

A CORNUCOPIA OF INFORMATION: USE OF ELECTRONIC RESOURCES BY STUDENTS OF THE STOCKHOLM SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS IN RIGA

Daina Puntuka

Head of the Library

Stockholm School of Economics in Riga

Latvia

The Stockholm School of Economics in Riga offers a three-year undergraduate and a two-year executive MBA programs. Our school was established in 1994 to:

- Offer an integrated academic institution of excellence, useful for the Baltic region
- Train and graduate students from the Baltic region in a bachelor programme in Economics and Business.
- Assist to create a sustainable development of the Latvian, Estonian and Lithuanian economies by supplying graduates with modern economics training.
- Participate in applied research in areas relevant for the long-term development of the economies in the Baltic States.
- Offer executive training and up-grading to the business community and society at large in the region.

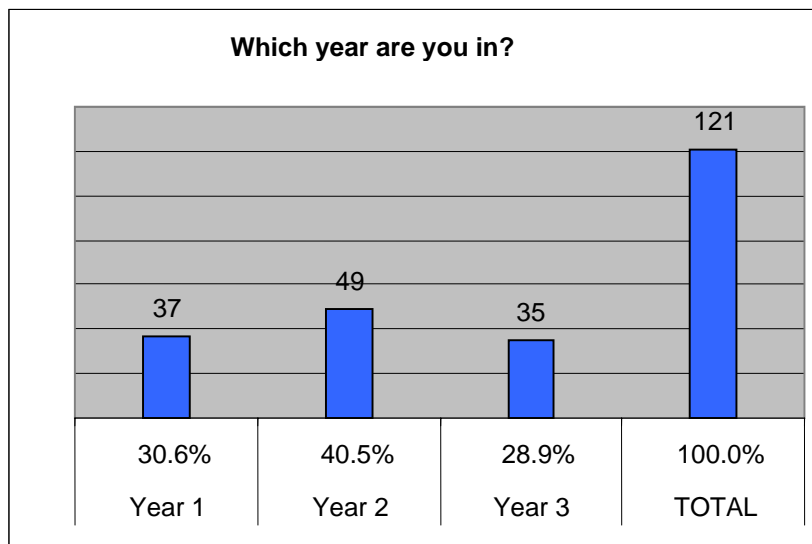
At present our school enrolls 366 undergraduate and 45 executive MBA students. Last autumn we celebrated our 10th anniversary and it made us all employed in different departments to look back at what we have been doing and whether we need any improvements in our activities. In 1994 the library was started from scratch- it means that we had only empty premises with empty shelves. The most outstanding feature of our school in comparison with other higher education institutions was that we supplied each student with textbooks in all subjects. It means that we bought 100 copies of each textbook. It considerably increased the number of our stock in a relatively short time. The next step was to purchase monographs in different fields of economics and business to enrich our collection of textbooks. We got a generous donation from a Swedish businessman, who donated 4 million Swedish crowns to purchase books only. He did not allow us to use his donation to subscribe to any electronic sources. So we had to think about ways how to supplement our collection of printed materials. The school was equipped with a modern computer laboratory where students had free access to Internet. The first electronic database we subscribed to was Reuters, which offers not only economic and financial data, but also a wider scope of information. Students learned how to use the database at their Information Technology and Communication course. The next step was to implement library automation system and electronic catalog. It was implemented gradually starting from 1998. In year 2000 we had a completely new OPAC on Internet and we had to think about the user instruction. The Library Consortium of Latvia offered an opportunity to subscribe to the EBSCO database and also try out some other well-known full-text databases as Proquest, Science Direct, etc. As our library has a very limited space, we decided to subscribe to a number of periodicals in electronic

format, namely, Wall Street Journal, Financial Times, International Financial Statistics, etc. A number of electronic databases are available throughout the school and accessed using IP addresses. It is even possible to use databases from home computers, for example, EBSCO and Countrywatch. These two databases are of great importance for our students when they write reports or graduation thesis. As our school has students from Lithuania and Estonia remote access of these databases is essential. At present our school subscribes to 17 business information databases. This is a rather serious financial investment and we would like our students and other library users to enjoy the full capacity of these resources for their study and research needs.

