

WEB BASED STUDENTS SUPPORT SERVICE FOR THE UNDERGRADUATE COLLEGE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The students of undergraduate colleges are seeking various kinds of information related to their curricula and future career planning. They most often visit college libraries for these sorts of information, but college libraries cannot provide sufficient information to the students as those are rarely systematically arranged. The frequently asked information could be provided, if the college librarians have the ready reference information tools. A college library can propose to develop CD-ROM and Intranet based information products, on its respective disciplines, for using within the campus network. These sorts of information should be updated regularly. If successful within the respective college, these sorts of information can be hosted to the college's website, which will enable the access through Internet.

INTRODUCTION

The library of a college caters various information needs of students, faculty members, research-scholars and staff members. Some of the documents are frequently asked, though available only in scattered discrete pages. Maintaining these scattered documents in separate files is a painstaking task, which requires proper attention on regular basis. As these documents are frequently viewed and photocopied frequently, multiple physical files have to be maintained to meet the demands of the users. Another choice is to store in digital files and give access to them within the campus through computer network. Such frequently asked documents are course syllabuses, university question papers, college test papers, model question papers, question banks, answers to model question papers, career and jobs related information, etc.

INFORMATION SUPPORT SERVICE IN COLLEGE

Apart from providing library services to the users, the college library supplements the pedagogy of academics. As part of the pedagogy, the students ask many gray-literature based documents for their learning, preparing assignments, preparing examinations and other purposes. Consider an example of St. Xavier's' College, Kolkata. The college offers 32 major or honours subjects of University of Calcutta in the undergraduate level, i.e., in B.Sc., B.A., B.Com., BBA and one subject in postgraduate level, i.e. B.Ed. The total page volume of different types of gray documents can be approximately 25 thousand as shown in the Table 1, which might be frequently required by the library users. All these frequently asked documents can be provided to the users if a college library maintains a library website, which may be a part of college websites, to host such documents in common digital formats. In addition to documents mentioned in the Table 1, library site can host documents like course materials, course calendars, assignments, lesson plans, academic journals, published and unpublished articles of the faculty members and research scholars, etc. A user survey

should be undertaken to know the information needs of various users groups. Accordingly documents will be scanned and placed on the library sites. Also evaluation of the contents should be undertaken regularly to reduce the redundancy factors. A feedback form can also be added in the library site, to get the reactions and suggestions of the users.

It is also common knowledge that distance education institutions are providing the students support services through their websites. For example, students of IGNOU (Indira Gandhi National Open University) can access their prospectus, course materials, assignments, term-end examination question papers, grade-cards, etc. through its website (www.ignou.ac.in). A college can also cater these sorts of information through Intranet, accessible from various centres within the campus. As college is a closed entity and its major activities are confined into a campus, information needs for its users groups can be met through the Intranet, as it only requires the LAN connectivity throughout the campus with web-browsing software in each node and an Intranet server for hosting and giving access to the full text contents. It is now common practice in some national level academic institutions like, IITs, IIMs, NITs, to provide access to various useful electronic documents to the groups of users at their convenient places within the campus through the Intranet, where the respective institution's library plays a major role in maintaining websites and the contents.

TABLE 1: PAGE VOLUME OF FREQUENTLY ASKED DOCUMENTS

TYPES OF DOCUMENTS	AVERAGE PAGE APPROXIMATION	APPROX. TOTAL NO. OF PAGES
C.U. Syllabus	32 X 25 pages	800
C.U. QP: Part I	32 X 4 papers X 5 years X 5 pages	3200
C.U. QP: Part II	32 X 4 papers X 5 years X 5 pages	3200
College Test QP: Part I	32 X 4 papers X 5 years X 5 pages	3200
College Test QP: Part II	32 X 4 papers X 5 years X 5 pages	3200
College 1 st Yr. QP: Half-Yearly / Annual	32 X 4 papers X 5 years X 5 pages	3200
Model QP/ Question Bank	32 X 50 pages	1600
Jobs related documents, FAQs and advertisements	32 X 100 pages	3200
Higher education related documents, FAQs and advertisements	32 X 100 pages	3200
Total No. of Pages		24800

