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Building a user-driven academic library

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Introduction

An academic library can be considered as an institution within a larger institution, the University. The library shares the university's mission and objectives and must define its sub-objectives according to the academic needs. The primary purpose of a university library is to support the teaching and the research carried out in the university it belongs to. To make this objective concrete, an analysis of the particular institutional environment and of its needs is crucial. Since a library must be built according to its specific users' needs, the best results are achieved when the library staff and the faculty join their efforts¹. The background of this paper is the work carried out at the Library of Polo Scientifico-Didattico di Rimini, University of Bologna: we refer therefore to that library and to the experiences carried out there². The university has the privilege of being the place where knowledge production and dissemination are strictly connected. When a professor teaches, he does not only transfer knowledge, but also a method. Furthermore, he "creates" future scholars and life-long learners. Today, attending a high school and a university is not enough to face working needs, because knowledge and techniques change quickly and we need critical tools to evaluate information. The university must therefore teach students how to become life-long learners, to permit them to adapt themselves to evolving needs.

Another important factor a library must always take into account is the cultural environment: for instance in Rimini, the public library Gambalunga, the Museum and the Archives. They constitute a cultural network offering different relevant tools for learning and researching. The academic library must carefully analyze the cultural context and make efforts to share resources with other institutions, without neglecting specific competences. Working with the Gambalunga library has been an interesting opportunity for the University library in Rimini.

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¹ The subject of faculty-library collaboration has been the object of over 400 publications (see Cook D., *Creating Connections: a Review of the Literature*, p.19-38, in Raspa, D., Ward, D. (eds.) (2000), *The Collaborative Imperative: Librarians and Faculty Working Together in the Information Universe*, Chicago: American Library Association). Very interesting experiences also in Pellen R., Miller W. (eds.) (2005), *Libraries Within Their Institutions: Creative Collaborations*, New York: Routledge

² The Library of Polo di Rimini supports eight faculties: Economics, Education Science, Farmacology, Fashion, Industrial Chemistry, Medicine, Sport Science and Statistics

Students attend both libraries and therefore the two libraries decided to share some services and to enter into an agreement to define what each could do for academic students³. The two libraries carried out many activities together, such as exhibitions, library tours and seminars about the use of the library.



The academic library has the role of transmitting cultural heritage to future generations, since it holds and gives access to past researches, but it is also the resource necessary to start any research, whose results will then be found in the library .

Nowadays the library is a resource granting access to information. Documents can be physically in the library or can be held by a library of a library network – for instance in the case of the interlibrary loan - or can be accessed through the internet.

The catalogue is no longer a tool to localize documents, but also a link to services: users can ask for interlibrary loan, by clicking on a link near a catalogue record or can ask to make a reservation of a book or, finally, can access to full text articles, if the library has the subscription to a journal.

The number of electronic resources is increasing and many scholars and students access from home to them. However, the library still has a central role, since it selects resources to be subscribed and make them accessible via the catalogue (by selecting them, acquiring them - often via consortia -, cataloguing them, creating links, ensuring access and resolving problems of access when they occur). Moreover, the library offers the help desk service to teach and facilitate the use of resources.

Users' satisfaction

To build satisfactory services for their users, librarians need to carefully listen to patrons, above all professors and students – who constitute the highest percentage of users in an academic library - and to work with them.

³ Citti, A. (2006), *Con la convenzione, più opportunità per studenti e cittadini*, «Biblioteche Oggi», 10, p. 38-42 and Di Bella M. (2006), *Una biblioteca comunale antica e una universitaria nuova di un'università antica*, «Biblioteche Oggi», 10, p. 42-44

User satisfaction is a crucial objective for the library at Polo di Rimini. We carried out surveys about users' satisfaction in 2007 and in 2010 together with the three other Polo of the University of Bologna: Cesena, Forlì and Ravenna⁴. Our surveys aimed at understanding our weaknesses and our strengths and therefore what we could do to improve our services. In 2010, we also wanted to understand whether our efforts carried out after 2007 survey had been appreciated by our users. We were pleased that most efforts reached our aims⁵. Results also confirmed that we had the best results when we worked together with the faculty on collection building and on teaching students how to use the library.

