

HOW THE ACADEMICS USE THE LIBRARY: A USER SURVEY OF THE FACULTY OF ARTS AT UNIVERSITY OF PERADENIYA

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Introduction

For the university library to provide excellent resources and services, it has to develop an on-going dialog with its user community.

In order to provide better library services for the users it is necessary to have a precise knowledge of the requirements of its users. The best way of getting to know about users and their requirements is to carry out user studies, which enable libraries to determine exactly how they should develop and what direction they should take in order to meet those requirements (Vaughan, 1987). On the other hand, university libraries have to improve the quality of their services to survive in this volatile competitive environment. Therefore it is crucial to evaluate the library services from the customer's point of view. At the same time in order to setup user-centered services, the library needs to know the users and their needs.

One of the main tools that can be used to evaluate and assess the library services is the user survey. It is impossible to assess the changing needs of the clientele unless user surveys are conducted to determine user needs and their information seeking behavior. (Gunasekera, 2006)

Library user surveys have become widespread in academic libraries during the past twenty years. Rapid

changes in library services and operations demand for internal institutional accountability and assessment expectations by external accrediting agencies have contributed to further development and application of user surveys within academic libraries during the past decade (Hiller, 2001).

The Main library, University of Peradeniya conducted a user survey among the members of academic staff in May, 2010. The objective of this study was to examine the information needs of the academic staff members of Faculty of Arts at University of Peradeniya. Specifically, this study attempted to examine the type of information sources and services used for their teaching and research. The study also sought to determine the faculty's level of satisfaction towards library services.

Methodology

The study used a structured questionnaire to collect data. The population of the study consisted of all permanent academic staff members in the Faculty of Arts and a total of 166 questionnaires were distributed to the population in May 2010 and 88 were returned with an overall 53% of response rate. The data were analyzed and interpreted using SPSS (17.0) version.

Data Analysis and Discussion

The study elicited data on the academic information needs of the faculty and their information seeking behavior. It covers issues regarding respondent's knowledge about the library services, the preferences for the sources of information, purpose of the visits, the satisfaction level of the services and the problems.

1. Library visits

The findings revealed that 27% of the respondents (n=24) visited the library daily, while 66% visited once a week and 22% visited twice a week. It is surprising to note that 30% of the respondents visited the library only when it is necessary.

2. Reasons for Library visits

Respondents were asked to mention the reason/s for the library visit. The respondents visit the library mostly to checkout books, to use reference collection, prepare for lectures and to read scholarly journals. Nearly half of the respondents come to the library to work on their seminar/conference papers and for internet searching.

3. Use of Library services

Respondents were asked about information services used for teaching and research. Lending and reference services are the most used information services by the faculty. More than half of the respondents used services of photocopying, Scheduled Reference service and library catalogues. Further results showed that Inter Library Loan service was the least used information service and the reason could be the unawareness about the service.

4. Use of Electronic resources and services

Respondents were asked to indicate the electronic resources and services used for academic and research purposes. Results showed a majority (67%) used the On Line Access Catalogues Catalog (OPAC) to search information resources available in the library. 48% of respondents used the library webpage while 40% used the internet facility and 38% used the E-journal facility for teaching and research. Only 27% of respondents used the E-mail facility in the library. Most of the departments now have the internet access for the staff and it could be the reason for low usage of e-mail facility in the library.

5. User satisfaction on library resources

The successful operation of library depends on the quality of the library collections. This study examined the level of the satisfaction towards the library collections. Medium level of satisfaction was shown by the respondents for Lending, Reference and Electronic resources. It was significant to find the same level of satisfaction for all library collections except periodicals. A low level of satisfaction was showed for current periodical collection. In order to meet the needs and requirements of users library should get feedback from the users periodically and should plan the library acquisitions accordingly.

Conclusion

Understanding the information needs of the users and taking necessary steps to satisfy them is the first step towards the provision of an effective library service. This can be achieved by

formal in-depth studies like user surveys. Librarians especially those involved in Reader Services should be thorough as to how individuals approach the library and the information sources and services they use for teaching and research. Library should develop strategies intended to improve the provision of information services especially towards information skills development and information resource awareness.

Recommendations

1. Library has to implement strategies to attract the staff members of the faculty by stimulating their interest in the services offered by the library [services offered by the library]. Hence, a wider awareness needs to be made of the services provided by the library and of the resources available to the faculty.
2. Library has to publish a library report and a handbook to promote the information services and facilities. The handbook should be regularly revised and should be included with explicit information on the range of services as well as conditions under which they may be accessed and used.
3. Colorful leaflets containing a variety of information on the different resources and the routines for accessing them both manually and electronically should be made as an effective promotional tool.
4. Pathfinders and subject guides to literature in various subject areas should be provided and be made easily accessible.

5. There should be a collaboration between the librarians and the faculty in designing courses on information skills for students. The faculty and the librarians should work together for the benefit of both groups with mutual understanding. In this way, channels of communication can be created and maintained.
6. On going research and research interests of the faculty should be known to the library. A local Area Network in which the library and departments are linked is recommended. An extensive current awareness service should be developed through the network.
7. The library should conduct user surveys at regular intervals since that will provide information to improve the services and streamline the operations towards a greater user satisfaction.

References

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