

A proactive university library in the Brazilian context

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Abstract

This work aims to present some procedures that characterize a pro-active posture in Brazilian university libraries. For this purpose, aspects of the concept of pro-active libraries are presented in a context where growth in the number of needy students entering private higher education demands ever more use and application of information technology (IT) for their learning processes. However, it has been observed that most of these students have difficulty in using and applying this technology, not only in their academic lives but also in their professional lives. In our approach to Brazilian private sector university libraries, it was seen that their mission should go beyond the context of universities. They should thus include in their routines, programs and/or activities that can furnish users with the necessary information literacy to solve their problems in all phases of their lives. This work is developed in the context of the Library System of the Centro Universitário da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro – UNIVER CIDADE, Brazil – which makes its services available not only for the academic community, but also for the general public. Adoption of pro-active procedures in the UNIVER CIDADE Library System allowed greater reach towards the users' information problems, thus offering support for efficient information management. Consequently, use of the system's services and participation in the instituted programs grew proportionately to the pro-active actions adopted by the Library System.

Keywords: University library – Pro-active library
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1 Introduction

Universities and libraries are institutions that serve the purpose of meeting the needs of a social group or of society in general. However, in the knowledge society, the university library is undergoing a crucial moment in its role of supporting the education process. According to the Brazilian Association for Maintenance of Higher Education (Associação Brasileira de Mantenedoras do Ensino Superior – ABMES), Brazil has around 4 million undergraduate students, of which 2,750,652 are in the private sector. [1] These numbers may reflect Brazilian Government subsidy programs that aim to bring the university to less favored classes with such programs as University for All (PRO UNI) [13] and the Student Higher- Education Funding Program – (FIES). [7]

PRO UNI has the purpose of offering full and partial scholarships to students in undergraduate courses and subsequent specializations in private higher education institutions, offering in exchange exemption from some taxes to those institutions that join the program. The Student Higher Education Funding Program - FIES is a Ministry of Education (MEC) program for financing undergraduate higher learning for students that cannot fully cover the costs of their education.

This scenario shows a paradox in the Brazilian educational system. On the one hand it shows that the educational level in the country is rising, but also that there is the problem of digital exclusion, as the majority of new students still have great difficulty in using and applying information and communication technology. This problem is seen daily in libraries of the Centro Universitário da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro Library System, an institution of higher education in the private sector, in which this work is based. [15]

Our main objective is to show some procedures that characterize a pro-active position in Brazilian university libraries. For this purpose we present some aspects of the concept of pro-activity in a context where the use and application of Information Technology (IT) constitutes an

essential tool not only for the student's educational process, but also for further promotion of social/digital inclusion in Brazil.

In our approach, the mission for higher education institutions should go beyond the university context. It should also include programs and/or activities that provide Information Literacy to solve information problems in any areas of the students' lives.

2 The Univercidade Libraries System

The Library System has the main objective of providing information infrastructure for Univercidade teaching, research and extension programs.

The Univercidade Libraries System archives, with approximately 400.000 volumes, is composed of books, periodical publications (printed and electronic), course conclusion monographs, CD-Roms, DVDs, diskettes, videotapes, maps, slides and records, distributed in the libraries of the different units. [14].

As well as the archive mainly for university students, there is another archive for Primary and Secondary education organized in the Colégio Cidade Libraries. There are also special collections such as those of the legal experts Clóvis Beviláqua and Vicente Sobrinho Porto, part of the book collection of the journalist Paulo Francis and the Philologist Otávio de Brito, the *Brasiliana*, a Russian collection on culture, art and literature, amongst other things.

In order to recover and work with information in the collection, a single database was created for all UniverCidade libraries using the Argonauta system both on the local level and remotely through the web.

Among the systems offered by the UniverCidade Libraries System are: access to the databases online, consultation of specialized databases (between units or between higher learning institute libraries in Rio de Janeiro), bibliographical exchange, bibliographical surveying, Internet access, user training and other things. In addition to these, there are sharing systems through participation in the following networks:

COMUT (Bibliographical exchange), as requesting library;

REDARTE – Library Network and Information Centers for Art;

Sharing between higher institute libraries of the State of Rio de Janeiro;

GIDJ/RJ – Juridical Information and Documentation Professional Group of Rio de Janeiro;

APCIS – Association of Professionals in Health Information that gathers librarians from public and private institutions in academic and research areas of health;

CBBU – Brazilian University Libraries Commission, where the General Director for Libraries is Regional Councilor for the Southeast Region II (RJ).

