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How the Usage of IT is Effecting Academic Libraries

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Abstract

The purpose of this treatise is to determine how information technology is affecting the usage of services in the academic library. Various studies suggest that there has been a decline in usage of traditional face-to-face reference services. The majority of the college students prefer to use the Web instead of frequenting the library. Librarians and educators are concerned that these students are developing poor research skills if they only use the internet for research. Many of them are not familiar with the best electronic resources. Librarians may have less reference work but they will need to offer instruction on using the Web for research.

Keywords: information technology, Web, reference services and academic libraries.
Introduction

The research has suggested that academic libraries represent the vanguard to changes in the library system. It is a well-known fact that academic libraries are compelled to serve a multitude of users with a myriad of diverse information needs and research skills. Furthermore, fundamental changes are accosting all libraries; academic libraries are forced to confront an expeditiously modifying educational is being beckoned. Numerous institutions have made a relentless attempt to evaluate the effect of library use on student achievement; however they were plagued with issues pertaining to privacy concerns.

The findings of some studies conducted by researchers have revealed there is an empirically relevant data maintaining that freshman undergraduate students who frequent the library attain a higher GPA during their first semester and are less likely to drop out than non-library users.

Unfortunately it is apparent that the advent of information technology has been conducive to loss in the usage of traditional library services. In fact library research associations have written various studies that have confirmed losses in the usage of reference services and book checkouts.

A Decline in the Usage of Reference Services

Although information technology has improved some services in the academic library its development has been conducive to a decline in the usage of reference services. It has been asserted by some scholars that a reduction the number of college students using traditional services seems to concur that many of them are using other information sources. It has been revealed in 2005 report from the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) that between 1995-2004, reference requests decreased approximately 4.5% per year and book circulation decreased
1.2% per year; however this varied among the different types of libraries (Applegate, 2008).

However, there was an increase in reference questions in Master’s or graduate level libraries during the same period. There was also a decrease in usage of those same services from 2009 - 2011 (ARL, 1986-2011). It has been asserted by some researchers that students are not using the library services at the same percentages they did a decade ago.

Jones (2008) contends that although information technology may facilitate the completion of scholarly projects for students some educators and librarians are displeased because they believe that it will conducive to the development of very inferior research skills. In the research study it was also indicated that three quarters (73%) of college students use the internet for information searching (Jones, 2008). The research also asserted that as many as 80% of the college students maintained that they use the library less than three hours each week.

The scholars have concurred that the vast majority of students they observed in the library checked his or her email while they were in the computer labs; only a small minority of students used the university-based or library websites (Jones, 2008). The students who were engaged in academic work used commercial engines in lieu of the university and library websites.

However, Fister (2008) contends that the allegory of the insignificance of the physical library in the lives of undergraduate students from personal observation (she is a director of a small liberal arts college with primarily residential students who are the traditional college age. It was indicated earlier by the ARL that there is a decline in usage of reference services However, a survey indicated that a modernized academic accommodations revealed study increases in usage (Shill & Tonner, 2004).
It is surprising to learn that the ACRL task force that conducted research on the future of academic libraries did not indicate a decrease in use as one of the ten assumptions for the future. The listings projected increases in usage. It was assumed that distance learning would become an progressively more universal choice in higher education, and would co-occur but not admonish the conventional library. It was concurred that students and the faculty would request more accelerated and ameliorated access to services. The researchers contended that the mandate for technology related services will increase and necessitate additional funding (Mullins, Allen & Hufford, 2007).

Applegate (2008) conducted a study founded on the number of reference transactions in a typical week question that is a segment of the Academic Library Survey (ALS) directed by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Two principle inquiries prompted the development of this study. Initially, is there a decrease in reference transaction activity in U.S. academic libraries as indicated by the Academic Library Survey? Second, does reference transaction activity decrease or increase differ according to the type of institution?

The findings of this study indicated that there is definitely a decrease in reference activity in academic libraries. It was also found that the percentage and experience of this decrease fluctuate significantly by the type of institution-ARL, doctoral, masters, baccalaureate, as well as public or private status (Applegate, 2008).

Changes in Academic Libraries

Troll (2002) discusses how libraries are changing. In this treatise she suggests that the use of reference service has varies for numerous years. Troll (2002) concurs that the conventional face to face reference service with a librarian is being converted by information technologies
expanded to influence a more distant audience, such as electronic mail, web-based forms, and chat or videoconferencing software. It is apparent that the usage data from these type of transactions are not usually compiled and reported. This suggests that the results may possibly be incomplete since most reference data only includes reference questions asked at the desk.

The usage of interlibrary loan has also increased substantially in many instances. The literature seems to suggest that the new technology has transformed ILL concealing the lines between ILL and document delivery services. It is safe to assume that technology has ameliorated the services offered by ILL; the patrons can begin their own ILL requests, have materials delivered to desktop and even trace their own requests online.

