

Participation in a large-scale study to evaluate agricultural research support services

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The Project

Ithaka S+R's Research Support Services program, which "is designed to help libraries re-imagine their services for scholars on a discipline-by-discipline basis." Ithaka S+R is a not-for-profit organization that partners with academic libraries to help them gather evidence, via surveys and other research methods, to improve library services and strategic planning.

Ithaka S+R is currently doing a series of studies to determine researcher support needs in various disciplines, such as religious studies, chemistry, and public health. We participated in their agricultural study, which aimed to learn about agricultural researchers' research focus, research methods and publishing practices. The data that we collected will be collated with 18 other institutions and will be published in a large report.

The Participants



The Training

Teams from all participating institutions were required to attend:

- A one-hour webinar on sampling methods and project recruitment
- A two-day in-person training covering interviewing, coding, and analysis.

The Process



Interviews

- Approved via IRB on February 17, 2016
- We interviewed 16 people across 10 departments in the College of Food Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences.
- Interviews lasted ~1 hour and were conducted in participants' offices or labs.
- We recorded researchers' thoughts on their research focus, research methods, and publishing practices.
- We photographed items of interest in participants' offices and labs to use in our local reports.

Transcription

All participants were responsible for getting their interviews transcribed. We hired a transcription service (audiotranscription.org). Other participants hired services, did the transcriptions themselves, or enlisted graduate students.

Coding

Who	Current research focus	Research methods	Kinds of data	Locating primary/secondary source materials	Challenges in process of conducting research	Keeping up with trends in field
Researcher 1						
Researcher 2						
Researcher 3						
Researcher 4						
Researcher 5						
Researcher 6						
Researcher 7						
Researcher 8						
Researcher 9						
Researcher 10						
Researcher 11						
Researcher 12						

Preliminary Findings

- Marked differences between where researchers are in their career and how they feel about data sharing.
- Majority of researchers see themselves as working across disciplines.
- Big differences between departments/type of research and whether researchers' felt they had adequate funding.
- Major challenges facing agricultural research in the future:
 - Food and water security
 - Not enough funding
 - Difficult to find grant funding outside of specific issues

Our Experiences:

Benefits:

- Being part of a large-scale study that would be difficult to maneuver on our own.
- Networking across institutions.
- Talking to researchers in-depth about topics that would never come up in casual conversation.

Challenges:

- Lack of control over interview questions, definition of agriculture, and research scope.
- Adhering to someone else's timeline.
- Waiting for transcripts.
- Recruitment (wound up with more full-professors)
- Sponsoring group didn't have in-depth knowledge of agricultural research.