

A View of Faculty Library Use and Perception From an Organizational Culture Lens

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Abstract: This study investigated faculty library demand from an organizational culture perspective at one college where annual requests for library instruction are received from a mere six percent of faculty. Analysis of survey data revealed a statistically significant difference in academic discipline assignment of library research, with the English-Humanities faculty group far exceeding all other faculty groups including the Social Sciences.

Very low faculty demand for library instructional services, combined with years of professional reading about poor relationships between faculty and librarians, prompted the researcher to investigate the nature of faculty library demand at her institution. At the researcher's campus, there are 400 faculty (full and part time), and student enrollment in the range of 20,000 headcount. Yet, only 28 faculty members, representing seven percent of total faculty, scheduled library instructional sessions in the fall 2002 term. In the following term, only 24 faculty, six percent, did so. In the Fall 2003 term, 24 faculty members requested instruction--again, only six percent of the faculty at the campus.

This dismal figure is mirrored in the library science literature. It is a national problem and study of the author's college may provide far-reaching insight for librarians. Librarians perceive an awkward, tenuous partnership with faculty (Feldman & Sciamarella, 2000; Hardesty, 1995). Although many in the academic community believe the library has intrinsic value, saying it is the heart of the college (Farber, 1999), the majority of students do not use libraries for research unless their professors require it (Baker, 1996; King & Ory, 1982). Therefore, an understanding of faculty library use (demand) is essential knowledge for the academic library profession.

Faculty Library Demand

Faculty library demand is defined as either of the following: (a) faculty requests for library research instruction taught by librarians or (b) faculty assignment of projects that require research skills or scholarly materials which the interaction between librarian and student facilitates (Baker, 1996). The phrase faculty library demand is used interchangeably in this paper with faculty library use, faculty library engagement, and faculty library involvement.

Faculty library demand can be direct or indirect. Examples of direct use include requiring library instructional workshops for students and collaborating with librarians on assignment effectiveness. Indirect use could take the form of a faculty member making an assignment that requires library based research without informing or consulting with librarians. Librarians, therefore, do not always understand all facets of the assignment or the faculty's intention. Librarians do not always know, for example, whether the purpose of the assignment was to use scholarly rather than popular materials to complete the assignment. Faculty may send their students to the library without consulting the catalog or indexing tools to learn if materials are housed in or accessible from the library, causing students to expect materials to be available on

site when they may not be, and must be requested through the more time consuming interlibrary loan process.

Organizational Culture

Organizational culture research was the lens the researcher chose to view dimensions of faculty library demand. Organizational culture as described by Schein (1992) helps explain the behavior of people within their organizations. Briefly stated, Schein (1992) defines organizational culture as “those elements of a group or organization that are most stable and least malleable” (p. 5) and “the idea that certain things in groups are shared or held in common” (p. 8). The concept is multi-faceted, including observed behavioral regularities in groups, such as the language they use, the customs and traditions that evolve, and the rituals they employ in a wide variety of situations. Organizational culture analysis is possible, Schein said, by focusing on “the encountering and deciphering of shared basic assumptions” (p. 7) and noting the physical layout of the organization, member interactions, and special competencies of groups. All of these cultural dimensions may be passed on from generation to generation as unwritten rules.

Organizational culture is represented by symbols of organizational identity. These include logos, slogans, advertising campaigns, and physical appearance of buildings and facilities; myths (such as stories of founders/leaders and historic successes); rituals (outings, celebrations, annual reviews, and strategic plans); jargon (frequently used terms and phrases); dominant styles of dress, décor, and lifestyle; prevailing practices such as emphasis on teamwork, and work styles such as long hours (Harrison, 2005). Organizational culture is a holistic concept which purports that the meaning of events and behavior cannot be completely appreciated if separated from the institution in which they occur (Kuh & Witt, 1988).

Becher (1989) and Kuh & Witt (1988) provide us with faculty subculture research. Becher describes college faculty as academic tribes, noting their indoctrination in graduate school to the languages and behaviors of their fields. Kuh & Witt (1988) write about the web that connects people within colleges, devoting attention to identifying the characteristics of faculty subcultures. Faculty subculture refers to the commonalities of faculty behaviors and attitudes within disciplines or departments, which is distinct from the larger faculty culture of the institution. Faculty subculture characteristics, particularly along disciplinary lines, were expected to be significant factors in the elucidation of low faculty library demand at the college. Faculty subcultures refer to norms that set a faculty group apart from, not those that integrate them with, the organizational whole. Sub cultural norms, as contrasted with organizational norms, may be unknown to, looked down upon, or thought of as separating forces by the other members of the society, in this case, the college. Faculty groups may be quite distinct from other faculty groups in their assumptions and beliefs and interpretations of events. The distinctions among subcultures might be made on the basis of time (if the subculture persisted through a number of years), origin (social or physical segregation, occupational specialization, and other sources), and by the mode of relationship to the surrounding culture (from indifference to conflict [Yinger, 1970]).

