

## Mentoring LIS Students During Their Internships: Case Study

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### Abstract:

*This paper explores ways for lifelong learning organization and library to form partnership, promoting the education of LIS (library and information studies) students and improving students' competence in LIS through an active learning period at work. This paper outlines roles for the librarian mentors of LIS students internships of vocational education. We emphasize the co-operation of both lifelong learning organizations and libraries, and describe the roles and tasks of the course coordinator and the library mentor. The role of the education manager and Librarian's role as mentor are important. The paper also reports about the evaluation done by the students during their studies.*

**Keywords:** Library, Mentoring, Internship, LIS education

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## INTRODUCTION

### Partnership of lifelong learning organization and library

The Library and the College have formed a partnership to support students in their library studies. A partnership can be operational, tactical and strategic. In a strategic partnership, the goal is to get partners to benefit by combining their knowledge capital. The core idea of a strategic partnership is to integrate knowledge capital, generate added value and build trust. Knowledge capital consists of three areas: organizational competence, renewal ability and intangible assets. Added value is incurred when the partners' knowledge capital is shared. (Stähle & Laento 2000).

Ivey (2003) interviewed academics and librarians, identified the elements of effective teaching collaboration and indicated four behaviours that promote effective collaboration: shared goals; mutual respect, tolerance and trust; competence for the task at hand by each of the partners; and ongoing communication.

Valkeakoski is a town of about 20,000 residents in Southern Finland. Valkeakoski library provides services for all town residents. In the library, customers can use computers and the free internet, borrow books and journals for both study and work. The library's information service provides professional assistance and advice. The Library also offers digital materials (books, journals). The Library co-operates with other public libraries in the Pirkanmaa area in the form of a joint online library.

Valkeakoski Vocational College (VAAO) is a training organization of lifelong learning services in six municipalities in the Southern Pirkanmaa region with a total population of 100,000. The college provides vocational education for both youth and adults, offering more than 40,000 teaching days annually to over 1000 students. The college has over 100 full-time teachers and administrative staff and approx. 40 part-time teachers. VAAO offers a wide range of vocational studies in technology (communication and transport), social services (health and sport), tourism, catering and domestic services and social sciences, business and administration. VAAO's strategy is to produce professional skills of high quality and profitability for the future. The programs of Information and library studies is divided into periods of learning and periods of working and the length of the course is about two years. There are approx. twenty IL students in the course.

Together with Valkeakoski Upper Secondary School and HAMK University of Applied Sciences, VAAO forms a large campus area called Valkeakoski Campus. This enables students to integrate courses from more than one school into their studies. VAAO and Valkeakoski library operate in the same town and are partly owned by the same organization, Valkeakoski town. There is a fair amount of interaction and cooperation between the organizations, particularly between the library and the LIS-course, whose cooperation has continued for over 15 years. A steady strategic partnership exists between the library and VAAO.

## **MENTORING**

### **Literature review about mentoring**

Normally, mentoring is seen as an action in which an experienced mentor guides a younger or more inexperienced actor. Mentoring is based on the confidential interaction between the mentor and the actor, where the mentor is seen as a trusted advisor and actor as a developmental person. Mentorship is of key importance to the needs and the development of an actor, even though it is based on sharing mentoring skills. (Kupias 2014, 11-12)

Mentoring is just one model for development and guidance: in the workplace there are also expert trainers, tutors, mentors, coaches, work counsellors and facilitators. According to Kupias mentoring has evolved through four development models. The first generation of mentoring was perceived as the mentor's knowledge and knowledge transfer to the actor. The mentor was in the centre of mentoring. During the second generation of mentoring, the "actor" term developed and the learner's own actions for learning and development were in the centre. At the third-generation stage, mentoring took particular account of the "mentor's role" which was to support the actor in his or her development. The fourth generation model is

more “peer mentoring” oriented. It should be noted, however, that this model should only be applied to the environment or to the circumstances in which it is appropriate. Good mentoring can include elements of the second, third and fourth generation mentoring styles, and the needs of the actors determine the selection of the mentoring approach. (Kupias 2014, 15-19)

