Cooperation between librarians and teaching staff

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Abstract

The changing times with new challenges and new need means that university libraries must look closely at their own visions and missions. The libraries must be ready to accept new tasks and cover the needs of the student's and academic staff in new areas. In this paper I will look at the need for cooperation between librarians and academic staff in order to optimize the teaching of information literacy in the library, and also present the on-line tutorial *Search and Write*.
Keywords: *challenge; university mission; task; information literacy*

În aceste timpuri în schimbare, care aduc cu ele noi provocări şi noi necesităţi, bibliotecile universitare trebuie să se aplece cu mai multă atenţie asupra propriilor viziuni şi misiuni. Bibliotecile trebuie să fie pregătite să accepte noi sarcini şi să satisfacă necesităţile studenţilor şi personalului didactic, în noi domenii. Lucrarea subliniază importanţa cooperării între bibliotecari şi personalul universitar în scopul de a optimiza predarea culturii informaţiei în bibliotecă şi, de asemenea, prezintă tutorialul online *Search and Write*.
Cuvinte-cheie: *provocare; misiunea universităţii; sarcină; cultura informaţiei*

The library in the university

University libraries all over the world are facing new challenges and new circumstances. The new and different environment will e.g. manifest themselves in the widely seen changing user behaviour, when the users are more and more using the electronic resources. Also, as the European Bologna Process puts more emphasis on students writing essays, this calls for new ways of using the library.

Another aspect of the changing environment for the library is the technological changes that have taken place during the last decades, with computers becoming more ordinary equipment for students and libraries. The digital wave with the enormous amount of electronic journals poses a different but related kind of challenge for the universities and their libraries.

On the one hand one can see a large increase in the publication, and the ease of dissemination of scholarly material and research results. On the other hand there is a similarly large increase in the costs of subscription to scholarly journals, way ahead of any ordinary price-rises in society. The costs are so high that the publications, and thereby also the results of the research, are out of reach for many of the universities in developing countries. This is in many ways counter to the possibilities that scholars now have to disseminate globally almost at once by using the Internet and the electronic channels.

Partly as an answer to this is the movement for Open Access, led by universities and academic libraries. At the moment, this is in its beginning.

Many universities in different parts of the world are having financial worries. This also influences the libraries. When the costs of subscription rise unreasonably and the agreements with the publishers are too harsh, this adds to the challenges faced by the libraries.

Although many libraries grapple successfully with these challenges, developing new services to meet new user needs, important stakeholders often have an old-fashioned view of the library. It is clear that libraries need new visions and updated images, and that they need to develop them in cooperation with stakeholders in the universities.

Traditional cooperation

The traditional cooperation between subject specialists and scholars/university staff in a university library has centred on the development of collections. Subject specialists have tried to find what is, or will be, on the student's curricula. They have looked for what is the research interest at the department. This has been important, in order to be able to stock the collections with the most needed literature. The scholars, on their side, have asked for specific books or journals to be bought, or for access to particular archives or corpora. As long as the scholars can only suggest, the cooperation has been somewhat lopsided, with the tendency to think that the librarians know best, at least from the part of the librarians.

When it comes to training, it has for a long time been based on the available resources. "This is how to use the OPAC, and important database X".

In the new, challenging environment the library must make sure to have a good understanding of the needs of the stakeholders and the most important group of "customers".

Key questions for the library

In order to obtain this understanding there are some important questions the library must ask itself and the stakeholders.

Where are we today?

This question has to do with the history and position of the library in the university, and can be answered by different means, like statistics, surveys and benchmarking.

Where do we want to be?

This question is about the vision for the future, and is closely related to the library mission. Important user groups and stakeholders are the ones that must be interviewed to give us the answer here, and also the librarians themselves.

How do we get there?

The answer to this important question comes from the literature, other libraries experiences and the library's own experiences of what works.

More about "Where do we want to be?"

"Where do we want to be?" and "Who do we want to be in the university system?" are questions that will set the agenda for interaction with the academic staff in the university. One can differentiate between the services that the library would like to offer, and the services that they have to offer, because they are required and expected from main user groups.

The way to find the solutions for these questions will be in cooperation with the top leadership of the university and larger segments of main user groups. When one has a better understanding of the role of the library, as seen both from outside the library and inside, one may then do the necessary allocations of time and resources.

An example of changing focus in the university and library

Among the new trends in the libraries in Norway, the implementation of teaching of Information Literacy has meant significant changes for the library, and also for the cooperation between academic staff and librarians.

The most used definition of "Information literacy":

Information literacy
is knowing
when and
why you need information,
where to find it, and
how to evaluate,
use and communicate it
in an ethical manner (American Library Association 1989)

Part of the learning philosophy behind the program for information literacy, and behind all the teaching in the library environment, is based on the idea of situated learning; that the students will learn more, better and faster if the teaching or training is given to them at the same time as they are doing the relevant task. So if the students

have a deadline for an essay at mid September, they will learn about relevant resources in late August/early September.

This way of thinking and planning trainings makes the library dependent on good and close cooperation with the teaching staff at the departments. They are the ones that plan the courses and the exams and know about the timing. The academic staff at departments is the ones that have control with the type of exam or essay to be written and assessed. Are the students given a broad field from where to write? Then they must be taught how to narrow the task. Are they given an already formulated hypothesis to answer? Then they need a different content of the teaching and training from the library.

The learning outcomes are discussed and set in cooperation with the subject teacher, and the subject teacher will arrange for smaller groups to be sent to the library.

In order for the teaching to be successful, the librarians and academic staff depend on each other, and on the cooperation they can manage for the benefit of their students.

Both the librarians and the academics prefer that the library teaching takes place in the library building, and we also use our web based program as an on-line back up.

The web based program that also may be used for distance students is called "søk og skriv", or search and write. It is based on SWIM from Aalborg University Library, and has been developed in cooperation with several other institutions of higher education in Bergen.

www.sokogskriv.no

Here are some screen shots of the web based program:

The program is module based, with the modules based on the flow of the writing process.

Also, there is a feature called "Oda's diary", where an imaginary student called Oda writes about her different experiences in writing an in-depth project. She records the emotional turmoil as well as the information searches she is doing.

There are also some exercises that will familiarize the students with one pattern of writing essays.

An important part of the course, which has been developed on the basis of the cooperation between librarians and academic staff, is the part that deals with the evaluation of different kinds of information, both printed and electronic.

A very brief argument for the importance of this, especially when it comes to electronic sources for information, can be found in this table:

Survey from two Universities 2008	Brasov, Romania	Bergen, Norway
Library OPAC	37 %	22 %
Library databases	20 %	16 %
Internet	43 %	52 %

This survey from Bergen and Brasov from 2008 shows that half the students will start their search for information for a given assignment in an Internet search engine. With the enormous amount of information from all kinds of informers to be found electronically, students are in desperate need for some kind of tools to be able to handle this successfully.

In addition, 89 % of university students from all over the world will go to a search engine at Internet to start to search for information (Rosa et al 2005, p. 1-17). The 2008-survey from Bergen and Brasov asked about information for an essay or assignment at the University, while OCLC asked about search for information generally, so the results may not be compared directly. Still, the trend is the same.

Conclusion

Students need tools to cope with the information overload, especially on the Internet. Libraries have traditionally been the custodians of academic information at the Universities. In close cooperation with academic staff, one way forward for the libraries is to take care of the teaching of information literacy. By doing this, the library will have a new role to play in the University, and will be able to update its vision and mission.

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