Bibliographic instruction

Teaching users how to master information resources is a very important activity for all libraries. At Polo di Rimini we invest many energies on this activity. We realized that the collaboration with teachers is a crucial element, as many colleagues from other Universities pointed out: "faculty-library collaboration paves the way to make students information literate and to make them life-long learners"⁶. Learning how to use the library means learning how to search, select, evaluate and use documents. This is not only crucial to learn (a discipline), but also to learn to learn and to acquire the capability to work in our environment of technological change and overloading information.

Our seminars about bibliographic research focused on the main standards agreed by American Libraries Associations:

1. Students have to learn how to define the nature and the extent of the information needed and become aware of the different resources and media available (books, journals, e-journals, databases, sites etc.)
2. Students have to learn how to access information, which means:
 - a. how to use a catalogue, a database etc.,
 - b. how to carry out an advanced search,
 - c. how to access from the library and from home,
 - d. how to select the appropriate source and technology (even a print encyclopedia can apply). To select such technology implies that students know the library's offer (scanners, audio/visual equipment/the proxy server to use e-resources from home...).
3. Students need to learn how to evaluate the quality of the information and its sources critically and correctly quote documents (both print and electronic). Selecting, evaluating and quoting documents found in the Internet seems particularly difficult to students and the library must teach them some criteria for this.
4. Students need to learn how to use information and integrate the different sources.

⁴ The University of Bologna is a multi-campus structure: Bologna plus 4 campus branches; the four branches are named Poli scientifico-didattici della Romagna, and are situated in four towns: Cesena, Forlì, Ravenna and Rimini. Until now every "Polo" has been self-governing, choosing its own organisation; therefore 2 "Polo" chose to have a centralised library, and two chose to have one library for each faculty; in total 10 libraries, which were the object of the survey (Citti A., Politi A.M., Sabattini F. and Semenzato C. (2011), *User Satisfaction Surveys as Decision Making Resources at the University of Bologna* paper presented at QQML2011, 3rd International Conference on Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Libraries <http://www.isast.org/qqml2011.html> to be published in «Library Management».

⁵ See also Citti A., Politi A.M., Sabattini F., Santocchini E., Sangiorgi S., Semenzato C. (2011), *Indagini sulla soddisfazione dell'utenza e focus group nelle biblioteche universitarie dei Poli della Romagna*, «Biblioteche Oggi», 7, p. 19-29 <http://www.bibliotecheoggi.it/content/n20110701901.pdf>

⁶ Wijayasundara N.D. (2008), *Faculty-library collaboration: A model for University of Colombo*, «The International Information & Library Review» 40, Issue 3, p. 188

5. "Students need to understand the economic legal and social issues surrounding the use of information and accesses and uses information ethically and legally"⁷. They need to acquire
 - a. the concept of copyright and of fair use of copyrighted material
 - b. issues about free vs. fee-based access to information

Our survey about users' satisfaction pointed out that users who know information literacy services⁸, interlibrary loan and document delivery are very satisfied of them, but a high percentage of users does not know such services. Users who know the service often attended librarians' seminars because professors induced them to. Once again, the cooperation with professors in organizing seminars tailored to professors' lessons and therefore to students' needs achieved a satisfactory result.

Collection building

Librarians-faculty collaboration leads to build a collection meeting the teaching and research needs. Therefore librarians at Polo di Rimini work with representatives of every faculty to build the collection. If faculty communicates the changing needs to librarians, they will be able to analyze specific sub-fields of interest. Then they propose lists of titles to be acquired to the faculty who has the scientific knowledge to evaluate them. This permits to create a collection fitting the community who will use it.

This joint work permits to acquire library materials according to budget restrictions. The risk of reducing the offer of documents for a subject area relevant for faculty could be mitigated with this approach. It can avoid a percentage cut across all areas and could be the opportunity to reduce investments in less relevant fields. Faculty suggestions of cuts must be supported by librarians' analysis of usage statistics, for instance the number of loans or accesses in case of electronic resources.

