Adjusting the Spiel and the Patter

Slide 1
Introduction
Kat and Mallory - Information Commons Specialists at Metropolitan State University.

Slide 2
There are 5 CLA’s or ICS’ (depending upon who you ask) within the library. A couple of interesting things about the library/information commons model and the role of the information commons specialist in the library. We exist somewhere in between the library and IT services. We make sure the library’s equipment is in good working order, but our primary job is to assist patrons with the use of university technology, web access, and university licensed software in the library.

Slide 3
We serve a highly diverse population. The Metro State library is collocated with the Dayton’s Bluff Branch of the Saint Paul Public Library. We have a highly active community borrower and computer-use program. This means we assist patrons possessing a wide range of tech skills. On any given day we may go from helping someone to edit a movie using Adobe Elements or analyze their data in SPSS to assisting someone who has never used a mouse, to open their first e-mail account.

With such a variety of users it can be difficult to determine what each group needs and how best to approach individuals. It can also make it difficult to remember to turn patron interactions into teaching moments.

We are a creative and dedicated bunch. It seems like we are always throwing around ideas to help our patrons. Rarely do these ideas gain enough traction to go anywhere. We decided it would be useful to find ways to assess the technology needs of our patrons in order to guide the provision of resources and services based upon what our patrons need and supported by evidence.

Slide 4
Due to constraints on our time and budget we wanted to find ways to evaluate our services in a quickly and efficiently. In this presentation we will share the results of our review of the literature, thoughts on using principles of web design to inform the way
we provide assistance, our experimental creation of user personas, our use of whiteboards to gain feedback from patrons, and finally share some of the ideas that have gained traction as a result of this initiative.

Mallory will start us off where every good librarian starts -- in the literature....

**Research description**

When we began this project we did some research. Ok, we did a ton of research *(Slide 5)* We wanted to find out A) Who has access to Information Communication Technologies or ICT? B) How do people use ICT? And C) How do different people view ICT? Overall our research told us several things like how having a computer in your home increases your chances of having better tech skills. Or that Universities presume that students will have sufficient tech skills upon entering school. These skills can include navigating the university webpage, registering for classes, applying for financial aid, using university email systems, etc. Students success in college is also dependent upon their ability to find information (most likely using technology because I haven’t seen a card catalog since I was in elementary school.) Essentially rote memorization is no longer the key to success. There is also the idea that Tech support services are generally aimed at students with the most tech proficiency instead of the least.

We spent a fair amount of time researching the digital divide. Traditionally the digital divide was thought of as the haves versus the have-nots. *(Slide 6)* Essentially those who had access to technology - computers, mobile phones, pagers, etc. and those who did not. With technology becoming more and more available, the digital divide we see to today is much more complicated. With more access, we see more gaps, socioeconomic-status, race, gender, age, education just to name a few, but these gaps also covers skills related to ICT. These are the new haves versus have nots - people that have the skills to retrieve information they are looking for, or the ability to use the application that is needed for their projects and the people lacking those skills. They might also be lacking in familiarity with today's various types of technology and web-pages. This skills gap is the second digital divide.
The first digital divide (Slide 7) can be split with socio-economic divide and education. Those with more (economically and educationally), had more. There was also an age gap. If you were above a certain age it was expected that you would not understand this newfangled technology. (Fun fact, the word newfangled has been around since the 1400’s) With this second divide, (Slide 8) we still see gaps in terms of volume of devices (i.e. persons who have home computer plus laptop plus tablet plus smartphone versus persons with just a smartphone or home computer/laptop & smartphone,) but we also see that same divide transfer to skills. The more tech you have, the more likely you are to know how to use it. Students can (and some do) write entire papers on their smartphones because it is the only technology they are comfortable with. This second divide is what we see the most at our library.

Demographics

When it comes to demographics research has shown us that there is a distinct gap when it comes to education. Almost 100% of US Public schools provide internet access for students, but the ratio of students to computers was much higher in poverty stricken schools than in schools in well off neighborhoods. (Slide 9) (Ex. 80:1 vs 30:1) It is also worth noting that teachers are more likely to assign technology dependent homework if they know their students have access to technology at home. (Kat Citation) This shows us that location and socioeconomic status matter. Along those same lines, people who go on to take at least some higher education courses are more adept and comfortable around technology. Individuals that stop education after high-school struggle more with technology. (2) Lots of the research we saw for demographics was contradicting. Age no longer has a clear division of tech users and non-tech users, nor does race, ethnicity, or gender. In fact, something we did come across in our research is that the number and variety of websites that a person visits is directly related to how quickly those persons can find information on the web. Here to talk more about that is Kat…..

