# Library Instruction in the University of Malaya Library

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**Abstrak:** *Rancangan bimbingan untuk menunjuk ajar cara-cara menggunakan perpustakaan dan khazanah ilmu di dalamnya telah dikendalikan secara formal di Perpustakaan Universiti Malaya. Di dalam rencana ini rancangan tersebut dihuraikan dengan perinci di samping mengenal pasti beberapa masalah yang dihadapi di dalam pengendaliannya. Beberapa cadangan diutarakan demi perkembangan rancangan ini pada masa hadapan khususnya ke arah menjadikannya sebahagian daripada perkhidmatan perpustakaan.*

**Abstract:** *An attempt has been made in the University of Malaya Library for a more formalised library instruction programme. The article describes the programme in some detail, identifies constraints currently faced and makes recommendations for its future development and in particular the institutionalisation of library instruction.*

The literature relating to reader education makes a distinction between 'library orientation' and 'library instruction' (often used synonymously with bibliographic instruction). The *Bibliographic Instruction Handbook* defines library orientation as 'service activities designed to introduce potential library users to the services, facilities, and organisation of a particular library. The primary purpose is to familiarise the user with the library as a system'.[1] It continues to define library instruction as 'any planned activities, outside the reference interview . . . designed to teach the library user how to locate information efficiently. The essential goals of this process are an understanding of the library's system of organisation and the ability to use selected materials. In addition, instruction may cover the structure of the literature and the general and specific research method appropriate for a discipline'.[2] Based upon the above definitions, one can say that the University of Malaya Library (UML) since its inception has had an elaborate and varied library orientation programme ranging from the traditional guided group tour, tape-slide programme,

one-to-one explanation and the setting up of a reference enquiry desk as an advisory service to serve readers who request assistance, to the current more sophisticated orientation programme that utilises the video-cassette with its advantages of versatility, adaptability, duplicity and repeatability.

The more specific, more in-depth user education that focuses on the use of subject oriented reference tools and search strategies has been handled by the professional librarians in UML although heretofore not on a systematic and regularised fashion but more on an ad hoc basis. For years subject knowledge and linguistic abilities of the librarians in UML have been depended upon by users. Academic staff from particular departments in the University liaise directly with librarians possessing subject knowledge and interest in their fields. Library instruction based on a varied mode and method of teaching that is more structured, course-related and reliant on tool-specific instruction usually presented in a classroom environment, has been conducted by interested librarians, but again on an ad hoc basis. In a sense every

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[1] *Bibliographic Instruction Handbook.* Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 1979. pp. 58–59.

[2] Ibid., p. 57.

librarian in UML in her/his own way educates users by introducing them to information services and in helping them to exploit the library's resources. In library parlance the term library orientation at one time referred to all types of user education but since the early 1970s with the resurgence of the user education movement, library instruction has been distinguished from library orientation and has taken on a more formal, structured approach to educating the user.[3] In UML a more formalised library instruction programme called the 'Reader Education Programme' initiated by the Reader Services Division in 1982 aims to instruct users in the effective and efficient use of library resources. It has been felt that classroom-based instruction confined to a group of students and structured around a particular course or discipline would be more effective and useful as a method of teaching library skills.

Course-integration, course credited instruction and assessment of students' performance via tests, are elements which the programme aims to incorporate in the formalisation and the institutionalisation of bibliographic instruction. This mode of library instruction has become all the more imperative with the complexity in volume and structure of library collections and the specialisation of literature in various disciplines as well as the development of new bibliographic tools and methods, so much so that users' acquisition of special library skills to locate specific information has become a pre-requisite for effective information retrieval. The advent of new technology in the form of Computer Output Microfiche catalogues and other new media has exacerbated the situation.