Exhibitions and book presentations

Another frame for collaboration are exhibitions and book presentations. Exhibitions can be part of the teaching process. For instance, in October 2005 the library took part in the project "Welcome to Asia", with the participation of the Universities of Bologna, Milan, Rome and Venice⁹. The event included exhibitions of dresses, accessories and books and meetings in Rimini. The participants were not only students and faculty from the universities above, but also collectors, stylists and creative. The strong collaboration among professors and staff

⁷ Ibid., p. 14

⁸ Information literacy is jargon used by librarians meaning a set of abilities permitting users "to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information". Information literacy makes users "information literate". See American Library Association, Presidential Committee on Information Literacy (1989), *Final report*, Chicago: American Library Association
< <http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlpubs/whitepages/presidential.htm> > in American Library Association (2000), *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/standards/standards.pdf>, p. 2 (last visited on 10th November 2011). The expression information literacy includes not only bibliographic instruction but also the ability for students and future workers "to apply these skills throughout educational, professional, and personal lives" and become life-long learners (Young R. M. and Harmony S. (1999) *Working with faculty to design undergraduate information literacy programs: how-to-do-it manual for librarians*, New York: Neal-Schuman, p. 1.

⁹ See Citti A. (2006), *Welcome to Asia: una mostra può far crescere le collezioni?* «Bibliotime», IX, 2 <<http://didattica.spbo.unibo.it/bibliotime/num-ix-2/citti.htm#nota2>>

gave birth to this exhibition. The exhibition was organized at the Museum of the town. We would therefore take advantage of the Museum's competences, but it required more organization than it would have required if organized within the library¹⁰, "off-site exhibitions require additional planning and considerations yet they offer unique opportunities to expand the library's audience and draw together communities who may not be aware of the library's resources". Actually, it has been a wonderful opportunity to show library's collection to citizens. We decided that the public could benefit more from the exhibition if they could browse books and journals. Therefore we could not use glass showcases, but tables and we had therefore to study how to organize the table and grant the safeguard of books¹¹.

Organizing the exhibition has been an opportunity to map the field "Asian dresses" which existed, but had not been systematically mapped before. However, it was perfectly coherent with the rest of the collections and the exhibition was a chance to work on it.

Many students came to the exhibition and browsed books. We were pleased to see that after the event the books about Asian dresses were loaned more often than in the past. This was also a success.

Presentation of books are an opportunity to draw attention to specific publications and subjects. Professors can offer their knowledge of the subject, whereas librarians can build the event in the library and take it as an opportunity to check a subfield of the collection and work on it. They can check that the most relevant books written by the author's book to be presented are in the library, and arrange a small exposition of them, they can also ensure that other books about the same subject are available, they can arrange leaflets, posters. Finally they can have contacts with local newspapers to ensure participation in the event etc.

Finding sponsors

During the last two years the library of Polo di Rimini has invested energies on finding sponsors, not only for economic reasons, but also to build relationships with local firms and to offer them competences about information searching. It has also been an opportunity to broaden the number of users and to market library services. Many professors could help the library in finding the right contact person who became a library sponsor.

Conclusion

Faculty and librarians collaboration is crucial to ensure user-driven services. The experiences carried out at the Polo Scientifico Didattico in Rimini prove that this collaboration gives satisfactory results and permits librarians to grow professionally, because they could understand professors' needs deeply.

Faculty can offer its scientific knowledge to build collections and can support decisions of cuts or growth of specific fields, whereas librarians use their technical knowledge to analyze statistics and other decision drivers.

Information literacy needs to be supported by professors. Professors can suggest the most appropriate subject and period of time for bibliographic seminars when students have specific needs, for instance when they must prepare dissertations or use databases. Building a seminar tailored to specific needs leads students to participate actively and learn more.

Exhibitions and presentation of books have been stimulating experiences where faculty and librarians shared their different competences to build events.

¹⁰ Dogu H. (1989), *Exhibiting library Books in an art Gallery: practical Considerations for an off-site, collaborative Exhibit*, «College research Libraries News» 50, 3, p. 210

¹¹ Photographs of the exhibition can be seen at Citti A. (2006), *Welcome to Asia...*, quoted above and available at <<http://didattica.spbo.unibo.it/bibliotime/num-ix-2/citti.htm#nota2>>

Collaborations between faculty and librarian are more and more frequent at Polo di Rimini and for some activities they are a stable way of working. Librarians are no longer considered “keepers of books”, but have a proactive role in creating access to information. Collaboration with faculty permits to deeper understand users’ needs and therefore build user-driven services.

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