

Outreach to faculty and academics

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ABSTRACT

Facilities and services provided by libraries, often if not always, are carried out in isolation rather than involving the faculties and users. For users to benefit however, it is crucial that they are at least aware of the library services. Policies and notices in library websites are only accessible when users visit the site. Similarly, brochures, handbooks and posters which libraries have always been fond of, only reach those who are physically in the library or where the posters are. Much information does not reach the absent or remote majority. It is a grave situation where users do not know the benefits they can obtain from libraries. Whilst libraries and librarians can pride themselves with the various continual efforts taken with user satisfaction in mind, it is time to take a step back and view the library and information policies from the users perspective. This papers attempts to study the awareness of the library facilities and services among the academics at the University of Malaya. In a short online survey among the academics, it was found that the range of awareness of the library services and facilities ranged from 25% to 85%.

Keywords: Outreach, Academic libraries, Awareness of library services, Faculty-Library relationship

INTRODUCTION

The academic library's mission is to support faculty and students in their teaching, learning and research. In tandem with that, libraries policies and procedures have continually evolved around the faculty and students needs. To keep pace with time, libraries have been spending a substantial amount of funds to acquire electronic books, journals and textbooks while maintaining the print collection for the not so IT savvy users. Technology and system have been fine tuned to make available electronic resources remotely, such as their homes, office, hostels and even when they have to travel overseas for conferences, and study leave. Library buildings now have more plug points and desktops, inviting corners for group discussions and relaxation. However, despite all these efforts by the library, annual user satisfaction surveys almost always show that there is room for improvement. In fact, it seems that digital book publishers and retailers (not libraries!) now know more about their readers than ever before as was reported in Wall Street Journal (Alter 2012).

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Changes in the library have been made with all library users in mind. Sadly the focus is almost always on the undergraduates and postgraduates and rarely the teaching staff. Academics are assumed to be academically excellent and matured to use the library services and facilities independently. The findings of a faculty survey among US colleges and universities (Flagg 2010), reported that the academic library is increasingly being

disintermediated from the discovery process, risking irrelevance in its core functional areas. This study will find out how much the academics at the University of Malaya are aware of the library services and facilities. It is hoped that these findings will define areas of disconnect between libraries and faculty and structure ways to promote and outreach to the academics.

DEFINITION OF OUTREACH

There seems to be no standard definition of outreach among libraries although a gamut of activities had been in practice. Such activities include: liaison librarians, library instruction, current awareness services, selective dissemination of information, collection development, and repositories. Toni M. Carter (Carter and Seaman 2011), defines outreach as, "Services and the promotion of services which include: (i) any assistance with research or information, (ii) resources available at a library, (iii) library facilities. Promotion of services involves marketing or the use of public relations techniques to promote these services, resources and facilities".

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a tendency for librarians to keep a distance from the academics. This has been aggravated by the current state of the use of IT and social media which has suppressed the need for face to face communication. Avenues for the promotion of services are now usually in the form of Emails, Facebook, Blogs, Web 2.0 tools, Twitter, etc. In Phelps' study (Phelps and Campbell 2012), 304 articles on library-faculty relationship were reviewed. It was obvious that most of the articles indexed were really about projects, classes, assignments and activities that librarians have done with faculty rather than on relationship. Also, librarians are more likely to talk about this relationship at library conferences rather than share it through publishing. The key variables for a collaborative relationship between faculty and library is based on 'trust' and 'commitment' and Phelps suggests that taking the focus off the product and putting it on the relationship is an effective marketing plan for outreach of library resources, facilities and services.

Library outreach to the faculties is one of the best ways to bridge the gap between libraries and faculty (Anthony 2010; Jacobs 2010; Stebelman, Siggins and Nutty 1999). Having a Ph.D, desktop publishing skills, and experience with Web authoring are not essential traits for the faculty outreach librarian (Stebelman et al. 1999). Librarians must feel comfortable communicating and approaching the faculty. They must be willing to be proactive, implement different methods of marketing the library's services to faculty and seek out users in their offices and departmental meetings. Stebelman also suggests that librarians must have excellent analytical skills to assess what is and is not working. The 'cutting-edge' image of George Washington University library when reviewed for ARL status, was its aggressive faculty training workshops, symposia and computer slide presentations promoting and explaining new information technologies, and the e-list and e-mail accounts established specifically for faculty use. At a time of budget constraints, librarians can work closely with the departments to seek guidance, receive feedback and negotiate when periodical subscriptions have to be cancelled.