The goals of mentoring are always defined on a case-by-case basis. However, the conditions for mentoring are generally set by the organization in which mentoring takes place. Organization-specific goals can include, for example, the commitment of new employees to the organization or the sharing of skills of retiring employees. (Kupias 2014, 33) Mentoring can be for example induction mentoring or student mentoring. Induction mentoring can be used for work orientation by assigning a mentor to a new employee. Generally, a new employee first gets a basic knowledge of the business and the job and after that, more in-depth knowledge from his/her personal mentor. The focus of orientation mentoring is on the new tasks of the actor. It is important that the mentor is more competent than the actor and an experienced colleague can well function as a mentor. Induction mentoring can be actor or mentor based. In the case of actor-based mentoring, the actor’s needs are paramount and a suitable mentor is sought for him/her. (Kupias 2014, 34-35) The aim of student mentoring is to support the student (actor) during an on-the-job learning period in the organization. The students are familiarized with the various functions of the organization by employees responsible for each function, but one responsible mentor is in charge of all on-the-job learning sessions. This helps utilize the content and practical expertise related to the mentor's work. The task of the mentor is to advise and guide the young student. Mentoring differs from orientation in that mentoring is about guiding the actor in a confidential interactive relationship. Mentoring is also often long-lasting and process-oriented. (Kupias 2014, 61-62)

### **Literature review about mentoring in libraries**

There are many articles in the literature dealing with university libraries and mentoring. Mentoring programs have been introduced in academic libraries to facilitate the socialization of new librarians into the profession, for obtaining tenure and to promote teaching and research skills. In the literature review of Lorenzetti and Powelson (2014) about mentoring programs in academic libraries (only studies in English for the years 1990-2013) it was noted that: in order for the programs to be sustainable, an adequate pool of mentors is required; there is little training for academic library mentors and mentees, although training has positive effects and mentoring is an activity that requires individuals to develop the necessary skills; the development of junior librarians has been a priority for academic library mentoring programmes; there is a trend towards peer-mentoring programs for the development of research, writing and publishing skills and not all mentoring programs were evaluated.

There is also research about the connections between mentoring and new librarians’ job satisfaction. Results show that supervisor support and mentoring has a positive impact on the affective commitment and job satisfaction of new employees. (Mallon 2014). One study (Dahl 2011) explored the role of librarian supervisors (mentors) of non-LIS undergraduate internships in academic library. The three players of the model are the educator, who plans the work experience; the student; and the mentor in the workplace. The educator’s role is to guide the preparation, and the reflective processes are the domain of the student. The mentor plays a role in shaping the experience about the learner’s interaction with the organization and the staff. The mentoring relationship requires the mentor to develop of plan for learning, engage in evaluative processes, and to provide challenge and support. As a conclusion, this

model can be applied to all types of internship, but non-LIS students who do not have professional work experience may need more guidance and mentoring.

Hallam and Newton-Smith (2006) compared two transitional mentoring programmes for new information and library professionals. One was a group programme and the other was a pair (mentor/mentee) programme. They emphasize that one critical element of the mentoring programme is an effective evaluation process. They provided questionnaires for both mentors and mentees in both programmes. As a result, they report that the mentees in both programmes felt that they had acquired new skills and knowledge through the relationship with their mentors. The mentors felt that they had gained learning outcomes: they had benefited from others' experience and affirmed their commitment to lifelong learning. As for their personal development, the mentors felt that they had learned from witnessing the development of the other person and gained increased self-insight.

