Information Skills: Targeting Untapped User Groups

Tina Hohmann
Technische Universität München, tina.hohmann@tum.de

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Tina Hohmann

TU München, Germany

Tina.hohmann@tum.de

Abstract

This paper will introduce our strategy to reach out to user groups other than students, the motivation behind, marketing, feedback and findings so far and our next steps.

Usually, information literacy programmes focus primarily on students and their information needs.
A survey among academic staff however showed knowledge gaps regarding important information resources and a fundamental need for research activities to be supported by information expertise. We also found that administrative staff of academic as well as non-academic departments have information needs of varied kinds. Since Bavaria's curriculum for secondary education recognises information skills as one of the key skills in society there is a growing need for training students and teachers alike. Arising from TUM's strong link to its Alumni, these form another important target group of the library.

At TUM library we realised a strong need to support these groups regarding their specific information requirements more systematically. As a consequence it has become an integral part of the library's mission to respond individually to their different requirements.

We offer tours, workshops and lectures which are tailored to specific needs and have been developed in close collaboration with our customers. Content and teaching methods differ accordingly from a treasure hunt for 6th form students to a workshop on academic networking and bibliometrics for researchers.

Some of the services are offered and communicated in collaboration with other support facilities at the university or embedded in the faculty curriculum, others started as ad hoc sessions.

The TUM initiative to address academic and non-academic staff as well as alumni in a more systematic way is part of the library's programme to change the library into the University Centre for Knowledge Management, part of which will be developed in the framework of the current IATUL Task Force action plan. This will be reported on elsewhere during this conference.

1. Introduction

"Information literacy and lifelong learning have a strategic, mutually reinforcing relationship with each other that is critical to the success of every individual, organization, institution, and nation-state in the global information society. These two modern paradigms should ideally be harnessed to work symbiotically and synergistically with one another if people and institutions are to successfully survive and compete in the 21st century and beyond" (Lau, 2006)

At the library of Technische Universität München (TUM) we aim to support all possible user groups regarding their information requirements in different stages of life and learning. With our information literacy programme we address future (sixth form) and former students (Alumni), obviously everybody during their academic career from undergraduates and master-students to teaching staff and researchers, all the different groups of TUM with varied information needs as well as members of the public. Our target groups lie within and outside university, some more evident than others and some we still find "untapped". We develop our sessions tailored to our customer's specific needs as explained later.

We believe that information literacy is constantly evolving. We follow current developments, including aspects of the 21st century skills set (http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/) such as media literacy, digital literacy and academic literacy. Our new "Transliteracy" project intends to develop standards for these new requirements in a systematic way and embed them into our programme. Transliteracy expands our definition of Information Literacy by „the ability to read, write and interact across a range of platforms, tools and media..."(Thomas et al, 2007)
Practically, it also enriches our services through the exploration of new technologies and media (e.g. mobile learning and web 2.0 applications).
Game-based learning is another aspect we would like to look into further.

2. Organisation

Up to 2009 user education at TUM library was based in Customer Services and library tours and inductions were mostly held on request. Over the time, the library was faced with an intensely growing demand for library inductions. To be able to meet the growing needs the library management decided to form a new department "Information Services", incorporating the library's enquiry service and user education. The aim was to develop a structured and comprehensive information literacy programme to provide training in a consistent high quality.

In 2011 we conducted 470 information literacy related events (tours and workshops) with more than 6.600 participants (http://www.informationskompetenz.de/veranstaltungsstatistik); additionally we offer about 50 e-learning-modules, produced by our e-learning unit (http://www.ub.tum.de/en/kurse-elearning/courses-elearning). Numbers are growing constantly.

Teaching is carried out by members of seven subject-related library information teams (BITs) with about 35 persons involved. They comprise the team coordinator, who is part of the department, the subject librarian and additional members of staff who can be from any part of the library. Each team supports a particular subject area, e.g. Architecture and Civil Engineering or a specific site, and it is their responsibility to answer requests, offer any assistance required and promote our services.
The department itself has been growing up to six FTEs (Full time equivalent) members of staff, five of which fully dedicated to user education. Their responsibilities include strategic planning, content development and scheduling of events as well as quality assurance and evaluation. Most of the team members are also involved in the enquiry service, which comprise a team of 20 persons including staff from other departments.

