Interview: Lisa Federer – UCLA

[Note: As of October 2013, Lisa is employed by the NIH Library.]

Tell me about the product or service that you provide in the role that you play at your library?

I am the Research Informationist at the UCLA Louise M. Darling Biomedical Library. My work in this area began with becoming a research informationist for an NIH-funded research team thanks to a National Library of Medicine supplemental grant. The grant came at a time when the UCLA Library was in the process of better defining our role in supporting e-research and data management, having recently participated in the ARL/DLF eScience Institute. Extending the concept of "research informationist" services more broadly to the health and life sciences community is one of many ways the Library has responded to the campus need for e-research and data support.

Defining exactly what a research informationist is and does is difficult, as I find that the role is still evolving and shifting. The more I interact with researchers, the better sense I have of how I can best support their needs and where gaps exist in campus services and resources. So far the areas I feel I've had the most impact in are providing instruction in data management through workshops and consultations, supporting systematic reviews by designing literature reviews, and guiding researchers with questions about NIH Public Access Policy compliance. We began offering monthly data management workshops in April 2013, and the series has been very successful so far. Feedback from attendees, as well as responses to a survey conducted in March 2013, indicates that many of our students, staff, and faculty have questions about data management and are not sure where to turn for help. Because it's not feasible for me to become as involved in every project as I am with the research team I was funded to support, I've found that providing lots of training opportunities is a useful approach to reaching as many people as possible.

How can other librarians use this product or service?

I think librarians can definitely learn from the successes and failures of data management and e-research services at other institutions, though ultimately I think that a librarian's best bet is to get out and talk to people on campus about what kind of support they need. All of my course materials, including video of many of the workshops, are available online, either through the UCLA Library website (http://www.library.ucla.edu) or my website (http://www.lisafederer.net).

How has your library reached out to your institutional community and how have you earned support for this particular service?

Identifying institutional partners has been crucial in the early successes with our data management and e-research support services. UCLA's Office of Research Administration, Office of Contract and Grants Administration, Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research, and Clinical and Translational Science Institute have all been key partners in helping get the word about the Library's services out to the research community, as well as identifying researchers' needs that campus resources do not currently meet. Many of these partnerships formed as a direct result of the Library's support for the NIH Public Access Policy. Particularly as NIH begins to enforce the policy more strictly, many campus stakeholders are concerned about the implications for UCLA grantees, but few have enough experience with the intricacies of how to comply to provide the in-depth support that grantees need. Being able to assist with these questions has given me a "foot in the door" with many campus partners and researchers.

What skills or experience do you think librarians need to acquire to meet the needs of escience and data management and can you provide examples of the skills and services that you or your other staff have in this particular area?

I think an escience librarian needs to be well-versed in funder policies (like how to write a data management plan and what funders expect in terms of sharing), familiar with the general culture of scientific research, and aware of what resources can help researchers to meet their needs (whether it's a tool like the DMPTool or a local resource, like who to contact or help with statistics). Most importantly, though, I think that a love of learning and a passion for science are the key to success in escience librarianship. Many interesting projects have come out of a researcher asking me a question I didn't know how to answer. In some ways, I think that my patrons and I are co-creating the definition of what a research informationist does. I start broad when I tell researchers what I do, and they often ask if I can help with specific aspects of their work. Sometimes the answer is no, but more often than not, their question helps me learn more about the research process and hopefully inspires me to learn a skill or concept that will come in handy with another researcher down the road. Some people would probably be uncomfortable with such ambiguity in terms of their job responsibilities, but I think to be successful as an escience librarian, you need to be willing to explore and be creative.