USER EDUCATION PROGRAMMES AND ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

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Abstract

This paper examines user education programmes in Academic library . The discussion focuses on the planning organization and implementation of these programmes and need for user education in Academic libraries and information Technology and user education such as web based user education programme.

Keywords : User Education, Academic Library

1.   Introduction

Academic libraries support the teaching and research needs of institutions they serve. It is the libraries' responsibility to ensure that the use of its information sources, resources and services are maximized to benefit its users, hence the necessity for user education programmes.

Developments in computers, microelectronics, and communication technologies have radically changed the library and information environment. Gone are the days of stand-alone libraries, in which a library was judged less by the quality of its resources and services than by the number of documents it had available. Traditional libraries were dominated by print publications and the access mechanisms were also by-and-large manual. The paradigm shift from stand-alone libraries to library and information networks, available via the Internet, can provide end-users with a seamless connection to Internet-based services. Moreover, we are surrounded by automated, digital, and virtual libraries as well as by networked data, specialized networks, and library networks. Multimedia and the Internet have further made the job of library and information professionals more challenging.

The development of new technology makes direct access to information easier for users, and, while information skills are required to collect and present that information, in the future there is likely to be less of a role for information workers as intermediaries between users and information sources.

2.   Definition

Fleming (1990) defines user education "as various programmes of instruction, education and exploration provided by libraries to users to enable them to make more effective, efficient and independent use of information sources and services to which these libraries provide access".

3.   The Challenge in Information Services

Information has become more complex and expensive. The traditional services, such as reference service, current awareness services, and selective dissemination of information need be supplemented by "Selective Elimination of Information," the evaluation of information to separate quality information from junk. In this context, the basic challenge is to convince and convert traditional users into users of Internet-based resources and services. Information literacy can contribute to developing information technology (IT) related competencies among end-users as it includes basic computer and network literacy. The aim of information literacy is to make information users capable of locating, retrieving, and using information.

4.   The Changing Academic Library

During the recent economic recession, money for education and libraries in India became very tight, requiring cuts in serial subscriptions and book purchases for academic libraries. At the same time, subscription prices were soaring, as were the costs and number of databases and journals available. Library planning is now essential in order to maximize available resources and take advantage of emerging technologies. Academic libraries in India should now implement a Library Planning and Action Initiative (LPAI).

To accomplish the goals of the LPAI, a planning team should be established in every academic library. An advisory task force must be formed to work closely with the planning team. The advisory task force members could be chancellors, vice-chancellors, other academic administrators, academic librarians, a representative from the Librarian's Association, information technologists, and other faculty including representation from faculty governance bodies.

5.   The Need For User Education

User education is essential. It helps publicize library services. It improves the image of the library. Above all, user education and training are the best ways to implement Ranganathan's five laws of library science[2]. User education and training are often fee-based, because developing the infrastructure for the network environment is very costly.

The world still appears to be suffering from an exponential increase in all kinds of   information – bearing material. Even if much of this is of little value, it still has to be shifted to find the required information.

Several new methods of information transfer, such as mechanized information retrieval   systems, are being developed, giving rise to new aspects of user education. Both educational and research topics are becoming increasingly multidisciplinary in nature, thereby drawing information from a wider range of sources. Not being able to find necessary information delays research or decisions. Lack of awareness of information leads to duplication of effort. Various estimate of the extent and cost of this have been made.

6.   Planning Of User Education

The establishment of the UNISIST programme within UNESCO as an Inter-Governmental programme to stimulate and guide voluntary Co-Operation in the flow of S&T information at the national, regional and international levels, and the launching of national information systems, such as NISSAT in India, has focused attention on the need for training the users in the effective use of information.

The UNESCO General Information programme (PGI) has been making organized efforts to promote user education and training programmers through organizing seminars, workshops, and developing tools, publications and guidelines. The 'UNISIST Guide for Teachers ' and the 'Guidelines for Developing & Implementing a National Plan for Training in information use ', are the two vary useful publications.