In order to promote the resources available in the library and through it in the whole campus and even beyond its borders, we have been offering our students library instruction lessons. They usually consist of two parts, where one deals with traditional sources and general insight in information resources, as well as explaining the pluses and minuses of both- printed and electronic. The other part is about our electronic OPAC and electronic databases. In order to revise the efficiency of our library course, I made a survey among our students to find out their opinion.

First of all, I sent out the survey questionnaire to all 366 students and this is what I received back- some with comments and some without them:

Year 1	30.6%	37
Year 2	40.5%	49
Year 3	28.9%	35
TOTAL	100.0%	121

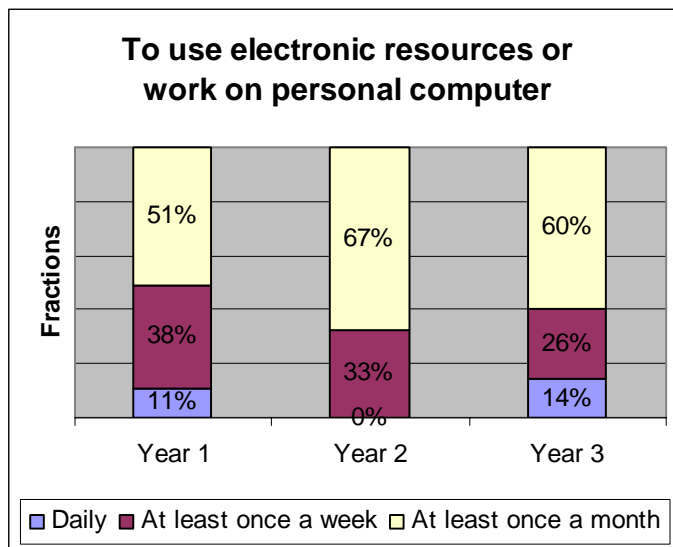


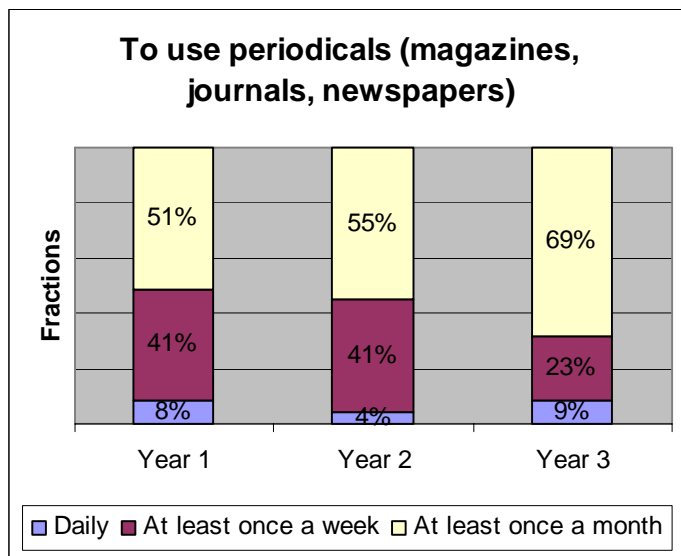
This chart shows that only one third of the target group chose to reply. I should say that the low rate of responses may be due to the fact that majority of our bachelor students are

convinced that all information is easily and instantly available on the Web. Another point of view is that information is for free. At our library lessons we try to convince our students that we pay a lot of money to purchase the databases and we even cannot afford to subscribe to such valuable sources as ScienceDirect, EconLit or JSTOR because they are too expensive for our small school. But, of course, our school employs a lot of foreign lecturers, who come to the school with fully prepared hand-outs and it looks like information offered is for free. The low rate of response means also that the library has not been persuasive enough to convince students, that they could do much better, save their time and improve their scores if they attend library instruction. Every year the administration of our school carries out interviews and surveys, where they try to find out about the positive and negative impacts on students academic performance. Library issue is also included in these sessions, but usually we get only positive responses. The only negative feature is overdue fees. Out of 10 possible points the library usually gets 8.