Library Demand and Organizational Culture: The Connection

Hardesty (1984) found that the only significant factor to explain differences in library use and perception by faculty was the organizational culture of the institution. Hardesty studied four upper level institutions and found that small Earlham College had developed a strong library: faculty culture primarily through the efforts of one extraordinary librarian and scholar named Evan Farber.

It was the author’s purpose to build on Hardesty (1984) and Baker (1996) in seeking dimensions of organizational culture in the predominantly community college that affect the

library use decision by faculty users as well as faculty non-users. To the researcher's knowledge, no such study has been completed before.

Significance of the Study

Four areas of significance were addressed by the study: (a) description of the types and frequency of direct and indirect faculty use of the community college library, (b) insight into faculty cultures at the community college, (c) research on the community college itself, rather than upper level institutions, and (d) recommendations to improve the relationship between the library and the faculty. The study of community college libraries and faculty use of them is extremely limited. Also, faculty cultures in the community college have rarely been described in the literature. Most academic library research is centered on the 4-year college or research university library; however, the community college environment is distinct from the 4-year institution. The focus on developmental studies and the academically under-prepared students who fill these classes is one huge difference. Cohen & Brawer (1996) note many characteristics of the community college that distinguish it from the university: high numbers of part time faculty; the heavy teaching load; and, the absence of publication expectations. Community colleges have evolved from junior colleges in the early 1900s with a strong emphasis on academics into complex institutions with a broad array of education, social, and economic functions (Bailey & Averianova, 1999).

This study attempts to fill a gap in the literature. There are few studies on faculty use of the library in the community college. This researcher follows a similar research path as Baker (1996) and Feldman & Sciamarella (2000); neither researcher, however, relied on organizational culture as a theoretical framework. Hardesty (1995) broke ground on how the subculture of classroom faculty in the 4-year institution is related to library involvement. Gawreluck (1993) and Trotter (1999) concentrate on the organizational culture of the community college but exclude the library.

Baker (1996) recommended "a multi-methodological investigation of the attitudes of faculty who are *not* [italics added] making library assignments" in community colleges (p. 122). This researcher has done just that. Baker's sample included only community college faculty who had demonstrated frequent use of the library, but the current study included faculty with various levels of engagement. One of Gawreluck's (1993) concluding recommendations was "an examination of the cultural characteristics and impact of...formal group cultures on the organization's culture" (p. 336). This researcher follows Gawreluck's lead in examining the cultural influence on faculty, deriving from disciplinary subcultures, on library use.

Research Questions

The following four questions were addressed by the study. In what ways and how often do faculty at one community college use their campus library? How do faculty rate the teaching and reference effectiveness of the college librarians? How do faculty rate the college library collections? How do faculty describe the usefulness of library research as compared to free Internet research? How is faculty library use influenced by the culture of their academic discipline? How is faculty library use influenced by the culture of the campus? How is faculty library use influenced by the culture of the college?

Method

The Research Site

The research site is one of the largest colleges in the United States, composed of six campuses, and enrolling well over 100,000 students. The college boasts several '#1 in the country' facts. For example, it graduates the most students with Associate Degrees and the most

Hispanic students in the United States. Academic offerings include certificate programs, Associate degrees, and the Bachelor's degree in education. The college has been a two year community college for more than forty years. Recently, it began to offer a select number of Bachelor's degrees in Education, subsequently changing its name from "community college" to college. The college's library collections are at the community college level of collecting. The libraries do not have the budgets or staff to emulate an upper level institution library.

Design and Instrumentation

When completed, the study will have employed a mixed-method approach in the sequential QUAN-QUAL design described by Tashakkori & Teddlie (1998). This manuscript describes the first quantitative phase of the data. At the time of this writing, the second, qualitative data collection and analysis was not complete. First, a researcher-designed questionnaire was piloted among five full time faculty, including one librarian, at one campus. All faculty in the pilot study confirmed that it took less than 20 minutes to complete the survey. A number of edits were made, and the questionnaire was deemed ready for distribution as soon as the Institutional Research Committee approved the study. This approval was necessary because the instrument was to be distributed among all six campuses and several outreach centers. It is the College's policy that the Institutional Research Committee must approve the study when all of the campuses and centers are involved.

