

# Focus Groups with Faculty – *Bringing Their Perspectives To Our Practice*

*Jane Quigley  
Kresge Physical Sciences Library  
Dartmouth College*

# 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

Thank you!