To ensure sustainability of the provision of services and facilities throughout the year, most libraries have identified subject specialists to meet the needs of faculty members. In the absence or lack of subject specialists, liaison officers are identified to provide closer proximity to faculty members and library. In a survey to investigate the impact and value of

library liaison officers among academics at an institute of higher education in UK, it was found that 4 out of 29 respondents did not know their liaison officers. Out of the 25 who knew, 7 could not remember the names of their liaison librarians (Cookie, Norris, Busby and Page 2011). On the other hand, Jacobs (2010), reports being inundated with requests for assistance working with the College of Education, providing individual research consultations to faculty and students, collaborate on information literacy instruction, and facilitate additions to the library's collection. The announcement of his presence in the College in the department's newsletter received much attention.

Although academics value the service provided by the liaison officers, they prefer if the scope of services be extended to include (Cookie et al. 2011): Giving copyright advice, Putting content in the Institutional repository, Finding an impact factor of a journal, Doing a literature search, Teaching students study skills, Seeking copyright permission for the academics, Teaching students about plagiarism, Doing citation analysis, using RSS feeds, Delivering interlibrary loans and photocopies to their desktop, Searching Google, Working on a research project, Photocopying books and journals for them, and Creating a Wiki.

Libraries must be acutely aware of the empowerment of the end users with the development in technology. Users now, claim information can be obtained from the Internet without the intermediation of librarian (Cookie et al. 2011). To overcome, this change, searching and retrieving interfaces have to be mastered by the librarians in order to impress upon the academics. At the University of California-Berkeley, the importance of conducting workshops to acquaint faculty with electronic databases was recognized as early as the seventies (Stebelman et al. 1999). So much can be taught to the academics by the librarians. Online catalog, remote access, personal file management, open source information, repositories, digital initiatives are only some of the examples.

METHOD

An online survey was carried out at the University of Malaya, Malaysia, from 21st until 29th June 2012. It was sent to all academics using the university's personal email account. The objective is to find out the academics' awareness level of the availability of library resources, services and facilities. The response rate of 9.3% (N=2,500) was encouraging, indicating that the academics recognize the library's effort to reach out to them. All faculties were represented among the respondents. Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents according to the faculties.

The highest response was from the faculties of Medicine (20.2%), Science (18.9%), Languages and Linguistics (9.9%), Engineering (8.6%) and Arts and Social Sciences (8.6%). A few faculty members replied that they are new employees and know very little about the library facilities and services. They even commented that the library must have some kind of induction courses for new academics. Most of the respondents came from the group who have served the University for 5 years or less (45.1%), followed by those who have served more than 10 years (38.2%), and 14.2% have served from 6-10 years. Table 2 shows the respondents by years of service.

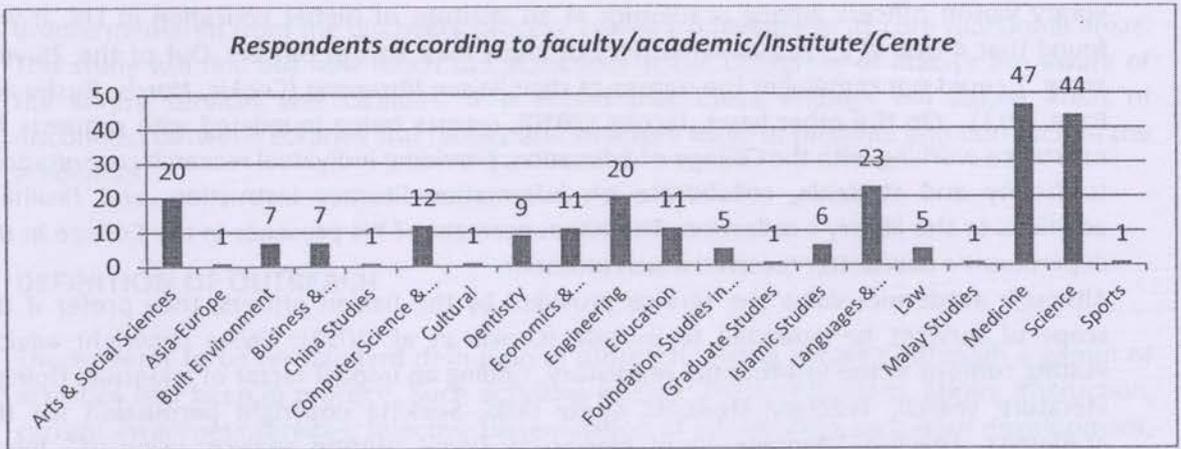


Figure 1: Respondents from Various Faculties

Table 1: Years of Service

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	0-5 years	105	45.1
	6-10 years	33	14.2
	More than 10 years	89	38.2
	Total	227	97.4
Missing	0	2.6	
Total	233	100.0	

FINDINGS

Eleven services and facilities were included in the survey. They are: (i) Online request for materials, (ii) Remote access to electronic resources, (iii) Academic core collection, (iv) Online availability for course materials, (v) Publication supply, (vi) Online renewal of materials borrowed, (vii) Document Delivery eligibility (viii) Liaison librarians' role, (ix) Research repositories, (x) Collaboration for User Education class, and (xi) EndNote sessions.