3 Scenario for Building Pro-activity

Information has always been important at universities, but now it has assumed an even greater importance than in the past, when it was called the life blood of universities and part of its basic infrastructure. Today we can say that the concepts of information and university are inseparable, as information occupies a central place in all university affairs; so central as to be inextricable from the notion of universities itself. [11]

Institutions of Higher Learning of the entire world are reevaluating ways to disseminate information for teaching, research, extension and for their own administration. In this context, university libraries can be considered mirrors of the universities. The quality of services offered by the university library can be a determining factor of the quality of the services offered by the university as a whole.

Therefore, in order to fulfill its role as a mirror of the university, the library should always be ready with high quality responses to its customers demands for information services, and often, to move forward and promote this demand.

We know that with the rise of the internet, the instantaneity, the ephemeral, complex and rapid way in which information is processed and presented on the net makes it difficult to control the quality of information.

Thus the survival of the library and its activities of supporting teaching and research depends on the manager of information taking a strategic posture, which implies perception, evaluation and adoption of differentiated perspectives for the administration of the current panorama. It implies declaring that knowing how to access and utilize information represents an essential element in modern education, which gives educational work the role of protagonist in the construction of an egalitarian and emancipated society.

However, the necessary competence for localizing, processing and utilizing information has not accompanied the tendencies of the “*info-highways*” or “*super-highways*” of the so-called Information Society.[6] This is observed in the routines of most Brazilian university libraries and especially in the UniverCidade Library System.

For example, a god portion of students do not even know what a library is, as they have never been introduced to one. Following, are some problems common to most Brazilian University Libraries faced by students who:

- a) do not know how to use the computer properly to carry out their research;
- b) do not know how to do research for their academic work (they often copy from texts);
- c) do not have a proper environment for studying outside the university (for public competitions for example);
- d) live in places where there are no libraries.

Faced with these problems, the Libraries System prepared some projects, currently transformed into programs, that aim to maintain the proactive posture of the system in view of the information needs of its users: a user training program, information literacy, complementing the general education program and continued training of librarians.

To evaluate the reach of these programs, we here insert the concept of the pro-active library, where the main purpose is to offer services that go beyond traditional models of serving users. It is worth knowing how this concept can be applied to the university library.

4 Proactive libraries in the Univercidade Library System

One of the meanings of the prefix "*pro*" is anticipation, something that takes place before. In this context, the proactive person is always anticipating events, even making a kind of forecast to be able to act in a given planned way. For this, it is necessary to identify and select the alternatives that can lead to a forecast of the results of each scenario. This, of course, takes time but with good planning there is a chance of success. [10]

Being proactive, therefore, means taking the initiative. Although initiative is part of pro-activity, it tends to appear as a reaction, and not as action to meet a certain demand. Proactivity manifests itself when as well as planning, positive questioning is added to a given demand, as in the example below:

An instructor giving a lecture asks who can take some photocopies of an article. Someone quickly volunteers. The proactive person volunteering also asks "Can we scan the article?" or "What if we ask someone to put the article in Word or Powerpoint format?". These questions aim for improvement in the process or the result. Positive questioning is thus the basis for changes that can occur in a given sector of activities and which can lead to consistent changes. Therefore, by adding initiative + planning + positive questioning we have proactivity. When associated to creativity, proactivity can lead to innovation. Creativity without proactivity is no more than a lot of ideas that might or might not be useful. Proactivity without creativity results in changes of small or short-term impact. [10]

In this context, the meaning of the proactivity concept reveals that there is a personal predisposition for initiating and maintaining activities that directly alter the environment. [12] A term that occurs repeatedly in this question is 'interactivity', where the proactive approach enables individuals to create their environments. Comprehension of the interacting approach leads to specific processes, such as selection, cognitive restructuring, evocation and manipulation that involve intentional efforts by people to mold, alter, explore and change their social environment. Through these processes it is possible to alter situations intentionally, whether social or non-social. [12]

On the other hand, there are conflicts in relation to the concept of proactivity, as many who believe themselves to be proactive often confuse the concept. While some people think being proactive is to have initiative, others understand that the term means having orientation for rapid action. [7] The proactive person is always anticipating events, even making predictions in order to be able to act under a plan. [10]

It is in this context that we are introducing the proactive procedures that are being introduced in the UniverCidade Library System. [14] Although the procedures related below might be seen as routine procedures in any library in the so-called first world, in Brazil the movement can be seen as an innovative proposal.

4.1 User Training Program

The objective of the user training program administered by librarians is to show the student/user how a library works and how to use its systems. [14]

The program covers topics such as organization of the archive, behavior and services offered. The program is obligatorily administered by librarians to students in the current courses in the institution in their first semester.

The project covers the following topics:

Conduct: This topic is centered on the importance of adequate behavior on the part of students on the library premises. It has been seen that due to a primary and secondary education where in many cases there has been little or no contact with libraries or information centers, freshmen do not always behave adequately and it is thus our obligation to show that there are rules and obligations of proper behavior, so that they can benefit from university life.