The next question was about the purpose of visiting the library.

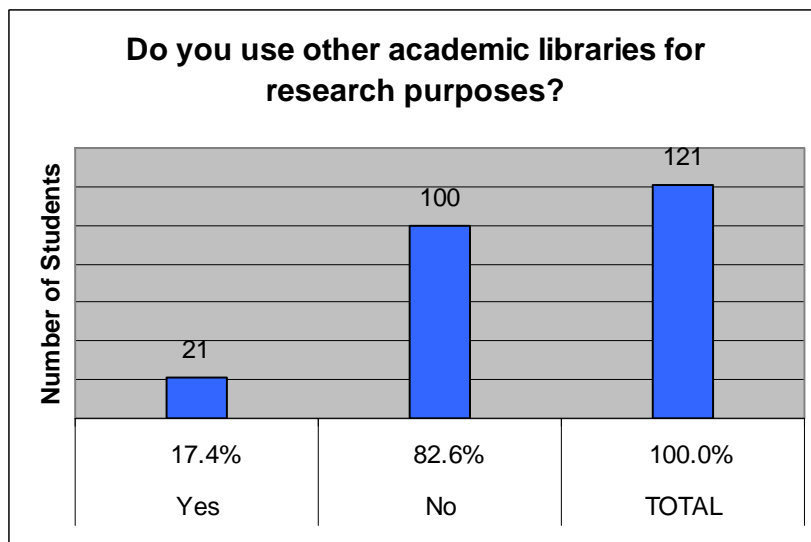
How often do you use the SSE Riga library for each of the following purposes (1= Daily; 2=At least once a week; 3= At least once a month)?





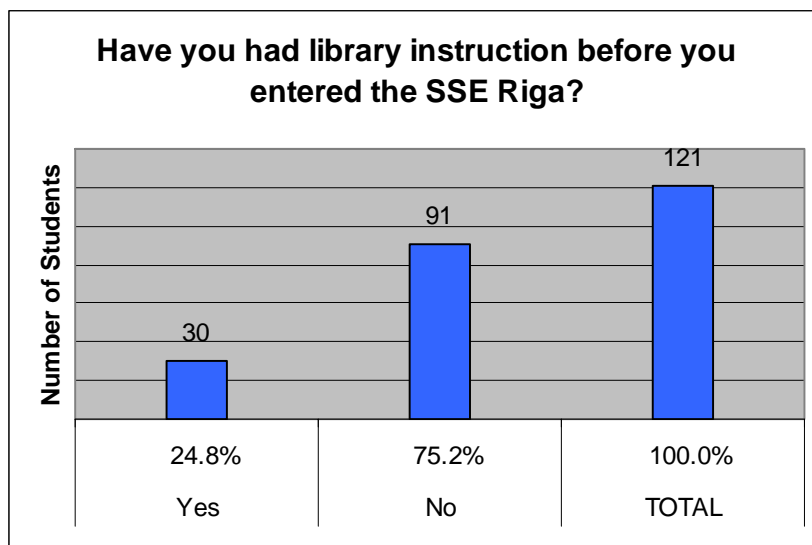
Comments concerning the usage of the library included several statements, that the library is used as a place where to work on personal laptops and teamwork. Each reader's table in our library is provided with an Internet outlet and students may access the school's network.

In order to find out the training needs of our students I was also interested whether they attend other libraries.