Table 2: Awareness of Library Services/Facilities

Library Services/Facilities	Online Request Materials	Remote Access	Academic Core Collection	Course Materials	Publication Supply	Online Renewal	Eligibility Document Delivery	Liaison Librarian	Um Research Repository	Collaboration Gxex1401	End Note
Yes	123 53.5%	152 66.1%	93 40.1%	59 25.4%	156 67.2%	199 85.4%	70 30.0%	150 64.9%	89 38.9%	59 25.4%	12 53.6%
No	107 46.5%	78 33.9%	139 59.9%	173 74.6%	76 32.8%	34 14.6%	163 70.0%	81 35.1%	140 61.1%	173 74.6%	10 46.4%
Total	230	230	232	232	232	233	233	231	229	232	23
Valid	230	230	232	232	232	233	233	231	229	232	23
Missing	3	3	1	1	1	0	0	2	4	1	0

With reference to Table 3, the level of awareness among the academics is as follows:

1. Online renewal of materials borrowed	85.4%
2. Publication supply	67.2%
3. Remote access	66.1%
4. Liaison Librarian's role	64.9%
5. EndNote	53.6%
6. Online request for materials	53.5%
7. Academic Core Collection	40.1%
8. UM Research Repository	38.9%
9. Document Delivery Eligibility	30%
10. Making available course materials	25.4%
11. Collaboration of GXEX1401	25.4%

For the purpose of this study, awareness of services and facilities which received less than 60% are identified as areas of disconnect between the library and academics. They are: End Note, Online request for materials, Academic Core Collection, UM Research Repository, Document Delivery Eligibility, Making available course materials online and Collaboration of GXEX1401. The library has to find the root cause of the unawareness of these services among the academics and make relevant changes to the structure and function if the library's mission is to remain relevant towards the autonomy transformation plan of the University.

Although the library has many mechanisms to enhance and promote library services and facilities, the findings as shown in Table 4, reveal that the most effective way to outreach to the academics is through the librarians' roadshows and information skills sessions (46.4%) and friends, students (39.9%). Dissemination of information using the library webpage and university mailing list reached out 26.6% and 26.3% respectively. The least effective method was through the library promotional materials (0.9%) and Library Facebook (14.2%).

Table 3: Ways Academics Get to Know the Library Services and Facilities

Method	Librarians (Roadshow Etc.)	Library Promotional Materials	Via Uminfo	Library Facebook	Library Website	Faculty Liaison Librarians	Friends, Students, etc.	Others
Frequency (Percent)	108 (46.4%)	2 (0.9%)	61 (26.2%)	33 (14.2%)	62 (26.6%)	48 (20.6%)	93 (39.9%)	21 (9.0%)

DISCUSSION

Most of the library services at the University of Malaya are promoted via the library web page. However, it is found that only 26.6% of the respondents actually get information about the library from the library website (Refer to Table 4). In a study on users' perception of the library webpage (Crowleya, Leffelb, Ramirezc, Hartd and Ile 2002), it was reported that users who were familiar with the library's web pages had fewer difficulties but novice users did not know or understand the library terminology. The process to find information on the Web pages was found to be complex and confusing. Although, facebook, being a user friendly social media can reach out to many, from the result it was found that only 14.2% got their information via facebook. In short, it can be concluded that if a user does not visit the library website and facebook, information will not get through.

The information on End Note for students is merely mentioned in 'Information Skills Session for Post Graduates (See Figure 1 below). The library tries to get more users to register for these sessions without giving much detailed information. Libraries have to realize that the academics have authority over the students' assignments and projects and can play a key role in encouraging students to attend such classes. Only then can students be made aware of the benefits of attending such sessions organized by the library.

Only 40% of the academics' are aware of the Academic Core Collection. Ironically, this collection consists of core reading materials for courses. If lecturers are not aware of it, any amount of promotion by the library is not effective. Since only 26.6% respondents get the information from the library webpage, only 30% of the academics are aware of their document delivery eligibility. Roadshows pertaining to the Institutional Repositories and Information Skills class/sessions are carried out with the faculty's approval. Often, it is difficult to get their commitment to schedule a slot for the roadshows.