Preserving the collection, (handling the works consulted): Awareness that works in the library serve the entire academic community makes it necessary that certain attitudes are taken in handling works. Care with the pieces

generally is therefore a fundamental part of the student's education within a library. It could be noted that the same work serves several users, and here there could be developed a concept of the dispersal of knowledge, but in this specific case emphasis is restricted to the need for preservation.

Electronic catalogue: The catalogue is one of the most ancient instruments in libraries. As traditional catalogues are replaced by electronic catalogues, the necessity arises for preparing the new student for this reality. The student shall be informed about access points: subject, author and title. It is necessary that he/she become familiar with the classification system adopted by the institution, in the case of UniverCidade, the Dewey Decimal Classification, in which various areas of knowledge are distributed, as well as the Cutter Sanborn table, which complements the document call number. The catalogue is the communication channel between the user and the archive, and orientation from the librarian is of fundamental importance for the user to dominate this activity within the different academic endeavors.

Virtual library (electronic periodicals): Access to the virtual library is available in the UniverCidade's Web page under the item Libraries. The virtual library is made up of thousands of electronic periodicals, referenced or available in full text, arranged by title, enabling simplified research or by refinement. The electronic periodicals data are important resources for academic research. Due to the main characteristic of periodicals, which is their constant output, academic work based on information from periodical articles carries the mark of recent information of good provenance.

Services offered: This item refers exclusively to the services that the library offers to users, as mentioned above: guided consultation of the archive, reserving books, lending, borrowing within the institution's libraries, borrowing between institutions, standardizing scientific and technical work, bibliographical exchange services, access to electronic databases, etc...

The concept of 'documents', which initially referred to 'books' has been expanded to include all kinds of physical support for education. The library operates with diverse kinds of documents and supports, from the most traditional, books, classified as general works, reference works, leaflets, catalogues and periodicals, to the most advanced electronic and digital audios, photos, films, microfilms and video. In this item, it is important to explain to the student about use of the diverse works that make up the library's document archive, with reference works, periodicals and their use being restricted to use within the library premises, as well as loans of videos and DVDs. Students are shown other parts of access to documents which should be considered, such as the information that can usually be found on the title page such as publisher, location, date, etc.

Internet: All science is a social activity determined by historical and social-economic conditions. The information society, the designation given to the present modern social, cultural and economic model develops tools that allow the use and exchange of information in useful and advanced modalities. The Internet, the worldwide computer network is one of these tools, and perhaps the most revolutionary in the last few decades. It is estimated that the amount of information doubles every five years and the number of books in the main libraries doubles every fourteen years, lending new weight to the expression "bring your reading up to date".

Institutional e-mail: regularly enrolled students at UniverCidade receive an e-mail. This is the institutional e-mail that allows the student to receive all kinds of communications that the institution produces in its different sectors. The institutional e-mail can be used as a direct channel between the library and the student. It is therefore useful for the student to check e-mails regularly for items of interest.

Standardization: Scientific works are those that are based on scientific research. They should be prepared according to pre-established standards and be unpublished and original and contribute to expanding knowledge and comprehension of certain problems. Scientific work can be based on primary sources (original texts or works) or secondary sources (made up of literature on the primary sources, such as encyclopedias, technical and specialized dictionaries), and presented in different forms according to the methodology and the objectives proposed.

The hours for the User Training are decided according to the professor responsible for the introductory discipline in the first quarters of each course and have an approximate minimum duration of ninety minutes.

According to the librarians administering user training, the program has met with approval and interest on the part of the students, demonstrated by the questions they bring up. There has also been interest and participation on the part of professors. However, there have been some problems, which are being resolved, such as lack of space in some of the libraries where the flow of users is much higher, especially those located in the north and west zones. There has been some difficulty in adjusting training times to classroom times, as the training is given during the school year. In some units there are many classes in their first semester, which makes it difficult to conciliate routine library activities with administering training. In any case, the experience has been satisfactory according to the results reported: a rise in library use; a rise in library registrations; greater knowledge of the library archives; knowledge of the non-conventional archive (monographs, ABTN standards, periodicals, CD Rom, etc); a rise in inter-library loans; greater respect in regards to using cell phones in the library; more signatures in the roll book; and

an overall greater visibility for the Univercidade library system.