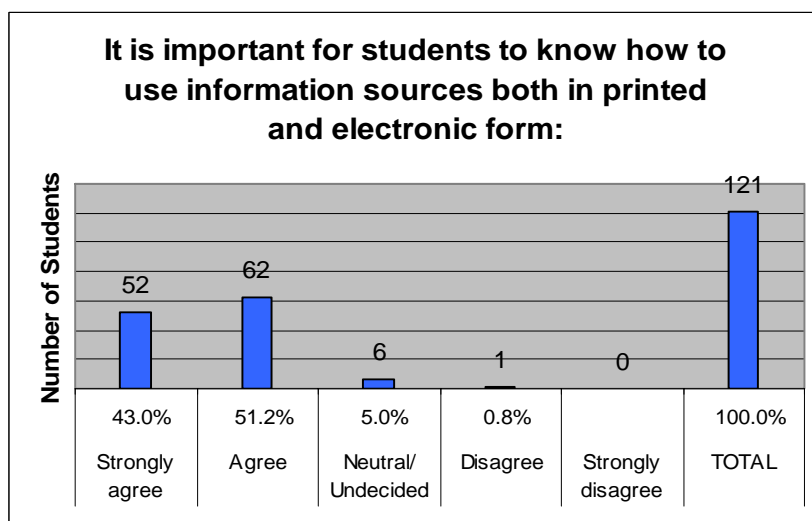


The comments included also statements, that our students use other academic libraries to use their electronic databases. They mentioned the National Library of Latvia as well as e-libraries on the Internet. During our library orientation lessons we introduce our students to other libraries, their websites and resources available there. We also stress the

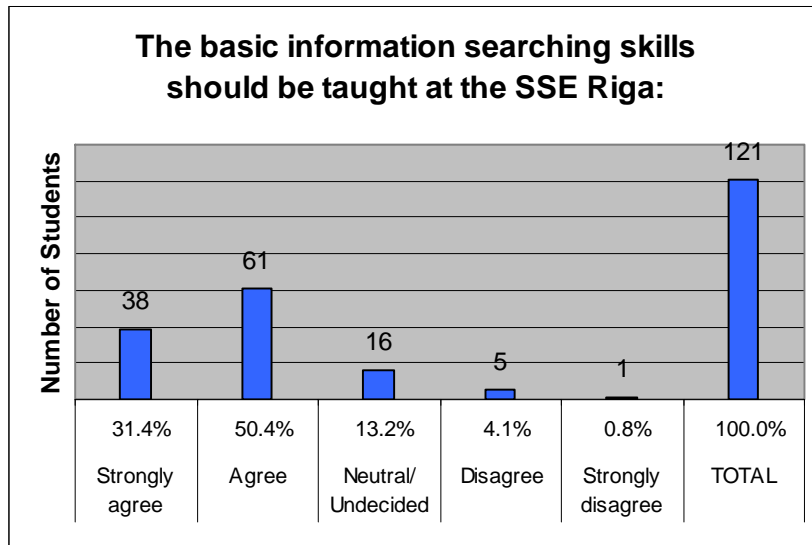
importance of Interlibrary loan- local and international, which provides a good support for such small school as ours. We show our students how to use union catalog of Latvia and also the Libris of the Nordic countries. I would like to thank Nordic librarians for supporting us and sending articles and books via International Library Loan. It is important to teach our students that no one library is able to provide all necessary information. And nowadays using the Web it is easy to find, which library owns the needed material. We also want to encourage our students to develop broader understanding about information resource division and accessibility. So that when they leave for studies in other universities for their next academic grades, they are prepared to use catalogs and databases effectively.



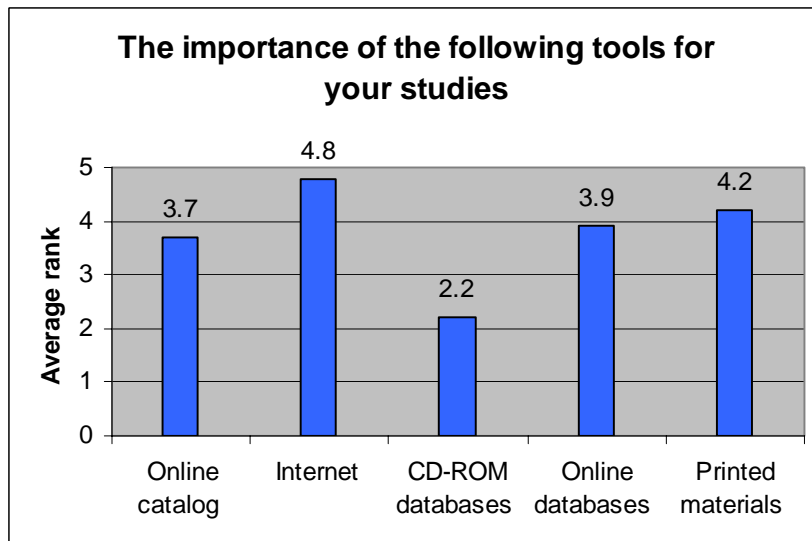
Those, who had had library training, got it at school or public libraries. It means that the Baltic school and public libraries are also thinking about their user education.



