Researchers say the darndest things!
Using semi-structured interviews to uncover the unique information behaviors of basic sciences researchers in an academic health center.

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Who? Basic science researchers
What? Information-seeking behavior
Where? College of Medicine, University of Vermont
How? A qualitative study using semi-structured interviews
Why? A research team was created to examine the unique information-seeking characteristics of basic sciences researchers, with the ultimate goal of designing a suite of library services that would better meet their needs.

Searching Information Resources

- “Google gives you so much information that it’s hard to pull out the good stuff.”
- “You’ll find a couple of publications that are exactly what you want and use them to find references.”
- “I like Wikipedia, not that it’s necessarily authenticated per se, but it has a lot of general information.”

- “PubMed. We use it all the time, every day, for 99.9% of our research.”
- “Our topic is so specific that I don’t get a lot of junk even with plain Google.”
- “I actually use PubMed very seldom.”
- “I am particular about only citing primary references when I can.”

How they keep up to date...

- “Badly… it’s kind of sporadic… I’ll go and check out what’s been published in the last couple of months.”
- “I have a robot set up through the UVM Biodesktop. It searches the literature, and it sends me a list of the titles of about 100 papers per week.”

Potential Library Services

- “I think it’s good for an institution to know what’s happening inside its doors. It’s a good recruitment tool.”
- “That’s a great way of finding out what someone else is doing.”
- “I actually use PubMed very seldom.”
- “I’m embarrassed to say this is the first time I’ve set foot in here.”

Work Environment

- “The other way [of keeping up to date] is just by talking to people on the phone.”
- “I have passwords from several universities. That’s what everyone does. For my PhD, if I needed a paper, I would send out a mass email and people would send it to you.”

- “[Grad students] get most of the information from other people in the lab or from other grad students in the department, and each department is so different in what their needs are.”

Lack of Centralization on Campus

- “It’s a shame. For whatever reason, it’s really two different campuses [the College of Medicine and the rest of UVM] and they don’t really share things and I don’t know why.”
- “I’ll go to a poster session and find that somebody is sending something out to be done and it’s costing 10 times more than we [a UVM CORE facility] would charge to do the same thing, and we do it faster. They didn’t know we existed!” [laughs]
- “I’ve been here 19 years and every year goes by I know fewer and fewer people doing research around here.”

Practical Implications for Dana Library

Try to...
- Communicate through administrative assistants
- Use both email and print flyers to communicate
- Pursue an institutional repository
- Offer courses in advanced searching and EndNote to graduate students

Avoid...
- Promoting literature searching services to this group, as they tend to do their own searching
- Offering alerting services; most keep up to date just fine through conventional and unconventional ways
- Marketing classes by just using the database name; instead, explain its usefulness and put it in context

Current Library Services

- “I go straight to the person at the desk, rather than walking around the library looking for something.”
- “I’m embarrassed to say this is the first time I’ve set foot in here.”

Communication Preferences

- “Email. Email is always best.”
- “What works best for me is a print flyer that I’d receive in my mailbox. I’m much more likely to read that than an email.”

Workshops & Classes

- “I tend to be more a self-taught person, so when it comes to learning … I pretty much teach myself.”
- “There are probably a lot of databases that I never use, but don’t know that I need them, so I wouldn’t think of going to a class about them.”

Institutional Repository

- “It’s from crazy, but as far as we can tell, the institution doesn’t have a list [of Grand Rounds] like that. Having all of that in one place and having the Library being in charge of it, that would be nice.”
- “Often you’re working with collaborators here on campus and you want to be able to figure out what they’re doing.”

Centralized List of Scholarly Activities

- “That’s a great way of finding out what someone else is doing.”
- “It’s sort of crazy, but as far as we can tell, the institution doesn’t have a list of Grand Rounds like that. Having all of that in one place and having the Library being in charge of it, that would be nice.”