

## **The Academic Library and the Faculty: A Mixed Method Study of Mutual Perceptions / Liat Klain-Gabbay**

### **Abstract**

This research analyzes the mutual perceptions of the academic library held by librarians/information scientists and a population that uses the academic library: professors and lecturers in the faculties of humanities and social sciences who are involved in both teaching and research. Faculty members have substantial influence on attitudes towards libraries and their status on campus, which subsequently affect budgetary allocations, perceptions about the importance of libraries in academic life and students' library use.

The goal of this mixed method study was to understand how faculty members in the humanities and social sciences perceive the academic libraries at three select institutions of higher education in Israel. It also examines how librarians/information scientists perceive their relationships with faculty members in these institutions. Consequently, its purpose was to analyze faculty members' knowledge about the services offered by the library, the abilities of librarian/information scientists, and their familiarity with the information technologies used in the library. Moreover, it examines how librarians/information scientists in academic libraries perceive themselves, their function, and their ability to assist professors and researchers. The study identified the existing perceptions of these two populations and examined the gaps, if any, between them. During the first stage, data was collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with both faculty members (PhD and higher) in the faculties of humanities and the social sciences, and with librarians/information scientists working in the libraries affiliated with these faculties. The interviews were followed by a quantitative study using a questionnaire on positions and attitudes that was based on the interview findings and distributed to members of both research groups. The questionnaires were distributed after the interviews in order to obtain a broader picture of the phenomena described by interviewees and of the relationship between the populations.

The main research questions considered were: **1.** How do faculty members in the faculties of humanities and social sciences perceive the academic library in the current era? **2.** How do librarians/information scientists working in libraries of the humanities and social sciences perceive academic libraries in the current era? Each main question was subdivided into further questions that focused on several aspects of the perceptions held by faculty members and librarians/information scientists and compared them. Analysis of both the qualitative and quantitative data yielded findings that were classified in four main categories: \*Perceptions of the library's function for both research and teaching. \*Adaptation of the library to developments in the academic world. \*Physical and virtual aspects of the library. \*Faculty members and administrators' perceptions of the library and its personnel, as well as the professional perceptions of the staff. Each of these categories encompassed perceptions about a range of subjects: the function of the

library for teaching and research; integration of the library in scholarly communication; perceptions regarding the function of library professionals; marketing; the desired position and model for the library; using library resources, and the perceptions of administrators. Perceptions were also analyzed by academic seniority.

The findings show that the perceptions of the faculty members and those of the librarians/information scientists are similar in some areas but there are significant gaps in others. Furthermore, differences were found between the various academic institutions, and these variances influence the attitude of faculty members and administrators towards the library, and their perception of its importance, which are evident in a variety of ways: usage, budgets, marketing, and relationships with faculty members. Another influential factor is the structure of the library system, whether it is centralized or decentralized. Despite the influence of institutional factors, the varying perceptions and the gaps between them were frequently found to be the result of personal traits of the faculty members and librarians/information scientists, including age, academic seniority, department, institution, structure the libraries in that institution, and how the library functions.

The principle gaps related to perceptions of the library as a supplier of the research needs of faculty members. While the libraries do provide sufficient technical support for research, some faculty members explained that they expected more than technical assistance, and there are other aspects of their research that require support. Some librarians/information scientists have been wise enough to understand this, and spoke about the need for libraries to become more involved. Despite this, it was generally apparent that the faculty members perceived themselves as having more research needs than those perceived by the librarians/information scientists. A gap was found in the scholarly communication process while faculty members expect the libraries to be involved more than the librarians/information scientists think they should be. Another gap relates to marketing. Librarians/information scientists believe that the libraries market themselves more than faculty members see that marketing. It was found that faculty members expect the libraries to be more proactive and take more initiative.

Similarities were found in the groups' perceptions regarding the ability of librarians/information scientists to be integrated into scholarly communication. Furthermore, while the participants did not agree on a single definition of the function of the library professional (in both research groups there were multiple definitions derived from different aspects of the library's work), the perceptions of both groups were similar. Moreover, both groups expressed similar opinions on the adaptation of libraries to developments in the academic world, and both preferred a centralized structure over a decentralized one.

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