Introducing Data to Academic Librarians

The Straw that Didn’t Break the Camel’s Back

Wendy Watkins
Carleton University
Ottawa, Canada

Charles K. Humphrey
University of Alberta
Edmonton, Canada

July, 2006
Salvador, Brazil
Data Liberation Initiative (DLI)

- Partnership between Canadian universities and Statistics Canada (STC)
- Makes STC public data available for academic research and teaching
- Housed largely in academic libraries
- Celebrating its 10th anniversary in 2006
Background

- DLI established in 1996 after lengthy negotiations
- Initially a 5-year pilot
- STC to provide data files, databases and geography files
- Universities to provide a DLI Contact to facilitate access and use
  - Before DLI – 9 data centres in various locations
  - Post DLI – 69 data centres largely in libraries
- Most contacts not schooled in data
- Training recognized as a need from the start
Training Challenges

- New contacts needed to:
  - Quickly acquire skills to manage the data collection
  - Understand the collection and its use
  - Develop skills to aid patrons working with data

- Experienced contacts needed to:
  - Assuage statistical anxieties
  - Develop a flexible curriculum to address the wide disparities in experience and skill
  - Build on strengths
  - Address weaknesses
Training Challenges (con’t)

- **Geography**
  - Participants stretched across a continent
  - Covered 5 time zones

- **Language**
  - Had to operate in English and French

- **Uneven skill distribution in community**
  - Experience was in West and Ontario
  - Very little experience in Quebec
  - No experience in Atlantic Canada
Goals

- Curriculum designed to:
  - Provide a basic level of core competencies
    - Entry-level skills needed for all institutions, regardless of size
  - Build up with more advanced training
  - Augment to include data literacy issues
  - Conduct training from a public-service perspective – i.e., putting the users’ interests and needs first
- Equip contacts with knowledge and skills to provide first-rate data service
Strategy

- Draft curriculum and training principles
- Rely on peer-to-peer instruction
- Develop comprehensive manual
- Conduct “Train the Trainers” workshop
  - Identify core trainers
  - Pair experienced with inexperienced but enthusiastic trainers
Strategy (con’t)

- Conduct “boot camp” workshops in four regions and two languages
  - Core trainers acted as safety net and resources for inexperienced trainers
- Use extra-curricular activities to build sense of community
- Distribute manual as basic training document
Training Programme

- Continuing Education Programme established in 1997
  - Annual, regionally-based training
- Evident from the start that training had to be multi-level and on-going
  - Personnel changes
  - New institutions
  - Dynamic collection
  - Technological change
  - Building expertise
- Two co-ordinators from each region
Progress to Date

- Training recognized as strength in independent year 5 evaluation
- 39 regional workshops conducted
- National training event, 2003 with IASSIST
  - Allowed for national and international experiences
- Formal establishment of education committee
  - Chair, regional training co-ordinators and STC representative
- Second “Train the Trainers” event
  - New recruits identified
  - Doubled the trainers’ cohort
Success Factors

- Leadership essential
- Travel subsidy results in level playing field, despite long distances
- Buy in by senior library management
  - 80 - 100% participation rates
- Great support from STC data producers
- Common core curriculum
- Recognition of regional differences
- Peer-to-peer instruction
- Emphasis on community building
Programme Outcomes

- Increased capacity in data services
  - Knowledge base and skill set has improved dramatically
- Recognition of data as an essential research resource
  - Staff now being hired on basis of skill and interest, rather than expediency
- Increased trust between data producers and academic researchers
- Establishment of network of Research Data Centres
Value-added Spin-offs

- Wealth of instructional material
  - Housed in an institutional repository
  - Nearly 200 presentations and workshops
  - Available as reference or instructional aids

- Case law database
  - Complex licensing environment
  - Aids contacts in interpretation of access questions

- Citation guide
  - Comprehensive guide to citing data, tables, maps and GIS
Conclusions

- Investment in training is key to success
  - Payoffs greater than expected
  - Some contacts essential part of grant-writing
- DLI opened a new chapter in library service
  - Setting stage for a numerate society
- DLI = Data Liberation Initiative
  = Data Library Initiative
  = Data Literacy Initiative
  = Success
Contacts

- Chuck Humphrey
  University of Alberta
  Edmonton, Alberta
  T6G 2J4  Canada
  humphrey@datalib.library.ualberta.ca

- Wendy Watkins
  Carleton University
  Ottawa, Ontario
  K1S 5B6
  wwatkins@ccs.carleton.ca
Thank you

☐ Questions?