The roles of librarians in the research and information skills development of PhD students at Vienna University

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Local and institutional factors

Vienna University Library has begun to recognize PhDs as an important customer group and has increased services directed at them.

- **Institutional factors: University of Vienna**
  - One of the largest universities in Central Europe
  - 91,000 students and 9,400 employees (6,700 faculty and academic staff)
  - 9,000 doctorates in a variety of PhD programs and individual studies (1,000+ doctoral studies/course)
  - Doctoral Center
    - http://doktorat.univie.ac.at/doktoratundimencentrum/
    - support center for PhD candidates
    - organization and offer workshops supporting the PhD research process
    - Strategic importance of doctoral students to university
    - Changing doctoral programs (new system with 8 curricula since 2009)

- **Institutional factors: Vienna University Library**
  - Main Library 4+ special libraries
  - Infrastructure
  - Time resources of individual in job situation
  - Support by library directors
  - Institutional culture as learning library
    - training of teacher librarians is possible
    - exchange in formal and informal meetings
    - Lack of formalized structures
  - Centre of Electronic Research as informal coordinator

- **Who teaches?**
  - Number of academic staff vs. teacher librarians
  - Who teaches PhDs depends on personal interest and commitment of individual librarians
  - Why take part? If teaching is not clearly defined as a job activity?
  - What is the librarian's understanding of his or her role as librarian?

- **Partners**
  - Doctoral Center
  - PhD supervisors at departmental level

What PhD candidates say

Information behaviour and practices of PhD students (2011):

- Working together with the University Libraries of Copenhagen and Oslo, Vienna University Library has recently participated in an international study on the information behavior of PhDs.

- **Methods:**
  - selective literature review, quantitative survey and qualitative follow-up interviews
  - Some key findings relevant to research competency support:
    - "Services are requested which are already in existence but are not communicated effectively to the target audience.
    - "Convenience of access is key, material not easily available is often disregarded. This is probably due to time pressure.
    - "Online library services are very much in use, physical buildings much less so.
    - Journal articles and Google are named as main resources; "Library management software is not as widely used as could be expected." (p.2)
  - "Information research habits are often established long before the PhD studies. They further develop during the PhD process but mostly without library support." (p.2)
  - "Most PhD students have not attended courses run by the library during the PhD program; some have attended courses in previous studies." (p.23)
  - "Some PhD students find it embarrassing to ask for assistance, some because they have already received it before." (p.22)
  - "Many PhD students receive help from fellow students and senior academics" (p.22) rather than librarians.
  - "Supervision plays an important role in their information-seeking process." (p.23)
  - "Monitoring and courses are requested from the library but need to be efficient, effective, and tailored." (p.22)

- **Recommendations relevant to research competency support:**
  - "Take drastic steps to improve marketing and branding." (p.22)
  - "Information concerning the group should be directly addressed to researchers rather than to the public generally or otherwise it may be considered irrelevant by PhDs." (p.22)
  - "Support needs to be "efficient, effective, and tailored"." (p.22)
  - "Offer ad hoc specialized rather than general support." (p.22)
  - "Offer short, specialized and to the point courses at the beginning of the PhD." (p.22)
  - "Seminars/touching outside normal working hours" (p.24) should be offered.
  - "Lecturers should teach PhD students the most efficient methods for searching early in their studies." (p.24)
  - "Expand the number of electronic resources and offer online support and online courses to accommodate needs of PhD students working and/or not giving time to attend courses in person." (p.22)
  - "We found differences in the PhD workflow which might be disciplinary, local, or individual. These need to be taken into account when developing, improving, or marketing library services for this target group and researchers in general. Failure to do so will lead to services being overlooked, disregarded, or considered inappropriate." (p.22)
  - "The library should maintain and update knowledge about local research workflows to facilitate knowledge based library development aimed at the local research communities." (p.22)

- **About the role of librarians**
  - When asking for help, PhDs mainly ask fellow students and senior academics - not librarians. (p.22)
  - "Librarians should participate in meetings and arrangements where PhD candidates meet." (p.20)
  - "Friendliness and competency of library staff is key." (p.23, p.25)

- **What is the librarian’s understanding of his or her role as librarian?**
  - PhDs believe librarians should participate in meetings and arrangements where PhD candidates meet.
  - "Librarians should participate in meetings and arrangements where PhD candidates meet." (p.23, p.25)

- **What teacher librarians (Doctoral Center Workshop Program) think and do:**
  - "We teach
class activities
  - lecturing/presenting
  - answering-and-question activities
  - practical exercises (where infrastructure allows)
  - blended learning (asynchronous pre-course discussion forums)
  - Some PhD students find it embarrassing to ask for assistance, some because they have already received it before.