**The Reader Education Programme**

With some previous experience in library instruction abroad, some splattering of notes from the Travelling Workshops Experiment (TWE), copious reading of the literature on reader education and literature searching techniques was undertaken in preparation for this instructional task. The most timely approach by the coordinator of the Southeast Asian Studies programme of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences of the University of Malaya for library instruction to their second and third year students, set in motion the need to seek a direction in institutionalising library instruction. The inadequacy of library school courses in preparing librarians for the task of

instructing readers in the exploitation of library resources is amply demonstrated in times like these. 'The skills and techniques that librarians need for communicating, interviewing, supervising and teaching may be lacking from most library school courses'.[4] What are the appropriate teaching techniques to instruct students? Under what circumstances is most effective learning achieved? These were some of the questions that came to mind. With no formal training in educational methodology it was an uphill task to strike a balance between librarianship and teaching. Nevertheless, as reference librarians, and having daily dealt with and gained some practical experience in handling readers, and utilising knowledge of their behaviour acquired in the process, we resorted to some commonsense measures in teaching and imparting knowledge, hampered however with all the usual physical constraints, and uncertainties one faces in a pioneering venture.

To ensure a structured and systematic approach, the course content had to be analysed so as to gear instruction to equip students with basic library skills for the efficient and effective use of the library resources and for the identification and procurement of requisite materials needed in pursuing their course. Literature searching techniques that included perusing periodical indexes and abstracting journals was the ultimate goal. The course outline of the Southeast Asian Studies programme was examined. Its aims, objectives, boundaries, scope and coverage of the courses offered and their description with the appended bibliographical reading lists were studied. The calibre of the undergraduates, and the stage reached in their course of study were taken into account and the following assumptions and observations were made:

1. That being a specific-course related group, the intended programme would have to take cognizance of a multidisciplinary appoach but within the confines of a definite geographical area, that being Southeast Asia.

2. The audience was a sufficiently self-motivated group who being in their second and third years of study, were either just about to research their chosen topics for the preparation of academic exercises or were already in the midst of it and had experienced the exasperation and frustration of their inability in locating requisite materials in the library.

[3] Beaubien, Anne K., Sharon A. Hogan and Mary W. George. *Learning the Library: Concepts and Methods For Effective Bibliographic Instruction*. New York: R.R. Bowker, 1982. p. 6.

[4] Roberts, Ann F. *Library Instruction for Librarians*. Littleton: Libraries Unlimited, 1982. p. 25.

3. We worked on the assumption that, based upon our knowledge of the lack of exposure to library instruction in Malaysian schools, (having ourselves come from the same schooling system), the students possessed no library skills. This therefore made a pretest to gauge the library knowledge of students quite futile. Besides it was wise to start on this premise as aptly stated by C.A. Kirkendall that librarians do often 'forget how complex our libraries are, how difficult and esoteric our wealth of professional knowledge really is'.[5]

The mode of instruction employed was the single one-shot lecture — apparently the most prevalent form of bibliographic instruction in an academic setting. Our venue was any available vacant room that could accomodate an average of 15 students at a time. Transparencies and an overhead projector were used. We had to cramp all that we wanted to instruct in one four-hour lecture with no chance of another session with the same group. With such a time constraint, our preparational task had to be impeccable. In the selection of appropriate reference tools on the subject matter of Southeast Asian studies, preference was given to those providing wide subject coverage and not confined to a specific area. Being itself a multidisciplinary course, it was impossible to cover all the related subject fields but this drawback was solved to a certain extent by the teaching of search strategy that employed various topics as examples to illustrate the use of each selected subject tool. Bibliographic instruction is indeed a most time-consuming and labour-intensive activity. To meet the time constraint printed handouts summarising the lecture and evaluating the various tools used by way of illustration were given out to the students. These saved valuable time in copying of notes during the class and participants were able to concentrate on actually examining and getting the feel of the reference tools selected for each lecture. We shunned the theoretical approach where concepts and principles on knowledge organisation and the charting of the research process, its corresponding literature and the conduct of inquiry are focused on and chose instead to concentrate on the use of specific selected tools and the development of skills in the use of these reference and bibliographic tools. After having discussed the importance of keeping research records preferably in the form of cards, we outlined the actual steps in a search strategy on Southeast Asian studies in a handout entitled 'How To Find Out in Southeast Asian

