Librarians 'embedded' in research[1]

The funding crisis in science gives information professionals in academia new opportunities to prove themselves indispensable to researchers, argue Nicolas Robinson-Garcia[a], and Daniel Torres-Salinas. [b]

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Last year's funding cuts in science have become a common topic in top scholarly journals. Deciding which scientific research to fund is an extremely difficult task. It is one on which scientists and funding agencies spend more and more time. Increasingly, decision-makers on research policy are having to base decisions on which project, research team or University gets funded on some kind of evidence.

Since it was founded in Spain in 2002, the EC3 Research Group has focused on three different research fronts: scholarly journals evaluation; the development of bibliometric indicators and methodologies; and the evaluation of science and research policy. EC3 has developed evidence-collection and analysis tools for monitoring scientific activity. It was the need to help decision-makers establish research policy that lead to the development in 2007 of the CIENTIFICA database.

CIENTIFICA is a scientific information application based on MS Access 2003. It monitors research inputs and outputs at different levels (institutional, departmental, individual, etc.). So far, it has been implemented in X institutions in Spain including the University of Navarre, University of Granada or the Public Hospitals System of the Basque Country.

In the last couple of years members of the Research Group have received many personal requests for research advice. The number of requests has increased recently, due to the economic constraints which have made it much harder to find research funding.

The embedded librarian: background

1 Nicolas Robinson-Garcia and Daniel Torres-Salinas will be presenting "Supporting research from the inside: The Embedded Librarian" at the session "Skills required to support academic dissemination of research- a national and international perspective" on Wed 13th July, 9:30-10:45 during the Umbrella Conference 2011.

Nowadays researchers have to undertake many tasks. They must seek and obtain funding, prepare research proposals and projects, as well as managing their own CVs and developing publication policies to advance their academic careers. Overloaded by these new duties, many are seeking help from a professional.

Should this professional be a librarian? And if so, why don't researchers call on librarians?

Once again, it seems we may have failed to keep up to date with our users' needs. Researcher and librarian have lost all 'physical' contact. Information-consuming behavior has relocated to the Internet and is no longer in libraries[2].

However, we contend that, although the role of academic librarians is being called into question[3], there could now be a great opportunity for librarians to meet these new demands and prove their worth to researchers.

After giving many lectures and having a good look at the requests we received, we realized that what we were proposing was not something new. We were looking for the concept of the 'embedded librarian', an information professional embedded in the research structure, who can get involved directly in the production and generation of scientific knowledge.

The first paper to use the concept 'embedded librarian' appears in *Dewey* (2005) [*sh'd this be Shumaker & Talley? There is no reference for Dewey – which has cataloguing connotations for English-speaking librarians*].

In this work *she* [?] explains the origin of the term, which was established during the Iraq War. It refers to 'embedded journalists' as those who embedded themselves within military units in order to get better stories and a firsthand impression. Following this philosophy, the embedded librarian's aim is to become involved in a research group to the extent of becoming an irreplaceable member of it with inside knowledge of all its activities.

Embedding in research

According to Shumaker & Talley[4], this new information professional works outside the physical library. Their main characteristic is that they work with small groups of specialised users, where

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2 In this article we are focusing on research not in teaching. Academic libraries' role regarding assessment to students or user's training is not called into question here.

3 Nicholas, David; Williams, Peter; Rowlands, Ian & Jan, Hamid R. (2010). Researchers' e-journal use and information seeking behaviour. *Journal of Information Science* Online first, published on June 1, 2010 as doi: 10.1177/0165551510371883

4 Shumaker, David & Talley, Mary. Models for embedded librarianship: Final Report. Special Library Association, 2009 [http://www.sla.org/pdfs/EmbeddedLibrarianshipFinalRptRev.pdf]

relationship between members of the group is an essential element. They also get involved in their research topics and workflows. This supersedes the traditional question-answer model used for reference services in academic libraries. This new model is rapidly spreading around the world. In fact it is becoming so important that journals such as *Information Outlook* or *Public Services Quarterly* have dedicated whole editions to the topic during the last year[5] or so.

But which tasks would this 'embedded librarian' have to accomplish? There would be three main pillars of their work, focusing on: managing data, monitoring the research group's visibility and mediating in the communication process with journals. Going into specifics we could summarise them as:

1- Active mediation in the process of publishing research papers. Managing drafts, preparing preprints and post-prints, sending articles for publication and communicating with journal editors, etc.

2- Dissemination of publications, results and activities regarding the research group's members. Developing strategies for promotion and dissemination through Web 2.0 tools; uploading papers for open access (always taking into account the journal's copyright policy), managing the research group's website, etc.

3- Organization and preservation of research and study material from all members. Data sharing and curation, developing data preservation policies, creating wikis, etc.

4- Expertise and management of the different platforms used by the researchers. Online journals, funding agencies, curriculum management systems, research project application forms, etc.

5- Visibility management. Generating bibliometric reports, career development advice regarding research and publication policies, etc.

As one might expect the 'embedded librarian' is no ordinary professional. We are talking about a librarian with new, highly specialised duties, someone who, above all, can easily adopt and integrate a specific research group's workflows, work outside their own environment, in different offices, and take charge of tasks previously undertaken by researchers. The embedded librarian has a blended role, between that of the researcher and traditional librarian. This person does not teach how to do things by designing guides or giving courses, but knows how to tackle and resolve problems by themselves.

There are probably many academic librarians and information specialists who already undertake this role. The term may be new, but it refers to a very old concept. However, it is not a common

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5 *Information Outlook*. Embedded librarianship issue, 2010, v. 14, n.1.
Public Services Quarterly. Embedded Librarianship. 2010, v. 6, n. 2/3.

practice in universities where, traditionally, academic librarians have always made existing information available, rather than engage actively in the process of producing it.

Maybe this time of economic crisis will help us to reconsider our roles and reinvent ourselves once more, in order to meet our clients' needs.

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