Getting Off the Ground: Developing Projects for Evidence-Based Decision Making

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Getting Off the Ground: Developing Projects for Evidence-Based Decision Making

Abstract
Are you interested in developing a research project? Do you want to learn something about your library users to make better, evidence based decisions? Do you already have a project in mind, but you need help in getting it off the ground?

Join presenters Kourtney Blackburn and Christina Hillman (St. John Fisher College) as they share their experience with a multi-year library space study, and lead you through developing your own library research project. Through this interactive workshop, attendees will leave with a basic understanding of selected research methods and a basic plan for their own research project.

Disciplines
Library and Information Science

Comments
Session presented at the Rochester Regional Library Council (RRLC) in Rochester, New York, on September 20, 2017.
Today’s Game Plan

1. Gain an overview of a completed library space study
2. Learn about selected research methods
3. Brainstorm ideas for project partners
4. Create an outline for your long-range project

GIF: http://gph.is/2d8mVpy
SJFC Space Study Overview

★ Goal or Objective:
○ Collect evidence to inform future space planning and renovations
  ■ How are students using our library spaces
  ■ What works? What doesn’t? What’s needed?

★ Timeline:
○ 18 Months (Spring 2016-Summer 2017) -- see slide 4

★ Methods -- Mixed
○ Ethnographic - Seating Sweeps
○ Qualitative - Focus Groups
○ Quantitative/Qualitative - Survey

★ Campus Partners
○ Faculty Experts -- methodologies, library champions
○ Students -- primary stakeholders, meaningful findings beyond just library perspective, research experience (course credit)

★ What did we learn?
Brainstorming Research Project

★ What are your goals?

★ What do you want to know and why?
  ○ EXAMPLE: Understand how the library’s leisure reading collection is being used by students? That way we can better market the books available.

★ Who are your main stakeholders for this project?

★ Who is not a stakeholder?

★ When do you need/want to conclude?
Let’s talk about it!
SJFC Project

★ Our Goal:
  ○ Collect space data to drive evidence based decision making
    ■ Questions to Answer:
      ● How are students using library spaces?
      ● What works, what doesn’t, what’s needed?

★ Our Stakeholders:
  ○ Students: undergrads, grads

★ Non-stakeholders (for this* project):
  ○ Faculty/staff
  ○ Administration
Overview of (selected) Research Methods

**Quantitative** -- “a set of strategies, techniques and assumptions used to study psychological, social and economic processes through the exploration of numeric patterns” (Stoudt, para. 1, 2014).

Examples: closed answer surveys, review of circulation stats vs. patron type

**Qualitative** -- “concerned with understanding human experience, interactions, and behavior patterns . . . to describe and interpret the why of human behavior and motivation” (Alberto, para. 1, 2006).

Examples: interviews, ethnographic, observations
Testing, Piloting, & Deploying

Testing --
★ Instruments: does it work as intended, do all researchers understand the tool?
★ Codes: is there a key, does it make sense?

Piloting --
★ Surveys: are questions understood/interpreted “correctly”, are questions getting at what we wanted to know, are the questions using language respondents will understand?

Deploying --
★ Surveys: email, paper, mail; from you or another entity
Brainstorming & Identifying Methods

★ Think about your goals:

○ What data do you need?

○ What methods will provide you with that data?

○ Data: what does success would look like?
Let’s talk about it!
SJFC Research Methods

★ Seating Sweeps - Ethnographic
★ Focus Group - Qualitative
★ Survey - Quantitative & Qualitative
Method: Seating Sweeps

★ Library staff, floor-by-floor
★ Anyone in library
★ Lasted 15-60 minutes
★ Pen and paper & Google Forms
★ Categories: desktop, laptop, cell phone, tablet, whiteboards in use, food/drink, group work, note taking, reading, sleeping, talking, headphones, other
Completed Sweeps Floor Plan
Method: Focus Group

★ Participants (N=41)
  ○ Freshmen (n=9)
  ○ Sophomores (n=9)
  ○ Juniors (n=10)
  ○ Seniors (n=8)
  ○ Master’s (n=2) & Doctoral (n=3)
★ ~1 hour sessions
★ Tailored questions by class
Method: Survey

★ Survey based on common focus group responses
★ Created using Qualtrics
★ Piloted with small group of students
★ Email from Student Government
★ Distributed to undergraduates, N=2948
Determining Logistics:

What’s feasible? What’s not?

