

Liaison librarian: prospects in information specialist's tasks (case animal health)

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The Faculty of Veterinary Medicine is a relatively small, highly specialised Faculty of the University. The leadership of the Faculty has a clear vision for the future, supported by staff and students. We were enormously impressed by the constructive, enthusiastic, passionate views that were expressed during our visit. As the only Faculty of its kind in Finland, the Faculty is the sole provider of veterinary training. This could lead to complacency. On the contrary, however, we found a forward looking, ambitious Faculty, keen to build on its considerable successes in both teaching and research.

University of Helsinki. Evaluation of education 2007–2008

It is a great privilege to work as a liaison librarian connecting the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine to the services of the campus library.

AIM:

The aim of the presentation is to describe the process of becoming a specialized campus library during a large structural re-organization of the University Libraries.

The challenge is how to maintain the existing services and refine them when the legislation of all the universities is renewed and simultaneously the economical situation is becoming tighter.

INTRODUCTION

What means "liaison"? See dictionary:

liaison *noun*

1 = communication, connection, contact, go-between, hook-up, interchange, intermediary

2 = affair, amour, entanglement, fling, illicit romance, intrigue, love affair, romance

According to Michele R. Tenant's comprehensive evaluation paper from 2006 a liaison librarian is a librarian who focuses on particular subject area and client base. Other names are subject specialist, subject librarian, subject bibliographer. In her evaluation the role of a liaison librarian was commented to be a valuable resource that increases faculty productivity and teaching efficacy. The library liaison program has enhanced the reputation of the library and librarianship.

Subject specialists

In Viikki Science Library there have been nine subject specialists since 1999. Each Faculty has 1-3 information specialists who focus on disciplines they are interested in. Faculties of Pharmacy and Veterinary Medicine have one subject specialist, Faculty of Biosciences and Faculty Agriculture and Forestry have more, due to the number of disciplines and amount of students and teachers. There are also Research Institutes and governmental Offices on the campus, enjoying the synergy benefits of the nearby academic life.

METHODS

1) Gathering information on possible similar cases,

Some examples of different models of a 'veterinary library' :

1) Hannover – totally independent

Of the five establishments of veterinary education in Germany, the University of Veterinary Medicine Hannover, Foundation, is the only one that has maintained its independent status until the present day.

With its transformation into a public foundation as of January 1, 2003, the TiHo took an historic and innovative step forward. Responsibility for the TiHo no longer lies with the State of Lower Saxony, but with a private foundation. This organizational form gives the TiHo new freedom of action and the ability to accrue capital. The TiHo will use this opportunity better to fulfil its responsibilities in research, teaching and services, and to seek solutions to pressing issues in animal health, animal welfare, consumer protection, food sciences, and the biomedical sciences.

The library of has 14 posts.

2) Branch or faculty library – independent, collaborative inside University

Dublin

The Library at UCD (University College Dublin) has branch Libraries

The Veterinary Medicine Library provides a service in support of the teaching and research needs of the Faculty. It is situated within the Veterinary Medicine Building on the Belfield Campus.

The library is the only academic veterinary medicine library in the Republic and holds a comprehensive collection of books, journals, indexing & abstracting services and A/V materials. Subjects covered include veterinary science and related disciplines. As part of its holdings, it has a large collection of Veterinary videos.

The library has 4 posts.

3) Branch library – integrated, collaborative inside University

Pennsylvania

The University of Pennsylvania Libraries

The Penn Libraries include fifteen libraries and an off-site high density storage facility. System-wide scholarly resources number nearly 6 million books, 44,000 current serials (of which 16,000 are e-journals) and 700 databases. The library is a leader in the development of digital library services and collections and is aggressively experimenting with and adopting new technology in research and teaching, including courseware.

The Veterinary Libraries (2):

The Steven W. Atwood Library and Information Commons, and its branch, the Jean Austin DuPont Library, located on the rural campus at New Bolton Center, are responsible for meeting the information needs of the faculty, staff, clinicians, and students of the School of Veterinary Medicine and other members of the Penn community.

5-6 posts

Head librarian works closely with the dean, and advises the director of collection development

2) Analyzing the existing situation

Current situation analysis, year 2009:

University of Helsinki has four campus libraries, centralized services and a complicated financing system. Viikki Science Library is one of the four campus libraries at the University of Helsinki. The Science library's primary target groups are students and staff on Viikki campus. The Science Library's services are available for everyone who needs information in library's subject areas.

The library focuses on the following **subject areas**:

- Biosciences and biotechnology
- Ecology, systematics and environmental science
- Food science
- Pharmacy
- Home economics and consumer research
- Agriculture
- Forestry
- Economics and social sciences
- Veterinary medicine

3) evaluating the best practices already working,

In Viikki Science Library there is nine subject specialists and three library advisory boards, which all form an interactive coordination and communication network between library staff and end-users.

4) creating a fruitful way of communication in the library and with co-operators

During the process there have been several meetings in all administrative levels of the library organization, including the senate of the University. Official committees has been nominated, also ad hoc working groups etc have planned the future of the Helsinki University Libraries' new administration and operation model. Common intranet is in use, library e-newspaper, discussion lists.

In Viikki Science Library there is weekly meeting every Wednesday, when the current situation is updated.