Studies' detailing a most basic form of searching on a variety of topics illustrating the search methodology and the use of tools. The search strategy involved firstly defining the research topic in words and phrases as well as by period using basic reference sources like dictionaries and encyclopaedias. The voluminous *International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* was a fairly familiar tool. The more recent *The Social Science Encyclopaedia*[6] was introduced as an example of an alternative source. In the selection of terms for searching the library catalogues and for later scrutiny of indexes, the use of the *Library of Congress Subject Headings* was stressed as a vital preliminary step. In accessing the catalogues, the author-title and the subject files were differentiated, the concept of the main-entry described and the filing rules explained. Some time was spent on illustrating the use of the Computer Output Microfiche (COM) catalogue, a new technology in the library. In particular the identification of subject-specific dictionaries, encyclopaedias and handbooks was described. Special attention was paid to extraction of bibliographical works on various topics found in UML holdings. In a multidisciplinary course such as this, a wide variety of tools covering various aspects of, if not exclusively Southeast Asian countries, the Asian nations in general were selected as concrete examples. These included the *Bibliography of Asian Studies*, Donald Clay Johnson's *Index to Southeast Asian Journals*, G.R. Nunn's *Asia: a Selected and Annotated Guide to Reference Works*, and *Southeast Asian Research Tools* issued by Southeast Asian Studies, Asian Studies Program, University of Hawaii, highlighting research tools for each Southeast Asian country. The fact that the component countries of the region have their own national bibliographies and indexes was stressed. Malaysia was picked as an example to show the variety of reference books that exist on a country level and participants were given detailed instruction at various levels of literature searching in this field. By analogy materials on other countries could be traced. Selective Malaysian reference tools which the class could comfortably cope with in respect of time and space constraint, and hold the audience interest were retrieved for display. Malaysian biographical sources (e.g. *Who's Who in Malaysia & Singapore*), directories (e.g. *Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers Directory*, and the *Malaysia Livestock Directory & Index*), and handbooks (e.g. *The Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange Annual Com-*

[5] Kirkendall, C.A. (ed.). *Bibliographic Instruction and the Learning Process.* Ann Arbor: Pierian Press, 1984. p. 97.

[6] *The Social Science Encyclopaedia.* Edited by Adam Kuper and Jessica Kuper. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985.

*panies Handbook, Information Malaysia* and *Kompass Buku Merah*), were introduced to the students as useful sources of information. For report literature on the social, economic and demographic aspects, government publications as a source of such information were shown. Such knowledge being essential for statistical backup, publications of the Statistics Department, (*Yearbook of Statistics*) and of various ministries such as the Ministry of Labour and Manpower (e.g. *Labour and Manpower Report*) were highlighted. Accessing the catalogues for the retrieval of these various publications under the government divisions, departments and ministries as well as by quasi-governmental bodies was described, and the actual documents displayed. Papers presented at conferences and articles in current journals are extremely important as indicators of the 'state of the art' in a given field. UML's comprehensive collection of conference papers indexed and maintained on cards in the National Collection Division and the in-house Malaysiana periodicals index in the Reader Services Division admirably filled this need. The published conference indexes and the periodical indexes by the National Library of Malaysia, entitled *Indeks Persidangan Malaysia* and *Indeks Majalah Malaysia* respectively, albeit their limitations in currency, were identified as supplementary sources to UML's in-house indexes. The fact that similar tools exist for the various Southeast Asian countries was continually stressed. Malaysian newspaper index embodied in *Indeks Suratkhabar Malaysia*, served to illustrate the tracing of newspaper reports. Its limitation on currency was pointed out but the maintenance of current newspaper clippings on selected topics by the National Collection Division filled the lucana. Back issues of selected Malaysian newspapers are maintained in microfilm format and students were advised on how to access them. Guidance was given on the use of guides to theses, newspapers and periodicals as well as manuscripts. Finally the coverage of periodical indexes and abstracting journals was introduced with definitions of new terms in current usage as well as the definition of 'citation'. With a passing mention of the *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature*, we elected, due to the time constraint, to instruct the use of the most useful tools, namely the *Social Science Index*, as an example of a scholarly Wilson style index, and the *Public Affairs Information Service Bulletin*, an index with a different approach in coverage and style from the usual periodical index. The use of *Sociological Abstracts* was illustrated as an example of an abstracting journal.

