

Students are a source of inspiration for the library



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It is not only since I became a grandfather that I have appreciated being with young people. It has always given me great joy to be with young people, to work together, to discuss together, to serve them not only in the private sphere, but also especially in the library. An elderly man with a wealth of experience, young people sitting at his feet and listening attentively to his advice is of course a cliché. But that is not so with us – rather the opposite. The elderly are now listening to the young: we ask students for their opinion on our ideas. We work with them on our projects. We even write reports together.

What has always impressed me most is their fresh, unspoiled point of view. They are always asking: *Why is this ... in the library?* And with many things, I can only reply: *Well, I do not know.* Or they ask: *Why are users not allowed to bring in their food and coats?* Again my stock answer is: *Well, I do not know. That has always been the rule.* If you are curious, such a “Why” can be very rewarding. Each “Why” can be a door to the future and a source of inspiration.

If you were to ask me, *What is the greatest danger for the library?*, I would refer to Donald T. Hawkins, who said: “What will kill our profession is a lack of imagination” Lack of imagination and clinging to old answers will result in a stubborn, narrow angle of view and as a consequence poor, useless services. Life will pass over us dinosaurs – but wait: maybe life has already passed over us – we just have not noticed! Because libraries are still used frequently, we seriously believe our daily planning is accurate.

How can you make an agile mammal out of a lazy dinosaur? For example one could try to integrate students in the planning of future services, in the daily business of the library, whether in the form of task forces that come together only for specific tasks, or in the form of an advisory board, which advises the library permanently.

Coming together with students, talking to them, asking them about their wishes, and not only in anonymous surveys, but live, face-to-face, brings each individual and the library immense benefit. It is hard work, but it is worthwhile and the advantages are obvious: better networking, more influence on campus, higher reputation, all services are optimized and sustainable: we know our market; we know our user; we define common goals and pull together with them. For the last five years we have had very good experiences with a student advisory board; we make use of two task forces regarding the use of tablets in education and the unique experiences of the 14 student assistants employed by the library.

What I like most about these encounters is the great enthusiasm of the students, their boundless optimism, and their strong imagination, which they are happily willing to share with the library and to devote themselves entirely to a single end and to better services. Certainly, some students are unable to put themselves in the shoes of librarians (but then for many librarians it would be very difficult to put themselves in students’ shoes), but the majority of them, especially in medicine, are simply brilliant, extremely smart people and very creative. It would be a shame and waste of resources, not to unleash their potential.



Fig. 1. Students in the library