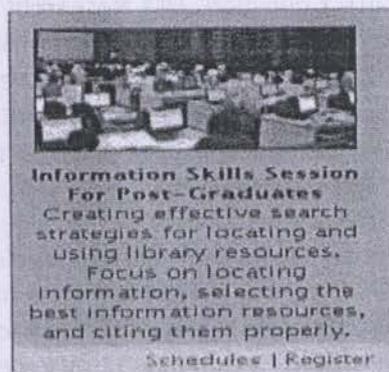


Figure 1: Promotion of End Note

The online request form for materials, which received only 53.5%, was hidden among Library Services, and parked under Services Form (Refer to Figure 2)

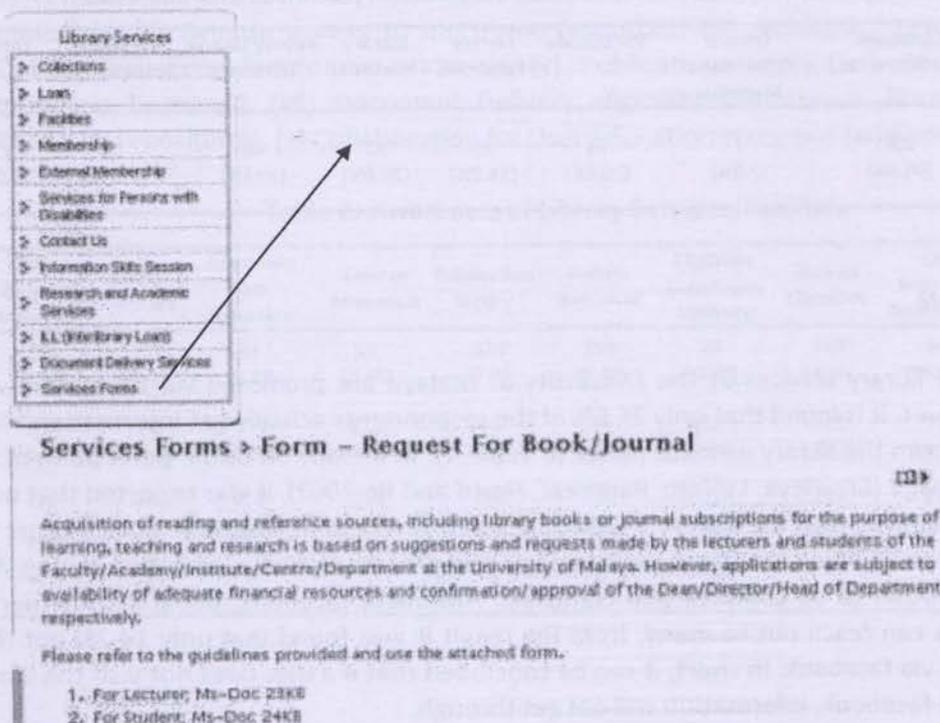


Figure 2: Online Request Form for Library Materials

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The library has to target orientation sessions for new faculty members to create connections with the academics. Knowing a library member will make the new academic feel there is someone to turn to when assistance is needed to use the library resources, services and facilities. This can increase the use of services and resources by the faculty who can then encourage students and research assistants to use them.

Librarians serving on faculty or department committees are another way of outreach. While this practice is advocated, the effectiveness of this is dependent on the librarians' confidence to speak out and be involved in faculty research, publication, conferences, etc. More important is the librarians' willingness to take the time to attend regular meetings and taking an interest in getting to know them and their activities. Liaison librarians must update faculty members about the new developments in the library.

Library website can be restructured for easy accessibility. The contents pages can be restructured to make it more visible for the users. There can be a link to Library website in all the faculty webpages, and new topic of user interest highlighted to alert and attract them to visit the library webpage on a regular basis.

The library can organize events, tea gatherings and invite the academics to the library. This will help to establish rapport with the faculty. Friendliness, helpful and competent librarians will encourage academicians to approach them. A good experience will encourage them to come back to us, and a bad experience will be the reverse. If librarians can be empathic and professional in our dealings with the academics, we can gain our own respect as an information specialist.

Student learning can improve through course-integrated information literacy instruction (Lindstrom and Shonrock 2006). It does not really matter if collaboration is in a single instruction session, specific course or through assignment topics. One of the reasons for the lack of information literacy programs can be attributed to the reluctance on the part of the academics (McGuinness 2003). Libraries have to play a proactive role to change the perception of the academics towards the teaching role of librarians and take efforts to fit the contents of information literacy programs to the course curriculum.

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