

Developing a global information learning policy at the Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium

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Introduction

Louvain-la-Neuve is located in Belgium, 25 km South-East from Brussels. The university comprises a large international community: 21000 students and a staff of 3000 academics and scientists and more than 2000 collaborators. There are more than 200 research units.

The Catholic University of Louvain was founded in 1425 in Louvain (Leuven) in the Flemish part of Belgium. But in 1968, due to political and linguistic reasons, the university was divided into 2 separated universities: a Flemish one which remained in Leuven and a French one, which moved to the French speaking part of Belgium. A new town was then created with name “Louvain-la-Neuve” (LLN). The university of LLN is the major university of the French community in Belgium.

In 1970, the former library was shared in 2 parts. The collections were unfortunately divided according to the inscriptions numbers : the even numbers moved to the young university and the uneven numbers remained in the Flemish one.

So, in the seventies, in the new university of LLN, instead of one central library, 7 independent libraries were created, each one serving one or more faculties and being an autonomous entity.

But, with the emergence of the electronical resources, such an independent management of libraries became problematic.

So at the end of the nineties, with the development of the virtual library, the authorities of the university decided to create a “central service of the libraries”, managed by a chief librarian. For this, the UCL called upon an external audit service.

The centralization

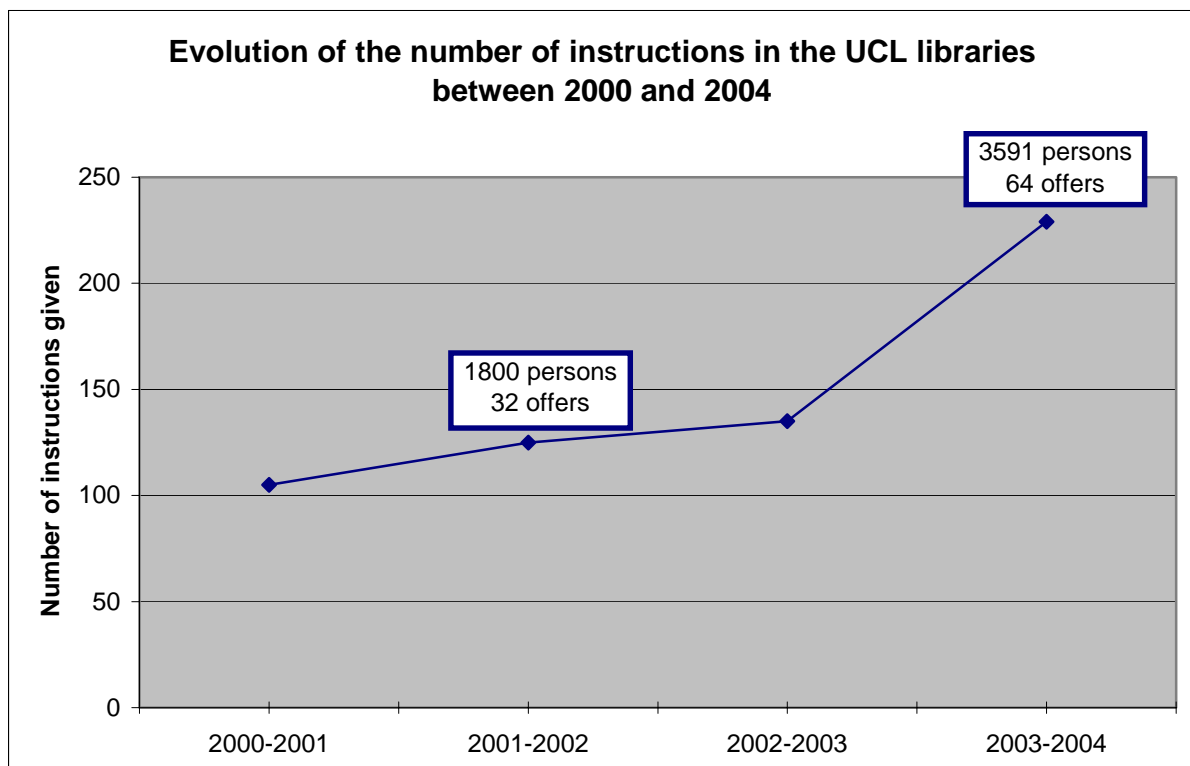
The development of the virtual library necessitated to centralize and to merge the previous autonomous way of management of each library into a shared and same way of working. So, the “central service of the libraries” manages, with the collaboration of each library, the following tasks :