## **LIS EDUCATION**

### **The LIS program at college**

The educational content of the LIS programme at college is rather extensive, since it includes

- \* Office software (Office365, social media tools, library system Axiell Aurora)
- \* Languages (Swedish, English, including library vocabulary, focus on language skills in customer service)
- \* Office work (including archiving, documents, office work in the library)
- \* Communication (proper use of language, expository text skills, marketing communication)
- \* Operating environment (legislation, administration, funding, library network, trends)
- \* Customer service in the library, including online services
- \* Information management, information retrieval and information service work
- \* Marketing and communication of library services (also online)
- \* Event production
- \* Planning and implementation of guidance situations for different groups (library use, information retrieval guidance, media guidance)
- \* Economics of the library (economics)
- \* Procurement process
- \* Maintenance of the collection (depreciation, maintenance and repair, commissioning, storage)
- \* Knowledge of literature (genres, history, sources of literature)
- \* Cataloguing and content description
- \* Presentation of materials (physical exhibitions by visual means, presentations in online environments, compilation of theme packages)
- \* On-the-job learning

### **The role of the education manager**

The role of the education manager is important. The education manager is the teacher in charge of the LIS programme, plans the educational content and schedule for each new course. She guides students to choose the right courses from the syllabus and gives information on how to apply for a traineeship in libraries. She provides information to the students on what the goals of the on-the-job learning periods in each case are. She sends the same in-

formation to the participating libraries. The teacher also guides students to finish their qualification and visits mentors and trainees during the on-the-job learning periods.

### **Pedagogy and skills demonstrations of the LIS program**

Library education is a form of hybrid training that includes classroom teaching, distance learning, online working days, independent study and on-the-job learning. These together lead to a competence that can be shown through skills demonstrations (demonstrating skills requirements by doing practical work).

Exercises in the studies are done in online learning environments (Moodle and Office365, e.g. Class Notebook). In addition, social media tools, such as Instagram, are used. Online courses are still mostly in Moodle. The transition to an alternative e-learning environment offered by Office365 is likely to occur in the near future. At the moment, a few training courses are experimenting with the tools and programmes it offers. Various social media tools are also used.

### **On-the-job learning documentation and communication tools**

Every online course is part of a broader entity so that part of the course is implemented in the classroom and part is done through distance learning and joint online sessions. Online work often includes conversations in small groups. The students also enter task responses in the learning environment, which are commented jointly and by the teacher. Online courses always include background materials chosen by the teacher, including materials created by the teacher, articles from the field, magazines, as well as video and web links.

Online sessions are scheduled and instructed. They are often placed between the face-to-face classroom days so that, for example, first time is a classroom day, followed by an online day and then again a classroom day. The amount of online independent study is likely to increase in the future. At present, online learning supports face-to-face learning and thus creates a functioning learning programme together with on-the-job learning.

### **Students in brief**

The students in the programme are adults, but the age range can vary between 18 and 60 years. Studying, learning and acquiring a new profession are therefore not dependent on the age. The majority of students are usually women, but in recent years the proportion of men has increased. Most are interested in working in public libraries.

Most of the adult students are changing fields of work. A person in the library field usually experiences a strong vocation for library work. Working in a library is often a long-term dream. Most have reading as a hobby and they have always been library users. The world of knowledge is often the attraction.

## **ROLE OF THE MENTOR**

### **Education and guidance for mentors working in libraries**

The Finnish National Board of Education issues regulations concerning the requirements for all vocational qualifications. Thus the vocational library qualification also has qualification

requirements that determine not only the skills requirements but also the targets and criteria for evaluation. Based on these, a curriculum is drawn up, that is what students are taught during the training.

The qualification requirements also define what should be practiced and learned during on-the-job learning. The qualification is divided into parts and one of the on-the-job learning sessions usually focuses on the competences required in one or two parts. For example, two parts of the degree have competence requirements for customer and information services, so the related job tasks are the subject of training during the on-the-job learning periods.

Mentors are provided with more detailed instructions in written form before the first on-the-job learning session. The guidelines contain information on the objectives of the on-the-job learning and what has been studied in the course prior to the on-the-job learning period. If a student is practicing in the same library for the entire duration of the training, the instructions for later on-the-job learning periods are often brief but more individually oriented, in other words the instructions are geared to the students' individual learning objectives.

