# Information Seeking Behaviors

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# Information

- Information can be any difference you perceive, in your environment or within yourself."

    -Case, D.O. (2002). *Looking for Information.*

# Information Need

- "An information need is a recognition that your knowledge is inadequate to satisfy a goal that you have."
  -Case (2002).

# Information Seeking

- Information seeing is a conscious effort to acquire information in response to a need or gap in your knowledge.

  -Case (2002).

# Information Behavior

- "Information behavior encompasses information seeking as well as the totality of other unintentional or passive behaviors (such as glimpsing or encountering information), as well as purposive behaviors that do not involve seeking, such as avoiding information."
  -Case (2002).

# Studying Information Behavior

- 1902 – Charles Eliot wrote about what was used and what was not in a library.

- 1916 – Ayres & McKinnie study information seeking at the Cleveland Public Library.

- Many information "needs & use" studies in the 1960s.

- Most of these early studies focused on how scientists and engineers sought information.

# Information Seeking in Libraries

- Information-seeking behavior of academics has been a focus of inquiry within the library and information science community for decades.

    e.g., American Psychological Association, 1963-1969; Bath University, 1979, 1980; Earle & Vickery, 1969; Garvey & Griffith, 1963-1967, 1971; Garvey, Lin, & Nelson, 1970, 1971; Line, 1971, 1973; Line, Brittain, & Cranmer, 1971.

# Collection Use Studies

- Early studies were user (demographics) and use studies for improving collection development.

  e.g., Broadus, 1977a, 1977b, 1980; Christiansen, Davis, & Reedscott, 1983; Subrahmanyam, 1983

# Systems Development

- Next set of studies explored the research habits of individuals or groups to design appropriate systems and services that could facilitate those habits.

  Belkin, Oddy, & Brooks, 1982a, 1982b; Ellis, 1989, 1993; Kuhlthau, 1993; Marchionini, 1993

# New Paradigm

- In response to calls in the mid 1980s for more focus on the user rather than the system, this field experienced a major shift both in conceptualization and research design.

# User Studies Become Information Seeking Studies

- Most use and user studies evolved into examination of information-seeking behavior employing more holistic approaches.

  e.g., Fidel, 1993; Pettigrew, Fidel, & Bruce, 2001; Wang, 1999

# Information Seeking Study Characteristics

- Study small groups via observation or unstructured interviews

- Moved away from studying large groups via questionnaires and structured interviews.

- Attempt to generate information-seeking models.

# Information Seeking Studies

- Information seeking studies have been conducted in the following areas:
  - Occupational groups
    - Scientists, engineers, social scientists, humanists, health care providers, managers, journalists, lawyers...
  - Social roles and demographic groups
    - Voters, consumers, patients, gatekeepers...

# How Information Behavior Studies Have Been Conducted

- Quantitative research
  - Used predominately until the 1980s
  - Provides statistical information
- Qualitative research
  - Richer data
  - Does not start with hypothesis
- Mixed methods
  - Combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches

# Methodologies for Studying Information Behavior

- Asking people what they do:
  - Surveys/questionnaires
    - Mailed, in-person/on-site, emailed, web-based
  - Interviews
    - Face-to-face, telephone, email
  - Focus groups
  - Critical incident methodology
    - Respondents talk about specific events at specific times.
  - Delphi technique
    - Experts come to a consensus on topic

# Methodologies for Studying Information Behavior

- Observing what people do
  - Watching people in natural (context appropriate) settings.
  - Watching people in experiments.
  - Unobtrusive - web logs, catalog transaction logs.
  - Intensive – emersion in the culture or social role.

# Annual Review of Information Science and Technology

- Menzel, 1966
- Herner & Herner, 1967
- Paisley, 1968
- Allen, 1969
- Lipetz, 1970

- Crane, 1971
- Lin & Garvey, 1972
- Martyn, 1974
- Crawford, 1978
- Dervin & Nilan, 1986*
- Hewins, 1990
- Wang, 1999

# Example Studies

- Tibbo, Helen R. "Primarily History in America: How US Historians Search for Primary Materials at the Dawn of the Digital Age." *American Archivist* 66 (Spring/Summer 2003): 9-50.

- Meho, Lokman I. and Helen R. Tibbo. "Modeling the Information-Seeking Behavior of Social Scientists: Ellis's Study Revisited." *Journal of the American Society for Information Science & Technology* 54/6 (April 2003): 569-586.