THE ITHAKA S+R LOCAL FACULTY SURVEY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT SAN ANTONIO
MANAGING FACULTY NEEDS IN A TIME OF TRANSITION

In a time of transition, the University of Texas at San Antonio implemented the Ithaka S+R Local Faculty Survey to better understand its faculty members' state of mind and the role of the library within the university. Assistant Dean for Collections & Curriculum Support Posie Aagaard reports "we have been transitioning from more of a commuter school to a research institution. We've been awarded more research grants and have excellent faculty members. It's important for us to know how well the library is adapting to the changing needs of the university."

The library was also poised to open a new faculty center within its walls, a center that will encompass an overarching umbrella of services for faculty members. The center will serve as a clearinghouse for faculty-related services offered by the library, as well as the university's research division, and the office overseeing academic and faculty support. Given this, "we really had a reason to survey our faculty members to see how they approach their teaching and research and what needs are not currently met….Even if we cannot offer additional services through the center immediately, this will help us understand future paths the center might take."

UTSA was particularly interested in faculty attitudes towards online teaching and worked with Ithaka S+R to develop a module of questions on this topic. "S+R spent some time with us, learning our background, and came up with questions that addressed perfectly what we were trying to learn." In particular, UTSA needed to distinguish between faculty members' interest in online teaching and their actual levels of teaching activity. The library was looking for timely findings on an issue important to the campus community. "We definitely did not anticipate how much faculty were thinking about online teaching—it's not something a lot of them are doing now, but they would welcome the opportunity to do more."

Aagaard admits, "We thought very hard about implementing the survey. You only get so many opportunities to engage faculty members in this way. But ultimately, we decided it was the right thing for us." All faculty members received a report of the survey findings, and the library now has the chance to dig in and evaluate how to better support them. While at many points, UTSA's faculty responses aligned with their counterparts at other universities within the same Carnegie class, some of the divergences were striking. "Lots more of our faculty rate digital research activities as important to their research than their national peers. That's something we need to explore!"

The Dean also shared the survey results widely across campus, opening up a discussion with her provost and bringing new data points to the campus online learning group. "It's especially satisfying," Aagaard concludes, "for our dean to be able to shout out 'I know the answer' when the academic deans wonder how faculty members share their research. We don't have to rely on anecdote—we now know our faculty."