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Collaborative Strategies to Meet the Challenges of Serving Graduate Students

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Collaborative Strategies to Meet the Challenges of Serving Graduate Students

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Problem
- Survey evidence suggested graduate students were an underserved population
- Many graduates lack awareness of resources, services and necessary research skills

Even as an MA student I am still pretty clueless about how to search for information effectively” Education grad student, LibQual 2004

• Library services are unknown. Never received a presentation. Only
•Graduate College already has mechanisms for communicating with
• Grad college web page / calendar
• Flyers sent to advisors
• Grad Student electronic distribution list
• Web banner ads
• Target graduate students directly; not instructor mediated
• Systemize the literature review search
• Create and organize a personal database of easily searched and accessed
• Specific workshop outcomes/deliverables

Strategy: Collaborate with Graduate College
- Graduate students already have a relationship with the Graduate College
- Graduate College already offered a Strategies for Success workshop
• Graduate College was logical partner because:
  - reluctance to give up class time
  - old language: what we offer you (assumes students will recognize value)
  - new language: identifies specific student concerns and provides solutions

Strategy: Mass Customizable Solution-Oriented Workshops
- Literature review workshops
- Refworks citation management workshops

About the Workshops
- Target graduate students directly; not instructor mediated
- Marketing / promotion
- Web banner ads
- Grad Student electronic distribution list
- Flyers sent to advisors
- Grad college web page / calendar
- Focus on immediate concerns and needs of graduates
- Design saves graduate students time and frustration
- Clearly identify learning objectives and outcomes
- Establish collegial, interactive, flexible, active-learning atmosphere
- Provide high librarian to student ratio (2 librarians to 15 students)
- Have one librarian rove and troubleshoot when the other demonstrates
- Intensify significant hands-on time throughout session
- Schedule sufficient time to accomplish real work for individuals’ research – not canned exercises
- Use session evaluations to inform continuous improvement

Literature Review Workshop
- Addresses graduate students’ immediate need to conduct a good, thorough literature review
- Addresses library anxiety issues
- Previous graduate student orientations and accompanying marketing materials were revised to address student concerns explicitly
  - old language: what we offer you (assumes students will recognize value)
  - new language: identifies specific student concerns and provides solutions
- Specific workshop outcomes/deliverables
  - Systemize the literature review search
  - Focus on relevant sources – eliminate the inessential
  - Ensure that nothing vital has been overlooked
  - Keep the literature review updated
  - Empower development of an informed, research-based perspective

Citation Management Workshops
- Addresses graduate students need to store and retrieve references efficiently, and format bibliographies correctly
- Addresses student information overload and bibliographic formatting concerns
- Specific workshop outcomes/deliverables
  - Create and organize a personal database of easily searched and accessed references
  - Import references directly from online sources
  - Input non-online sources
  - Add notes and keywords to keep track of important points and facilitate source retrieval
  - Output a bibliography in any required style and format
  - Learn techniques that facilitate scholarly professionalism in citing sources

Outcomes
- Very positive evaluations from both workshop types
  - 97% (lit. review) & 99% (citation management) of attendees agreed or strongly agreed that they would recommend the workshop to a friend or colleague
  - 99% (lit. review) & 100% (citation management) of attendees strongly agreed or agreed that the techniques they learned would be useful to them
  - 24% reported the most useful part of the workshop was hands-on time
  - 18% reported the most useful part of the workshop was small class size

Participant comments from workshop evaluations:
- (most useful) “The little bits of information on how to really focus in on my search.”
- (most useful) “Knowing that all these interesting databases exist definitely will go a long way. I will now be able to explore them thanks to the presentation.”
- (most useful) “The hands on opportunity to develop references that are useful to me in my current work.”

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Conclusions
- Provide graduate students opportunity and motivation to learn outside the traditional class-related structure
- Use surveys and evaluations to provide insight into graduate student needs and to facilitate informed collaborative dialog
- Recognize that current student culture values customized individual service and a useful end-product – not just practice
- Use clear, solution oriented language to positively impact workshop content, outreach materials and attendance
- Use resources or services that attract student attention as a gateway to additional educational opportunities

Graduate College, Workshops and Individual Consultations

Individual graduate research consultations increased with our workshop sessions, despite an overall decline in class- specific graduate library sessions