The Student and the Information Search Process

Library Development Using Student Voices
Malmö University

- Established in 1998
- 4 interdisciplinary faculties
- 21,000 students (12,000 full-time equivalents)
- 1,300 employees
“The University Library as an Inclusive Learning Environment”

A two year project 2010-2011 at Malmö university library

• To be more professional in how we approach and work with an increasingly heterogeneous student population.
• Increase the awareness about widening participation and retention among the staff.
• Clarify the librarian’s role in an inclusive learning environment
• Deepen our knowledge about student’s information search processes, from the student point of view (how they formulate their problems, their knowledge) and with this as a starting point develop our services: library introductions, teaching/library instruction and how we design the physical library.
• ...and in the long run contribute to student retention
Two branches of the project

Action research
- Focus groups
- Analyse the book-a-librarian-service

In-service training
- Educational visits
- Lectures
- Workshops
- Journal club

Other methods: critical friend, quality walks, diary

Both tracks are interconnected!
Booking form

Book a session at least three working days in advance.
We will confirm your booking by email.

Choose a library:
- Health & Society Library
- Study Square Kronan
- Oral Health Library
- Orkanen Library

Name:

Email:

Programme/Course/Faculty:

Suggest a time which times and days work best for you:

What subject(s) are you looking for information about?
Describe your question:

What problems have you encountered?

Which search terms have you used and where have you searched?

By clicking Submit, you give consent to the storage of your information.
Empirical material

- 599 bookings
- 2007-2009

Important to remember:
The student’s information search process from the student point of view (how they formulate their problems)
Method

• First the project group performed a qualitative content analysis of this material and identified 25 kinds of problems.
• Each problem was given a tag.
• Each booking was tagged, one booking often got several tags.
• This was then analysed
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Tags</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Looking for information on in-training service among adults</td>
<td>This is my first independent research project. I’m lost. I wan’t to know how you search a subject /.../ How can I know what has already been done and what kind of research I can do, and what kind of literature I have to read. It might be silly to ask questions like this but as I said I’m lost.</td>
<td>Helpless, Introduction/library instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking for scholarly articles concerning massage as pain relief</td>
<td>Having trouble finding scientific articles, I’m mostly finding reviews</td>
<td>Scientific</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Why do students book a librarian?

1. Too little information
2. Relevance
3. Scientific
4. Search technique
5. Databases/Access points
6. Key words/Key words in english
7. Material type articles
8. Introduction/Library instruction
9. Tutor
10. Too much information
A great range between...

the "driven" student
• Has a language for the ISP
• Can articulate their problem
• Wants to confirm that they haven’t missed anything important.
• Do they really understand what they articulate?

the helpless student
• Is missing a language for the ISP
• Is having a hard time articulating their needs
• Feels lost in the academic world of practice
• Asks questions they should ask elsewhere

Both student co-exist in the same classroom - this poses a pedagogical challenge
So...

- Many problems might be solved quite easily.
- Student voices = taylor-made teaching.
- The library works as a neutral place in the university.
- Varied forms of teaching (learning activities)
Model of the information search process. (Kuhlthau, 2004)
Students book a librarian in all stages of the ISP

• Initiation: don’t know how to start
• Selection: have often re-formulated/changed their question/subject when we meet them
• Exploration: find too much/little, not relevant/right information (most common)
• Formulation: can formulate their need, have a clear focus, need help with search technique and databases
• Collection: collecting information
• Presentation: want to make sure they haven’t missed anything
So...

• Book a librarian is most effective in the formulation stage.
• Zone of intervention – right help at the right time
• The knowledge of ISP is important (for librarians, teachers, students).
• A lot of work is done outside the library – research question, formulation of focus
What have we done so far?

- Spread our findings to:
  - Teachers
  - Library staff
- Presented the analysis in several of the higher education courses for (new) faculty teachers
- Developed our teaching in information literacy
  - collaboration with teachers
  - integrated assignments
  - taylor-made teaching
Where do we go from here?

- Revise our thesaurus
- Investigate the correspondence between the expressed problem and the actual problem
- Investigate more closely how we can best meet the needs of the student in a specific stage of the ISP
- Further train our staff in meeting students in different stages of the ISP – tie theory and practice together
- Spread our findings to teachers
- Develop support material
- Continue analysing the bookings
THANK YOU!

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