According to our principles we are further developing our programme by constantly questioning content and methods.
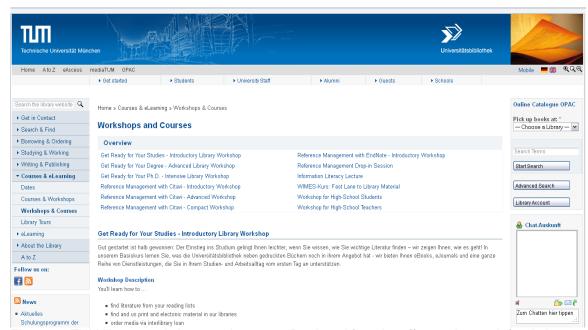
3. Our programme

Figure 1 - TUM library workshops and courses. Retrieved from http://www.ub.tum.de/workshops

With more than 30.000 students at TUM these form our biggest user group by far. Naturally we meet their need for user education with a set of tours, standard workshops and drop-in sessions.

However, for the purpose of this paper I will focus on the 40% of activities addressing other user groups as detailed below.

3.1 Academic staff

"The services we provide at our sites…support research, teaching and studies." (http://www.ub.tum.de/en/mission-statement)

For a lot of universities academic staff is a standard target group for their Information Literacy programme already. We are not as far as that, therefore we are currently expanding our programme for researchers responding to their requirements.

Last year we conducted a survey among academic staff, which revealed significant knowledge gaps regarding library services, especially regarding access to electronic journals and databases. Participants expressed a training need on varied information skills including open access, bibliometrics, academic writing, publishing and copyright issues. Thus we expanded our training for academics to include the issues mentioned and promote these in a more systematic way, e.g. presenting our programme at central events for PhD students or new academic staff.

So far we have developed two different sessions for academic staff.

For research staff at the beginning of their career we offer a workshop "Get ready for your PhD – Intensive Library Workshop": Participants find out about searching literature in print and electronically, researching databases, referencing and open access publishing. At the moment we offer 12 workshops per semester, three of which are generic and nine with an emphasis on a specific subject, such as Architecture/Civil Engineering or Medicine. Some of these are part of the training programme of the graduate schools.

In our new training set for researchers we offer a range of modules. The different modules cover current awareness tools and academic networking, basic research in databases, bibliometrics and library services for staff. A workshop containing all of these is part of the TUM central

training programme for staff (WIMES), and will be offered once per semester initially. On request, we conduct individual workshops for specific departments or research groups with a chosen combination of the content.

3.2 Non-academic staff

The next user groups are usually not in the focus of a university library, and comprise the whole range of non academic staff at the university from support staff at the faculties and other facilities to technical services. We feel responsible for information requirements of all these groups.

Since 2008 we offer a half-day training called "the fast route to literature". It is aimed at support staff in the faculties, who are involved in literature provision in their area. Participants learn how to find literature in the library, order books and journal articles via inter-library-loan, request books for our collection and how to use our reserved reading service. Acknowledging the fact that there are still a lot of departmental libraries in use, we offer a purchasing service for departmental collections. This workshop is also part of the WIMES programme and running once per semester.

We are aware of information needs in parts of the university not related to the faculties, but just at the beginning to develop a programme tailored to their needs.
Our library information team (BIT) for central services found out that there are about 180 potential target groups.

Some of these are related to academic provision such as the Institute for Advanced Studies, where international researchers are based or ProLehre, a service unit to support studying and teaching. Some are mainly student-facing such as the Student Service Center, staff-facing such as Human Resources or the training centres or central services such as Finance or Property.

Some are already part of our inner-university network which we work together on a regular basis, therefore their information needs are more evident for us. Staff members of the TUM Centre for Vocational Training or the International Office for example can use our whole service portfolio as far as they know. Sometimes we are pointed to information needs only by chance. A while ago we found out that the fire department of one of our sites started buying standards, not aware that they would have access through the library, which we certainly explained then.

So far we had a couple of events for the Finance Department, the Language Centre and Human Resources, including a library tour and a session on literature search. We plan to offer regular events to address the administrative units of the university one after the other.

Promoting our services this way can not only improve both the working experience of the participants and use of our resources, but enhances liaison and cooperation with other groups at the university.