How do people experience interfaces

*Slide 10*

How many of you have visited 100 web sites?
Where will you look to find contact information on web site?
You know the answers to these questions because you have internalized aspects of good web design. This internalization occurs when you experience a wide variety of web sites. Many web sites use principles of good design which creates conformity among web sites, particularly regarding navigation and placement of certain elements. The more web sites they experience the better they will get at recognizing different parts of the site more quickly resulting in the ability to locate needed information more quickly. Practice is key.
Let’s take a couple of minutes to bring some of those unconscious web skills to your conscious perception.

C.R.A.P. - Robin Williams - The non-designers’ design book
- Contrast
- Repetition
- Alignment
- Proximity

Reading skills - Less skilled readers read in a context-based, non-automatic fashion instead of an automatic, feature-based fashion. Hierarchy and structure aids in reading.

All our thinking about web design principles led us to consider the possible benefits of creating user personas that describe our patrons. Personas are highly generalized narratives of potential web site users. Web designers use personas to circumvent the isolation that can occur when developing a web site. Many times the designers will not meet the users. Interestingly, working with the public can have a similar effect. You can get worn out and forget that each person has a story, a portion of that story informs their relationship with technology. As the Info Commons Desk team was developing the personas we came to realize some interesting characteristics of the three types of users we described.
- High Tech Skills Student - has access to many types of tech throughout the day, has support in the form of friends and family who know tech, highly motivated to learn more about technology
- Low Tech Skills Student - Low support from friends and family, limited access to technology, must learn tech to succeed in school
- Community User - Low support from friends and family, limited access to tech, not highly motivated to learn more about tech, just wants to meet immediate goals

Assessment
When we started this project, we began by brainstorming ways to collect data to assess user’s levels of tech use. Our first bit of data that we wanted to pull was our Desk Tracker data. (Slide 15) We use desk tracker to record patron interactions. Periodically people will forget to enter interactions or new student workers will not have immediate access so it is by no means a flawless system, but it gave us somewhere to start.

When we pulled Desk Tracker Data we look at two things 1) Patron type (click for arrow) and 2) technical assistance (click for arrow). This category is then broken down into sub categories of (Slide 16) Copying/Printing/Scanning, Username Set-Up/Password, D2L, Applications (Word, Excel, etc.), Basic PC Skills (E-mail, login/logout, etc.), Wireless, EnvisionWare: Other:

Within those subcategories (Slide 17) we spend a lot of time helping people use printer, helping students with basic PC skills, and working with students using different applications like word, excel, etc. We also spend a lot of time with community members trying to use our envisionware software to log in and out of community computers. (Slide 18) Within envisionware we have user skill splits. (Slide 19) Most of our time working with envisionware is spent on helping patrons reserve computers using the software. The last category that takes up a lot of data is “other.” (Slide 20) The problem with “other” is that it encompasses everything. (Slide 21) It covers everything from formatting papers to audio issues to mouse not working to registering for classes
to student H: drives to zip files and on and on and on. It shows where we as a team need to start unifying our language. We have 3 different instances of students formatting papers but they are all logged as separate because our language is inconsistent. If we want to track what is asked for most often, we need better language to track it.

After deciding to look at desk tracker data we decided we should have other data gathered as well. We discussed the possibility of doing surveys but it became clear that while surveys are a great tool, they are not what we should be using for our initial research. We couldn’t do something so in depth when we hadn’t even scratched the surface yet. We talked over using online surveys as well but realized that would limit our responses to those who knew how to access online surveys.

Ultimately we decided to use our whiteboards that are stationed in the computer lab entrance and the student lounge. We left one at the entrance and moved the other into the area where our community user computers are. We decided that some sort of informal survey on the whiteboards was our best option. We talked over using open ended questions vs multiple choice where people could leave hash marks. Ultimately we decided open ended would give us a better idea of how to refine our questions in the future when we could use multiple choice. We came up with following five questions:

(Slide 22)

1) What do you use computers for?
2) What do you do when you need help with technology?
3) What technology skills would you like to develop?
4) What devices do you use the most?
5) Where do you access technology the most? Home, work, school, other?