In addition to the written material, instructions, advice and joint planning are carried out during on-site visits. The on-site visit is done by the teacher during the first on-the-job learning session and also on the subsequent on-the-job learning sessions. However, on-site visits are always made whenever required or requested. In addition, communication during on-the-job learning sessions takes place by phone or email when necessary.

### **Librarian's role as mentor**

The first student of college started a training session (internship) in the library in spring 2003. Since then, there has been a steady stream of trainees in the library, and up to date there have already been 16 students.

The trainee (mentee) usually works in the library four cycles during the year. The studies last 1.5 or 2 years, depending on the student's training background. Between training periods there are theory studies at the school. These theory studies are applied in practice during the next training period. The college informs the library about the topics of the theoretical period and the course to be focused on before the traineeship begins. The teacher makes a few on-site visits during the internship to discuss the stage of the trainee's studies and to make plans for the skills demonstrations.

Internship includes two broad practice sections. The first focuses on customer service, information, marketing, information acquisition skills and their teaching. At this stage, students must also familiarize themselves with the library's operating environment and the entire library network. After these studies, the second extensive section focuses on collecting physical and e-material collections, describing the material and opening up the content. Of course, many things are learned at all times, for example, customer service, compilation tasks and marketing of materials are part of each on-the-job learning period. The college has also asked for ideas to develop the program from the library. Based on them, the college added a course on literary genres and history. The library had noticed that not all the trainees knew even the great classics.

The library organizes skills demonstrations in these two areas, where both practical and theoretical demonstrations show the student's competence. The evaluators included a representative of the college and two representatives of the library, one representing the employer and the other representing librarians. The student also performs a self-assessment. The evaluations are conducted together during the evaluation session and the student receives grades for each requirement evaluated.

It is important for workplace mentors to have training on the content, evaluation and teaching of library studies in general. Meeting with other mentors would certainly also provide support and new ideas. Even though the vocational college in Valkeakoski instructs and informs the mentors well about the progress of their trainees and the content of the traineeships, such general information is important. The college arrange such information sessions or at least inform the workplace mentors about their upcoming events.

### **Student mentoring**

Long experience of libraries and the library field provides a solid foundation for mentoring. It may, however, be disadvantageous if it is forgotten that what is obvious to the mentor, is not for the beginner (mentee). Fortunately, the entire library staff participates in the guidance process so the student gets acquainted with a wide range of skills and ways of doing things. It becomes clear to the student that different and versatile, flexible skills are needed in the field. It is also desirable that the student identifies his or her strengths and best competences. In addition to basic skills, special skills such as pedagogic competences, marketing expertise or metadata knowledge are important in the information industry today.

The interns' different ways of learning need to be taken into account when personalizing the training. Especially among adults there are very different learners. Older interns often need time to think and learn, particularly when it comes to learning new programmes and sources of information. Younger people are faster and learn by doing together, but often lack experience in working life and organizing work. An independent mentee who actively seeks information is the easiest for the mentor to guide.

The self-directedness, readiness to train and IT skills of students have significantly improved over the years. The college has increasingly addressed and encouraged the acquisition of these skills. The college is aware that mentoring interns requires manpower, and that the mentors and other employees do not have extra hours to do this but perform the guidance on top of their other duties.

In addition to learning the basic skills and practices of the profession, the interns should become aware of the importance and inspiring nature of his own field as well as the importance of following what happens the field. In the library field this is especially important. The employees' enthusiasm and appreciation of the field is also passed on to customers.

### **The student is an asset**

Guiding a trainee (mentee) requires a great deal of the organization: when each requirement is practiced, when staff has the time to give guidance, when the activities of the library give

the opportunity to practice, e.g. group visits take place at certain times. All staff must be enthusiastic about guidance and also take advantage of the trainee's skills and new ideas in their own tasks.