5) making prognoses

During the academic year 2008-2009 the Helsinki University Libraries (HUL) have been processing a big structural development towards more unified collections and services. Big changes at the University level and developments in our own professional fields have initiated actions that turn new pages in the history of Finnish academic libraries. The global economic situation and the demographic prognosis guide actions from governmental side.

6) systematically doing documentation of the process.

The Viikki Science Library has actively developed its own working processes and documented them, also the central unit of the HUL has documented the processes; all the archives are available in the University Intranet (Alma).

The case of veterinary medicine librarianship (Finland)

Historic overview

The veterinary library occupation in Finland was founded in 1892 when the Finnish Veterinary Association and the Finnish Veterinary journal were founded
College of Veterinary Medicine and its Library 1945-1995
University of Helsinki, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine and its faculty library 1995-2003

As an academic library, the library of the College and Faculty of veterinary medicine had a comprehensive responsibility of gathering and providing scientific information in the animal health branch in Finland. It had 5-9 professionals and very intimate relationships in the veterinary world in Finland. It served veterinarian's information needs from campus to county, never neglecting the idea of lifelong learning.

Description of the present situation

Viikki Science Library 2004-2009

One (1) subject specialist is in charge of the liaison librarian's task: teaching information literacy (IL), developing the veterinary collection, indexing and classification of monographs and articles (international and national databases). Formal connections are needed to keep live communication between the library and the Faculty. The library serves four faculties on the campus and it has nine (9) subject specialists.

Future prospects

Helsinki University Library, Viikki Campus Library 2010-

The four campus libraries and the coordination office will be administratively become one (1) University Library from 1.1.2010. It will have one budget and one director. The so called back office routines will be centralized in the city center of Helsinki, close to the new City Campus Library, in a brand new library building. Campus libraries will serve their clients in situ on campuses, providing the traditional library services and supporting electronic publishing, among other new library services.

RESULTS

A new model for the University Library is created

The new Helsinki University Library will launch in January 2010, and it will be the largest academic library in Finland. The library has ca. 2 million visitors and issues ca. 3 million loans per year. Library staff will number about 250, and the yearly budget will be 20 million Euros.

The University of Helsinki has continuously developed its library system starting in the early nineties. At that point, the University had ca. 150 separate libraries. As a result of focused development work library services are now grouped into larger units according to campus and academic field.

After the reforms the Helsinki University library will continue to provide library services on the City, the Meilahti, the Viikki and the Kumpula campuses. On the City campus a new library will be built.

Some concerns from the Campus point of view: how to maintain the present services and how to insure the future development, there will be an increasing need of specialization on campus level. New challenges, but also new possibilities are in front of the personnel of the new Helsinki University Library.

DISCUSSION

How will the Campus library satisfy the needs of a Campus which unites a multidisciplinary science community of more than 6,000 students and 1,500 teachers, a home to a wide range of life science researchers and students in such fields as environmental science, veterinary medicine, food research and economics?

Would the liaison librarian –system be a fruitful answer? "From the veterinary point of view" it sounds reasonable. A liaison librarian is like glue between research, development, practitioners, pet owners, teachers and students.

Academic teaching in veterinary medicine is very close to working life, so a liaison librarian is a link between profession and development based on scientific research.

A liaison librarian must know the needs of practice and the means of scientific research.

Research also produces solid expertise, based on which the University's experts promote the progress of society and the Finnish economy. Better science creates better life; and when science in the service of life, the target of the University is fulfilled.

Numerous international research groups also work on the Viikki Campus. The new situation will create a lot of challenges, focusing on the liaison librarian's work, presently done by subject area specialists. It is important to be able to work in teams – teams in the library and as a team-worker in a research group.

SUGGESTION

Knotworking

Professor Yrjö Engeström will conduct a laboratory of changes in Viikki Science Library in autumn 2009: development of subject services

The methods of the process follow his book "From teams to knots : studies of collaboration and learning at work (Cambridge 2008)

A research group from the campus gets a library professional as a contact person for developing new partnership. The research group will be tied with strong knots to the library. The results of the model will be applied in the new library organization in 1.1.2010 in the whole University of Helsinki

"Teams are commonly celebrated as efficient and humane ways of organizing work and learning. By means of a series of in-depth case studies of teams in the United States and Finland over a time span of more than ten years, this book shows that teams are not a universal and a historical form of collaboration. Teams are best understood in their specific activity contexts and embedded in historical development of work. Today, static teams are increasingly replaced by forms of fluid knotworking around runaway objects that require and generate new forms of expansive learning and distributed agency. The book develops a set of conceptual tools for analysis and design of transformations in collaborative work and learning."

Yrjö Engeström: From teams to knots. Cambridge 2008

CONCLUSIONS

Libraries must be proactive: connections to Faculties and Research Institutions are vital for the success of the basic work in information services. Science library should promote library science in its own activity; this is one way to bring more quality in the library activity. Campus libraries must focus more in the subject areas, have live contacts to the scientific With the back office services from the central unit this will possible, but it does not happen without conscious work and co-operation in the library world and University Now it is time to be active in planning to ensure that it all will work after 1.1.2010

The Liaison librarian is situated between the scientific community, its information needs and the University libraries network, with all its possibilities to create services. Without the professional and social back up of the subject specialists – colleagues world wide - the task would be impossible.

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