The academic library service desk as a pedagogical tool

ECIL 2023
Liv Inger Lamøy and Astrid Kilvik
NTNU University Library
NTNU University Library

• 15 branch libraries in Trondheim, Ålesund and Gjøvik

• The main mission of the library is to support research and teaching at the university

• Our primary users are students and employees at NTNU
Two projects about the library desk service – partly funded by the National Library in Norway

TREFF (2017-2019)
Purpose: examine the desk service.
Focus: the personal meeting with the student at the desk.

SkjermtREFF (2021-2023)
Purpose: explore different aspects of meeting the library users digitally on Zoom.

Both
We have examined how the physical and the digital meetings work from the perspectives of both users and library staff.

Goal
Further develop both the physical and the digital user meeting in academic libraries.
SkjermTREFF - the digital library desk on Zoom

• Pandemic in 2020: The NTNU University Library established a digital library service desk, reference service, courses and writing activities on Zoom - The Virtual Library (DVB)

• From autumn 2020, DVB became part of the library's permanent service - operated jointly and across the library branches

• More information about The Virtual Library: https://i.ntnu.no/wiki/-/wiki/English/The+Virtual+Library

Illustrations: Stine Thordarson Moltubakk, Idun K. Østerdal
Research methods

Library users
• In-depth semi-structured interviews
• Guerrilla interviews on the campuses

Library staff
• Focus group interviews

Statistics
• Registration of questions based on pre-defined categories (as in the TREFF-project)
Results: statistics

The physical library desks
(15 libraries)

The digital library desk

January- April 2023

Collection and access
Counselling/Guidance
Citing and Referencing
Loan
Practical
IT
Other

January - April 2023

17 %
5 %
23 %
6 %
39 %
3 %
7 %
## Number of questions

### January – April 2023 – The physical library desk

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collection and access</th>
<th>Counselling/Guidance</th>
<th>Citing and Referencing</th>
<th>Loan</th>
<th>Practical</th>
<th>IT</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4179</td>
<td>1319</td>
<td>549</td>
<td>7141</td>
<td>3236</td>
<td>1055</td>
<td>927</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### January – April 2023 – The digital library desk

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collection and access</th>
<th>Counselling/Guidance</th>
<th>Citing and Referencing</th>
<th>Loan</th>
<th>Practical</th>
<th>IT</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pedagogical challenges and opportunities
Undisturbedness at the digital desk

Many of our informants expressed that they appreciated the focus, *undisturbedness*, and the experience of *not having to rush* in the digital meeting. This in contrast to the situation at a physical desk.

“I felt that it was like both had one focus only ... that is, each other in focus“

“[they] .. have in a way conveyed indirectly that ...that I should help you, I really have been waiting for you to call right now.”

Implications for practice:
- to use this undisturbedness in the digital desk for pedagogical purposes
- transform the undisturbedness to the physical desk as well
The unique meeting

Quote from an informant:

"The mindset should be that the one time during the semester that particular student asks for something at the library desk, she/he should get help. It is unique to him/her."

Implications for practice:
- take care of each individual and use the pedagogical opportunities, ref the reference interview (Bøyum, 2021)
Librarians´ competencies

It seems to be unclear what the physical desk can be used for and what kind of expertise is available there (ref. the TREFF project). This uncertainty seems to apply to the digital desk as well.

“Never think they are too busy to be asked, but don't know what they know, except answering short questions.”

“…Don't quite know what the librarian's job is…It's awkward to feel that you may have asked the wrong question in the wrong place”

Implications for practice:
- we need to market librarians´ expertise better to both students and faculty
- involve the students more in the development of the library´s pedagogical work
The library desk as a pedagogical tool - a survey of the competence needs of library desk staff

- Reference management and tools
- Academic writing for students (subject-specific)
- Literature search and the most used databases
- To practice on specific questions (frequently asked)
- Reference interview
- User meetings in general
- Word
References


