

***The Impact of Information Literacy
in the Academic Education Environment***

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Abstract

Electronic environmental impact on all sectors of social and economic life influenced the academic training too. Thus, it is required to introduce in training, indifferent of specialty disciplines, a course of information literacy to develop theoretical knowledge and practical skills concerning the construction, processing and communication of information. The paper try to analyze what kind of methods and resources must be used in information literacy instruction provided by an academic library. We try to demonstrate that the information literacy instruction is very important for the academic users because it demonstrated the importance of all kind of information (traditional or on line) and how different kind of strategy concepts and models could increase effectiveness in this area of professional practice.

Keywords: academic library, information literacy, electronic environment, information strategy, information society

Introduction

Once the exponential development of informatics as well as of technologies of information and communication, the classical method of transmitting information has been added a new, modern one. The main means of communication in the traditional system have been largely influenced by the development of networks and especially by the Internet, at its various levels, according to the field of interest.

Libraries, as main depositories and suppliers of information for the society, storing and disseminating information to micro and macrolevel, cannot master this whole informational assembly and meet, at the same time, real and potential requests effectively.

Confronted with the actual explosions of information, libraries are obliged to confirm the worsening of their budget situation caused by the discrepancy between the exponential growth of the number of documents which would be desirable and necessary to purchase and the funds allocated for this purpose.

Specifically, academic libraries have a role in guiding the studies, researches and reference needs, besides that of documentary and bibliographic signaling. Users are students, teachers, researchers who request information of various degrees of specialization. Academic students in the first cycle require works of reference mainly: encyclopedias, dictionaries, guides for bibliographic initiation, reference works for their study, such as: important treaties, collective syntheses, textbooks, literary texts, specialized and general serials and, definitely, specific documentation.

Of utmost importance are the research plans, compulsory and optional bibliographies for each discipline. To have an objective look over the requests, regular statistics should be elaborated regarding the document circulation and the trends in the current readings.

An important fact is the right to information, one of the most discussed liberties in the present society. Whether it be used for positive purposes or for negative ones, this right is defended and guaranteed by various international laws related to the fundamental rights and freedom, such as: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 19) (1): “any person has the right to freedom and expression of opinions; this right includes freedom of opinions without interference from the outside, and freedom to seek, receive and spread information and ideas through any

means, regardless of state borders”. The International Pact on Civil and Political Rights (Article 19) (2): “any person is entitled to freedom of expression; this right includes freedom to seek, receive and spread information and ideas of any kind, regardless of frontiers, in the oral, written, printed or artistic form or by any means chosen” and the Convention on Children's Rights, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on November 20, 1989 (Article 13) (3).

In the context of the new information and communication technological developments, educational reforms must establish the universities to integrate information and technological skills instruction into the curriculum. New technologies create opportunities for learners but they must be approached critically and used correctly. Information literacy became a necessary requirement for academic students in the present information era and academic libraries are able to cultivate students in this area. In this context librarians must be part of the process to inform and empower learning with technology that enables users to access information in its many forms and formats – real and virtual – and use it responsibly.

The changes affect not only library services but also the way how users access information and the type of skills needed to do it effectively and efficiently. As the availability of online databases grew and users need special training, librarians become even more concerned about teaching students in using libraries and information. In this context many faculties also needed help and guidance in using electronic information formats but often don't admit it.

Librarians have become increasingly more concerned about the need for people to gain information skills so that they can be successful in the Information Society. A report of the American Library Association provides an excellent rationale for academic librarians to integrate information literacy programs into the curriculum.

