



Trends in academic libraries graduate student services: A case study

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This case study seeks to identify current trends in graduate students services within academic libraries. Graduate services data was collected from a sample of libraries in the United States. Findings reveal a varied level of services. Recommendations are provided for graduate services that can be adapted to fit a library's need.

Introduction

In a recent study of early career researchers, university libraries were referred to as a place “largely seen as study spaces for undergraduates and not places to go to for discovering research information” (Nicholas et al. 2017, p.7). Further noting that Google/Google Scholar are heavily relied upon for accessing information by graduate students (Nicholas et al., 2017). Thus indicating some separation from the library physically and virtually for graduates students. The needs of graduate students (students in a Master's or Doctoral program) are quite different from undergraduates and require specialized services that are easily accessible.

Graduate students have varying information needs and skill-sets. Many may have several different obligations while pursuing their degree. Some are recent graduates while others might be returning students after many years in the workforce. Each student brings a different level of information literacy and digital literacy skills to carry out research. They may be a part of a research lab, teach classes, serve as a TA (teaching assistant) while preparing for a new career, working part-time or full-time, and/or learning scholarly communication practices (Rempel, Husson-Christian, & Mellinger, 2011). Additionally, graduate students can fall into the following categories: traditional students attending on-campus classes, off-campus classes, online, or a combination. With the many roles and information needs of graduate students, how can academic libraries best serve graduate students? This case study aims to address two questions.

- (1) What services are the current trends of graduate student services offered by academic libraries?
- (2) How to make graduate students aware of these services?

Literature review

An analysis of LibQUAL⁺™ survey data (Jankowska, Hertel, & Young, 2006, p.62), identified some issues pertaining to graduate

students that are still relevant over ten years later such as, “lack of awareness of library services and resources”, “preference for e-resources”, and “need to for help”. Studies show that graduate students do not always receive an introduction to the library (Rempel & Davidson, 2008, Harris, 2011) and tend to rely on peers and advisors (Harrington, 2009) rather than seek out help from a librarian. Instead, graduate students access the library remotely and tend to favor Google (Mazurkiewicz & Sturm, 2014) and Google Scholar as their go to resource followed by ResearchGate (Nicholas et al., 2017). A study by Harrington (2009), found that information workshops and online tutorials specifically geared toward graduate students are needed. There are several studies that recommend for several different formats of information literacy training for graduate students.

O'Clair (2013) recommends a for credit course for graduate students to help them obtain the necessary research skills. While, Bausman and Ward (2015) prefer “Optimal instruction models” with information about library services and resources. Bussell, Hagman, and Guder (2017) found students prefer to learn on demand and prefer to have resources available to support this type of learning style. Critz et al. (2012) suggests getting faculty onboard to encourage students to attend workshops. A study by Read and Morash (2016) found the best way to provide “point of need library” services to online graduate students is through the LMS with customized libguides accompanying the research. Other point of need services included FAQs for frequently asked reference questions and creating short video tutorials, that are included in the assignment (Read & Morash, 2016).

Recently, library services specific to graduate students have become another important aspect of graduate training. Library services are expanding to include Data Services and Data Management, typically assistance in specialized software for quantitative, qualitative, GIS, etc. Some libraries are able to provide staffing, with a Data Librarian or Data Specialist for consultations, classes, etc. Data Management Services can include a research guide and/or training is available at some libraries. Fong (2017, p. 138) noted that libraries should consider providing training for graduate students in preserving digital information and scripting to manipulate data as well as providing Data Management Training for graduate students due to funding mandates and for “their future careers”. Cushing and Dumbleton (2017) suggest more outreach efforts to PhD students to promote library services and moving away from the term “data management” to “PIM” (Personal Information Management).

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Along with providing information literacy and data management training, study space is an important consideration. According to a study by [Sadler and Given \(2007\)](#), graduate student study participants noted the library as a place to work and indicated the appearance of the library was an important factor. A study from Georgetown University Libraries also recommended improving the library's appearance and providing more private spaces for graduate students ([Gibbs, Boettcher, Hollingsworth, & Slania, 2012](#)). Many libraries offer dedicated work space for graduate students such as dissertation writing rooms and/or group study space. Other examples of library space use for graduate students include, a dedicated space is to only graduate students thus allowing for a study and campus services such as IRB, parking, the I.D. office, etc. to be available in that space to assist graduate students ([Seton Hall University Libraries, 2015](#)). A study from FSU, recommends a “community building space” in addition to study, research, and workshop space ([Burel et al. 2015](#)).

