STUDENT AND LIBRARY SERVICES IN COOPERATION

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Abstract

At Ångström Laboratory, one of the largest campuses at Uppsala University, the Library and the Student Services Office merged in November 2012. This merger is a pilot project to improve service for students and faculty. Ångström Laboratory has around 900 staff and almost 10,000 students, of whom most also spend time at other campuses. In this paper we describe the background and the implementation of the pilot project.

One of the main reasons for moving together was the wish to gather together all kinds of student services, including the distribution of written examinations in one place. The central location and open environment of the Library made it a good choice.

The heart of the Library and Student Services is an open office consisting of two service desks located in the library area. There are silent study areas; computers for searching and printing, an area for relaxing with newspapers and journals, meeting rooms and offices for the staff. The result is a lively place with a cozy atmosphere.

As the Library and the Student Services still belong to different parts of the University we are now starting to find out how best to collaborate. To understand more we log all the questions we get and the services we deliver. We also have meetings together and use the same lunch room to get to know each other and our different functions. We will define which matters can be solved in common, and how we can back each other up when necessary.

Keywords: collaboration, student services, student spaces, library services

Introduction and background

Student service and library service are two important support functions for teaching and research at the University. The Library supports both researchers and students in a direct way – with books, articles, user education, etc. Student Services are designed mainly for the students but effective and transparent services are also beneficial to faculty. At the Faculty of Science and Technology at Uppsala University most of the lecturers split their time between teaching and research, so smoothly running teaching services free up time and effort for research.

At the Ångström Laboratory two different processes lead up to the idea of cooperation between student and library services. Due to the increasing use and cost of digital books and articles the Ångström Library has had to make cuts in expenditure and substantially reduce the size of its premises. Student Services on the other hand needed to reorganise and relocate to bring together various offices in one centrally located place at the Ångström Laboratory. An invitation
from the Library to move Student Services into the library area was the starting point for the collaboration that could possibly solve both problems. The merger would also benefit the students who had long asked for increased study areas and quiet study places.

1. Studying in the cosy area

First, we found out that we both have the same goal: to offer excellent service to the students. The rearrangement of the library area was a good opportunity to plan for better study conditions for the increasing number of students. Student Service and the academic library together can help students acclimatise quickly to university life. (Grallo, Chalmers, & Baker, 2012) The focus is on optimising the library as a place of study and a student service centre. (Sennyey, Ross, & Mills, 2009)

We began working together in November 2012 with the ambition that both students and faculty would benefit from the cooperation between and proximity of the student and library services, namely:

- Students would easily find different kinds of services in one place
- Joint resources would make it possible to improve the study areas
- Cooperation between teaching and Library would increase
- Information about courses in information literacy would reach the students and lecturers more easily
- Closer collaboration between librarians and study advisers would increase the use of the Language Workshop
- An increasing number of students and teachers would find their way to the Library
- The Library would be more involved in what is happening on campus
Ångström Library and Student Service

Ångström Library is one of 10 subject libraries at Uppsala University Library. Uppsala University Library has a staff of 198 people with 7 of them working at Ångström Library. In the last four years, the Ångström Library has been forced to reduce its staff by 20%.

The Library serves students and researchers at the Ångström Laboratory and the nearby Information Technology Centre. The subjects are astronomy, physics, chemistry, technology, information technology and mathematics. The Library has 30,000 volumes of printed literature. Like many other technical and scientific libraries, over 95% of the media budget is used for the purchase of relatively expensive databases, journals and e-books. The Library offers courses in information literacy for undergraduate and post-graduate students, and also individual help with the “Book a librarian” service. The Library staff mans the desk and works with manual in and out checking of books, making new library cards and answering all kinds of questions including reference questions. Other tasks in the Library are acquisitions, cataloguing, loans and interlibrary loans, administration of e-media, webpages, subject guides and our virtual reference service. The staff also participates in projects and collaborate with other libraries within Uppsala University Library.

Researchers and employees have access to the Library around-the-clock. The students have access to the book collection between 8:30 am and 4:30 pm on weekdays when the reference desk is open. The rest of the Library is available around-the-clock also for students. The area outside the book collection includes study areas, and an area for relaxation with newspapers and scientific journals. While most of the journals are available online a collection of around 65 journals are available in print.