Information literacy proved to be an ambiguous concept which was given a variety of definitions. For the beginning we will give two definitions for “*Information literacy*” to understand better what is all about, especially because this term has several interpretations. In **ACRL Information Literacy Glossary** it is defined like “*the set of skills needed to find, retrieve, analyze, and use information. Information literacy is more closely tied to course-integrated instruction but it extends far beyond coordination between the reference librarian and the individual faculty member*”(4). According to this definition the students must demonstrate competencies in formulating research questions and in their ability to use information as well

as an understanding of ethical and legal issues surrounding information. The final report of the ACRL Presidential Committee on Information Literacy stipulated that *“Information literate people are those who have learned how to learn. They know how to learn because they know how knowledge is organized, how to find information and how to use information in such a way that others can learn from them. They are people prepared for lifelong learning, because they can always find the information needed for any task or decision at hand.”* (5) The second definition emphasizes the informational independence of the user, independence that he win skimming through such a course.

The term *“information literacy”* is used in this paper to refer to the set of skills required to identify information sources, access information, evaluate it, and use it effectively, efficiently, and ethically. Also, we try to demonstrate the importance of information literacy instruction, as an important tool to inform academic students about library collections, services and other activities, in order to stimulate them to use the library for supporting and developing their learning and scientific research processes.

The present situation

The academic libraries plays an important and active role in the field of scientific research as a starting step and is one of the basic elements that support universities in achieving their objectives related to scientific research and quality management. So, information literacy instruction must be one of the courses offered by the academic library that aims to educate its users on how to use information how to become information independent. The academic library must provide courses related instruction, tutorials and other methods to support student development of information literacy skills.

Nowadays it is known that the way in which a academic library can be instructive is larger than the traditional understanding (6). Many information literacy courses have to encourage the collaboration between faculty (department) and library with the goal of helping students develop these skills to enable them to recognize various information sources and to use information in a right and suitable way. They have to get a set of abilities that enable them to understand which the library services are and how to use them; which are the library departments; which are the importance of academic library in supporting the research skills; how to find information sources; application of ethical principles in consultation and use of information sources etc. On the other side the students must obtain practical skills allowing them to apply theoretical knowledge to practical work: how to access and use the library site; how to use the library

catalogue; how to access and use electronic databases; what kind of research strategy have to use for a particular research; how to evaluate information; how to use special collections etc.

The purpose of this paper is to examine this phenomenon in the context of higher education, by assessing the quality of current information literacy strategy documentation and exploring the application of corporate strategy concepts and techniques to this emergent field of professional practice. Analyzing this aspect in Romanian universities it is observable that only a small proportion of Romanian students use the library, and this fact depends upon the faculty expectations. Many times they don't know what information is available, they have difficulty determining the information they need and the quality of it, they are unable to compare and evaluate alternative information. Therefore, it is imperative that librarians work collaboratively with academics. Also, the information literacy instructions are not comprehensive in all academic libraries. Not many universities offer the required lectures that inform students about the importance of libraries and libraries' departments, the practical training of online access to databases through internet etc. In conclusion, not in many Romanian universities, information literacy is formally integrated into the curricula of general education.

The librarians and information literacy

The librarian must support teachers' roles by building up information skills and discovering how to integrate them into the course. In this role, librarians encourage faculty in the establishment of learning priorities which ensure that students develop the abilities that will allow them to be information independent in this digital world. The academic communities need to understand this, and in turn to support the librarians' effort. (7) We must reconsider our role as academic librarians in the new information age and we need to build relationships with all educational factors, encouraging and supporting them to integrate an information literacy course into curricula.

Permanently librarians were concerned to offer students information literacy skills, to change the faculties' attitudes toward the library and to demonstrate the importance of the library's involvement in curriculum development. The question is what practical steps can academic librarians take to become more a part of the educational mission?:

- Knowing and understanding the academic organization;
- Identifying the academic councils, the Senate and working groups which are involved directly in academic program and make lobby for librarian membership in these committees;

- Taking a leadership role in providing information literacy courses for all specialties in the academic.

Educational processes may be traditional, electronic, in an online environment or through distance education. Analyzing the Romanian educational environment we notice that the faculties have a determined role in the degree to which a library contributes to the academic programs, specifically the curriculum, because the responsible factors, in most cases, consider that kind of courses not so important. They have to realize that students will obtain necessary library and information skills through a coursework determined by faculty. In addition, the librarians must involve in curriculum planning and cooperative teaching with faculty to help students develop information skills.

