

Changing Roles of Sri Lankan Academic Libraries: A Case Study at USJP Library

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Abstract

The rapid change in technology, the speed with which the volume of information increases, the changes in information-seeking patterns and the changes in higher education have forced university authorities to rethink the traditional roles of libraries and to invest them with exiting new roles. The University of Sri Jayewardenepura (USJP), being one of the largest university in Sri Lanka in terms of student number, has taken the challenge of tackling the changing role of the library successfully. At the moment, the library caters to 5 main faculties: Humanities and Social Sciences; Applied Sciences; Management Studies and Commerce; Medical Sciences; and Graduate Studies. The library extends its services to two newly established faculties of Engineering and Technology. The user community consists of nearly 15,000 undergraduate and postgraduate students and nearly 1000 academic and non-academic staff. The changes made at the USJP library fall into two main areas: a) library services and products; and b) the physical environment. These areas were included in the "modernization project" of the library, which started in 2015 but some changes had happened before this project as well. For example, when considering the services and products of the library, the major achievement of the library in recent times was the migration of the integrated library management system from Windows for Alice, to the open source system, Koha, in 2014. This migration helped not only to have an efficient system, but to save money on annual maintenance charges. In order to support the emerging research culture in the university, the library established a research support unit in 2015. In view of streamlining the user education programmes, a separate unit was established in January 2016. The library's institutional repository named 'Scholar Bank', set up in early 2012, where the publications and academic work of staff and students are deposited, is very popular among

the user community. The number of electronic databases available to the university was increased from 1 to 7 with the consortium facilities provided by the University Grants Commission in 2014. The efficiency of the Inter Library Loan (ILL) service was increased by assigning a dedicated team separately for this in 2013. This service fulfills the needs of our own user community as well as the needs of outside libraries. With the introduction of the cash register in 2012, library fines are paid at the counter itself and users are not sent to the finance branch which is located in a separate building. Upon the request of the English Language Teaching Unit (ELTU), USJP, we designated a section of the library as the English Learning Zone (ELZ). This has very simple English story books and levelled readers and this is heavily used by the students during their first year where the staff of ELTU combines its programmes with the library. Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) tags were put in use with the new detection gates in 2015, as a precaution to minimize unauthorized movements of library property. Along with this, a security surveillance system, CCTV, will function soon to prevent thefts and mutilation of library material. The library started a laptop lending service to students in 2015 and students are allowed to bring in their own electronic equipment to the library. Wi-fi was provided to designated areas of the library in the mid of 2015 and these are now full of students using computers. With regard to the physical environment, improvements started with air conditioning provided to the areas used by students. The beautification of the library was done by having reading promotion posters and pots with foliage on appropriate locations. Specially designed furniture like the "READ" rack, gadget corners, triangular shaped movable computer tables, lobby sofas, multi-revolving racks have been placed at strategic corners to attract users. Kiosk type touch screen computers will be provided in the lobby for interactive searching of library items. Some more changes that have been implemented in the library are as follows: The library books which have not been used for the last 30 years or so and are not permitted to be withdrawn are kept as a separate collection named "Depository Collection". This process helps to give a fresh look to the existing collections. "Just-returned" books are kept for few hours before re-shelving in a rack on the same floor where the counter is located. A coin operated Nescafe machine was installed inside the library to provide refreshment facilities to patrons without them having to go out from the library. Though it is not common to have newspaper reading facilities in academic libraries, our library also provides this facility to fulfil user needs. It is proposed to have research commons, individual and group study areas for students in the future. More importantly, a library building renovation project is underway. It is hoped that

upon the completion of the renovation, a conducive environment will be created in the library to attract users. Librarians need to support the improvement of the learning experience of students. The USJP library staff has addressed this by developing information literacy modules for all levels of students which help students to improve their critical and analytical abilities. Our library has an updated attractive homepage which acts as an entry point to library resources. The library web was updated in 2015 with the assistance of the university web team. The USJP library has many areas of strengths on meeting these new roles successfully. Foremost in this, is the support extended by the university authorities to make the library improve in its many areas. A dedicated and skilled library staff is the driving force behind this and it is very much in evidence in the library at USJP. The support extended by other units is also vital: the IT centre, the web team of the university, the ELTU, the Staff Development Centre, the Supplies Division of the university deserve special mention. The strong collaboration between the library and the academics of the university is very important in providing quality library services and it is much in evidence. The relationships with colleagues in other libraries and institutions both locally and internationally are also helpful to receive inputs in innovative activities and the library of USLP is successfully placed within this vibrant network.

Keywords: *Role of Academic Libraries, Modernization of Library Services, University of Sri Jayawardenepura*