

Research Incentive Fund Grant Supports Professional Discourse (or How INULA Helped Me Practice What I Teach)

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"The information literate student validates understanding and interpretation of the information through discourse with other individuals, subject-area experts, and/or practitioners."

Some of you may recognize this quote as a performance standard for the ACRL information literacy competency number three, the one about evaluating and incorporating information. I highlight it here because these innocuous words took on a profound reality when I ventured out to share and discuss my own research with other librarians.

Thanks to an INULA Research Incentive Grant, I travelled to Seattle, Washington last summer to present a poster accepted for the biennial Library Assessment Conference. The poster, entitled Helping Libraries Count: Collecting Reference Statistics for Meaningful Use, describes an assessment project I have been working on for over a year. I am not going to discuss the research here; instead I want to reflect on the experience of sharing my work with a broad audience of librarians interested in assessment. An occasion to present my research was much more of a learning experience for me than I ever expected.

As the performance standard suggests, sharing discoveries with others informs our own research and practice, just as much as our findings inform others. When we work on original research or develop a new practice, much of the work is done within a set of walls-maybe our office walls or maybe the walls of the institution where we work-but certainly within a limited context. For me, the everyday nature of that context constrains my perspective regarding the initiative, innovation, and potential impact of the work that I am doing. (Recognize those three descriptors, too?) The opportunity for discourse with other practitioners truly did validate my understanding of what I am learning in researching useful applications of reference statistics. It helped me broaden the scope of how I interpret this research and make it relevant to a larger audience. As conference attendees reviewed my poster, I was able to talk to many individuals about the project, hear their reactions, field questions, and consider new, stimulating ideas. Needless to say, the interest and appreciation people expressed was encouraging and gave me fresh insight and appreciation for what I had accomplished. The experience also gave me lots of inspiration about how to continue, and the motivation to do so.

Daily, academic librarians lead others through the steps of information literacy on one level or another, but it is still easy to forget what important and powerful lessons we have to deliver. Over the years, the INULA Research Incentive Fund Grants have helped numerous members as they assemble, organize, prepare, and present their contributions to librarianship. By supporting librarians in each of these phases of their own research, INULA is providing opportunities for us to practice what we teach in pervasive and profitable ways.

---Judith Garrison, MLS, May 2009