Improving Library Services at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem

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Abstract

The continuous changes in higher education studies in Israel and the dissemination of information affect the informative media, the information use and the human knowledge. The library changes have a powerful influence on the way in which the library is informing the community, and the library specialists understand their role in the high studies performance and in the educational process. The core of the Hebrew University library activity is the information literacy but it doesn't exist a homogenous policy or training programs.

Keywords: Information literacy, higher education**,** libraries

At the beginning of the 21st century, Israeli academic libraries are more and more involved in the creation of knowledge. New management strategies, producing higher performance, are being used to reorganize both the theory and practice of academic libraries.

The diversity of Israeli academic libraries is the direct result of the variety of institutions of higher education, with different missions, different organizational structures, different academic emphases, and different

student bodies. In order to help the specific institution's educational mission, library collections' content and services must answer the specific needs of their institution.

The history of Israeli academic libraries is directly related to the proclamation of the state of Israel. In 1948, Israel had two universities: the Israel Institute of Technology (or Technion), founded in Haifa in 1924, and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, established in 1925 on Mount Scopus. Since then five more universities have been established: the Weizmann Institute of Science (1949), Tel Aviv University (1953), Bar-Ilan University (1955), the University of Haifa (1963), and Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (1966) plus the Open University, for distance education. Today there are also many colleges, both regional colleges and former teacher training schools.

Israeli universities do not have a uniform library model. While the University of Haifa has a single main library serving all departments, other universities, such as Bar-Ilan University and the Technion, have individual departmental libraries. Some universities such as the Hebrew University of Jerusalem have large divisional libraries.

The Nineties saw the onset of the electronic library. Databases, networks and Internet became key words. While the traditional library continued its tasks, a new and parallel library – the electronic library – emerged.

Israeli academic libraries use the ALEPH online system, developed in Israel and marketed world-wide, which includes catalogs of university, college libraries and other libraries in Israel and enables searches in both European and non-European alphabets.

Till 2005, the **Hebrew University** was exceptional in that the university library was a national library as well, maintaining large collections as stipulated by the Law of Deposit including everything that has been published about Israel, Judaism, and Jewish history. Most books in Israeli academic library collections, except in the fields of Judaism and Hebrew literature, are in English rather than Hebrew. There are also books in various other languages.

Since 2003, the libraries of the Hebrew University and since 2006, the libraries of Bar Ilan University have adopted a new organizational structure, in answer to research and teaching needs at a time of rapid changes in information technologies.

Almost all Hebrew University libraries have been unified under the aegis of the Library Authority which provides an academic, professional and

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administrative framework. The Library Authority has started the process of unifying the various library catalogs.

The university's main libraries are the Library for Humanities and the Social Sciences, the Science Library, the Law Library, the National Library of Medicine, the Education and Social Work Library and the Agriculture Library.

The **Bloomfield Library for Humanities and Social Sciences** was established in 1981 with the merging of 24 departmental libraries from the Givat Ram campus into one new five-story building on Mt. Scopus. There are three floors of reading rooms, divided up by the various fields of study. Each reading room is approximately 3,000 square meters. There is a modern media department for the music, audio and video collection. The collection includes 538,623 cataloged titles of books, print journal subscriptions, 20,000 electronic journal subscriptions, DVD and videocassettes, electronic databases.

The **Berman National Medical Library** is located in the Hadassah Medical Center, Ein Kerem. The library serves the Faculties of Medicine and Dentistry, the Schools of Pharmacy, Nursing, Public Health and Occupational Therapy, and the Hadassah Hospitals in Ein Kerem and Mt. Scopus. Approximately 5,000 active patrons are registered with the library .

In 1975, the collections and staff of smaller departmental and faculty libraries were combined in the new library building, the Muriel and Philip Berman National Medical Library. As the central library of the nationwide medical library network, it supplies interlibrary loan services to approximately 80 academic, research, public and private medical institutions throughout the country. It has the largest medical and paramedical collection in Israel, including approximately 60,000 book titles and 5,000 periodical titles, altogether half a million volumes. The library currently subscribes to approximately 1,000 periodicals.

