

Interviewing scientists for their library and information needs

Jeffery Loo
jloo@berkeley.edu
April 16, 2010

Research questions

For scientific researchers:

- What are their best practices for information activities in scientific research?
- What are their library and information needs for scientific research objectives?
- What are their requests for novel library services?

Action research goals:

- Explain libraries' potential in facilitating scientific research.
- Continue the dialogue with the participant into the future.

Methodology

- Exploratory study to identify themes for future testing and quantitative surveying.
- Semi-structured qualitative interviews lasting 30+ minutes.

Participant recruitment

Snowball sampling - begin with a few known contacts and then ask for their contacts we could interview. See Appendix 1 for sample recruitment email and Appendix 2 for confirmation of appointment setup.

Guiding principles for the protocol

- Start with happy thoughts. Use positive psychology to foster discussion.
- Cast a wide net. Try to understand scientists' general needs for a broad range of information activities, and then future studies will focus, focus, focus on these exploratory findings.
- Ask a small number of open-ended questions. Let the participant guide the discussion, and hopefully, this may alleviate participants' anxiety and boredom.
- Prevent non-response by providing prompts.

Interview protocol

Protocol summary

Show the participant the concept map of information activities in scientific research (<http://www.jeffloo.com/stuff/2010/summary-sria.pdf>). Participants evaluate these activities and then share their thoughts on best practices, information needs, and library services.

Preparation

- Send a confirmation of the interview appointment (see Appendix 2). This note provides optional instructions for the participant's preparation.
- Study the participant's CV and identify talking points for casual conversation.
- Near the interview date, send a friendly reminder of the appointment (see Appendix 3).

Introductions

- Provide compensation to participant (e.g., meet over coffee, library swag).
- Introduce myself (e.g., provide business card, give supervisor's contact details, explain my position in the library).
- Explain research purpose.
 - "The purpose of this research is:
 - to identify best practices for information activities in scientific research, and
 - to identify the library and information needs of scientists."
- Explain how the results will be used.
 - "We hope the results will help us to:
 - identify what the library could do to further help scientists in their research
 - learn from you (the participant) of novel and emerging ways of managing scientific information".
- Explain that our discussion will be reported in an anonymous fashion. The participant will be de-identified in all reports.
- Prompt participants to introduce themselves (e.g., I am interested in your work with ...).

Questions

- Explain the concept map of scientific research objectives and their associated information activities, services, and support.
- Ask the following questions. Tell participants to discuss those issues that stand out to them - they do not need to address every issue.

Research goal	Questions asked
Identify best practices for information activities in scientific research.	(1.1) Please checkmark the objectives and activities that you find easy to accomplish, works well, or you feel confident about.
Identify library and information needs for science research objectives.	(1.2) Please circle the objectives and activities that you find unnecessarily complicated.
Understand best practices for information activities in scientific research.	For those objectives and activities that you find easy to accomplish, works well, or you feel confident about: (2.1) What are you doing to make these objectives and activities be positive experiences? (2.2) For these activities, what advice can you give to other researchers?

<p>Understand library and information needs for science research objectives.</p>	<p>For those objectives and activities that you find unnecessarily complicated:</p> <p>(3.1) What is complicated about these objectives and activities?</p> <p>(3.2) For these activities, what services or technologies would be helpful?</p>
<p>Identify requests for library services.</p>	<p>(4) Do you have any thoughts about new ways the library could facilitate your information activities?</p>
<p>Explain libraries' potential in facilitating scientific research.</p> <p>Continue the dialogue with the participant into the future.</p>	<p>(5) Any questions about this research or the library?</p>

Conclusion

- Ask for further comments.
- Review highlights of the discussion and summarize what the Library has learned from this interview.
- Thank participant for their time and insight.

Data collection and analysis

Bring a laptop and take notes. During relevant discussion, try to transcribe the conversation.

For each research goal, outline themes and representative comments from the discussion.

References

** concept map design based on Maplas and Erway (2009)

** concept map content includes ideas from the following resources

Hemminger, B. M., Lu, D., Vaughan, K. T. L., & Adams, S. J. (2007). Information seeking behavior of academic scientists. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 58(14), 2205-2225. doi:10.1002/asi.20686

Maplas, C., & Erway, R. (2009). Scholarly information practices in the online environment: Implications for shared library service frameworks. Retrieved 3/29, 2010, from <http://www.slideshare.net/RLGPrograms/scholarly-information-practices-in-the-online-environment>

Palmer, C. L., & Cragin, M. H. (2008). Scholarship and disciplinary practices. In B. Cronin (Ed.), *Annual review of information science and technology* (pp. 165-212). Medford, NJ: Information Today, Inc.

Palmer, C. L., Tefteau, L. C. & Pirmann, C. M. (2009). Scholarly information practices in the online environment: Themes from the literature and implications for library service

development. Retrieved 3/29, 2010, from <http://www.oclc.org/research/publications/library/2009/2009-02.pdf>

Sonnenwald, D. H. (2007). Scientific collaboration. In B. Cronin (Ed.), *Annual review of information science and technology* (pp. 643-681). Medford, NJ: Information Today, Inc.

Appendix 1: Recruitment email

Subject: Pilot study on scientists' information needs - request for participation

Dear _____,

My name is _____, and I am the _____. I am writing because I hope you may participate in a Library research study.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

+++++

The purpose of this research is:

- (a) to identify best practices for information activities in scientific research, and
- (b) to identify the library and information needs of scientists.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IN THIS STUDY?

+++++

You will spend approximately 30 minutes to:

- (1) review a framework of information activities in scientific research
- (2) discuss your thoughts and impressions about the information needs and activities of scientists

This study employs an interview. This is an in-person conversation where <co-interviewer name ____> and I ask you questions and then take notes of your responses and reactions.

Unfortunately, we are unable to offer compensation other than the opportunity to share your thoughts on information services for scientists.

RIGHTS

+++++

There is no obligation to participate in this study. If you agree to participate, your privacy will be protected at all times. There are no anticipated risks or discomfort involved, and you may decide to end your participation at any time.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO PARTICIPATE

+++++

That is great! We could meet for an interview at your lab or at _____. Here are some suggested meeting times:

- <date and time>

Are you free at one of these times? If not, we could schedule an appointment to your convenience.

Please email me for any questions or to make further arrangements.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Jeffery Loo

Appendix 2: Confirmation of interview appointment

Dear _____

Thank you very much for your interest. <We> look forward to meeting you at <date and time>.

Take care,
Jeff

(OPTIONAL) PREPARATION FOR THE STUDY

+++++

During the interview, you will evaluate the following concept map. Please review. <http://jeffloo.com/stuff/2010/summary-sria.pdf>

The map outlines:

- (1) objectives in scientific research (the figure's inner circle),
- (2) information activities that support these objectives (the white ring), and
- (3) services and tools that support these information activities (the outer ring).

Appendix 3: Interview reminder

Dear _____

A friendly reminder of today's meeting for our study on information needs. <We> look forward to chatting with you at <time> in your office.

See you soon,
Jeff