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# How are Researchers Documenting Their Day-to-Day Activities?

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# HOW ARE RESEARCHERS DOCUMENTING THEIR DAY-TO-DAY ACTIVITIES?

## INTRODUCTION



The Informatics Interest Group (IIG) at the University of Michigan undertook a pilot project to evaluate the feasibility of launching a full-scale research project to investigate the best practices of our researchers in keeping lab notebooks. Our objectives are to learn about practices already present on campus through a series of faculty interviews and analyze those practices based on their similarities or differences, their compliance with modern technology, and their ease of use and access, as well as to suggest other practices based on our review of tools reported in the literature.

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Selected questions asked during the interviews.



- 1 Do you primarily use print or electronic lab notebooks?
- 2 Do you have notebook standards and policies that each lab member should follow?
- 3 How do you share notebooks in the lab?
- 4 How do you preserve notebook contents, and what happens when a researcher leaves?
- 5 What is the size of your lab/research group?
- 6 Are you aware that UM has a license to LabArchives?

## PAPER VS. ELECTRONIC

### Paper Notebooks



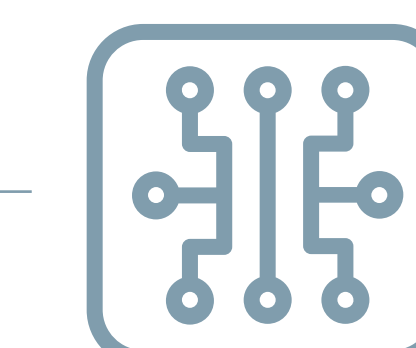
#### PROS

- Easier to jot things down quickly
- Easy to carry around & show others, bring to lab meetings, flip through pages to find results

#### CONS

- Not easily shared without making copies
- Fragility of research information we keep in print