The plan was for each question to be posted for a week before we changed it. The responses we received for the questions that were answered varied widely. As far as computer use goes our patrons use it for everything from gaming, to writing books, to research projects. The following slides will give you a few more ideas as to what people use them for. (Slide 23)

(Whiteboard slides here and briefly talk about some of the answers –)
Use – mapping out bus routes, online banking, online dating, email, tax forms, Facebook, homework, research, printing things. *(Slide 24)*

Help – Google it, ask library staff, YouTube, parents, siblings, cry, injure self, injure computer.

Tech skills - Skype, Mac, Adobe, PowerPoint, excel, “hacking”

We also chose a whiteboard survey because we did not have to go through HSRB to do this type of informal research. *(Slide 25)* There is no pretense of privacy or confidentiality because people are writing on whiteboards where everyone can see it. However because it is so informal, we can't make any generalizations from it either. These responses still provide direction for us to set goals for our library staff. Kat will tell us more about this.

**Needs Assessment**

Using the idea of the reference interview you can gauge what a person’s tech needs are. Ask lots of questions and clarify their responses. I like to think of it as teaching someone to ride a bike.

- Tech needs - what do they already know? What do they need to know? How much help is necessary? Training wheels?
- Learning needs - how will they best learn what they need to know? It’s almost always best to let them be the driver, but sometimes….
- Goals - What is their primary or immediate goal? Are there other goals they are working on simultaneously? Are they preparing for a bike marathon or just a fun ride around the block?
- Interests - Are they interested in bike riding? What do they enjoy doing? Is there a way you can bring those interests in to increase engagement?
- Attitudes - nonverbal communication - what does their body language tell you?

Are they afraid their bike will end up like this?

*Slide 26*
People tend to identify themselves as computer people or non-computer people. The question is not how do we turn non-computer people into computer people it is how do we empower people to use technology to accomplish their goals? A large part of it is taking the fear and anxiety out of computer use. Up until now this has primarily been accomplished by the mere presence of assistance in the lab. But how can we create an environment where tech anxiety is reduced and active tech learning occurs?

Undertaking an initiative to assess the technology needs of our patrons and viewing our library patrons through the design lens has been highly beneficial.

- Alters our perception of software and web sites. It is okay to tell a user that a web site is designed poorly.
- Provides a new perspective to technology instruction that encourages working with the design.
- Personas remind us that each person has a story and a relationship with technology.
- Reminds us that many people can consume technology, but not know how to harness technology to meet specific goals.

**Slide 27**

Our research has prompted us to consider making some changes:

- Extended laptop loans
- Educating and training staff and student workers to assess tech needs and respond appropriately
- Altering our service model to allow for more one-on-one assistance/instruction
- Make adjustments to desk tracker to better record our technical interactions including: the addition of clearly defined common terms, better training in the use of Desk Tracker, and the possible addition of categories

**Slide 28**

Conducting this research has provided the impetus for our desk to become active participants in the assessment of our library services. In the future, we do plan to do a more formal survey of the tech needs and research into the ICT skills of our students.
and community users. Partnering with our Center for Online Learning to conduct this research may be beneficial.

**Slide 29**
Thank You!

**Slide 30**
The MIS 100 class story
There was an older gentleman who used to come into the library on Tuesday evenings. He was taking our MIS 100 course. He would approach the desk and ask for assistance 3-4 times each evening. The first few times he came to the desk he prefaced his request for assistance with, “Please can you help me? I do not know what I am doing wrong. I do not know computers.” The MIS course was an online course. The anxiety in the man’s voice was heart-wrenching. I would go help him (mostly hand-hold) for a few minutes then excuse myself. He didn’t want anyone to do the work for him, he just wanted someone to be present in case he needed help. Only once or twice did I need to provide actual assistance. The thing I found incredible about this gentleman was the speed with which he acquired skill with computers. As his confidence grew he called on me less and less. The semester ended and he finished the class. I just saw him in the library the other day. He smiled and said I would be seeing more of him as he was now starting an upper level computer course. I have n