

The Changing Environment of Academic Libraries: End-User Education and Planning Strategies for Libraries in India

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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.

In fact, there is a paradigm shift from a parent-child relationship between information provider and user to an "adult-adult" relationship. While new formats and mechanisms are being developed to cope with this rapidly changing environment, the existing gap between the generation and use of information is further widening in the present situation. A major aim of user education is therefore to widen the use of a range of library resources, which will enable academics to improve their teaching and research, and students to learn more and achieve better results in their work.

In the print-based environment we spoke of library instruction, bibliographic instruction, and user education programs. Initiation of users, lectures to library users, library tours, pamphlets and brochures, audio-visual aids, and, in a few cases, user education programs were the main tools and techniques for enabling patrons to make good use of the library. These tools and techniques must now be supplemented. End-user training should now be the focus of user education.¹

The Need for End-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 science². User education and training are often fee-based, because developing the infrastructure for the network environment is very costly.

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.

Planning Strategies

Traditionally, librarians instructed the end-users in the use of print publications, but a balance between print and digital documents will be a basic norm in the near future. In this context, training and retraining the end-users in the use of IT-based resources and services, such as e-mail, ftp, telnet, www, browsers, search engines, opacs, databases, system software, application software, electronic journals, computer conferences, scholarly discussion lists, mailing lists, Usenet newsgroups, websites, CDs, and DVDs should become an integral part of a library's user education programme. This is where strategic planning comes in, in order to develop a comprehensive user-education and training programme at the national level. The University Grants Commission (UGC), the National Information system for Science and Technology (NISSAT) (www.dsr.nic.in/vsdsir/division/nissat/nissat.html), National Social Science Documentation Centre (NASSDOC), Indian National Scientific Documentation Centre (INSDOC) (www.insdoc.org/), Defence Scientific Information & Documentation Centre (DESIDOC) (www.drdo.org/labs/compsci/desidoc/index.shtml), university libraries, library associations, library and information science departments can play a pivotal role in this direction. Such national programmes can be customized at the local level to suit institutional needs.

The Changing Academic Library³

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. A Library Planning and Action Initiative (LPAI) should now be implemented by academic libraries in India.

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.

The LPAI task force should use the following strategies to guide the Academic Libraries' transition to the digital future:

Seek innovative and cost-effective means to strengthen resource sharing. Resource sharing should extend throughout academic libraries (and other important libraries) as a strategy to maximize the resources available for print collections that meet the needs of students and faculty for information needed in teaching and research.

Create digital libraries. The Academic Digital Library (ADL) should provide new services and extend existing ones to guide libraries in the successful integration of traditional and digital formats. The programs of the ADL should support information access and delivery via electronic communications; information preservation, storage, and retrieval; information management consultation and training; new forms of scholarly and scientific communication; and development of the knowledge network of the university.

Mutually beneficial collaboration of academic libraries with libraries, museums and industry. Collaboration is a strategy to extend library access, share the costs of library collections and services, and develop an academically and economically sustainable model of scholarly communication.

Information infrastructure that supports the dissemination of and access to scholarly and scientific information in a networked environment. A sophisticated and robust technological infrastructure is required to disseminate and access digital information. Academic libraries must invest in technology to support the delivery of digital collections and be tightly integrated into information management and technology planning at all levels.

Organize an environment of continuous planning and innovation. The environment for scholarly information is expected to be highly fluid for at least the next decade, as universities attempt to meet the challenges of scholarly and scientific communication in the 21st century. The academic library should develop a planning process that will support our libraries as they continue to engage in innovation and the development of organizational, technical, policy, and financial structures needed to make the transition to integrated print and digital collections. Planning structures should also

encourage and support strategies to enhance the transmission of scholarly and scientific communication in a digital environment.

Conclusion

At the end of the 20th century, 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, users 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.

References

1. Singh, Jaglar. "End-User Training," *ILA Bulletin* 35 (Oct. 1999-Mar. 2000)
2. Ranganathan, S. R. *The Five Laws of Library Science*. Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1963. 2nd ed. (*Ranganathan Series in Library Science*; no. 12)

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."
3. For a collection of relevant articles, see Gerard B. McCabe and Ruth J. Person. *Academic Libraries: Their Rationale and Role in American Higher Education*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1995. (*Contributions in Librarianship and Information Science*; no. 84)