To address the many information needs of graduate students, [Fong et al. \(2016\)](#) conducted a broad study of Master's and PhD students to find out what types of training graduate students need by discipline. In a survey, respondents indicated their interest in training in the following areas: research, grants, and job searches. Some of the areas of interest in the research training section consisted of finding information, data management, data analysis software, conducting literature review, and how to publish. Delivery of instruction is preferred several different types of modes different modes such as: face-to-face, online, webinar and through online tutorials. This study represents holistic approach to providing services as some of the training as the partnership with other campus units.

In summary, Universities invest many resources into graduate programs, therefore as a part of this process the library plays an important role to help retain graduate students ([O'Clair, 2013](#)). There are several different components of library services and resources that could greatly impact the research success of graduate students. A study of graduate services found that graduate students “had difficulties with the lack of comprehensive approach to services, space, and scholarly support” ([Rempel et al., 2011, p. 10](#)). Although there are many aspects to providing access to resources and services for graduate students, one of the most important is the library website, as it serves as an entry point to the library for graduate students. Especially in the absence of introduction to the library that is typically offered to undergraduates or on-campus students, therefore the website becomes the first point of contact and is key to help shaping graduate students' interactions with the library. This was confirmed by a study from Budzise-Weaver, & Ander, which found graduate students tend to use library services prominently featured on the library's website (2016).

Institutional background

[Seton Hall University Libraries \(2015\)](#) located in [place] with approximately 10,000 students. There are over 3000 graduate students in 75+ graduate programs ([Seton Hall University Libraries, 2015](#)). is carnegie classification Research Doctoral: Professional-dominant. Graduate programs are offered on-campus, online, and a combination of on-campus and online. [Seton Hall University Libraries \(2015\)](#) online graduate programs are growing. The graduate student interactions with the library occur in the following formats. Typically, library instruction for graduate students is given at the request of the professor and through research appointments for groups and individuals. The faculty frequently encourage students (especially doctoral students) to make a research appointment. A research guide is delivered through the Learning Management System (LMS) for each course, either subject or course, specifically for information about subject resources. Due to some limitations with the LMS, each guide is several clicks in.

Instructional how to guides and videos are available on the website. Data Management Services are planned for the future.

Since some of the graduate programs are online, not all students come to campus and in some cases, those who do come to campus may also work full-time and have limited time. Those students are typically coming to campus for class only. Requests for graduate specific online tutorials, study space, access to software, and questions about the scholarly communication process, primarily from the social sciences. The impetus for this study is from working with graduate students who were not always aware of all the services and often unsure of how to navigate to these services and use them. Like many university libraries, there is limited funding for new resources and services. The increase in nontraditional programs, has raised the question what types of services are needed and how should they be delivered to graduate students? In order to inform future services, a literature review, review of existing services, and data was collected from regional, peer and aspirant institutions, and ARL libraries.

Methodology

Considering the information presented above there are numerous issues to consider. To answer the questions: what type of graduate services should be offered by the library and how should they be made available? A review of current practices from a selection of libraries from information presented on each library's website.

To analyze current services, a sampling of [Seton Hall University Libraries \(2015\)](#) regional, [Seton Hall University Libraries \(2015\)](#) peer, [Seton Hall University Libraries \(2015\)](#) aspirant, and ARL libraries were selected. From the four categories, five libraries were selected for each area with a total of 20 libraries reviewed for this study. The selection criteria for each category is as follows: Regional libraries were selected based on The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education[®] to classify similar graduate programs. The next two categories are derived from the [Seton Hall University Libraries \(2015\)](#) peer and aspirant list. Followed by a random sample of ARL libraries to review current trends.

Group 1: Regional Research Doctoral: Professional-dominant (Carnegie classification).

(5 libraries)

Group 2: Peer libraries from provided by [Seton Hall University Libraries \(2015\)](#) Libraries list (5 libraries).

Group 3: Aspirant Libraries provided by [Seton Hall University Libraries \(2015\)](#) Libraries list (5 libraries).

Group 4: ARL libraries randomly selected (5 libraries).

The following questions were used to collect data from each of the five groups. Each university library's website was reviewed in April 2017 for data collection (Fig. 1):

- Is there a webpage or guide for Graduate Student Library Services?
- Does a listing of library classes exist specific to graduate students? Offerings of Instruction classes to sign up for (i.e. information literacy, citation management, quantitative/qualitative training, etc.)
- Is physical space reserved for Graduate Student study (individual and group work)?
- Are self-paced online learning tutorials/guides available?
- Does the library offer a Data Services program?
- Is Data Management guide, workshop, or consultation service available?
- Are there resources information literacy services for graduate student teachers?
- Is information provided for students traveling abroad?
- Is there any guidance for the publication process such as Scholarly Communication services?

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