- human resources
- the development and maintenance of the OPAC, which is the backbone of the libraries of our university. It contains more than 2.000.000 volumes, 10.000 e-seriales and 5000 serials

- the consortium policy shared with the other French speaking academic libraries of Belgium
- projects with those universities, such as electronical thesis (bictel, e-print repositories, institutional repositories, cud, Unicat, ...)
- subscription to more than 70 bibliographic databases
- accountancy
- purchase of equipment
- bibliographic search training

A working team "Information literacy learning"

By quasi-monthly acquisition of new bibliographical tools, the library user is faced with a wide range of information sources, so wide that he becomes lost... That's why the need in "information literacy competency" instructions became quickly unavoidable. So, as shown in the following graph, the instructions supply never stopped growing during the last 3 years.



Facing this unavoidable need in instructions, the UCL libraries created a transversal team. Seven librarian instructors from each faculty library compose this team.

The main goal of this team is to determine the need for instructions and to implement the policy that will allow to respond them. This group also constitutes the interface between the users and the designers of the OPAC.

One of the first tasks of the team has been the realization of the on-line help of the libraries' catalogue. It also ensures its upgrade every time the OPAC changes.

In 2001, by means of an inquiry towards the librarian instructors, the group has established an inventory of all the existing instructions offers among the different libraries, as well as the intended public.

The inquiry has revealed that:

- 21 librarian instructors took part to the training of the users
- 32 instructions offers were organized. Among these, only 9 were mandatory and part of an existing course. The others were elaborated at the request of the students or initiated by the librarians who were faced to the fact that users knew little of the available bibliographic tools. They had difficulties to use them and were asking recurrent questions
- The concerned public was very heterogeneous :
 - o Students of the first cycle
 - o Students of the second cycle
 - o Phd students and researchers
 - o Administrative and technical staff of the university
 - o Some professors
 - o Elder students from the "université des aînés"
- Redundancy of some instructions
- Variety of contents and pedagogical approaches

This situation has been evolving steadily towards an increasing number of instructions and public since the inquiry. On the other hand, the university has been acquiring more and more diverse and complex bibliographic tools. Confronted to this, the librarians felt the need to professionalize this part of their job. So, the instructors' working team has started coordinating the creation of a better and more efficient instruction offer. Therefore, the following strategy was decided:

- a) instruct the instructors
- b) develop common instruction tools

A. Instruct the instructors:

1. Courses in pedagogy

Most of the librarian instructors did not have any education to pedagogy during their studies. It seemed important to fill this gap. Therefore, two courses were organized, in collaboration with the IPM (Institute for university pedagogy and multimedia) of the UCL.

These courses were given by two specialists in pedagogy.

- the first one, given in 3 modules of 2 hours each, was focused on "pedagogic tools and new technologies". This course was followed by all the librarian instructors.
- The second one, which was more consequent in terms of time (20 hours) and implication, has been given to 8 librarian instructors. This course was focused on "the building of an instruction project":
 - o Analysis of the instruction needs

- Determination of the objectives
- Building of the course structure
- Evaluation of the learning
- Evaluation of the course structure

At the end of this course, each participant presented a personal work, namely applying the concepts on an existing instruction. This work was evaluated by the 2 specialists.

By the way, this course is also given to all new professors joining the university.

2. Masters in university pedagogy.

Two members of the instructors team have started following an "master degree" in university pedagogy, with the following goals:

- to develop a frame for analysis and reflection on a professional instruction approach
- to position the information research instructions in the academic courses

These studies will allow them to support their on-the-field instruction practise with a solid theoretical background. This experience has also positive repercussions on the entire instructors' team.

B. Develop common instruction tools

1. Sharing the existing tools

The instructors have shared on an intranet all the tools they use to support their instructions (PPT files, courses, exercises, evaluation grids, ...).

2. Working day on "multimedia supports"

The instructors' working team has organised a 'librarian instructors day', on the subject 'Using multimedia supports when instructing users'.

A specialist in hypermedia and learning was invited : Mr. André Tricot, researcher at the CNRS and assistant professor at the "Institut universitaire des maîtres de Toulouse, France".