A rather comprehensive list of indexing and abstracting journals in the various disciplines of the social sciences was given to the students and examples of some shown in the class to prompt self-study. Our approach was therefore more skill development and tool-specific in which a vast array of reference items were presented in a search strategy order — an approach we considered the most appropriate in the current setting.

Like all experimental trial and error methods, with the passage of time we realised various shortcomings even whilst instructing, some of which were subsequently reflected in answers to the questionnaires given to the students. Being over zealous, too many research tools were employed as illustration, and it seemed to overwhelm the students. 'It is possible in these 'one-shot' [or one session] lecture to cover too much material, in too great a degree of complexity, in too short a time'.[7] Our handout was pitched at too high a level and beyond the undergraduates' comprehension. With hindsight, in later sessions, we rectified and modified our instructional methods to the mutual satisfaction of the parties concerned. A select number of research tools were employed with more stress on the conceptuals and principles of planning and organising research. Time constraints again compelled us regretfully to leave the teaching of the mode of citation of bibliographical sources completely in the hands of the teaching staff.

Response to the questionnaires to assess what the participants had learnt was positive and most encouraging. All the respondents averred that the programme would help them in pursuing research in the library while some expressed regret that these skills had not been taught earlier, and that it certainly was more useful than a library tour. 10% of these respondents stressed the need to combine a tour with the session. This need was met by the video presentation of the library and its services. As we had anticipated, many students — a good 30% — indicated that too much information was cramped in each session which could have been more usefully spread over many more sessions for better comprehension. When asked if they were confused by any part of the instruction, most students expressed confusion over the use of periodical indexes and abstracting journals than with any other area of instruction. This could be due to the fact that to the undergraduates this was a new source of information which required fairly in-depth knowledge of the topic being researched to select the correct terms for the search. Perhaps instruction on the use of these tools could be delayed until the

[7]Beaubien, Anne K., Sharon A. Hogan and Mary W. George. op. cit., p. 157.

students are half-way through their course. But extension of the instruction over a longer period does seem imperative and effort must be made to give individual attention at the cost of limiting the course content.

In the early years informal student and faculty feedback was very encouraging. Whilst this was an indication that the programme had been well received, a more systematic method of assessing the participants' improved library competence was needed. To this end, since 1985, a one hour test has been given to participants immediately after each session, to test skills acquired in accessing the card and COM catalogues via the subject and author-title files. Though not perfect answers were always given, overall, the participants seemed able to trace documents in the library. In the second part of the test, they were assessed on the use of some specific periodical indexes and abstracting journals on a research topic. The results were indicative of the students having acquired the rudiments of effective retrieval skills. In the last question, they were asked to pick a bibliographical source of their choice for selection of titles. A handful of students displayed remarkable originality in this, but most students seemed too tight for time to complete this part. The most heartening fact of these sessions was the rapport established with the students who used the library throughout their course with greater competency and did not hesitate to approach us for further clarification and help.

Library instruction has also been conducted for postgraduate students. The programme is adapted and tailored to meet the requirements of the Master of Public Administration and Master of Education candidates, with the latter group being given greater emphasis on the use of the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) system. UML currently holds this invaluable educational source of approximately 160,000 full-text documents in microfiche format from 1976 to date.

The culmination of our efforts in user education was reached when the Chief Librarian approached us to offer a similar programme to the Master of Philosophy (M. Phil.) candidates of the Institute of Advanced Studies of the University. The Institute's liaison with the library serves as an excellent example of faculty support and an integration of the library in

academic activity. The Institute proved to lend effective support and reflect a positive attitude so essential to the success and effectiveness of library instruction programmes. As Constance A. Mellon says, 'faculty attitude, not instructional excellence, is the real barrier to effective library instruction programs'.[8]