An important part of the Student Services at the Ångström Laboratory is the service desk next to the library reference desk. The service desk is a pilot project in the reorganisation of Student Services within the Faculty of Science and Technology. The aim is to use the first six months after opening to optimise the services and to use the experience for service desks at other campuses around the university. The service desk is open between 8:30 am and 4:30 pm on weekdays, i.e. the same hours as the library reference desk. At the service desk the students get help with registration, certificates, web services and other questions concerning their studies. When help is not available at the service desk great effort is put into referring the students to the appropriate office or person. The distribution of written examinations for the courses at the Ångström Laboratory is concentrated to the service desk. This is the major part of the services of the desk.

Besides the service desk, Student Services at the Ångström Laboratory handle administration of the courses and programmes, study guidance and scheduling of courses. The degree programmes include Bachelor’s programmes in mathematics, physics, chemistry, several Master’s programmes and 13 different engineering programmes. Self-contained courses and courses within teacher training are also served and administered by Student Services. The administrators maintain the student registry Uppdok as well as the course database, degree project reports, web-sites and written examinations. The study advisers inform students in class and welcome students individually. Each study adviser works primarily with the students for one or several degree programmes. He or she gives advice about the study plan, complementary courses, study motivation and techniques, etc. An important part of the job is answering emails from current and prospective students. Scheduling the courses is a complex task involving students, teachers and teaching premises. Increasing number of students in unchanged premises makes scheduling more challenging and requires experienced staff. Since last year the number of students at Ångström Laboratory has increased with around 220 students due to one new degree programme and one programme moved from another campus.
Around 25 staff work with Student Services at the Ångström Laboratory and the majority of the staff have offices in or near the Library. The rest of the staff work within the four different departments at Ångström Laboratory and are not so involved with the Library. Student Services at the Ångström Laboratory are part of Student Services of the Faculty of Science and Technology.

Cooperation

Soon after the decision for co-location was made in March 2012, two major issues were addressed. One was planning the use of the common space and how to share the offices. The other was the question of how to cooperate in the service desks and help each other. A collaboration group was formed with representatives from the Library and Student Services, two safety officers, and a student representative. The group met once a week and one of the first tasks was to make a risk assessment action plan to minimise health and safety problems.

In June 2012, staff from the Library and Student Services made a joint study trip to Lund and Malmö to find inspiration for interior design, facilities and cooperation. The trip which included visits, group work and eating out was also a good way for the two staff groups to get to know each other. First visited was the BMC Library in Lund where there is a joint desk for Study Centre and Library with the distribution of examinations. A visit was also made at the Lund Institute of Technology study centre, where there are a library and a student service desk next to each other. In Malmö we went to the University Library and the newly built Student Centre. The staff from Student Services and Library also spent half a day with group work around possibilities of cooperation, the design and functionality of the desk and planning the common space. Many good ideas for cooperation such as helping each other with simpler matter at the desk, organise joint events for students, have joint meetings and collaborate on the dissemination of information, came up during the group work. These ideas provided a basis for further planning.

During the summer and fall 2012 the collaboration group continued to meet almost every week. Communication with other staff was important throughout the process, it took the form of written minutes and the co-location was a standing item on the agenda of each working group's weekly meetings.

In February 2013, the Library and Student Services had a joint planning day. Four groups with different themes were arranged:

How can we help each other and cooperate at the desks?
We will identify what we can do for each other and have training sessions. We would like to have a joint site on the intranet for information, and are planning to post information about who does what and FAQs. We have started to log all the questions and business that appears at the desks.

How can we organise the cooperation?
We will continue with regular joint meetings, both formal and informal, safety inspections and planning days. We can invite other parts of the university e.g. IT support. We will start cooperating on teaching students with courses in study techniques and information retrieval in term 1 and when students start their degree project.

How can we organise joint events?
Examples of joint events are theme weeks, reception of new students and invite researchers to do a short presentation of their research so called "science sludge".

**How can we collaborate on information?**
We can take joint information action and use common information screens. Clear signs are important so we will make plans of the floor space and where staff is located, information about who works with what, and internal maps for reference.