- **Supervision and courses are requested from the library but need to be efficient, effective, and tailored.** (p.22)

- **In-house communication channels:**
  - workshops focused on PhD support by librarians
  - internal newsletter
  - teamwork for new projects

Current roles (program/what we do)

Vienna University Library has begun to support the development of research and information skills in a number of ways.

- **Special support**
  - workshops within Doctoral Center workshop program
  - assisted literature research
  - visits to PhD classes
  - individual support sessions
  - reference interviews at the library counter
  - Welcome Day (International PhDs)
  - PhD Newsletter contributions

- We teach key competencies defined by Doctoral Center and librarians:
  - searching and finding information (general/re-introduction)
  - subject related search competencies and the research process
  - bibliometrics
  - open access publishing
  - Endnote (information management)
  - copyright and plagiarism

- How many PhDs have we reached so far?
  - 2009-2011: 628 participants in 60 workshops of Doctoral Center run by librarians

- What teacher librarians (Doctoral Center Workshop Program) think and do:
  - All see themselves as representatives of the library but to varying degrees.
  - Time constraints are an important factor
  - Methodologies in one-shot classes are predominantly teacher-based:
    - lecturing/presenting
    - answer-and-question activities
    - practical exercises (where infrastructure allows)
    - blended learning (asynchronous pre-course discussion forums)
    - There is some interest in further training and support (pedagogical and didactic issues).

Evaluation and evolution: global and local

Librarians’ roles in the research and information skills development is work in progress. Program evaluation and evolution have relied on:

- **Findings of the PhD study (2011)**
  - **Findings from literature**
    - A literature review on the information literacy of PhDs and researchers by one of the presenters has recently been published. The findings include:
      - Return to PhD after period of absence from university is common, which means candidates do not have information research skills (Rhodes & Ralph 2010)
      - Online distance learning is recommended (Rhodes & Ralph 2010), also e-learning or blended learning (Streetfield et al., 2009)
      - Direct support of researchers is recommended (Streetfield et al., 2010)
      - Online resources are mostly used, physical resources are less often used (Yeager 2008)
      - Theses often not finished due to full-time employment (Yeager 2008)
      - Feelings of isolation among PhD candidates are prevalent (Yeager 2008) (Brahme 2010)
      - Online tutorials and one-shot workshops are short and do not serve long-term skills development; course integration is best for pre-disertation seminars; individual consultations can be useful (Piers 2011)
      - PhD persistence has been linked to library expenditures and the number of professional library staff (Weisz 2007)
  - Efficiency of learning should be ensured through needs assessment, evaluation, library staff training, etc. (Streetfield et al., 2009)
  - Information literacy strategy document would help (Streetfield et al., 2010)
  - Since under- and postgraduates overestimate their information competency (Urquart et al. 2003, Andretta 2001) and do often not visit workshops, libraries should respond with checklists and online tests which help doctoral candidates arrive at more realistic insights into their competencies (Stubbings & Franklin 2005)
  - A combination of reference management software courses with information literacy issues is a way of attracting more participants to courses (Feeding et al. 2009)

- **Doctoral Center Program workshops evaluation criteria**
  - number of participants
  - course feedback
  - needs
  - In-house communication channels:
    - workshop focused on PhD support by librarians
    - internal newsletter
    - teamwork for new projects

Lessons learnt

- **Learn and applied**
  - marketing of library services specific to target group → contributions to PhD newsletter; Welcome Day
  - intensified exchange and training

- **To do/open questions**
  - How to ensure that PhD students become aware of and experience Vienna University Library as an attractive source of support
  - How to reach more PhD students: 
    - online presence?
    - go where they are?