In many foreign countries academic librarians are equal partners with faculty in the instructional process, a model that not function very well in Romanian academic environment. There the library instruction is compulsory, being a required part of the general curriculum and the students have to pass a test to assess library skills before they graduate. From this point of view the librarians must become involved in curriculum planning. Therefore, there are some directions on which librarians must involve:

- intervention by the academic makers which must realize the importance of introducing such courses in academic curricula;
- library administrators must demonstrate need for such training;
- they had long-term commitments to integrate library instruction into the curriculum;
- expand their collaboration with faculty in building the curriculum;
- help students understand the role of the library in the Information Society;
- prepare a brochure explaining the concept of information literacy, goals and objectives for the information literacy program, and a basic checklist for evaluating information;
- begin to experiment with various faculty members to develop the most effective way to teach basic information skills
- developing criteria to measure information literacy outcomes

There are some criteria that provide librarians with a powerful rationale in their demand to become involved in the teaching/learning process to participate in the education of students for success in the Information Age:

- librarians must understand the curriculum and have good relationships with faculty leaders because this support is crucial;

- librarians must facilitate the integration of electronic information into the curriculum
- librarians must offer their expertise in teaching information skills to students
- librarians must help faculty become knowledgeable about electronic information formats
- librarians must be very well prepared for teaching, understand different learning styles, and engage students actively in the teaching process;
- librarians must be flexible to accommodate the range of the curriculum and disciplines, as well as a diversity of faculty and students;
- librarians must use effective marketing techniques to demonstrate the importance of information and technology literacy and their crucial role in it;
- librarians must stay somewhat ahead of the technology developments so they can be the first to teach new information formats and networks.

In Romania librarians hoped to be seen like partners in the educational and teaching process, a hope that was not fully realized in most universities. The higher Romanian education has not yet embraced the concept of integrating information literacy instruction into the curriculum. Reasons for this include such factors as the faculty's control of the curriculum, individuality and autonomy of each institution regarding curriculum and educational outcomes, and the status of librarians within higher education. Academic librarians and the members of the Romanian Librarians Association have worked to integrate library and information skills into the curriculum, and in several institutions they have been successful (universities from Brasov, Pitesti, Timișoara). At this time there is an interest within the Romanian Librarians Association to bring information literacy into the universities curriculum, and this may be one way to ensure information skills as an important learning outcome of higher education.

It is urgent to teach information literacy to students especially because most of them usually work while studying, their work environment involving to know how to use the new technologies in information and communication. Through the information literacy program, students will be able to locate, evaluate, and use information more effectively to satisfy their information requirements. Librarians will work with all faculty members to include information literacy modules into appropriate courses, and to monitor students' progress in becoming information literate (8).

Why is necessary to introduce an “information literacy” course in academic curricula?

Difficulties on the path of the reader which can be solved by the bibliography are not at all minor. And it is normal that now, when the number of those who can write is so hard to estimate, the possibility of knowing “who”, “where”, “when”, and “how” has written on a certain subject is almost impossible by a person for whom the sources of bibliographical investigation and method of access are not available.

These sources are in a continuous and effervescent evolution, both from a quantitative and a qualitative point of view, dictated by the informational technologies and by the telecommunication networks, Internet type. At the moment, these documents can be accessed and produced on the internet with an impressive diversity, of a real or doubtful value, without volume limits or unbearable technical or financial constraints.

This very fact presupposes a few imminent risks: the saturation of the informational market which hinders the rapid access to valuable knowledge.

Libraries shall be confronted with the situation of initiating ample programs in order to screen and reevaluate the documentary resources on the internet.

Multimedia document acquisition by the libraries facilitates their creation and production. Thus, long term projects of the libraries should consider not only the necessity of a common development with the internet but also the obvious evolution towards the digitized documentation.