### Electronic Notebooks



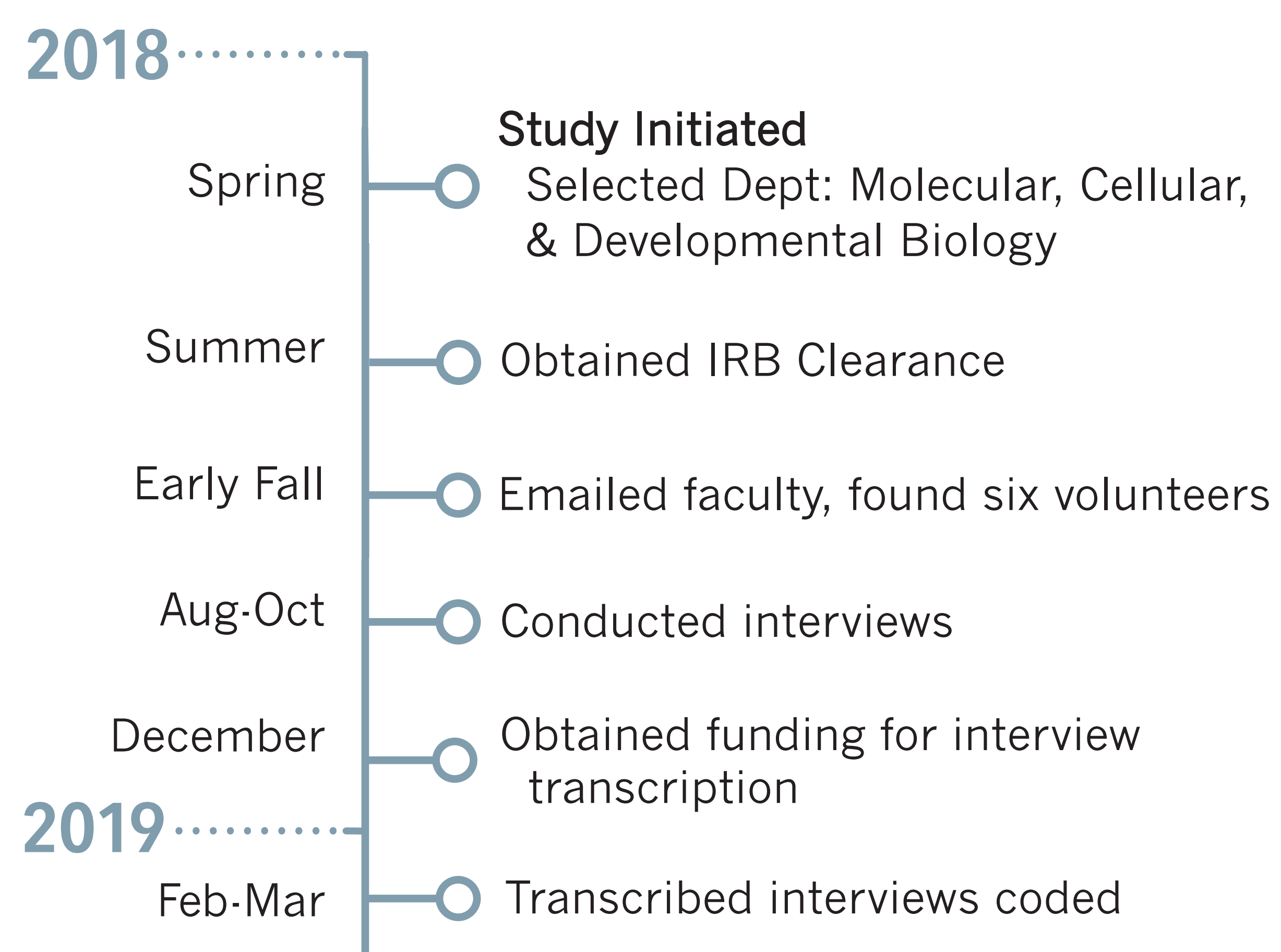
#### PROS

- Easier to share information
- Information is backed up
- Ease of downloading data from a lab instrument

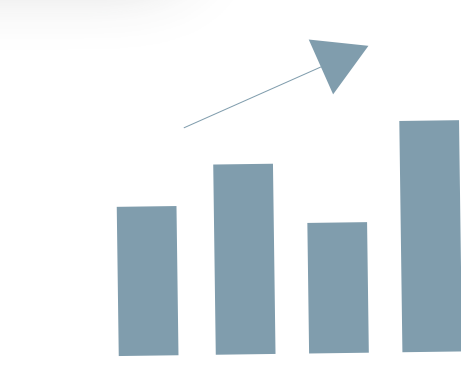
#### CONS

- Company may go defunct and information could be lost
- Product might not be tailored for researcher needs

## METHODOLOGY

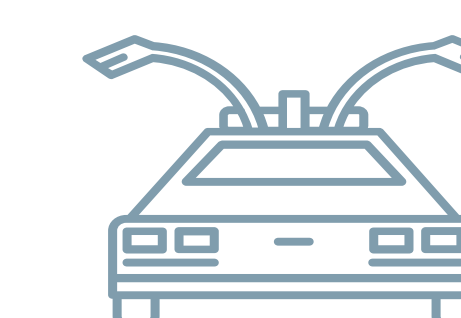


## RESULTS



- .....» Of the six faculty members interviewed, all use print to record activities in their labs
- .....» Two of the six faculty use both print and electronic notebooks
- .....» Every lab also had laboratory samples of different kinds
- .....» Paper notebooks were stored but not backed up
- .....» All faculty had small to medium-sized labs
- .....» No labs had rigid policies they followed
- .....» Sharing is done with collaborators, peers, and advisors in either electronic format or with paper copies

## FUTURE PLANS



Meet with a small number of librarians on campus who have an interest in Electronic Lab Notebooks (ELN) to discuss the library's role in ELNs within the university.

If desired we will investigate further by doing a survey to generate more data.

If data shows trends we will come up with some suggested best practices for ELN use to be shared campus-wide.

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