

User information literacy: Case studies from university library programmes in the SCANUL-ECS region.

Edited by Elizabeth Kiondo and Jangawe Msuya.

Oxford: INASP, 2005. 252p.

Price: £12 (including postage and packing).

Within a university environment a student who is not information-literate is at a distinct disadvantage, in not being able to determine his/her need for information and thus being unaware of how and where to get information. The availability of a library does not mean that such a student has the skills and ability to use the facility to solve information problems. User information literacy is currently one of the “buzz words” in the academic/information environment. This book provides a variety of definitions of Information Literacy (IL). In Chapter One, Msuya provides some definitions and comes to conclusions as to what the term encompasses. He, for example, states that the information-literate person should (1) understand the need for information; (2) know what information sources are available, how to find, evaluate, exploit and disseminate information, and how to manage it.

The book is the result of a recommendation made at the Sixth Standing Conference of African National and University Libraries in Eastern, Central and Southern Africa (SCANUL-ECS) that a situational analysis of information literacy programmes offered in university libraries in the region be done and reported. Rosenberg, in the Foreword, identified two aims to be attained by this volume: firstly, to describe in what ways and to what extent university libraries in the SCANUL-ECS Region of Africa are implementing and embracing IL, and, secondly, to provide a way forward for both individual libraries and SCANUL-ECS.

The book consists of a Foreword, a chapter by Msuya (University of Dar es Salaam Library) providing an overview of the results, and fifteen chapters describing case studies done at various libraries (University Libraries of Botswana, Moi, Nairobi, Namibia, Rand Afrikaans University, UNISA, Dar es Salaam, University of the Western Cape, Monash, United States International (Kenya), Zimbabwe, and the Copperbelt, as well as the Thomas Mofolo Library (Lesotho), Sokoine National Agricultural Library and the National University of Science and Technology Library (Zimbabwe) about the state of IL at their institutions. The chapters describing IL programmes are each structured in a similar way, i.e. they provide background information on their library services, describe the development of library user education programmes, the IL strategies and programmes implemented by each library, staff involved in conducting these programmes, assessments and evaluation of the programmes, and future plans. This layout makes the book very easy to read, compare the programmes and initiatives offered, and determine problems and solutions.

Each case study makes for interesting reading as it describes how the specific institution views IL, identifies and describes IL programmes in relative detail, giving a very good indication as to what content is covered, and how it is presented to the user. It also provides a description of the problems experienced whilst offering the programmes. Common problems identified are: (1) staffing, where staff are not always qualified to teach, or are negatively disposed towards the programmes, because they are perceived to be an extra burden on staff with no extra incentives for them, (2) poor user attendance due to the fact that, in most cases, this is not a credit-bearing programme, and (3) insufficient resources. Problems concerning assessment and evaluation of each programme are also highlighted. Interestingly, the issue that the majority of the students come from information- and library-deprived communities, as a problem, did not feature strongly.

As these activities are important feedback mechanisms for improving programme content, teaching methods, relevancy, etc. they need to be properly administered. The case studies, however, reveal that a variety of methods are

used, ranging from the completion of an evaluation form (University of the Western Cape, UNISA and Monash South Africa), a formal test at the end of a credit-bearing programme (University of Nairobi and the University of Zimbabwe), engaging in research that investigates the perceived quality of the programmes by the learners, to no evaluation at all. Rosenberg implies that lack of evaluation does not contribute towards winning the support of the university community, leaving IL in a vacuum from which it cannot survive (Fidzani and Molebatsi). She therefore calls for closer cooperation between university libraries and academic faculties to integrate the IL programmes into the curriculum so that these can be formally assessed.

The book not only provides a wealth of information on the IL programmes of each university, but also provides interesting information on various user education and library-orientation programmes at different institutions. As seen from the background information provided about each library, big and small, each has to grapple with the problem of teaching their users to become information literate. All university libraries would be able to relate to the issues discussed and learn valuable lessons from them.

This book would be of interest to university librarians, academics and anyone else interested in the field of IL. It is very readable, providing valuable information that can be used to benchmark a library, or ideas on how to introduce and conduct IL programmes. By picking up the "best practises" from each individual library it could be possible to create a rather comprehensive manual on effective IL teaching. It is therefore recommended for any library involved with information literacy. As is the case with the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP), this book is very affordable and will soon be placed on open access, full-text online on the INASP web site (URL: <http://www.inasp.info>).

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