

Between the cracks? - Examining the relationships between library staff, faculty and students and their effects on solving the information literacy problems of students today / Anna Yevelson

Abstract

The recent generations have seen significant changes in information environment, fueled by technological development and the introduction of the internet into almost every area of our lives. Information has become abundant accessible and available, given to free sharing and editing. These changes have influenced the individual's consumption and use of information, as well as the consumption and use of the whole society. There arose the need for people to adopt skills to cope with the influx of information, skill which has been defined as "information literacy." This term contains within it different aspects regarding abilities to identify, search, evaluate, and use information. Nowadays, the importance of information literacy is tantamount, as is evident in the expectation from every university graduate to be informationally literate. Coincidentally, the current information environment has offered the students new possibilities, yet new challenges as well, as were not existent in the past. On the one hand, the students receive readily and instantly available information, yet they are forced to face multiple difficulties stemming from the unlimited availability and the nature of materials accessible online, oftentimes unsupported, unfiltered, and unreliable.

A question arises in this situation: with whom lies the responsibility of teaching information literacy? Is it with lecturers who accompany the students throughout their academic studies, or with the librarians who for years deal with the subject of information as part of their professional occupation? Both lecturers and librarians face challenges posed by the intricate information environment, and attempt to find effective solutions. The lecturers do so by attempting to incorporate the subject of information literacy within the curriculum. The librarians do so by reinventing the

role of the library and the librarian in order to adjust to the needs of its users, both novice students and weathered scholars alike.

The aim of this study has been to contribute to research literature on the subject of information literacy in institutions of higher education, by surveying the rising needs of current students with regards to information literacy; as well as examining in what manner do the relations between the students, the library staff, and the academic staff influence the application and the effectiveness of proposed solutions. This subject was explored among the population of professional staff members at the Aranne Library at the Ben Gurion University of the Negev, the academic staff of the Department of Fine Arts at the same university, and the students of the department. The study implemented the qualitative methodology, including thematic analysis of in-depth semi-structures interviews held with representatives of all three studied populations. The entirety of the study included 32 interviewees.

The research questions that arose with regards to the studied subject sought to examine the difficulties facing students nowadays in the area of information literacy, and whether they feel to be receiving sufficient response to these difficulties from the library and the department. How does the academic staff in the Department of Fine Arts view the topic of information literacy among students, and the role played by the library within the learning environment? How does the library itself view the topic of information literacy among students, What are the points of strength and the points of weakness in the relation between the professional staff at the Aranne Library, the academic staff of the departments, and their students, and how do they define the ideal program that would fulfil the students' needs with regards to information literacy?

The results of this study presented the conceptions of each of the examined populations with regards to the subject of information literacy, its necessity and importance, as well as the challenges rising in the area. The students were found to struggle with their studies as a result of lacking information literacy skills, in addition to the expectations upheld by the lecturers. Yet, simultaneously, they believed to have not received sufficient aid on the subject from the lecturers. These students did not seek help with the library staff, since they were unaware of its resources and services. The lecturers considered it of utmost importance to instill information literacy skills in

their students, and expected the students to obtain these abilities during their studies, yet the department lacked any organized program on the subject and the lecturers assumed others would instill these skills. The academic staff did direct the students to the library, yet failed to elucidate how that institute may be of help. The library staff was aware of students' difficulties and developed various programs to aid in their struggles, yet these plans were not always successful, due to the lack of awareness of their users, as well as the incompatibility of these programs with the needs of the users.

The conclusions of this study leads to the realization that, with regards to information literacy, the lecturers, the librarians, and the students share a common goal and similar interests. Yet due to lack of open discourse between the groups, challenges arise without the knowledge of the three relevant parties. When the awareness is there, the absence of communication leads to a lack of practical implementation for suitable solutions. Collaboration and communication between the academic staff, the librarians, and the students are the solution to many of the difficulties faced by these communities today, as well as in the future.