Once that committee approved the study, distribution of the survey was accomplished via campus mail to a random sample of 247 full-time faculty at the college. Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size table was used to arrive at the sample number of 247. Baker's (1996) survey was used, with permission from him, for several survey items.

It was decided to limit the participants to full-time faculty for several reasons. Full-time faculty are more easily identified due to the publication of their names on the college's website, in a Seniority List. Also, they are included in the college's email and phone directories by name, phone, and department. Inclusion of part time faculty in the college directories is sporadic. Also, part time faculty have a high turnover rate. It would have been more difficult to reach them for follow up for the second interview phase of the study if they had discontinued employment at the college.

The list of the names of all full time faculty at the college, posted on the college's website, was copied to an Excel spreadsheet program. The researcher added the departments and phone numbers for each person. The online list of full time faculty was provided by the Human Resources office at the college.

The first section of the questionnaire sought demographic and educational background data from the respondents, as well as indicators of frequency and type of use of the library. The next section used a Likert scale for responses; items pertained to perceptions of the library's collection and librarians' teaching as related to the faculty member's discipline, items related to the faculty member's teaching methods, perception of student academic readiness to use the library, and departmental norms in relation to the library. On teaching methods, several survey items addressed the faculty member's concentration on the course textbook. An example of a survey item on the value of the library for the faculty member's academic discipline: "It is important that faculty in my field make graded assignments to motivate students to use the library." One survey item pertaining to departmental norms was, "I talk about the campus library with faculty colleagues in my department." Several open-ended questions at the conclusion of the questionnaire allowed respondents to comment on the assignment(s) they used to incorporate

library research into their courses and scenarios of positive or negative experiences associated with the library.

In an effort to achieve a desirable response after the initial mailing in March, 2005 (Fowler, 1993, recommends 75%), the researcher followed with another mailing one month later. Only 19% of recipients had responded in the first mailing. The timing was not ideal, as the second mailing occurred at the end of the spring term. Most faculty take a six week leave in the first or second summer session, so it was decided to wait until the beginning of the fall term to follow up again. Thirty-five percent of surveys were received by the end of the second mailing.

During the fall term, the researcher began to solicit response by talking to people. Several participants were approached face to face and received a “yes, I’ll do it” response. It was determined by the researcher that this method was very time consuming. She then created a phone mail distribution list and sent a phone message to faculty asking for their help in completing the survey.

The final follow-up strategy used in the fall term was an online survey using the software program Flashlight Online (2005). The college provided the researcher with an account to utilize this college owned program after she learned that the participants could be identified by an ID number in the program and that the confidentiality of the responses could be assured. The electronic version of the survey was sent to about two-thirds of faculty, following a traditional mailing to one-third early in the fall term.

After all of these efforts, 126 surveys were received, representing a response rate of 51% of the original sample. The researcher, in consultation with the dissertation committee, was permitted to move forward to analyze the quantitative data at this point for several reasons. Faculty apathy was part of the problem being studied; it was not unexpected that a high response rate would be difficult to achieve. Also, the respondents were deemed to be representative of the total faculty population because of the broad disciplinary representation, 105 identified academic areas, and the large number of respondents who were low or non-users of the library.

Results

Initial data analysis showed that faculty college-wide reported higher library instructional session use (20 percent regular, or per semester, use) than the six to seven percent rate at the researcher’s campus. Analysis by campus showed similar results to those at the researcher’s campus. About 25% at each campus reported regular or occasional use. Even at the researcher’s campus, where records have been kept verifying the six percent scheduling rate, the faculty reported on the survey a 25% library instruction request rate. Factors that may contribute to this difference are: (a) faculty are over-reporting their actual library instruction requests and (b) faculty who chose to respond to the survey used library instructional sessions at a higher rate than non-respondents. English and Humanities faculty made library related assignments to a significantly higher degree than any other discipline group. It is expected that in-depth interviews of faculty in the hard sciences will reveal insights as to why they appear to be estranged from the library.

On the role and effectiveness of librarians, data gleaned from this study revealed an interesting dichotomy. As to the need of librarians to teach research in the academic field of the faculty member, 38% of faculty agreed. Yet, on whether the guidance of librarians in teaching students about research in general is essential, 95% of faculty agreed.

Survey results reflect faculty approval of the librarians’ teaching skills but not of the libraries’ budgets or collections. Some faculty rated the libraries collections as poor but also stated they never used the libraries. Myth, an important element of the culture of the institution,

may be at work. Further investigation in the qualitative phase will serve to triangulate the data and elicit the implications for practice and future research.

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