★ **Time:**
- How long do you have?
- How long do you need?

★ **Staff:**
- Who will be involved?
- Who will do what?

★ **Budget:**
- What could be free/in-kind?
- How much do you need for...
  - Payments to vendors?
  - Personnel?
  - Advertising?
  - Prizes/Incentives?
  - Materials/Technology?
  - Software?
  - Space?
Let’s talk about it!
SJFC Logistics

★ Time:
  ○ Needed ~year to obtain reliable, rich data amid other responsibilities

★ Staff:
  ○ Library staff (2 project coordinators + extra staff)
  ○ Who will do what?
    ■ Library staff designed sweep maps and data entry, ordered pizza, performed sweeps, communicated with project partners and stakeholders
    ■ Kourtney: coordinated events
    ■ Christina: oversaw research design, execution, and analysis

★ Budget: <$500
  ○ Pizza and Prizes
  ○ In-kind: project partner expertise
  ○ Free: promotional materials, survey tool
Determining Partners

★ What skills or strengths do you need?
★ Who are the experts (consider research methods)?
★ Who is available and interested? Is it mutually beneficial?
★ Who do you have relationships with?
★ Are they your stakeholders? Pro/Con?
★ What is your role? Have a shared understanding
Talk with a Partner...
Determining SJFC Partners

★ What skills or strengths did we need? Who are the experts?
   ○ Faculty doing methods classes

★ Who was available and interested?
   ○ Faculty/library champions, identified students

★ Who do we have relationships with? Were they stakeholders?
   ○ Library champions, primary and secondary stakeholders

★ Pro/Con?
   ○ Quality of research output is improved, taken seriously
   ○ What is the role of the librarian in an independent study?
Sketch out your timeline

★ Work backward
★ Chunk it out:
  ○ By semester
  ○ By month
  ○ By week

Gif: http://gph.is/11nv2Ua
SJFC Timeline

★ Close to 2 years start to finish (slide 25)

★ Regular meetings with project partners, emailed progress reports and check-ins/updates -- Always maintain communication with partners

★ Met weekly with student researchers at the end -- project wrap-up, presentation, and paper
Fall 2015: Create floor plans and codes, test floor plans and train library staff

Spring 2016: Seating Sweeps (Feb & April)

Summer 2016: Survey development and refinement based on special headcount data and previously administered surveys. Find project partners!

September 2016: Pilot test survey to small subset of SJFC community and refine questions if/when necessary. Find students for project, develop focus group questions

October & November 2016: Deploy survey Focus Groups for SJFC students community through email, supported by Qualtrics.

December 2016-February 2017: Focus Group analysis and writing and testing survey.

February 2017: Survey development & piloting

March 2017: Marketing and Deploy survey through Qualtrics.

April-June 2017: Survey analysis; comparison with all other data points; write-up findings for college administration and subsequent publication.
Data & Results: Evidence Based Decisions

★ Project Goal → To gain evidence on how students are using Lavery
  ○ Sweeps -- find out where patrons are in the library, what they are bringing into the library, and what they are doing once they are in the library
  ○ Focus Groups -- up close understanding from specific user groups of library use, likes and dislikes, wishes
  ○ Survey -- undergraduate use pattern of the library, likes and dislikes, doesn’t look at demographic information

★ Patterns in the data → What keeps showing up in each data collection method? Are there data which show relationships?
  ○ Outlets, Seating, Lighting → whenever the chance arises they will mention these
  ○ Busy times reported vs. captures via seating sweeps
WHAT ELSE?
References

Quantitative Methods: http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446294406.n297

Qualitative Methods: http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412952668.n171

Qualitative Methods: http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412961288.n350