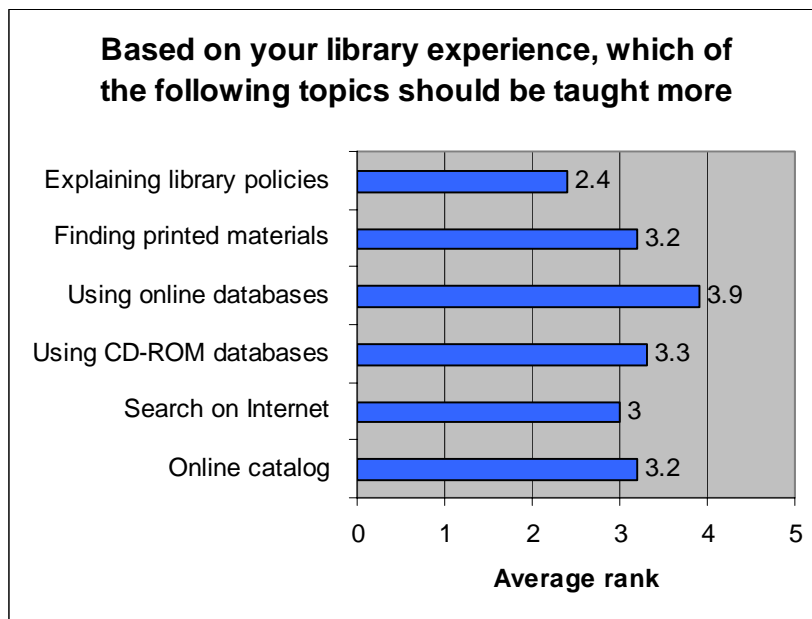
We can see from the responses that the majority of respondents consider library instruction to be important. I think that library instruction programs should be broader incorporated in the activities of our libraries starting from the very first library visits of our young generation. Then this process sequences and integrates different competencies throughout the person's educational course and academic career. It also serves as a good background for life-long learning.



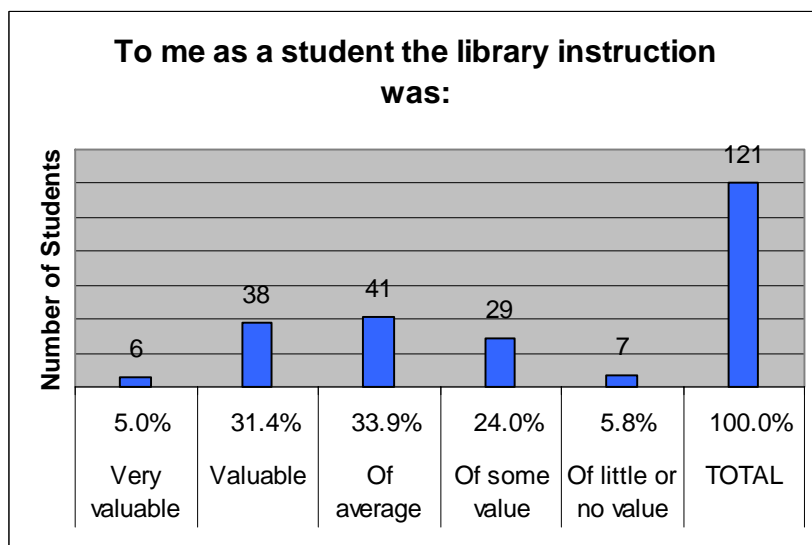
They also agree that the school has to provide instruction in information search.



