Peer Review: Health Sciences Faculty's Beliefs and Practices

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The purpose of this project was to fund the qualitative data analysis software ATLAS.ti in support of a research project designed to discover LSUHSC-NO faculty members' beliefs about and motivation to participate in peer review of scholarly manuscripts. It is also intended to provide guidance for the library to develop educational opportunities for faculty and residents regarding performing peer reviews.

Was the time sufficient to carry out the plan?

The one-year timeframe for the project was not sufficient to carry out the entire project. Thirteen interviews were conducted with senior faculty members across all five schools which encompass LSUHSC-NO. We are still in the process of analyzing the data. Early analysis is promising; we have learned some valuable information from our interviewees. Although we are still working on the project, we do not require an extension of funding to complete it.

Were expected outcomes met?

The intended outcomes of the project included the development of a documented methodology of the process, purchase of the ATLAS.ti software, a manuscript suitable for presentation and publication, and an educational program tailored to the needs of LSUHSC-NO faculty. Some of the outcomes have been achieved, but the project is still in process. With SCAMeL's help, the LSUHSC-NO libraries were able to purchase a 5-user, 3-year license to ATLAS.ti which is being used by the researchers to analyze the data. The project methodology has been documented and is growing as the project progresses. However, the data gathered through the interviews is still in the analysis phase.

Initial analysis of the interviews has shown that the faculty are very active or have been very active in the peer review process of scholarly projects. Several participants discussed

participating in peer review of NIH grants in addition to scholarly manuscripts prior to publication. They find peer reviewing to be rewarding professionally, but not financially. They nearly all agree that training in the expectations and processes of peer review was not provided to them and they were forced to learn as they went. They also agree that participating in the peer review process keeps them abreast of the current developments in their fields. However, they tended to believe that a double-blind peer review is not truly blind; they stated that they often could ascertain who had reviewed their manuscripts and the identities of the authors of the manuscripts that they reviewed. Participants expressed the belief that peer review was a valuable part of the scholarly conversation and should be continued, yet the process must change for it to survive.

Participants were very forthcoming with suggestions as to how the library could support junior faculty in their peer review activities. They suggested that the library develop a workshop that involves more than a single meeting to guide faculty members just starting peer reviews. They also suggested that this workshop be presented to the whole faculty rather than only one school or department.

What worked well?

The interview format for the project worked very well for the topic. We arranged for two researchers to meet with each participant virtually. This allowed both the researchers and the participants to develop a dialog, clarify explanations, and make suggestions. The ATLAS.ti software package provides space for all researchers to independently analyze and code the interview transcripts. This allows diverse interpretations of the data and a way to synthesize the findings.

Would you have done anything differently?

In retrospect, we would have revised our timeline to allow for more time to learn the software. ATLAS.ti is powerful but not always the most intuitive tool. While the videos provided by the company are helpful, there was a steep learning curve which delayed the analysis of our data. Also, I would have requested funding for a human transcription service. The Zoom transcription feature did not provide us with useful transcripts and AI-based transcription tools, while better than Zoom, required hours of editing before the text was ready for analysis.