Over time was reiterated the important role of the library in higher education reform and was explained how librarians can involve themselves in this process. There are some reasons for which is necessary to integrate the teaching of information skills into the curriculum:

- anyone can become information literate;
- information literacy is action-oriented, helping to solve problems and make decisions;
- information skills are transferable from one discipline to another, from one task to another;
- information skills are needed for lifelong learning;
- information literacy helps people handle information and new technologies.

Our proposals regarding the introduction of an information literacy course into curricula are:

- the higher education accrediting agencies have to incorporate information literacy outcomes as part of the accrediting criteria for higher education institutions;
- conduct more research studies on information literacy instruction in academic libraries;
- modifying education and performance to include information literacy concerns;
- each professor who proposes a course for the various areas within the basic curriculum has to fill out a form which includes a question on how the course will deal with information literacy in the field;
- allocating specialized course credits for students to participate in promoting library usage and academic achievement;
- pay more attention to offering various methods of information literacy instruction to students concerning practical aspects.

The academic library can organize and deliver a basic information literacy education program for different levels of students. As teacher and librarian I notice that first-year students have only a minimal understanding of how to use information effectively. So, at the first level will be delivered to new students and may include a course about how is organized and how to use the library, the purpose being to allow students to become familiar with the library's collections, enquiry systems, layout and functions. The second level will consist of a course about documentation and all the aspects on this problem. Will be explained how documents are organized and disseminated, will be defined own documentation needs and develop an efficient plan to retrieve it. The third level will consist of a course on information searching, and it is intended to develop students' capacities in undertaking scientific research and practical work to lay strong foundations for future study and scientific research. It will be a course that describes the methods and technology received to seek and utilize the scientific documents and materials, particularly the electronic resources. Students will learn to utilize the retrieval methods of each database and digital resources. Once completing the course, the students must to achieve the following:

- to distinguish between different types of information identified during the in-class group activities;
- find and use a variety of sources related to the selected current topic using more research tools;
- apply given criteria for evaluating evidence and assess the authority, reliability, scientific accuracy, and validity of sources of information;

- research, integrate and synthesize information from various print and electronic sources regarding a practical question;
- write a thesis statement for the final project using the main criteria provided by the course sheet;
- communicate the thesis statement with the found sources using a multimedia presentation

After attending such a course, students will be able to (9):

- Apply professional standards, policies and accepted practices for the use of a variety of documents and technologies including accessibility.
- Apply appropriate means of documenting their work
- Understand and apply legal and ethical uses of information and technology including copyright and intellectual property
- Use of search engines and databases
- Evaluate online and printed material
- Synthesize information and methods of presentation

For instance, in an academic, encyclopedic library, the initiation in the bibliography methodology research is more necessary than ensuring adequate assistance by the reference librarian – bibliographer.

"To inform the reader means to focus him on the tool suitable, making him understand that there is no research built on a single source, even if its aim is a communication or a seminar paper." (10)

Moreover: "The way libraries classify and organize documents, bibliographic research or documentary research, be it hand-operated or computerized, or both – case frequent today –, it classifies and organizes instruments it uses. The organization and the logical progression offer time saving and getting the most appropriate answers to questions." (11)

Conclusions

The academic libraries and implicitly all educational structures faced with challenges due to the new information and communication development and changes that affect every educational program and process. In present educational reforms are taking place in Romania to improve educational outcomes and these developments causing major changes. Curriculum reform is necessary because students and employers are demanding improved educational outcomes to ensure that they will become competitive on the labor market. In this context librarians must maximize their potential to be in the position to assume their role in the teaching and learning process.

Each academic has to develop educational strategies and learning resources to help students develop information literacy skills. It is necessary to have an active and continuing program concerning information access, developed and supported by the faculty's makers, librarians and other information providers because we must be willing to promote and share our experience in this information age in support of our institutional educational mission.

We are confident that will be accepted by most Romanian universities to develop and integrate an effective Information Literacy course because it will be able to enhance students' generic abilities, which include problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication and presentation their ideas. In this way, our students will be undoubtedly better prepared, both for their future studies and to develop their careers.

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