In July 2003 three libraries were merged and became the **Education, Jewish Education and Social Work Library** on the Mount Scopus campus, also under the Libraries Authority. The multi-disciplinary collections cover education, social work and related fields such as psychology, psychotherapy, sociology and anthropology, relating to different age groups and population types. The unified library holds some 200,000 books and an extensive collection of multimedia resources such as videocassettes and educational games. The Jewish Education Library houses one of the most comprehensive collections of publications and audiovisual materials in the field of Jewish education. It includes textbooks for Hebrew

language instruction and Jewish studies in Israel and the Diaspora. The library houses a media center consisting of two video rooms, equipped to allow individual and group viewing of the collection of videotapes and DVDs by students and teaching staff.

Continuous changes in Israeli higher education and in the media of information dissemination affect information use and the knowledge base. These changes powerfully influence the library's role in informing the community, and the role of library specialists in academic performance and in the educational process. While the core of Israeli academic library activity is information literacy, there is no homogenous policy or training program. Each academic library determines its own policy according to its own needs. Even in the same university, information literacy policy and programs may differ in each universitz division.

At the Hebrew University, the Library Authority, the new organizational structure of all university libraries, is trying to establish a standard teaching program for information literacy, but as of 2008, only some departments have mandated courses in the use of library facilities and services for students.

Each academic year over 2,000 new undergraduate students registered in the Faculties of Humanities and Social Sciences and in the School of Business Administration arrive on the Mt. Scopus Campus. For the first month of classes, hour-long classes in library use are offered to students who physically enter the library looking for assistance. Depending on demand, the librarians teach approximately 1,300 students in 50 groups. Library instruction covers the general layout and rules of the library (reserve books, scanned articles etc.), and the use of the online catalog and how to access databases and online journals.

During the academic year, lecturers often ask the reference or subject specialist librarian to teach a class on how to research a subject area or use specific databases in their field.

Recently a state-of-the-art station for the disabled was installed, and students will be taught to use it at the onset of the new academic year. At the reference section a number of short videos was prepared for new users to help navigate the library' homepage and online catalog: http://www.mslib.huji.ac.il/main/siteNew/?page=89

The **Harman Science Library** serves as the main library for the Faculty of Science and Math. For the first two weeks of every academic year it conducts a special instructional set-up to accommodate new students: For three hours every day a librarian is present near the computer terminals

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at the entrance of the library and is available for one-on-one tutorials covering catalog features and searching, locating books, setting up an account and answering any other questions the students may have. In addition, a library tour is given once a day, showing the location of various types of books, areas for quiet learning and the location of computers for student use.

Throughout the year the reference staff assists students and faculty members to search and locate information online.

During the academic year the Harman Library continues to give specialized classes to students and faculty members on specialized databases such as the ISI database and specialized subjects such as patent searching. The classes can be held in a specific lab on request. The library also arrange for tutorials by experts on certain databases, such as SciFinder Scholar.

As of the current academic year the Harman Library conducts an on-line course that is mandatory for second and third year students in certain departments such as Life Sciences, Mathematics and Physics. The course covers online catalog searching, correct referencing, the ISI database and unique specialized databases for each department.

The Education, Jewish Education and Social Work Library's strategy emphasizes the role of information literacy in enabling users to maximize their easy access to all library resources. As part of the Israeli Libraries Consortium – Malmad, library users can access a huge collection of electronic resources as ebooks, databases, electronic periodicals.

Set against the multiple possibilities available in the era of advanced technologies is the growing diversity of library users: Israeli students enrolled in regular programs and overseas students enrolled in special one-year programs, academic staff, senior citizens , and outside scholars. The library has to adapt to this by structured training programs:

1. *General library orientation course*, for new students, which feature the services and scientific resources available. They have the option of participating at various hours, in groups of up to 20 persons. Readers who need library refresher training or personal instruction are assisted on an individual base by the reference librarian.

2. *Workshops for faculty use of electronic resources* which help faculty and students to get the best from our library resources and to work on their own.

3. *Workshops for MA and PHD students* oriented to special research subjects.

The increasing use of technology in libraries affects all areas of information processing and access. The increase in electronic resources offers students more and more options for information searching. The libraries do not have a common search platform for all databases and users must learn and understand various search interfaces. MA and PHD students more and more prefer using electronic resources, and quickly become familiar with the various interfaces.

The Library Authority of the Hebrew University has undertaken to explain to university faculty and administration the importance of mandatory information literacy courses for students. At the same time, librarians improve their teaching skills at special training workshops. All these underline the efforts of libraries and faculty who understand that the free access and use of new technologies for all students to all information resources, becomes increasingly more relevant.

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