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Segmentation techniques for expanding a library instruction market Evaluating and brainstorming

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Abstract

This article describes a two-part segmentation technique applied to an instruction program during a strategic planning process. This technique was used to better understand the characteristics and needs of the instruction program audiences. First described is the brainstorming technique used to create a comprehensive segment list of the existing and potential audiences of the instruction program. Second is a description of the follow up review session that evaluated past years' efforts using this new language of segmentation. © 2003 Elsevier Science Inc. All rights reserved.

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Do you really know who your current clients are in your instructional program? Do you have a vision of potential clients and needs? Do you have a priority list of the next instructional audiences that your library wants to help? Are there current parts of your program that should be de-emphasized so you can get to some others you desperately want to expand?

It is no longer inspiration, or being creatively talented. Anyone can be creative—provided they learn and develop their skills.

Edward de Bono

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Even though this paper is not intended to cover why there is a critical need to improve and increase instruction, the following list of a few obvious instruction foci demonstrates the necessity for librarians to move beyond mere statistical descriptions of their clientele.

- The explosion in electronic resources has expanded and made information retrieval more complex.
- College students are more diverse in ethnic background and age.
- Students must learn to use electronic resources in an academic environment in a different way than they do recreationally.
- College curricula are becoming more interdisciplinary, meaning faculty, who have specialized in a small disciplinary area, are increasingly dependent on professional librarians to become acquainted with the research methods of other fields.
- Many faculty are still acclimating to the new technological environment.
- Students often have complex schedules that make serious demands on their time.
- Faculty using instructional services are usually unable to keep up with the changes in information in their field or changing library products.
- Faculty and student audiences are reluctant to give the library large blocks of predictable time to learn new material and techniques. Everyone wants “instant gratification” and “instant learning.”
- The institution assumes that technology and related instructional techniques must always be modern and up to date and used in instruction, whether there is technological support or not.
- There are few instructional programs that are receiving significant new professional positions for instruction, while the learning potential remains high and growing.

A library’s instruction program will grow or change based on the characteristics of those who randomly approach it unless its future is strategically planned. Instructional services programs may well still grow by a random approach model, but hopefully it will also change by choosing to cultivate segments and to negotiate improved instructional services with and for those segments.

The most damaging phrase in the language is: “It’s always been done that way.”

Rear Admiral Grace Hopper

Managers of instructional programs in academic libraries typically know their clientele statistically; they know how many classes they teach, which disciplines they are reaching, whether or not the instruction sessions are for graduate or undergraduate classes, and whether or not they are research methodology classes. They also usually provide an evaluation instrument that tells perhaps a little more. This “statistical” model focuses on “how many” participate in the program, based on obvious classes. In our library, we have historically followed this approach; however, we found ourselves wanting to know our clientele in a more complex way.

This article describes a two-part segmenting technique that we have recently applied to our instructional program as part of a strategic planning process that gave us a better understanding of the characteristics and needs of our “customers.” After we discuss the

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