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How do you do? Understanding the everyday life of researchers in order to support their research: Library collaboration and partnership with researchers at Lund University

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Abstract LILAC 2013

How do you do? Understanding the everyday life of researchers in order to support their research

Library collaboration and partnership with researchers at Lund University

This paper presents a project at Lund University Libraries (LUB), Sweden, with the object to identify areas where the present support services ought to be developed and strengthened. The project is built upon the idea that if libraries are to offer relevant research support services, the librarians must collaborate with researchers in order to understand their needs and wishes in relation to their research processes. Only then can librarians understand the context in which the researchers are developing their skills and creating knowledge; only then can librarians be partners in the researchers' efforts to start and end every research project as successfully as possible.

A three folded project design was used: a) a literature review focusing on definitions and examples of research support services as well as researchers needs and experiences of support services, b) a survey to get an overview of the support services offered today at LUB, the decentralized library network at Lund University, and c) focus group interviews with researchers to investigate key obstacles in their research processes.

Seven faculties participated in the project and at each faculty, focus group interviews where performed during the autumn of 2012. The research process was schematically divided into four phases; to start a project, to collect material, to process/ analyze / write and to communicate the results. The researchers were, in a focus group setting with 4 or 5 other researchers from the same faculty, asked to discuss how they work in the different stages of their research processes and to give examples of obstacles that they experience. In order to go beyond traditional notions of what libraries offer or can offer, the researchers where asked not to evaluate the services that already exist but to focus on their everyday life as researchers. The choice of focus group interviews as method gave added value as for researchers to get together and discuss everyday yet important issues with others.

The first two stages of the project, the literature overview and the survey, form a background and both show that much support services are concentrated around the phases; to collect material and to communicate results. The findings from the focus group interviews point to common as well as special needs and issues. What researchers have in common is limited time, need of funding and the everyday fragmentation. They talk about networks, information overload and the need of organization. And this is their everyday life in which we must find our way to work together. The project gives us a direction in which we should address our research support services but it also generates a model for how librarians can work in order to get to know their research community and to create networks and partnerships for the future.

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