

Evaluation as a Tool for Developing the Quality of the Academic Libraries. Case Study at a Large and Traditional Research Oriented Scandinavian University - Viewpoint of a Member of the Evaluation Panel

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THE COMMISSION

We were invited as an international review team to assess the development of the library system in the Helsinki University. As reviewers and experts we came to Helsinki for two days in May 2004 - Hans Geleijnse from The Netherlands, Sinikka Koskiala from Finland and myself from Sweden. The result of our evaluation is the report Follow-up Evaluation of Library and information Services in Helsinki University 2004 (Geleijnse, Koskiala & Sahlén, 2004).

The university requested the panel to answer some questions, and they wanted us to give some comments on the key issues for the future. The questions and key issues were the starting point for our investigation. Another base for our study was the assessment of the library activities in the university from the year 2000 (Geleijnse et al, 2000). The strategy for the university, the assessment report with different viewpoints and recommendations and other relevant information were useful for us in the evaluation. How has the university succeeded in its library development, required by the panel from year 2000?

THE EVALUATION PROCESS

The evaluation started the year before with self-evaluations of librarians and library staff, deans, directors of independent institutes, researchers, teachers, and students. The reports from these self-evaluations were provided to us. Besides the report from year 2000 and the self-evaluations we took part of other written material, from the libraries and the university, before our visit to Helsinki. The strategy for the university, action plans for libraries and the information technology, data and statistics concerning library activities, annual reports and other relevant information were delivered to us. All this material was very useful in the evaluation.

A steering-group, chaired by Vice Rector and chairman of the Library Committee, Hannele Niemi, was formed in 2003 to prepare and co-ordinate the review. They, together with the evaluation officer and the Director of Information and Library Services, gave us good support. Besides the steering group we met the Rector and deans, groups of researchers, teachers, students, and of course library staff. The National Librarian and Directors for the faculty and campus libraries gave us their descriptions. We visited branch libraries and the education centre, Alexandria Learning Centre.

The written material, the visits, and the group-meetings - all gave us a broad and clear view of the library situation at the University of Helsinki. Following the visit our notes and impressions blended together - in close contacts through e-mail - to the evaluation report.

Even if the evaluation is two years old, it's no problem to remember the meetings, the visits and the results. First of all I would like to express that I'm satisfied with the evaluation - the process and the report. It gave me, and I hope also the other in the evaluation group, very interesting impressions, which are useful in several of following situations. When you are part of an evaluation group you give your knowledge and your impressions. At the same time you get something back, new experiences which are useful for yourself.

The second thing I will say is about decentralization. I have worked in several universities - as researcher, teacher, library director and as member of board - and every university is by nature a decentralized organization.

But Helsinki University is one of the most decentralized universities I have seen. It was important to notice this fact when we studied the situation for the library organization.

THE EVALUATION REPORT

In the panel we were pleased with the activities following the assessment year 2000. One example is the creation of a small central unit, responsible for cooperation and electronic resources, and it's important to have this unit permanent.

Despite the development in the university libraries from year 2000, we identified during our evaluation process some important obstacles, problems or questions. I will give you some examples of these and the decentralization, funding model, and the role of the National Library are the common denominators for these obstacles, problems or questions. A special situation for Finland was the National library's close relation to the university. They still get their financial support through the university but the situation has improved. For the other problems we scrutinized many library directors who can find some relations to their own situation:

- a continuous tension concerning what should be done on a central level and what on a decentralized level in the campus libraries,
- the management of the important differences between the campus libraries,
- the need for a solid funding model for the future,
- a coherent staff strategy,
- the cost of space and the fact the available space is partly underused,
- the need to make better use of the expensive information resources,
- clear service agreements between the University of Helsinki and the National Library.

In our study of the structure and organization of the university libraries we notice the important and strong role of the campus libraries, the new role of the National Library and the importance of the central Unit of Information and Library Services and Development. Together they form what we call 'The University Library'. In our recommendations we noticed - some examples - a need

- for further cooperation between these three parts but also between the different campus libraries,
- for a sustainable staff strategy to better use of the human resources,
- further clarifications of the relations between the university and the National Library, with tasks being performed by the National Library and service level agreements were needed,
- to increase the funding for licensing and electronic information.

Some of our ideas in the evaluation group for the development in the university and in the National Library have been fulfilled. Of course it depends on great activities from those persons responsible for the development, but for us in the evaluation group it's a pleasure to have been a small part of this development in the library of Helsinki University.

REFERENCES

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