about it. I'm comfortable with the process of how I'm going to get information about that subject area to learn about it. Not so that I can be an expert but so that I can understand how it's going to impact on the stuff that I already do know.*"

While this participant was from Group B, the participant nonetheless believed that part of their role was to graduate students prepared for employment. There

is a sense of pride for them to know that employers recognize that they graduate students capable of finding information and developing their knowledge in new areas.

Category 2: Student Ability

Most participants observed low research skills among students. This reflected two factors: Internet use over library resources and a misguided assumption that students arrive at university with adequate research skills or develop these in lower year courses. Three participants felt that their students have adequate or good research skills, which will be discussed later.

Sub-categories:

i. Gap in Education.

Participants expressed students' preparedness to do post-secondary level research in a variety of ways. There was an understanding that secondary education preparation was both inconsistent and limited. It was at the university level that some observed a failure to equip students with the skills necessary to complete research assignments. As participants identified above, it is one of the primary roles of post-secondary education to further develop students' research skills, yet it is undermined by some pedagogical practices. A librarian-led IL instruction session exposes students to the rigor of university level research assignments.

> "…*their [high school] teachers have taught them to access the Web a lot and so they're used to getting their information from web sites. And so now you tell them 'no you have to go to the primary literature and you have to find something published recently.' That's a lot more difficult for them and [a research skills instruction session] is just a starting point for them over their four years. At some point they have to be introduced to it and we (the specific academic department) do it in first year.*"

It is a sense of responsibility to students and sympathy for students given the difficult task that the research assignment presents, that motivates this participant. They have worked closely with a librarian to integrate research skills into the curriculum of a first year course.

There is a faulty assumption for the next participant that students had acquired the skills in lower level university courses to complete research assignments.

> "*An awareness that this was a gap in their education, which in good conscience I just couldn't overlook which was a major motivator [for enlisting the skills of the liaison librarian]*"

Another participant from Group A describes a practice that contributes to this gap.

> "*I know part of the reason [students' research skills are poor] may be because the material is supplied to them. So for example, [professors] often don't require students to go get their own articles. They give them [the articles] to them [the students] .They don't have to use the Internet or they don't have to physically go to the library. So we do things in some ways that undermine them in our attempts to ensure that they actually read something, you haven't forced them to learn how to use the library.*"

There is a growing concern for these three participants that trends in pedagogical practices in education contribute to a failure to equip students with adequate research skills.

Participants observed a relationship between decreases in the number of Teaching Assistants and the research skills of students. Class size and lack of teaching support often meant that the essay as an evaluation method appeared with less frequency in lower level undergraduate courses.

> "*So unfortunately you end up with students in their third and fourth year who still produce papers with sentence fragments and incomplete clauses because they don't have the opportunity to write at the first and secondary level.*"

This participant (Group B) reflected upon the typical scenario many librarians experience. While he understood factors which produce students who are ill-prepared to complete a research assignment, it was not his responsibility to address this; it was a larger university-wide issue.

ii. Internet Dependence/Low Library Use.

Internet use/misuse remains a concern among faculty. However, in contrast to previous research (Leckie & Fullertson 28), many participants interviewed for this study did discuss the use of the internet in class. This may be a reflection of the age of the Internet and specifically Google which at the time of this study (2004) was already seven years old. It is likely that faculty perceptions are evolving and will continue to do so.

The Internet or Google issue constituted a significant motivation for some participants to assist students' research skills development. Observations of Internet dependence varied. At the extreme, perceived over use of the Internet led this participant to completely ban URL's from citation lists. It should be noted that this study took place in 2004; perceptions may be evolving.

> "…*they can't list their Google searches in the work cited so they're not counted as anything….The Googling is driving me crazy*"

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Their work with a librarian helps direct their students to library resources over Google.

The following participant provides a more enthusiastic and positive result of the impact of Google.

"*Our students aren't intimidated by the fact that they have to go find some stuff. In part that's because Google helps them realize that yes you can go find stuff very rapidly and so they gain skills in finding music or whatever…..so they are going to Google. They do recognize that the Web offers an incredible resource of information and [it] is completely in their mindset.*"

This study finds inconsistencies among participants' sanctioned use of Google. The previous participant's expectation that students will use the Internet reflects their acceptance that URLs will appear in students' bibliographies.
Many participants from Group B lacked detailed strategies for assisting students with use of the Web. The use of the Internet formed a substantial motivator for Group A participants to include a librarian-led IL session to help students develop more sophisticated research skills with regard to the Internet.

Faculty as Academics

Category 1: Benefits to Scholars

Faculty as scholars expressed a desire for students to read published academic work. They hope to draw students into their field of study. They recognize that this requires the skills to search for the information to build knowledge. It is rewarding for faculty to inspire a student to pursue knowledge and to develop their skills to do so independently.

Sub-category:

i. Scholarly Community

Scholarly communication takes place when there are writers and readers. This sub-category acknowledges that the presence of research skills facilitates students' access to scholarly writing through which they become part of the audience for scholars.

"*I'm writing scholarly articles and I'd just like to think that somebody's going to be reading these things, not particularly my students. I don't say you have to read what I've written. I just hope that there [is] some kind of general audience out there that is going to engage with something. It just makes what I'm doing more relevant to me by saying this exists out there and at this level you should be poking around in it a little*"

It is rewarding for this participant to promote student engagement with scholarly literature. They provide a librarian-led instruction session for their students.

ii. Knowledge Discovery

Many of the participants saw research skills as a fundamental component which enables students to encounter a vast and contradictory world of information. This participant (Group A) observed the transformative effect of research skills on students.