However, a mentor often has a feeling of insufficiency and lack of time to plan and implement all the requirements of the training properly. Although there is no compensation for the trainee's guidance, the trainee is an asset, especially as the skills increase. The student is happy to do new things, that is, he is an additional, enthusiastic hand to try out new ideas that sometimes become permanent library practice. Many experiments would be left untried without a trainee in the library. The staff does not change in the library very often, so trainees are stimulating to the whole working community and challenge it to adopt new practices and new thinking.

## **THE EVALUATION AND FEEDBACK**

### **The evaluation and feedback done by the students about the course and mentorship**

A lot of feedback is collected from students. Feedback is collected e.g. during an individual course by an individual teacher. Feedback is also asked about how the teacher succeeded in the guidance at the beginning of the education. Students also receive a feedback form during the spring, asking about teaching, guidance and other services of the college and asking for suggestions for development. The school also organizes once a year a so-called VAAO forum, where students representing their education groups tell about their experiences to the management of the school.

The college also collects feedback on the internship in different ways. An online questionnaire is actively in use. However, most of the feedback is collected during on-site visits. With mentors and other people involved in the tutoring, the school's representative will find out where to improve and what has worked well on the other.

Cooperation between libraries and the college has generally been excellent. The libraries are long-term partners of the college and over the years there have been more and more trainees in libraries. The co-operation model in these contexts has become flexible and smooth. Both parties know each other. The long-term cooperation library knows the particulars of the student's qualification requirements well based on previous experience. In the case of new collaboration libraries, fresh and inexperienced mentors will be trained to give workplace guidance either by providing them with guidance material or by training them during the first on-site visit. Trainee training is also available at various educational establishments.

Usually students are quite contented with the LIS programme. Usual feedback is: "combination of theory and on-the-job learning is a great way to learn a new profession". Here are some statistics that have been collected from students during 2010 – 2016:

Table 1. Feedback collected from LIS students

	1 (not satisfied)	2 (only somewhat satisfied)	3 (satisfied)	4 (very happy)	5 (highly pleased)	Average n=60
Opinion about the LIS programme	0 % of the respondents	0 % of the respondents	18 % of the respondents	38 % of the respondents	44 % of the respondents	4,25
Opinion about the mentoring in the library	0 % of the respondents	0 % of the respondents	13 % of the respondents	40 % of the respondents	47 % of the respondents	4,33

## DISCUSSION

The strategic partnership of college and library forms steady basis for the internships of LIS students in the library. Collaboration and communication between the educational institution and the on-the-job learning site must be active so that the trainee gets a clear picture of the content of the learning sessions in both the educational institution and the library. It is important for a mentor in the workplace to have continuous information on changes and developments in on-the-job learning both at an educational institution and in general.

At work, everyone in the library has to be prepared to train a trainee in general positions as well as in their own specialty field. It is desirable that every mentor also challenges their own skills and routines. It is worthwhile using the trainee's latest knowledge and know-how. The trainee is also happy to try new things. The content of the internships must be flexible, as teaching sessions need to be largely devised for the guidance of other mentor's assignments.

The longer the trainee has been in the library, the better the other employees have also internalized their own assignment. The working community must be prepared to take the student. Creating a positive and encouraging learning environment is perhaps the most challenging task for the mentor.

It is important to identify the trainee's personality and learning methods right from the start of the training. Basic knowledge about the student's learning style is also available from the college before the beginning of the training. In addition to learning and enhancing the command of basic skills, the mentor's important task is to maintain and stimulate the student's enthusiasm in the field of his choice and to encourage the student to recognize his / her special skills. Working life is also changing all the time, so the student must be prepared to the fact that tasks and ways of doing things are constantly changing.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed the mentoring of LIS students during their internships. The activities of the library and the college have evolved over the years as a strategic partnership for the benefit of LIS students. Important actors in the partnership are the student's education man-

ager at the college and the mentor in the library. The training of students in the college and during on-the-job learning in the library support each other, as the feedback from the students tells us. Mentoring in the libraries is valued highly by students. After all, the strategic partnership of college and library is a process that needs continuous development together for the benefit of LIS students, libraries and college.

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