

Researching Your Way Out of a Paper Bag:

Supporting Research Interests in an Academic Library

Jennifer Brannock, Special Collections Librarian

Miao Jin, Catalog Librarian

Tisha Zelner, Information Services Librarian

University Libraries, University of Southern Mississippi

Conference Abstract: The Research Work Group at the University of Southern Mississippi was established to assist tenure track librarians with their research needs. This poster session displays the different kinds of information available to librarians relating to scholarly research, finding publishing venues, or writing grants which address institutional needs.

Introduction

To the typical undergraduate, library research means the process of finding information using the library's resources. But, to a tenure-track academic librarian, research may also have an entirely different meaning; research is one of three areas in which faculty must achieve success in order to be awarded promotion and tenure. The Association of College and Research Libraries ([Association of College and Research Libraries](#) 2002) adopted the ACRL Standards for Faculty Status of College and University Librarians in 1971. Librarians at the University of Southern Mississippi (USM) have had faculty status for over twenty years. Along with faculty rank and status come the tenure and promotion requirements in the three areas of job performance, research, and service. While a masters degree in library and information science should prepare one to achieve success in the performance of one's duties as a librarian, such education often does not prepare one to be successful in the area of research and scholarship. To address the desire for greater support in this area, the creation of a Research Work Group (RWG) at the USM Libraries was suggested during a library faculty retreat in June 2004. This article describes the founding and first eighteen months of activity of the Research Work Group at the University of Southern Mississippi.

The Research Work Group

The RWG was established in September 2004 and was initially composed of six library faculty members who expressed an interest in mentoring the research of other library faculty. Miller and others ([1976](#), 22) wrote in the *Journal of Academic Librarianship* that the Advisory Committee on Research at the Ohio State University Libraries was “unable to locate information on research committees at other university libraries.” Thirty years later, there is still little published information available about this specific topic. The RWG at USM is loosely based on the model described by Tamera Lee ([1995](#)) in her article, “The Library Research Committee: It Has the Money and the Time.” The official purpose of USM’s Research Work Group is to “promote research within the University of Southern Mississippi Libraries by creating awareness of alternate funding opportunities and new technologies, in addition to fostering collaboration between the Libraries and other groups within the University community” ([University Libraries](#) n.d.). The RWG began with many ideas of what it could accomplish, so its first task was to establish priorities and set some specific goals.

RESEARCH Checklist

- **R**ecruit committee members
- **E**nlist support of library administration to establish library research work group
- **S**urvey library faculty to identify research needs
- **E**ducate library faculty about support available from the research work group
- **A**ctivate an electronic mailing list to announce grant, publication, and other opportunities
- **R**ound-up existing resources to support research activities
- **C**reate new resources to facilitate scholarly pursuits of librarians
- **H**ost event to promote scholarship of library faculty to the wider university community

Accomplishments

Immediately after formation of the RWG, its members decided to perform an inventory of the academic backgrounds and research interests of the libraries’ faculty. Since conducting a survey is an effective way to identify

characteristics of a group, the RWG designed and conducted a survey of all library faculty working at the USM libraries. The survey consisted of fourteen questions, including eight closed-ended questions and six open-ended questions. The response rate for the survey was 100%. After analyzing data from the survey, the RWG became more aware of the kinds of support it could offer to library faculty.

Based on the survey results, the RWG created a Web site to provide resources in support of library faculty research. This Web site is part of the University Libraries' internal Web site. The site provides information on library awards, grants, and publishing opportunities, as well as some grant writing resources and grant application procedures. The RWG also started an electronic mailing list to facilitate the sharing of scholarly opportunities among library faculty. The e-mail list has been very active since its inception and has become an effective communication tool for library faculty to exchange and share research-related information such as calls for papers or participation in programs.

In the survey, a few library faculty expressed their frustration with preparing grant applications. To address this concern, the RWG decided to act as a moderating forum for library faculty in their grant writing and application processes. The RWG reviews the proposals to gauge the feasibility of the project and determine what funding may be needed from the libraries or external university resources.