From Mr. Tricot's talk and the subsequent workshops, 3 important items were pointed out:

- Stand-alone instruction systems which use multimedia supports as an unique and all-in-one support for a given instruction often miss their goals. When using multimedia supports, it is better to design them as complementary tools and combine them with existing supports (courses, exercises, on-line help)
- There is often a confusion between pedagogical innovation and technological innovation. Both are independent, the one doesn't necessarily imply the other
- Every instruction system has to be designed in function of the learning objectives

3. Set up of a Tutorial

The librarian instructors of the UCL, willing to offer a better service for instruction of information literacy competences to the users, have submitted a project to the university's authorities, for the creation or the adaptation of a WEB tutorial. This tutorial will help the students to acquire efficient strategies for documentary information research, to choose the adequate research tools and to be able to use them, and to localize and exploit the documents found.

Instructions at the science library

The science library serves 3 faculties: the Science faculty, the Applied Science faculty and the Bio-engineering, Agronomy and Environment faculty.

Until now, most of the instructions are given by one person. This person is the reference for all the matters related to the utilization of the information research tools. This person is also responsible for the promotion of the information research instructions towards the different actors concerned (professors, researchers associations, ...).

In 2003, more than 500 persons have attended these instructions. This number increased to 670 in 2004. Only 25% of the instructions are part of an existing program. The other 75% are initiated on demand of the users or proposed spontaneously by the library. The public consists of students of the first, second and third cycle, as well as researchers.

The library has also set up a 'reference desk'. This specific desk, apart from the reception and accessible at certain hours, ensures a personal response to documentary information requests. The starting point is a specific users' need, which is then analyzed by the librarian. The goal is to teach the user how to adopt the adequate approach when facing a documentary information research in general.

Prospectives : as part of the 'Louvain Academy'

The 'Louvain Academy' was founded in June 2004. This academy groups, besides the Catholic University of Louvain, several faculties disseminated in the french-speaking part of Belgium, namely the 'Facultés Universitaires Notre-Dame de la Paix de Namur', the 'Facultés Universitaires Catholiques de Mons' and the 'Facultés Universitaires Saint-Louis de Bruxelles'. The 'Louvain Academy' brings together almost 50 % of the students of the universities in the French-speaking part of Belgium.

One of the projects that this academy has achieved is the adoption of an unique management system for all its libraries. This system will allow to create a collective catalogue, offering a unique entry point to the available resources. This catalogue will be operational at the start of the academic year 2005-2006.

At that time, it will be possible to extend the instruction policy set up at the UCL to the entire 'Louvain Academy'.

Paradoxs

Despite the will and efforts made by the librarians to improve the quality of their instructions, an important obstacle subsists which is difficult to by-pass, especially in the domain of the sciences. There is a gap between the librarians on the one hand, who are convinced of the need to organize and improve the instruction of the users, and the academicians on the other hand, who do not consider these instructions being very important, especially compared with the small amount of time they have to teach their own matters. It is therefore very uneasy to convince academicians to incorporate information research instructions into the students' education programs. Now, these same academicians are more and more promoting a 'learning through active pedagogy'. As for the librarians, they are confronted permanently to the evolution of the information (complexity of access, digitalization, evolution of the standards, overfull production, evaluation, ...). They can estimate the gap between the richness of available information and the poor use that is made of it.

It is also difficult to ensure a good collaboration and coordination between the IT people who conceive the OPAC system and the end-users (instructors as well as effective users). The users often complain about the complexity of the system. Also, the upgrades of the graphical user interface (GUI), databases and functionalities are often installed without warning the librarian instructors nor the users. This sometimes brings about fanciful situations. Indeed, when an instructor, facing 50 students, has to cope with a sudden change in GUI without being warned, he feels like being trapped and he would better be good at repartee and deploy a great sense of humor ...

Conclusions

We have seen that "librarian instructors" of different faculties, very far from each other regarding their interest and culture, could create a global service of learning adapted to different publics, different e-products and different scientific matters.

To do so, they have invested in professionalizing the instructions, by attending several instructions themselves, by sharing in common all the tools used to support the instructions in the different libraries and by organising a workshop on multimedia supports. The last one ended up in the creation of a web tutorial.

This policy has been set up to cope with the steadily increasing number of instructions given in the different libraries of the university, a direct consequence of the increasing diversity and complexity of the bibliographic tools.

Despite the efforts made by the librarians, the integration of these instructions into the students' learning program remains difficult. Authorities have to be convinced that it is worth to invest time and efforts to make these instructions compulsory.