Several countries, particularly USA and UK, have made organized efforts in promoting programme for educating and training information users and extensive literature in the field is available to guide the formulation of such programmes in India.

Libraries provide a support service to the institutions they serve. It is important to understand the goals of the institution served to enable librarians to come up with a mission statement which should reflect the

library's commitment in helping the institution achieve its goals. Thorough planning is needed to ensure that all activities carried out are towards meeting the institutional goal s. Commitment to educate users should be reflected in the mission statement of the library. This should be followed by a written user education policy.

User education programmes should aim to make all users aware of the information resources available, both directly in the library and from external sources and enable users to enjoy the search for i nformation . It is interesting to note that many of the objectives listed by libraries in this study stressed the self-sufficiency of users through a successful user education programme.

Written policies and objectives on user education provide a basis for self-evaluation. This could be used to answer questions like, is the user education programme achieving what it was set out to achieve? If not more detailed studies on user information needs should be conducted. User education programmes need continuous revision to keep up to date with the changing information environment. Written objectives for instruction should be derived from the written profiles of the information needs of the users. Universities have unique identities "each university library must design its own course to meet the immediate needs of its clientele as well as fit into the university teaching programme". This is evident in the responses; some libraries' concern is introducing first year students to the library "some of whom have never used a library before".

7. Some specific components of user education are:

- Librarians introducing new students, some of who come from school systems where there are generally no school librarians or well established libraries, to the complexities of university library facilities.

- Librarians familiarizing users, who have little or no information seeking skills at all with a broad range of library resources in order to develop library skills.

- Librarians educating users on how to find materials manually or electronically using on-line public access catalogues and CD-ROMs.

8. It is generally agreed that there are three levels of user education:

The library orientation is to be given at the beginning of every academic year or semester ... it should be applicable to all those who are using the library for the first time.

- The second stage, i.e. subject oriented instruction for undergraduates at a stage when they are admitted to a special branch or subject of their choice or at the time of project work.

- Literature search training ... should be provided at the beginning of their research work.'

The literature search is specified as being for post-graduate students but with students developing as self-guided independent learners there is no reason why this should be the case. Depending on the student, the course, and the assignment there may be some overlap between the three stages.

Knowing which level of user education is required by a particular group of students enables the librarian to determine the aims and objectives of the session. The three main aims of user education regardless of level are:

- To train the user to exploit the library resources effectively.

- To provide the user with the skills for independent information seeking.

- To encourage the user to seek the assistance of library professionals.

9.   User education for students is necessary.

If study programmes are to be based on the students' active search for knowledge, then students must acquire sounder knowledge of searching for, evaluating and utilizing scientific and scholarly information. Libraries today offer comprehensive courses in library orientation and information retrieval (i.e. "user education" in library terminology). Such courses have become better organized and certain larger libraries have special user education divisions. However, the courses vary in scope and are not always well integrated into the teaching process. User education ought to be integrated as much as possible into the different parts of each study programme. Moreover, librarians and lecturers in co-operation with each other should hold the courses.

10.   User education for lecturers

New pedagogic methods, new technology and extended study programmes necessitate the further development of user education. Development is being hindered by the fact that user education often lacks permanent formal status and position, and shortcomings in the pedagogic competence of librarians, whose education has so far included little training in teaching skills. Moreover, libraries must offer a much broader selection of courses in user education for lecturers. Ideally lecturers ought to be much more proficient in information retrieval and library orientation than their students, so that they can actively use the library as a resource in their teaching. This is not always the case, which can be difficult to admit.

11.   User Education Services include:

Course-Integrated Instruction:

Working in collaboration with professors and other classroom instructors, the User Education Librarian and other library faculty provide course-related library instruction on request. Topics of instruction vary widely, from instruction on how to use the databases available for a particular field, using on-line catalog, to using the Internet for research. This instruction can take place in our classroom or at the various computer labs across the campus. For more details, call 549-3965 or fill out the online request for library instruction.