Troll (2008) indicates that there was an increase the number of traditional library instruction sessions and participation was increasing. It is believed a decrease in this area is caused by distance learning technologies that are being positioned to deliver library instruction. There is also a possibility that many patrons have a sufficient amount of technological expertise to transmit skills from one vendor’s database to another.

It is a well-known fact that there has been an increase in the use of electronic resources. The students and the faculty usually want access to full text resources. However, they are incognizant of the high cost of electronic resources.

Digital Academic Library

Han and Goulding (2003) described the standard of information and reference services in the digital library. Although the use of traditional reference services has declined a myriad of literature asserts that digital reference services have become exceedingly prevalent in recent years. The scholars contend that when someone asks a question it as significant as what they are
asking (Lankes, Collins & Kasowitz, 2000). This implies that librarians should consider the incentive behind a question as well as making an effort to answer it. In this particular study the authors place the digital library into the context of information service and contrariwise put information service into the context of the digital library. The authors of this study recommend a three levelled support system and dissertate on each segment separately. The advent of the digital library indicates how technology has changed the usage of academic libraries.

One of the significant aspects of digital libraries is the use of portals. Halm (2002) contends that emphasis is being placed on portals and subsequently he asserted that the digital library provides comprehensible admittance to a gamut of assorted information resources. It has been indicated by a survey that too many students are only using the Web to locate information in lieu of trying the periodical indexes that are offered through the Web (Tenopir & Ennis, 2002). A myriad of reports have suggested that the library is considered inconvenient when compared to the commercial search engines; this concept might be conducive to a decline in library usage.

Presently libraries are subscribing to an increasingly large number of costly electronic databases and e-journals. Nevertheless, the conventional print resources are still present. It has been assumed by some researchers that the users are overwhelmed by the number of resources; they need support to find the best resources and services. The vast majority of students do not want to search through a myriad of databases to information for their topic. Most users want full-text sources, easy-access, self-help information services and access to the Internet (Han & Goulding, 2003). Bentham (2002) concurs that librarians must create easier access to electronic resources; if they do not succeed in this endeavor many students and other users will look elsewhere for information.
Digital libraries which are a part of information technology still need reference librarians to help the students find information. Bunge and Bopp (2000) indicate that in most cases multifaceted information tools and systems will develop more rapidly than self-help components and interfaces; this necessitates the personal assistance of experts essential for the total utilization of the most current and authoritative resources.

Most students will still need education in the forms of library instruction, tours and programs in the digital library. The scholars contend that digital libraries must offer more than access to information; they are compelled to support new types of intellectual work. The researchers indicate that this entails the use of the computer system through system development and the user component via education and training in the utilization of innovative procedures.

The digital libraries are considered easy to use; the students and other users are able to locate information without too much difficulty. However, this is conducive to the transition from professional mediated mode to end-user self-service mode (Han & Goulding, 2003). The literature asserts that mediated information searching and fee-based services have decreased in the last few years.

Despite these developments the responsibilities have the reference librarian has remained the same as it did in the traditional library; the role is somewhat different. In lieu of assisting students directly a significant amount of their work will be conducted behind the scenes according to the researchers. Bopp and Bunge (2000) suggest that “the role of librarians will become one of designing and ‘engineering’ these interface and help systems, in lieu of personally helping users.”
Digital reference service is basically reference service that is delivered through electronic means using both asynchronous (e-mail, web-forms) and synchronous software (real-time system) (Han & Goulding, 2003). In contrast to traditional reference services, digital reference service can be accessed regardless of time or distance. Most users, especially students consider digital reference more expedient than traditional reference.

Digital reference, according to the researchers must be used in combination with other service points and methods, not as a substitute. Nevertheless digital reference does have strengths and weaknesses. A survey by one scholar indicated that digital reference is very effective in answering ready reference questions, those from regular library users and pertaining to popular culture or entertainment (Janes, Hill & Rolfe, 2001).

Nevertheless, some scholars contend that too much emphasis on digital reference might conducive to the denigrating the professional status of the librarian. Some researchers have suggested that librarians will be relegated to mere information retrievers. The digital library system should include well-trained and highly competent individualized support.

Conclusion and Summary

The literature has revealed that most surveys have indicated a decline in the use of traditional reference services in the academic library. Most students prefer to search for resources via the Web to complete their projects. However, they still need a professional librarian to help them determine which electronic resources and websites are the best. Many educators and librarians fear that these students will develop inferior research skills if they are too dependent on information technology.
There have been increases in usage of distance learning and interlibrary loan. The digital library, which is a consequence of information technology, has become very widespread. It offers service that is not restricted by time or distance. It must be used in conjunction with other resources. It is apparent that information technology has had a significant impact on the usage of the academic library. Nevertheless, there is still a need for face-to-face professional assistance.
References


