

Methods from the Ethnographic Research in Illinois Academic Libraries (ERIAL) Project

Ethnographic Interviews were conducted with 161 students, 75 teaching faculty and 48 librarians to elicit each group's understanding of their role in the student research process and their expectations for the other groups during student research. The interviews were conducted by a project anthropologist (or, in the case of some student interviews, a librarian) and lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes. The interviews followed a common structure and utilized open-ended questions intended to elicit specific examples describing students' experiences undertaking research assignments, as well as how librarians and faculty members interacted with students during the research process. Questions focused on each group's understanding of students' previous preparation for research, elements of good research projects, major themes of the research process, how students got help, obstacles that students faced, librarians' and students' experiences of working together, and librarian and faculty members' experiences of and hopes for working together. Faculty and students were also asked to recall a recent research assignment and to describe their roles in it.

Photo Journals were conducted with 54 students and 21 librarians. Each respondent was loaned a digital camera and was asked to take a set of 25 photos over the course of several days. These photos included views of work spaces, communication and computing devices, books, and favorite work/study locations. After participants took the photos, follow-up interviews were conducted by a project anthropologist (with librarians and some students) or a project librarian (with students). Interviews elicited responses to the contents of the photos to learn about processes and tools students used to complete their research assignments and to learn about the context in which their research happened.

Mapping Diaries were conducted with 34 students. Each respondent was given a set of maps of her/his campus and was asked to mark the course of her/his movements over the course of one academic day, noting the times and places he/she visited and the purpose for going there. Afterward, the student conducted a brief interview with a project anthropologist to debrief the day's events. The maps elicited more information about the spaces in which students conducted their research and day-to-day schoolwork.

Research Journals were conducted with 17 students. In the research journals activity, each participant was given a notebook at the beginning of a semester and asked to make an entry every time he/she worked on a research assignment. These entries were to include the date, time, place of work, and a brief description of the type of activity the student was doing. The researchers then collected the completed journals at the end of the semester.

Web Design Workshops were conducted with students, faculty and librarians. Five student design workshops (40 students combined), two faculty workshops (12 faculty combined) and three librarian/staff workshops (15 librarians/staff combined), elicited participants' opinions on the design and content of the library home page. Participants were asked a series of brainstorming questions to generate the features that would be included on a "perfect" library website, and were asked to mark up a printed screenshot of the library's homepage with what they liked and disliked, and what they might like to see changed. Participants were then

grouped into teams and asked to design from scratch their ideal homepages using large tablets of paper. Finally, respondents presented their ideal designs to each other and discussed the webpage as a large group.

Space Design Workshops were conducted with 19 students. Similar to the web design workshops, this activity elicited participants' opinions on the design the library's physical space home page. Participants were asked a series of brainstorming questions about the tasks and activities they completed in the library, which characteristics of the library they liked and disliked, and what they might like to see changed. Participants were then asked to design a perfect library space from scratch on a large piece of paper and to present their ideal designs to the group.

Cognitive Maps were conducted with 140 students and 6 faculty. Over a series of several days, the project anthropologists solicited students' participation in cognitive mapping at several locations across the ERIAL campuses. Participants completed this activity away from the library itself, so that their results would not be affected by immediate visual cues. To complete the cognitive mapping exercise, the respondent was given a blank piece of paper with short directions at the top, along with blue, green and red pens. Students were then given six minutes to draw a map of the library from memory, and asked to change the color of their marker every two minutes, an approach that allowed the researchers to learn which elements of the map students drew first, second and third, and provided both spatial and temporal data about how students conceptualized library spaces.

Research Process Interviews were conducted with 60 students. Participants were asked students to allow a project anthropologist to accompany them while they conducted research for an assignment. The anthropologist videotaped the student as he/she worked, and asked clarifying questions about their research processes and approaches. Interviews averaged approximately 15 to 30 minutes. This firsthand observation facilitated a rich understanding of how exactly students conducted their search for information.

Retrospective Research Paper Interviews were conducted with 9 students. In the retrospective research paper interview, participants were asked to give a step-by-step account of how they completed a previous research assignment while drawing each step on a large sheet of paper, producing both a narrative and a visual account of the assignment from beginning to end.

[1] The Photo Journals, Mapping Diaries, Web Design Workshops, Space Design Workshops and Retrospective Research Paper Interview were adapted from protocols developed by Nancy Foster and the "Studying Students" research team at the River Campus Libraries of the University of Rochester. The ERIAL project would like to express its thanks to Nancy Foster, Susan Gibbons, and the members of the University of Rochester research team for sharing these protocols with our project. For more information on the University of Rochester study, see Nancy Foster and Susan Gibbons, *Studying Students: The Undergraduate Research Project at the University of Rochester* (Chicago: Association College and Research Libraries, 2007).