Project for an open course in information literacy in the UACEG library

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Abstract: The development of the information society requires of the university libraries to transform into educational-consultative centres, responsible for developing information literacy in their customers. The world library organizations like IFLA and the leading university libraries are developing programmes, grounded on the accreditation standards of the universities. On the basis of the investigated models, the Library information centre of UACEG (University of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy) developed its own methods for creating an open course in information literacy for students.

Keywords: information literacy, long-life learning, evaluation and teaching information literacy

1. Introduction

Libraries as cultural institutions are responsible for the diffusion of knowledge in information literacy. In Bulgaria the concept "information literacy" started to be mentioned after the social-economical changes occurred in the early 90's. From then date also the first attempts of creating such courses. Today they exist in almost every university library as a part of the students' programme of studies.

The development of the information society requires of the university libraries to transform into educational-consultative centers, responsible for developing information literacy in their customers. In the section of university libraries we join hands for the idea of all the advantages of the introduction of these courses. Achieving a better result, however, requires teaching to be integrated into the programme of studies, because the information literacy is a process and its skills are very important for the future achievements of everyone. These courses have to be permanent and profiled for the different specialities, to be held at a time appropriate for the readers and with the active collaboration of the lecturers, which have to be our followers.

2. Concept

The University library of UACEG has developed a methodology for leading an open course in information literacy, based on the following:

1. Creating a course in information competence on behalf of the University library of UACEG and integrating it into the programme of studies of the first-year students from all subjects.

2. Developing different modules of exercises in information literacy in the University library of the UACEG for students in the second course and upper courses.

The course has for an **object** to master the students' theoretical knowledge and practical skills for retrieving, evaluating and using the information acquired from different specialized information resources, owned by the library.

The course has two **tasks**:

1. Developing the students' knowledge and skills for achieving higher results during their studies, and for a successful career thereafter.

2. Forming the habit of searching and easy orientation into the huge information database concerning architecture, civil engineering and geodesy – topics necessary for them not only in their studies, but in their future work.

3. Development

The project consists of three different phases: preparatory, essential and conclusive.

According to the tasks set in the work schedule, the experience of other university libraries in Bulgaria at their work for increasing the students' information literacy was examined first. Within the discussion forum also were shared good library practices and were made the promotion materials for the course.

After that we lead a questionnaire survey among readers of the library concerning their knowledge on its information resources. It had for an object to find the cross point between the library's purposes and the needs and desires of the students. 2000 inquiry forms were filled in.

The investigation was divided in two stages. First, the students registered as readers at the library filled the inquiry forms in, then we tried to extend the survey by including a big part of the students, who for one or another reason do not use the library's services. That way were inquired almost all of the students in our university. That helped us to define our purposes clearly.

The results of the analysis of the filled in inquiry forms showed that there are no principal differences in the expectations of readers and those students who do not use the library regarding the services and resources they wish to find at the library.

The lack of sufficient relevant information concerning the available at the library digital database was common too in spite of the distributed advertisement brochures, uploads of the rules for using the database to the site of the UACEG, the advertising campaigns, periodically organized at the library and other forms of popularization of the available at the library resources.

A part of the questions in the inquiry form were related to the opinion of the lecturers about the library at the UACEG according to the students, and whether the lecturers themselves recommend the use of the library resources at their lectures.

Another part of the questions were related to our potential partners – other public or university libraries, which the students have used, use or intend to use. We were interested in what exactly was attracting them in these libraries, what are the differences, what satisfies the students' needs, etc. That group of questions gave us information about the skills that the readers have acquired from other libraries – for example skills concerning work with catalogues.

After the analysis of the so collected from the survey information, we found out that the service we intended to offer the students, has not been offered in our university by now. We needed that kind of service, because of the following reasons:

1. The students do not know how to extract useful for them information form the specialized database in architecture, civil engineering and geodesy.

2. A big part of the students do not nave any idea or habits for individual searching for information in traditional or digital catalogues.

3. The acquisition of practical skills for working with documentary sources are highly valuable, because the students' knowledge and their experience in extracting relevant for them information in that traditional way, is insufficient.