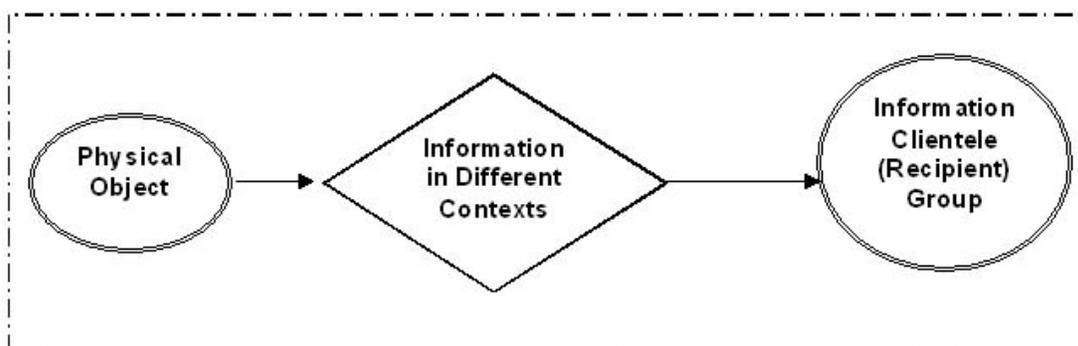
FAQs= Frequently Asked Questions; QP=Question Papers; C.U.=University of Calcutta; No. of subjects in college=32.

USE OF INTRANET IN A COLLEGE

Intranet is an Internet-like network within an organisation. Web browsing software provides easy access to internal websites established by departments, library, teams, individuals, and other network resources and applications. It is accessible within the campus, but not

accessible from the outside network or Internet. Since Intranets are Internet-like networks within the organisations, they depend on the information technologies that make the Internet possible. For example, organisations using Intranet must have or install TCP/IP client/server networks, web browser, web publishing software, network management and security software. The Intranet will become the primary vehicle for delivery academic news, and main source of information about the academic curricula. More processes will be added to turn information into knowledge, and to increase the value of Intranet to each student and faculty. Content creation and updation in an Intranet environment are easier and modular. Intranet users only can browse, print and download the documents; they cannot edit, modify or erase the documents at the original source. Contents like, undergraduate course syllabus, university question papers, college test papers, question banks, etc. can be hosted, which are regularly needed by the students and faculty members. This will form web-based student support service for frequently asked information, which are mostly gray-literature based. Contents like, project reports (which the college successfully completed), seminar proceedings (which were organized by the college), articles or research papers written by the faculty members for academic journals and seminars, abstract of the doctorate dissertation of the faculty members, etc. can also be included in the Intranet to disseminate knowledge generated by the college.

FIGURE 1: SELECTION OF DOCUMENTS FOR VARIOUS GROUPS OF USERS



INFORMATION STORAGE AND RETRIEVAL OF THE ELECTRONIC DOCUMENTS

Information stored in physical documents is converted into digital documents though either keying the texts or scanning the texts. These documents can be scanned and stored in digital formats either as PDF (Portable Document Format) or as image file format or as html document. The PDF format is most convenient amongst the digital formats in this case. It is printing device-independent, and supports e-publishing using sophisticated formatting and graphics including embedded links, annotations, thumbnails of pages, and chapter outlines for direct access. It can maintain the looks of the original paper documents. The documents are created as read-only, and can store pages in major language scripts, like pages in Bengali. This type of document is to view and print through a web-browser or Acrobat Reader. These documents require half-yearly or yearly update, as new sets of physical documents emerge during this period. The documents in different contexts are segregated according to their use. Then the documents files are created and are stored in an Intranet server. The campus-wide network is established to access the Intranet through web-browsers, where information clientele groups are located, like in the library, computer centre,

faculty rooms, laboratories, departments and cyber-café. The clientele groups can access the documents directly at any time from their convenient places, which are required by them frequently for various reasons without involving the library staff. The documents are hyper-linked from the library website. The user can open an electronic document at a single click.

CONCLUSION

The role of college librarians has changed considerably with the advancement of information technology. The mindsets of the service providers have to be changed to play crucial roles in the society in general and in the academic community in particular. They have to be proactive ones to initiate various value-added library services including web-based support services. The UGC provides financial support similar to this sort of web-based support service in the tenth five-year plan in developing e-contents in higher education subjects. The UGC e-content scheme aims at developing high quality e-content, as well as expertise for generating such content over the long term. The scheme provides financial assistance and technical support to teachers and other experts based in colleges and universities for the development of e-content. The main objectives of this scheme is (a) generation of e-content, in all subjects; (b) development of teachers and experts resources in e-journal creation; (c) distribution of the e-content to teachers and students from formal and non-formal educational modes, for supplementing and complementing professional teaching and learning content; and (d) development of partnerships between educational institutions and the IT industry for the continuous development of new content and methodology taking into account contemporary technology.

The college librarians can take part in this UGC scheme to develop e-contents in any contemporary subject, including the subjects available in the college, involving the subject experts. What they have to do is that, they have to take care of the functions of planning, coordination, implementation and delivery of the e-contents as project managers.

Similarly, if the mentioned digital documents are created to use in-house, access to these documents can be extended to the other colleges, either through Internet or producing CD-ROM-based products and realize at least the cost of the project. The college librarians can revive their own profession proving their creative skills and endeavouring the developmental activities in the colleges.

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