3.3 Schools

In 2008 Research Skills (W-Seminar = das wissenschaftspropädeutische Seminar) have been introduced as a subject in Bavaria's schools for students of the last two years in secondary education. Information Skills are part of that. For a lot of teachers this is an area where they don't feel very confident, we do. As an academic library we support pupils and teachers alike.

In 2009 TUM formed ExploreTUM to streamline the university's varied services for schools. The aim is to encourage outstanding students to join TUM for their studies and to prepare them for a life at university. ExploreTUM organises a range of talks, tours and events for pupils from age 10 onwards. The university forged partnerships with a number of schools in the Bavarian area which are offered special events and support with their teaching. (www.schueler.tum.de)

Now the library is part of ExploreTUM's round table, participating in some of their big events and currently offering about 80 trainings for schools per year. In that respect we see our programme for schools as an opportunity to pique pupil's curiosity regarding university and studying, to pre-teach future students and communicate a positive image of the library.

Our regular 1.5 hour-long workshop for students is based on the "Learning Library" concept by Susanne Rockenbach (2008). Instead of instructing, the librarian acts as a facilitator, i.e. as a point of reference, while students work on different exercises in small groups. After a quick tour through the library and a short introduction into their tasks students explore information resources all around the library by themselves. The tasks are about finding resources on the library catalogue and locate them in the library, searching the internet and in databases. The tasks given are always relatedt to the context the students are currently working on at school. At the end the groups are presenting their results in front of their co-students. We found that the method used works perfect for us as students are completely absorbed with fulfilling their tasks, so there is no time for boredom or negligence.

For the yearly Taster Day we have developed a treasure hunt to call students' attention to some of the library's services available to them. They learn about scanning, dictionaries, our reference collection and electronic journals, motivated by the promise of a little treat.

We see teachers as an important target group as disseminators among students. Currently we offer "Fit for the W-Seminar – a workshop on information literacy" for teachers 2-3 times per year. This one-day workshop is integrated in the official training programme for Bavarian teachers and proofs to be very popular. Most teachers are happy about their learning as well as the networking opportunities. It comprises presentations, followed by hands-on exercises on searching on the Internet and the library catalogue, referencing and plagiarism.

3.4 Externals and Alumni

In Germany all academic libraries are open to use by members of the public, which is why externals form a significant user group for us.

Our bimonthly After Work Library Tours are open to everybody. They comprise a library tour followed by an introductory session on retrieval strategies. Participants are usually a mix of members of TUM staff, as well as members of the public including students from other universities. External users are generally amazed about the range of services available to them, our opening times - which are very generous compared to public libraries in Germany or the situation a few years ago -, borrowing regulations and the range of electronic resources available.

TUM Alumni are recognised as one of the most important contacts for the university as they form a network including top managers in the industry, who support the university personally, politically and financially.
As part of the event programme of the TUM Alumni & Career Service "Back to the Campus" (http://www.alumni.tum.de/en/veroeffentlichungen/back-to-the-campus) we offer a library tour including a "behind the scenes", followed by a session on information retrieval.

4. Next steps

Thus far an overview of our services related to information literacy for evident and not so evident user groups. For the near future we plan to further develop these for existing target groups and to include more "untapped" groups into our programme.
At a glance, these are our findings and next steps.

Feedback: A few months ago we started evaluating our teaching sessions systematically to find out about participants' experience in order to further develop our teaching and marketing. Content and method of the sessions are usually seen as appropriate and helping with learning outcome. Academic staff has mixed attitudes towards current awareness and networking. We

are monitoring if this is subject specific or if this is an area that will be more established in the future. At the moment most participants find out about the event word-of-mouth or through our website. The library's marketing team is currently developing a strategy to contact all target groups.

Long-term evaluation: Where possible, we plan to ask feedback from participants a second time after 1-2 years to find out long-term learning outcomes and behavioural changes. This is part of our quality management programme and will document how sustainable our programme is for our users and help us with improving our programme.

Framework: Last but not least - Given the amount of events and the range of user groups we address we would like to structure our efforts with a theoretical background. Taking into account existing models on information literacy we plan to develop a framework for our information literacy programme including a set of standards and aims to define our objectives for the future.

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