At the question whether they would like to know the results of the survey, all of the students without any exception answered "yes". That confirmed our conviction that the subject of our project is concerning them too.

An important part of our preparatory work for the project was to make the lecturers in the UACEG our followers and to define together the best way to acquaint the students with the specific capabilities of our library. We organized a series of conversations on the subject, determined the most convenient time and specified the material for instruction.

After a discussion, the following method of conducting the activities was adopted. We select a particular topic and it is taught in the library, where also are acquired practical skills such as working with the content in the database, structure of the bibliographical record, etc. Our purpose is developping skills in searching for information and creating a bibliographic record in the currently taught subject. That allows the developed methodology to be applicable in different lessons for each of the specialties in the University.

After the preparatory work, in which students and teachers were convinced in the necessity of establishing and conducting such courses, we came to the realization of the project itself.

The collected empirical material helped us to elaborate the methodology of the course and to prepare the lectures, the practical exercises, and also their argumentation and illustration with particular examples of our professional experience. We prepared the support materials for the students. Everyone who passed the course, received in a folder the support materials that we prepared, and also the necessary methodical guidelines to their use in future activities.

The prepared lectures and exercises were divided into two main groups – for architects and for engineers. The distribution of the materials was also organized in two modules - a common and a specialized.

The common includes a presentation of the library and its information resources. It consists of 5 subjects with exercises and is destined primarily for first-year students.

The specialized is also divided in 5 subjects with exercises. It affects topics such as planning of research, searching techniques and evaluation criteria of information. It is focused at the students in the second and upper courses.

The teaching *methods* include lectures and use of audio-visual equipment. Most of the time is set for the **practical exercises**. For *assessing* the acquired knowledge at the end of each exercise is conducted a test, and after the end of the course we organised a survey among the trainees. The purpose of that second survey is to establish the opinion of every student for the practical benefit of the course.

During the experimental work our attention was mainly focused on building and developing the students' individual skills for working in a library. Lectures and exercises were implemented in the both modules and for the different faculties and courses.

The increase of the use of electronic databases from students who passed this course clearly explains the practical benefit of the utilization of this type of skills. Even students, who were not registered as readers in the library, registered after the course.

After the end of the course, we analysed the inquiry forms concerning the evaluation of the course. The results showed that fifth-year students are more critical and have more recommendations. That determines their better guidance in respect of what is necessary for their future work as experts.

The total evaluation of the course is mainly "excellent" or "good". According to the students, the course covers useful subjects that meet the needs and interests. It also is well organized, useful and

effectively represented. The knowledge and style of presentation of the librarians have also received a good evaluation. The generally high evaluation of the classes, shows their necessity and timeliness.

4. Achieved results

Developing readers' information literacy is an objective process. Through this project the university library of UACEG only catalyzed this process for our readers:

1. We set the beginning of building in the first-year students, passed the course, essential habits in working with traditional and electronic information database.

2. The value of the knowledge and skills in finding and evaluating information was realized from the students of the above courses. These skills are required for example in the development of their graduation papers (diplomas) and in citations in scientific literature.

3. We created a universal applicable methodology for teaching information literacy to students in our university.

4. In the presence of the students was successfully presented an entire new vision for the Library Information Centre as an institution, responsible for the quality of the university education.

5. The project confirmed the traditional role of the University library as a centre for scientific and cultural communication with a contemporary image of a modern centre for real and virtual meetings and exchange of information, an active mediator in the international scientific and cultural dialogue.

6. The active role of the lecturers, who had prepared their students for the benefits of passing such a course for their future activity, had a great influence on the successful implementation of the course and strengthened the traditionally good relations between students, teachers and library specialists.

5. Conclusion

The team that worked on the project strives for achieving maximum results at this stage of the project. It is convinced that the project must be extended further in the future and the subjects and methods should be developed too. Probably some topics might be added, others might drop out of the project and new topics may appear. We hope that in the process of working with students, our collaboration with the lecturers will be enriched and that the results will be useful for both sides. We are satisfied that our project met the understanding and support of the academic community, the students and the management department of UACEG.

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