The bibliographic instruction to the M. Phil. students was course-integrated and credit worthy towards the candidates' final grades in the HC 502 course, 'General Research Methodology'. In developing this programme, we approached it in a similar fashion as that adopted for the Southeast Asian Studies programme by studying and surveying the student composition and the course outline as well as aims and objectives of the M. Phil. programme. Being postgraduate entrees the calibre of these students in respect of academic achievement and intellectual level was naturally superior to the undergraduates tutored by us. The course too is generally multidisciplinary but very project-oriented. Candidates undertook projects in the scientific field or in the area of human development and land use. Distinctly different tools and research methodology were required for each category and separate sessions were organised with students attending the sessions according to their choice of projects. A basic search strategy was introduced, with emphasis on the various alternatives in formulating a search. Being project-oriented each candidate had a research topic in mind. Working on this premise the appropriate instructional strategy seemed the problem analysis scheme or approach as elaborated by Beaubien, Hogan and George,[9] in which the user performs his own question analysis and on receipt of instruction on the mode of accessing the library tools including the catalogues, he is able to select the appropriate bibliographic tools. But instruction on the elementary but very essential processes, searching for definitions of terms and placing the topic in historical and subject context, accessing the catalogues, use of the *Library of Congress Subject Headings* and illustrating the use of the COM catalogue was effected. The stress here was however on the use of the subject catalogue to retrieve relevant reference tools ranging from dictionaries to abstracting journals. As far as possible the students were made aware of the parallel growth in the biblio-

[8] Mellon, Constance A. 'Systematic Development for Library Instruction Programs: Issues of Design and Change', in *Bibliographic Instruction and the Learning Process: Theory, Style and Motivation*, papers presented at the twelfth Annual Library Instruction Conference held at Eastern Michigan University, May 6 & 7, 1982. Edited by Carolyn A. Kirkendall. Ann Arbor: Pierian Press, 1984. p. 73.

[9] Beaubien, Anne K., Sharon A. Hogan and Mary W. George, op. cit.

graphic control of the literature that is generated in a discipline. The instruction was geared towards concepts and principles of knowledge organisation and the types of bibliographic tools that exist to capture and record the information that proliferates. More advanced tools like book reviews, sources for evaluation of completed research or those in progress, sources that capture essays and miscellaneous works not indexed in periodical indexes, current contents type of indexes, and state of the art publications, like 'Advances in . . .' 'Reviews in . . .', and 'Current issues in . . .' were discussed.

The M. Phil. bibliographic instruction programme gave us an opportunity to test our skills in the construction of an assessment or a test that could examine appropriately and fairly the candidates' abilities and progress in the acquisition of specific library skills and ability to locate relevant literature in their field. This also worked as a yardstick in evaluating our worth as instructors. The candidates' efficient use of the author-title as well as the subject catalogues was the focal point of the test. Since the catalogues serve as the key to a library's holdings, intelligent and efficient use of these tools is vital to the intellectual process of identifying materials on one's topic of research. In the second part of the test, the efficient use of periodical indexes and abstracting journals was assessed. Using techniques taught in the sessions, identification of relevant indexes and abstracts was tested. Proper bibliographic identification and citations were expected in the compilation of a short bibliography of selected works. Using tools in UML's reference collection, the candidates were given two and a half hours to complete the test. The results were most gratifying. As we were at hand to iron out any confusion or irregularities (it also being our first attempt at such an exercise) grades were tipped towards a high average. Our objective was not only to test them strictly on correct answers but also on the processes adopted in literature searching. We regarded the test as an education in itself. Informal feedback was positive and candidates actually enjoyed doing the test.

### Future development of the Reader Education Programme

To date about 500 students of the University have benefitted from the Reader Education Programme.

The future development of the programme depends much on the success of the instruction librarians in contending with the current constraints of staff and time. Currently only the two professionals from the Reader Services Division are engaged in this programme in addition to shouldering the daily routine reference functions. More participation in this programme would be welcome. The librarian of the Engineering Library of UML has also begun bibliographic instruction for students of engineering. The lack of physical infrastructure proves an encumbrance to the smooth implementation of the programme. The allocation of a permanent location for reader education classes would alleviate the irksome task of having to scout around for an instruction room everytime there arises a request for a session. With a fixed venue to house a permanent collection of reference tools and equipment, staff could be relieved of this time-consuming and laborious task of retrieving relevant materials on an ad hoc basis.

