e-Science @ UMass: Anticipating and Supporting e-Science Activities at the University of Massachusetts

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As the scientific community begins to understand the need to safeguard increasingly large and complex datasets, librarians are faced with both opportunities and challenges.

We are confronted with the exciting prospect of polishing up our time-honored skills and expertise and presenting them anew in the context of e-science.

In March of 2008 an Ad Hoc committee of Science Librarians from the University of Massachusetts Five Campus System convened to discuss the challenges of e-science and prepare the Libraries for their role in e-science initiatives.

Three primary outcomes intended to support e-science activities emerged from the work of the Ad Hoc committee:

- A two-tiered proposal of extended services for faculty support—to share e-resources among the campuses (which impacts licensing, document delivery and authentication) and to develop services focused on the support and curation of non-traditional research outputs
- The creation of a set of Principles Fundamental to the Role of the University of Massachusetts Research Libraries in e-Science, a document modeled on the principles presented in the ARL Report, “Agenda for Developing e-Science in Research Libraries”
- The organization of a series of events to educate librarians about the applications of e-science

In order to engage researchers generating data, we must be aware of the research trends in their fields. Moreover, we must study methodologies used in different disciplines in order to effectively collaborate with them. Catherine Blake of the School of Information and Library Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, speaking at the Association of Research Libraries 2008 Fall Forum, noted that librarians need to “think like someone within the discipline.”

However, only a few librarians on the Ad Hoc committee had a formal science background, as we came to realize, and all of us struggled to keep current with our users’ research areas.

Due to this realization, the events we organized sought to inform and prepare science librarians to engage research faculty as a first step toward active participation in e-science: a Regional e-Science Symposium and Science Boot Camp for Librarians.

Regionally planned and cooperatively organized, these events are models for ongoing education and development. Both the Symposium and the Boot Camp were planned and executed within a relatively short time frame (five and seven months, respectively) and, because they targeted a small geographic region, were more affordable for the participants than national meetings requiring longer travel.

Small, regional educational opportunities which draw on the resources of the district—researchers, facilities, funding—will enable librarians to keep up with the changing face of research effectively, economically, and collaboratively.