4.2 Information Literacy at Univercidade

The idea of 'Information Literacy' emerged with the advent of information and communication technology in the beginning of the 70s and today is associated with the practice of information and critical thinking in the areas of information and communication technology. The beginning of the movement was a reaction of librarians by adopting a proactive position in libraries in view of the growing demand for changes for inclusion in the information society. [5]

According to the Roundtable for Information Competence and Learning Throughout Life held at the Alexandria Library in 2005, information competence and learning throughout life are the lighthouses of society, illuminating the paths to development, prosperity and liberty. [4]

Information competence is at the center of learning throughout life. It enables people from all walks of life to search for, evaluate, use and create information effectively to reach personal, social, occupational and educational goals. It is a basic human right in a digital world and promotes social inclusion in all nations.

Learning throughout life prepares individuals, communities and nations to reach their goals and take advantage of opportunities that arise in the evolving global environment for shared benefits. It aids them and their institutions in facing the technological, economic, and social challenges to overcome disadvantages and improve general well-being.

According to the Green Book for an Information Society in Brazil (Livro Verde da Sociedade da Informação no Brasil), digital inclusion refers not only to acquisition of basic abilities for using computers and the internet, but also the ability to use this media in favor of the individual and community, with responsibility and a sense of citizenship. [2], [3], [4], [5], [9]

For people to acquire information literacy, it is necessary for the education system to include this learning in the curriculum. The elements necessary for inclusion should consider not only physical access to information and communication technology, but also people's ability to use it. [2] Information Literacy can be developed under different concepts: a) based on information technology; b) based on information sources; c) based on information as a process; d) based on construction of knowledge; e) based on knowledge extension; f) based on knowledge. [2]

The Univercidade Library System adopts the concept based on sources of information with a view to enabling the user to access it independently. The first experiments took place in 2003 in the area of health sciences. From that

time, the work has been carefully evaluated to improve its adaptation to the needs of the students. The disciplined methodology proposes to: a) contextualize information in society to demonstrate its importance in the students' academic and professional lives; b) provide the student with knowledge of criteria that determine the quality of information; c) provide the student with knowledge of sources of information; d) provide the student with knowledge of criteria that determine the quality of sources of information; e) provide the student with knowledge of information standards in diverse formats . [14]

This is currently being applied in Course Conclusion Works, in which students are preparing projects for monographs. A project is also in the initial phase for applying a model used in the Health area to the area of juridical Sciences. "*People trained to use information sources can be called information literate*", [5]

4.3 Complement your General Education Program

This program was adopted in order to offer students follow up of recent facts occurring in their areas of study. This is achieved by consultation and reading newspapers and general information magazines. These periodicals could be better utilized if sections that do not always make the headlines are taken into account, such as Education, Art, Philosophy, Globalization, Social Responsibility, Ecology and Citizenship. The library system thus created a sort of 'clipping' for the subjects cited. News is selected, indexed and distributed to the libraries and to the coordinating professors for each unit's teachers' training course. The students thus have the selected news items available, and can easily consult them or copy them for later reading. This service is monitored by professors in the classroom, which motivates students to research for more detailed and up-to-date information, thus helping to create reading habits and contributing to general education. [14]

4.4 Continuing Education for Librarians

The program was implemented with the objective of perfecting and updating librarians' knowledge in the Univercidade Library System. [14] The program is developed in two categories: a) technical; b) library interaction. In the first group are included all elements that enable technical improvements required for the profession of librarian. Here are included courses and events for training and/or updating on tools used in library routines. Librarian interactivity is directed basically towards promoting encounters between librarians in the System. This is done through publicizing and holding events in the area of library studies. News on events and courses are

passed on through the intranet to all libraries. Meetings between librarians in the System take place monthly at the Univercidade center. On these occasions, representatives of each unit bring up any problems and conflicts that occurred during the month to be discussed and solved by all in a roundtable. The monthly meeting is also reserved for reading current texts on the field, that are debated with a view to applying the concepts to the libraries. An event is held annually that brings together all the teams from the Centro Universitário da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro Library System. On these occasions, employees who developed scientific or practical works have the opportunity to address the entire community, which is a factor of aggregation for all the teams in the System.

5 Conclusion

Educational program subsidies have contributed to the inclusion of greater numbers of lower-income higher-education students in private institutions. However, most of these students have difficulties in applying information technologies to their university learning processes. This scenario resulted in the Libraries System at the Centro Universitário da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro – UNIVER CIDADE, which began to adopt a proactive posture towards the new demand. The procedures used have to do with training not only users of the System in information literacy, but also the institution's librarians. The proactive attitudes in the UniverCidade Libraries System made possible a greater involvement in academic life, bringing greater visibility to documentation and information activities within and outside the institution. This careful and serious work is seen by the academic community as a model of application to be followed, as the results, achieved through effort and dedication, have made the library a strong component of the academic structure and for establishing the groundwork for learning. Solid library administration of this type contributes to training good professionals with the appropriate profile for carrying out their various functions. The initiatives have had favorable repercussions not only for library professionals, but also for the visibility and professional concept of the Library System.

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