> "*No matter how much--information -- instruction that you give them, and I've seen this now several times, that whole thing of trial and error. [It's] that whole thing of recognizing that information is incomplete.*"

They witnessed that students hold a belief that there is a final definitive answer to be found. The librarian-led instruction session supports their goal to provide students with the ability to encounter conflicting ideas, beliefs and theories in their own individual research.

Category 2: Benefits to Students

Researching at progressively advanced levels of scholarship can lead to improved research skills. It has a recursive property; the more one does the better at it one becomes. Participants were able to provide specific accounts of the effect of improved research skills (with or without an IL instruction) on students.

Sub-categories:

i. Sophisticated researcher vs Google-mania

The impact of IL instruction was repeatedly described as causing a fundamental shift in how students approached research. It creates a more sophisticated student in terms of the type of questions they form in order to explore a subject. This participant describes the reflections of a student who had never attended an instruction session.

> "*[The student] had never been to one of these sessions through her whole career. She said she felt like a different species in there [in IL instruction session] from the other students in the room. She said she never heard this stuff. And she said she didn't even know what to ask a librarian.*"

This participant further explained that before attending an IL session, students ask questions such as "what am I supposed to do" whereas after an instruction

session students are more articulate about the help they need. They ask questions such as "can you suggest terms I could be entering [in the database]".

An IL instruction session is understood to alter how a student uses the Internet. From participants' perspectives as academics, there is a greater sophistication with the research process that naturally comes with advanced research skills.

"I really think the commonest experience I have seen of students is going from a kind of Google-maniac where you just Google everything to actually going to a particular websites (such as library databases) that have particular resources."

There is more to the Internet issue that just over-dependence. What this participant is saying, is that students become savvier and begin to be more critical of what they read with improved research skills.

ii. Self-Directed Learners

This is similar to the above subcategories under Pedagogical Goals of faculty as educators however, academics see self-directed learning as a core ability for graduate students. A participant from Group A observed that IL instruction helps students develop the ability to engage in "*more self-directed researching*". It is a building block toward graduate school.

"*By the time someone is a graduate student they really must be doing a lot of secondary material searching and there must be a comfort and facility in using library resources to find things.*"

Comparisons between Participant Groups

Participants, regardless of their use or non-use of librarian-led IL instruction, believed in the need for and the value of research skills. The difference was found to be not in value but in pedagogical practices. Participants of both groups discussed the relative usefulness of research instruction given the nature of the course. This participant explained how IL instruction was not useful where there was high textbook content and low literature content.

"…quite honestly there would be very little contact [in the course] with the literature because they're still learning the basics and there's no point in drawing current literature and current ideas when they haven't yet understood the fundamentals…sort of jargon of the topic."

Non-users of Librarian-Led Library Research Instruction

Generally when participants were asked how they found their students' ability to do research, they observed their students to have inadequate skills. However,

there were three participants in Group B who responded positively about their students' research skills which are described below.

Case #1

This participant saw research and writing skills as an integral part of their role as an educator. In their upper level course (50 students), they prepared "elaborate handouts [explaining] here is what I want the bibliography to look like. This is what in-text citations look like". There wasn't over use and misuse of the Internet by their students, because they discussed appropriate use and evaluation of Internet sources. They ensured that students knew "some of the scholarly sources [for anthropology] and what a scholarly source is [such as] a book or a journal published by a reputable press". Sometimes they provided workshops (outside regular class time) on specific topics such as writing style. Their students possessed the ability to do research well because they equipped them with the tools.

Case #2

This participant's discipline (philosophy) focuses on primary texts to the exclusion of secondary literature. Where secondary material was required for the course, the instructor provided a selected bibliography. Research skills were not considered necessary until graduate work. Indeed, consultation of secondary sources was discouraged.

> *"So learning to do that (read primary texts)…the patience and skill and secondary sources in some way can be a liability in that they might be looking to them as a sort of crib to guide them through the original source. What you really want is for them is to do the reading and try to figure out what's going on in the source".*

Case #3

This participant did not report that students experienced difficulties with research assignments. With further exploration, they explained that students are too busy to do research. Most of what they need is on reserve in the library.

> *"…they [students] don't have time to spend three weeks looking for references….Some of the references I have on permanent reserve – it's not exhaustive one but it's pretty good. You've [the library] got sixty some odd journal articles and books."*

Students' research skills were sacrificed for the higher concern placed on the product and the elimination of plagiarism. This might be considered a strategy which circumvents the need for research skills instruction entirely.

While most of what students need is on reserve, this participant further observed that:

> "*Often times [students] really need that one starting source....so I say start with this (item on reserve) and look at the bibliography. Often times it's just critical that you get a first (source). It just cracks [the subject area] open.*"

Differences Between Groups

A general difference between the two participant groups was not found in their motivation to assist students with research skills but rather the manner in which they chose to address the issue. Five of seven participants from Group B described various approaches from one-on-one meetings with students to in class instruction.

> "*…in my first year course [I] do an online demonstration in class of using the journal article indexes (databases) so that they can see how it is that you can go…find social science full text article and these are the kind of terms that you can include and this is what journal articles are and so on*".

Participants from Group A were more accustomed to pedagogical methods than Group B. Some participants in Group B also used course reserve (as described above) or bibliographies of recommended sources (not included in course readings) to help students find resources.

Summary

This study begins to uncover what rewards faculty derive from, and what goals are achieved in, their role as educators and academics with the development of students' research skills. The participants discussed how research skills intersect with their investment in their discipline, their desire to impart that knowledge to their students and create both readers and scholars of their discipline. Among the notable findings of this study was the discovery that participants in Group B were found to be making attempts to address their students' research skills. Participants from either group did so because they recognized students' needs and for some they also believed it to be part of their role as educators. The awareness of pedagogical practices to improve student learning presented by the participants of this study may represent a cultural shift among faculty with a greater focus on their roles as educators.

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