Focus Groups with Faculty –
Bringing Their Perspectives
To Our Practice

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Background

• Dartmouth Library “Summer Series” – an annual professional development program for librarians sponsored by E&O
• 2006 focus on our roles as liaisons over two consecutive half-day sessions
• Program elements included an outside speaker, small-group sessions/activities, and the discussion of results from two faculty focus groups held earlier.
Early Planning

• Input from managers – what did they hope would emerge from this program?
  – Share experiences, practices and strategies
  – Emphasis on our effectiveness as liaisons
  – Better understanding of faculty perspectives – activities, pressures, priorities – their context
  – ‘Intake’ v. Output – liaison as sponge not salesman
What We Did

Focus group sessions – best way to gain insight into faculty perspectives

• Two sessions, over lunch, in mid-August for faculty across campus
  – 162 faculty members invited; 15 participated (two groups of 6 and 9 faculty).
  – Summer term (many faculty were away)

• Sessions were held in DCAL – Dartmouth’s faculty center for teaching & learning
What We Did (*cont.*)

- Confidential setting, privacy respected
- Facilitator introduced session & guided conversation with prompts
- Sessions not recorded; two notetakers. Notes summarized soon after sessions
- 20/20 hindsight – inconvenient for professional school faculty
Questions

• “What is your perception of what we do?”
• “In your opinion, what are the most and least important things librarians do for you?”
• “What do you want us to do? What else could we be doing that we aren't doing now?”
• “Let's talk about communication - What kind of things do you want to hear about from us? How are we doing in communicating with you?”
• “What could we be doing to become more familiar with what is going on in your department?”
On Communication …

Notetaker 1

- have initial meeting with faculty member and then follow-up with interesting information
- quick announcements at faculty meetings
- librarian office hours in department
- personalize email communications…Dear Chris…
- risk annoying in order to inform the interested parties…go ahead and send more information
- med school curriculum committee…good access to take in what is going on with teaching
- likes flyers
- use bulletin boards in departments
- get added to blackboard as a librarian for the class

Notetaker 2

- In an initial meeting, send new info when available
  - Beginning of year faculty meeting
  - Office hours
  - Reminders of new ideas
  - Figure it out and then show in 15 minutes
- Targeted email
  - Personalize email, Dear …..
  - Risk annoying people
- Use library as problem solver
- In Medical School, target by department
  - Ex. Lora is on Curriculum Committee
- Send out flyers
- Use easel posters
- Newsletters
- Department bulletin board
- Add to student list on Blackboard
Final Cut

• **Communications**

• Faculty welcome communications from librarians. Be persistent!
• They are sometimes overwhelmed with information so be specific, personalized, and targeted to capture their attention.
• Err on the side of sending too much rather than too little
• Handouts – so that faculty can go back and review at their leisure
• Keep new information up front on the website. (RSS?)
• Quick announcements at faculty meetings
• Bulletin boards
• Send flyers in addition to email
• Bring new library technologies to faculty awareness
• What do faculty need to do to better communicate with us?
What Was Accomplished?

• Re-examine assumptions in light of direct responses from faculty
• Foundation for ongoing conversations with faculty and across the library
• Build institutional experience
• Value for diverse audiences
What Was Accomplished? (cont.)

• Multiple voices meant there was something for everyone:
  – Communications – be persistent! Email works fine
  – … but handouts and flyers are great too!
  – Expertise in copyright and avoiding plagiarism
  – Interest in collaborating on assignments

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Thank you!