In order to offer research assistance to library faculty, the members of the RWG realized the importance of improving their own research skills. As one effort toward this end, four RWG members attended a SOLINET workshop to learn how to use SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) to perform data analysis on survey results. The RWG also collaborates with the Library Professional Development Series coordinator, who schedules continuing education workshops, to schedule programs that focus on research skills.

The RWG also took steps to collaborate with other research faculty on campus. The chair of RWG serves as the University Libraries' representative to the University Research Council. This participation creates an opportunity to make valuable contacts with research and academic faculty throughout the university and to look into the efforts of the departmental research work groups found in each college. To date, the

Department of Geography and Geology has expressed interest in collaborating on a grant proposal to organize and catalog a map collection. Preliminary steps produced a small grant to assess the preservation needs of special collections in general and the historical map collection in particular. The RWG hopes to identify more opportunities for scholarly collaboration between library faculty and other university faculty.

Future Plans

Every year the University Research Council at USM hosts LETTERS Day. LETTERS, an acronym for Lives Enriched Through Their Endeavors: Research and Scholarship, is a daylong event that celebrates outstanding researchers, performers, and scholars among the faculty at USM. Exceptional faculty members receive awards in the areas of creative activity, academic partnerships, basic research, and applied research. The winners have to present papers on their research to the university community. In addition to lectures by LETTERS Day award winners, three of the five academic colleges host a series of faculty presentations that highlight the research of the professors. Since the University Libraries is not a member of an academic college, librarians have previously not had the opportunity to illustrate their research on LETTERS Day. The RWG plans on hosting a Library Research Forum in conjunction with LETTERS Day to offer library faculty the opportunity to give presentations that focus on their research. The library research forum will provide a venue to remind others of librarians' faculty status, as well as showcase the research interests of the librarians.

To assist librarians with research and publication, the RWG hopes to open a research lab. The purpose of the lab is to provide a quiet space where librarians can work on research projects, poster sessions, grants, and dossier preparation without being disturbed by e-mail or phone calls. The lab will have a small collection of books and other resources about grant writing, research, statistical analysis, tenure dossier preparation, and other topics relevant to library research. An interest has been expressed in various software programs that may be necessary for research projects and presentations, but are not part of a librarian's day-to-day software needs. In response, a computer with software for publishing, statistical analysis, and graphic design will be provided in the research lab. By providing tools such as this, as a tangible form of support for the research

activities of librarians , the RWG hopes to advance the quality and quantity of the scholarship produced by the library faculty.

Conclusion

Research is an important aspect of the careers of tenure-track librarians. The creation of the Research Work Group at the University of Southern Mississippi is the first step in supporting and publicizing the research interests of library faculty. With the resources created and provided by the group, the librarians have the support needed to effectively tackle their research activities.

References

- Association of College and Research Libraries. 2002. "Guidelines for Academic Status for College and University Librarians," American Library Association, <http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlstandards/guidelinesacademic.htm> (accessed April 27, 2006).
- Lee, Tamera P. 1995. "The Library Research Committee: It Has the Money and the Time," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 21(2): 111-115.
- Miller, Susan, et al. 1976. "To Be or Not To Be: an Academic Library Research Committee," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 2(1): 22.
- University Libraries, "USM Libraries Research Work Group Home," University of Southern Mississippi, <http://www.lib.usm.edu/internal/nuke/html/modules.php?name=Content&pa=showpage&pid=55> (accessed April 27, 2006).
-

Further Readings

Creswell, John W. *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research* (Upper Saddle River: Merrill Prentice Hall, 2002), 395.

Faculty Senate, "Resolution on Faculty Status, Rank, and Tenure for Librarians," University of Southern Mississippi, <http://www.usm.edu/fsenate/resolutions/reslibrarians03.htm> (accessed April 27, 2006).