Some of the ideas from the planning day will be implemented in 2013.

Already, after working together for a few months, we have noticed several benefits:

- Students and teachers deal with several things in the same place
- We can help and ask each other
- We help students and teachers with simple questions relating to each other’s areas of expertise.
- We are not alone at the desk

2. The open space

**The refurbishment**

In April 2012 the planning started with meetings with a project manager from the Building Department and representatives from faculty, Library, Student Services and students to plan the renovation and reconfiguration of existing premises. The plan was that everything would be ready for the start of the semester in September 2012.

A lot of time was spent on planning and negotiation on the premises at the beginning. The area was not large enough for all the requirements. The students needed quiet study areas and study places in various audio zones. Student Service needed offices and space for the written examinations. A small meeting room was needed for the Language Workshop who offers individual tutoring of students in the library two half-days a week. A larger meeting room was needed for staff meetings, etc. To meet the needs the librarians had to weed out the collections and another 100 meters of shelving had to be rearranged. The Library staff's offices were reduced causing some share rooms.
We wanted to create a cosy open space of the area outside the desks with a sofa, armchairs, computer workstations, study areas and new journal shelves. The students would be able to use the open space for both group and individual study. A study has shown that today’s students see open plan spaces both as social spaces and as a work environment, they are not mutually exclusive. (Bryant, Matthews, & Walton, 2009) New furniture was ordered. The open space is used for queuing at the desks and can also be used for exhibitions, displays of new books and events for students. We also plan to place a coffee machine in the open space. We believe that the core role of the library space in the future will be a place of collaborative learning and community interaction and that the students will find it conducive to their learning. (Montgomery & Miller, 2011)

3. The new journal shelves

Obvious advantages arising from our co-location are the shared use of meeting rooms, lunch room and other facilities. We also share printers and copying machines. Two new height adjustable desks coloured red and orange, rotary computer screens and clear signs over each desk make the service desks practical for students and staff.

The desks and the reconstructed spaces were inaugurated on November 30th 2012, when the students and all the staff at the Library and campus were invited. The Librarian Director Lars Burman and Dean of Education Ingrid Ahnesjö made speeches and tied up two red ribbons to manifest the merging of two activities.
What have we learned from this?

It takes time to get used to the thought of large changes. The project of merging the Library and Student Services affects not only the staff within the two service organisations but also the students, researchers and other employees. What became evident early in the process was the need for information and the possibility to discuss and express opinions about the project. Having meetings that are open for everyone is important.

It was important for the staff directly involved in the project to be able to influence and participate in the decisions about the process. To meet this need a collaboration group was formed for the planning of large issues and details. Participating in the collaboration group were staff from the Library and Student Services including two safety officers. A student, member of the student union, was invited to the group. The Swedish Work Environment Act states that employers and employees must cooperate on work environment. The major part of this cooperation was performed in this group.

The joint study trip to Lund and Malmö was time and money well invested. On the trip everybody got to know each other and was able to focus more on the positive side and less on the negative aspects of the new situation. The trip served as a kind of turning point for the project.

It is difficult to estimate the space needed when merging two different organisations and adding new services. In our case some areas turned out to be almost too small. The inconvenience of this can be overcome by clever planning and use of space. We got help with the planning of the space and furnishing from an interior designer.

Conclusion

It is essential that the Library works integrally with other parts of the University and improved dialogue and integration have long been an important aim for the Library. Co-location and collaboration with Student Services are a part of this.
Already the advantages of working together can be seen; our combined information from a single place is clearer, it is easier to implement the Library's user education, the Library and the Student Services can learn from each other and help each other. The gains are also social; the library staff feels more involved in campus life and have found new colleagues.

For the students it is easier to retrieve all exams from one place and at the same time visit the Library. Also more teachers and students have become aware of the Library's existence and services.

Our common goal is and will remain excellent service to the students and lecturers.

We aim to develop the cooperation in different forms like joint training sessions to be able to help each other at the information desks, collaborate on the library instruction and contacts with lecturers and program managers and in organising joint events for the students.

In five years the campus will expand and we are already planning to stay together whether or not we move within the campus. We are considering co-location and cooperation with other parts of the campus such as campus management, reception, IT support and the café.

References