Integration of bibliographic instruction into the curriculum of each discipline will lead to rapid development, expansion and further refinement of reader education. The availability of a graphic designer, for example, would help tremendously in the churning out of attractive and concise handouts in eye-catching styles to capture and maintain students' interests in the programme. Faculties in the University endowed with technical expertise and graphic staff could lend support in sharing their facilities to boost the programme. A positive faculty attitude too, as that displayed by the Institute of Advanced Studies, towards the role librarians can play in the educational process is a pre-requisite. As John Cowley laments, 'there is little doubt that in most colleges much work remains to be done to convince academic colleagues of the importance of the library in relation to the development of new courses and the fullest integration of the library with academic activity [and that] cooperation between the librarian and academic colleagues is essential to the success of user education'.[10] In the pioneering of library instruction, the legitimacy of librarians playing the role of teachers has been questioned. In UML, only a few librarians have either any semblance of instructional training or any form of teaching experience. This shortcoming can be overcome with cooperation between our excellent and well established Faculty of Education

[10]Cowley, John. 'User Education in the Traditional Library', in *Library User Education: Are New Approaches Needed?* Proceedings of a Conference, Trinity College Cambridge 1979. Edited by Peter Fox. London: The British Library Board, 1980. p. 36 and 37.

and the Chief Librarian encouraging and facilitating the enrollment of instruction librarians in the Faculty's programme to improve their teaching techniques. Mellon stresses the importance of the learning of teaching by librarians by saying, 'It is time for those engaged in library instruction to become aware of the growing body of literature on learning theory and to incorporate what is known about how people think and learn into the design of user instruction'.[11]

The subject specialisation of the corps of librarians that UML is justifiably proud of could be drawn upon to further refine the programme. UML librarians not only hail from a varied background of academic achievement but are deemed to be amongst the most experienced librarians in the country. Thus in-depth bibliographic instruction on specific subjects could be meaningfully undertaken by librarians in their respective fields. Instruction on the use of *Biological Abstracts* or *Chemical Abstracts* by librarians with a science background and those specialising in the humanities and fine arts handling reference tools in these areas could be of tremendous help in instructing students pursuing these courses. Bibliographic instruction can also be offered on very specific courses, e.g. on rural sociology, urban social development, criminology or legal research.

## User education in Malaysia

This paper's main concern has been user education in UML. It is suggested that library instruction programmes which are in the 'infancy' stage in Malaysia should be developed further in academic libraries in Malaysia and offered as an integral part of library services. There certainly exists a user-oriented awareness, a sensitivity to user needs besides the greater attention given to acquire, catalogue and store materials for immediate and future use. With collections being what they are today attention needs to be focussed upon users' information needs with a critical appraisal of the research strategies expertise or the lack of these in library users. A concerted effort coupled with innovative programmed instruction in this area is required. Financial, staff and time constraints cannot always be cited for the snail's pace of progress in this field. Library administrators must plan for the establishment and continued development of user education programmes and exploitation of expertise amongst their staff.

The Library Association of Malaysia could emulate the American Library Association and enhance its efforts via varied cooperative methods to develop programmes and play the professional and inspirational role in developing and promoting user education. It could organise seminars and workshops on the theme. Through newsletters, interested librarians could be kept informed on the state of the art of library instruction programmes in the country. Like the Annual Conference on Library Orientation for Academic Libraries initiated and organised by the Eastern Michigan University, the Library Association here could in concert with academic libraries in the country help highlight user instruction and conduct various activities in this area of librarianship.

Librarians in the country could organise themselves into projects like the Library Orientation Exchange Project (LOEX) at the Center of Educational Resources, Eastern Michigan University and its British equivalent, the Library Instruction Materials Bank (LIMB) and the Travelling Workshops Experiment (TWE) and through these establish various clearinghouses, exchange programmes for instructional materials and conduct courses in order to institutionalise user instruction in libraries in Malaysia.

Training and exposure to developments abroad in reader education are invaluable in acquiring new modes and methods of instruction that could be put to the test locally. On the other hand, as Girja Kumar and Krishan Kumar[12] prescribe, user education in developing countries is part and parcel of a developing country's socio-economic development and its implementation depends much on the policy makers' efforts in incorporating it into the education policy of the country. Meanwhile we as 'bare-foot' librarians can create an impact in our own little way in promoting library instruction through our own trial and error method as we plod untrodden paths in search of a direction in this vital area of librarianship.

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