Individual Instruction:

Faculty and students may request an appointment with the User Education Librarian for assistance in learning new sources and skills. This has proven beneficial to faculty writing dissertations or those preparing a literature review for grant applications. Students who are writing lengthy and complicated research papers may also benefit from this service.

Library Assignment Consultations:

The User Education Librarian can help faculty design assignments that offer students a successful and challenging library experience.

12.   Information technology and user education

There is no doubt that the information environment in libraries in changing in India. Libraries are either automated or are in the process of being automated. This new information technology in libraries poses a considerable challenge for librarians. Librarians have to teach users with little or no knowledge of computers how to search the OPAC.

Instruction on the use of the OPAC, forms a basic step to searching a computerised database, which might lead to more sophisticated searches like searching other databases thus being exposed to more information.

Most of the libraries had CD-ROM titles in their collections; CD-ROMs enable users to get current information in their subject areas. Training in CD-ROM searches will enable users to have access to more information. Identification of information in users research areas available elsewhere, gives users a chance to have access to material through inter-library loans and thus promote resource sharing.

It is very unfortunate that from the libraries studied CD-ROM instruction is not compulsory. Rather, subject specialists on request do it. This deprives readers of developing skills to utilize a faster and current bibliographic reference. User education programmes should aim at sensitizing users to the value of online public access catalogues and CD-ROMS so that they can learn to appreciate and use them.

The Internet poses another challenge to the librarians. It affects their job and working practices. According to Bauwens (1993), knowledge of how to navigate the Internet is now becoming a basic requirement for information professionals. This would enable librarians to carry out instruction on the use of the Internet. Users need to be introduced to different on-line catalogues and their search procedures.

Currently none of the libraries examined include instruction on the use of the Internet in their user education programmes. Libraries should not only see themselves as users of Internet but also as providers of information from the Internet. There is a growing need to support users in the form of training to provide them with skills needed for effective exploitation of online resources.

13.   Web-based User Education

Web guides and teaching tools are found everywhere on the Web because they are easily updated, accessed, and printed on demand. They may include color graphics, and screenshots. The best ones gather librarian-selected Web links, subscription resources, and library materials in well-organized pages.

It is too much to expect that one library or person can produce the best guides to every resource. Web links to the best work of others are an enduring trend.

A few libraries have developed web tutorials and training modules. If well done, they can approach the quality of multimedia authoring software. Examples include the James Madison University Library module series Go For the Gold and the University of Nevada, Reno Library's learn to use the library tutorial.

14.   Conclusion

At this time college and university libraries face enormous challenges and opportunities. As campuses move into the information age, the mission and role of the library is being redefined. While the amount of information libraries need to acquire continues to increase, the resources available to do so are insufficient. Moreover, administrators need to assess the relationship between the library and the computer center, as both fight for limited resources.

The growing universe of print-based publications and digital documents on the one hand, and the declining universe of library budgets on the other, can be handled confidently by adopting certain strategies, such as by developing critical thinking skills, as well as promoting information literacy at large In the near future, uses should expect timely access to quality information. This information must be accurate,

relevant, comprehensive, and engaging. This can be done successfully by incorporating end-user education and training components, in the academic libraries developing continuing professional education and training programs for the library and information professionals, as well as the end-users will have to develop learning attitude and network related competence to us by the information and communication technologies.

15. Reference

1. Singh, Jaglar. "End-User Training," ILA Bulletin 35 (Oct. 1999-Mar. 2000)

2. Ranganathan, S. R. 1963. The Five Laws of Library Science. Bombay : Asia Publishing House. 2nd ed. (Ranganathan Series in Library Science; no. 12)

3. Ranganathan's laws of library science are: "Books are for use; every reader his book; every book its reader; save the time of the reader; the library is a growing organism."