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Outreach Focusing on Research Teams – Presentation Notes

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UNY Science Librarians' Meeting – Friday, October 26, 2012. Syracuse, NY

Note: No presentation slides were prepared for this talk.

Trigger:

- Wonderful rich data mining/data analysis features of SciFinder – not just at a literature reference level, but at a substance/substructure level and a reaction level.
- FYI, SciFinder 1st major platform to have an extensive analysis feature (top subject headings, top journals, top authors). Then Web of Science copied it and then Engineering Village and then Ebsco, OPAC's, and now many interfaces do this.
- Key point: I knew that students and faculty were just scratching the surface.

Summer of 2011:

- Pondered how I could reach out to the Chemistry department
- At least at our institution, advertising general workshops pointless. People don't sign up, and if they sign up, they don't show up.
- Decided to ask each faculty member to invite me to a regularly scheduled research team meeting with all their post-docs, students, etc.

Parameters:

- I didn't ask; I insisted. I must come to your regular meeting time and place (advantage: student attendance usually required).
- Made it clear that I would come even if the regular meeting was early morning or evening. Side note: they were surprised at this, despite over 10 years of stressing how eager I was to serve them.
- All search examples would be directly from their current research.
- Asked faculty to provide a couple of sample topics, structures, and/or reactions.
- If they did not respond, I searched SciFinder for the most recent publications of the faculty member, looked at the indexing, and made sure my substance/structure/reaction/topic queries retrieved their research. (Examples were rigged!)
- Insisted on a minimum of 45 minutes – no quickie over the top, generic presentation
- Persisted until I got a slot, though, of course, sensitive to their work flow. Some had student presentations to get out of the way, travel, etc.
- I succeeded in meeting with every faculty member that had students over the course of two semesters, approx. 22 meetings.

Teaching Points:

- I am the most important chemical information resource in the entire university. (Resources by Subject page: <http://libweb1.lib.buffalo.edu/infotree/resourcesbysubject.asp?subject=Chemistry>).
- Quickly made sure there were no questions about library services/resources making sure they knew how to get their hands on full-text of desired items, especially in light of our enhanced document delivery/ILL service named Delivery+ <http://library.buffalo.edu/delivery/> that delivers books and article regardless of location/electronic availability in or outside our library system.
- SciFinder and similar high-powered databases are not merely finding tools, **they are research tools as much as any instrument they have in their labs. Then I proved it.**
- **Asking for help is not a sign of failure, but a sign of intelligence.** I told a story of meeting a research team at a TA luncheon. When asked how research was going, they indicated it was going well, but they thought a 1955 technical report probably had some important data they needed. When asked how long they had been looking for the report, they said, "About a year." We tried not to look too astonished. Within 20 minutes, we had not only identified the report but had an electronic full-text version in hand. **Asking for help is not a sign of failure, but a sign of intelligence.**
- Last two points I am repeating at virtually every information literacy session I now teach.
- I emphasize asking for help by noting that any sophomore chem major could probably run a decent infra-red spectra. But what happens when you have a tricky sample or the machine isn't giving you the results you expect or you can't interpret the results. You go to the person that runs the machine all the time. I run the database "machine" all the time, in my case, searching Chemical Abstracts on almost a daily basis since 1975. And yes, there were online databases in 1975!

Benefits:

- Most successful outreach I have ever done (2nd most effective: individual lunch with every new faculty member).
- Snuck in training the faculty member under the guise of educating their students.
- Opened their eyes to search/data mining beyond Google.
- Unexpected: Learned much more about not just specific research needs, but the research organization/structure of the department, who was working with whom. For example, I discovered that some research teams met jointly with other teams. Good to know!
- Opened the door for follow up individual consultations, sometimes immediately after the presentation (always allowed time for that if I was at the end of the team meeting). One poor polymer chemistry student had been searching acrylic copolymers one specific copolymer at a time. Did not realize that MF/structure searching of component monomers could retrieve entire classes of polymers in one pass.

Next Steps:

- Moving on to Physics. Going well. Only thing I've modified is to scale back my time expectations a bit, asking for a minimum of 30 minutes.
- I have to take into account that arXiv, INSPIRES, and ADS are very effective resources with good search systems. I have to be prepared to show them why there is still advantage to moving beyond them and the ubiquitous Google Scholar.
- I don't have to show structure searches in many cases, but do have to show property searching, so I still prefer 45-60 minutes.
- Focus on INSPEC/Compendex/NTIS (for us all on Engineering Village so searching is one-pass), and Knovel, especially for overview and property data. However, for many of the condensed matter people, SciFinder is highly relevant, useful, and completely unknown to them.
- Final story. A professor came by during on-site office hours and mentioned his interest in a particular binary semiconductor. I rolled right into SciFinder, retrieved the 200+ references associated with the CAS Registry Number and showed how the Analyze and Categorize features of SciFinder permitted me to data mine the results, producing a comprehensive road map to the research done on the compound. He was quite amazed and told me, "My graduate student who I asked to search this compound didn't find nearly so much." I tried not to sound too wounded, when I noted that, in being a science librarian for 37 years, I had learned a few tricks along the way! Another reminder that our patrons don't know what they don't know!