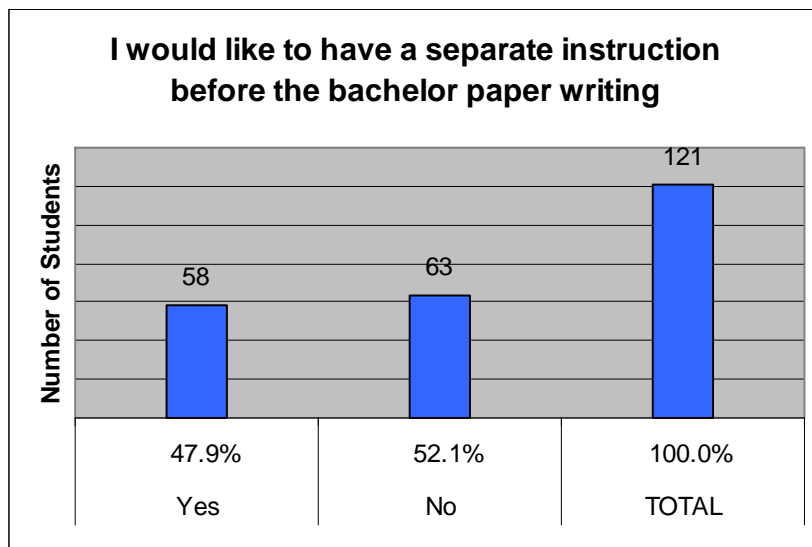
Students had to use the scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest positive score. Here we can see that students perceive all sources of information as important. So our hybrid library serves their needs concerning the scope of information carriers.



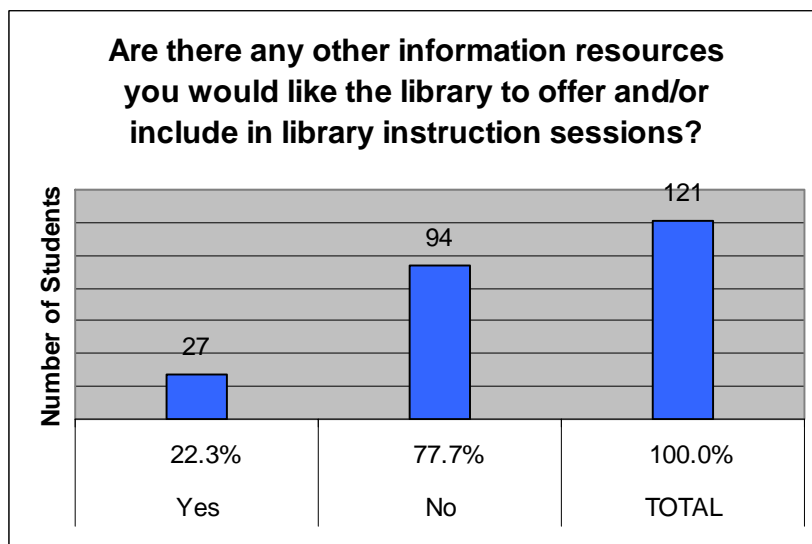
The scale of 1 to 5 was offered here as well and we can see that the usage of online databases should be taught more. Thus we have decided to apply for assistance to the administration and request more time for teaching online databases.



Comments concerning this question were about having more hands-on practice. Students wanted to have practical tasks. Some mentioned that learning by doing they consider to be the best approach to instruction. We provide library instruction at the beginning of the first year only. It concerns both the undergraduate and the master degree students. We felt that students need more training before they write their thesis. That is why I provided the following statement:



The positive and negative replies are approximately of the same number. The supporters of this statement would like to get more information about available information sources, online databases, which include working papers of different universities. Some respondents are interested in the evaluation of the Internet sources, their validity and accuracy. Students also suggested to provide more information on social science information gateways. They also express the need to refresh their searching knowledge in order to use the available databases more productively.

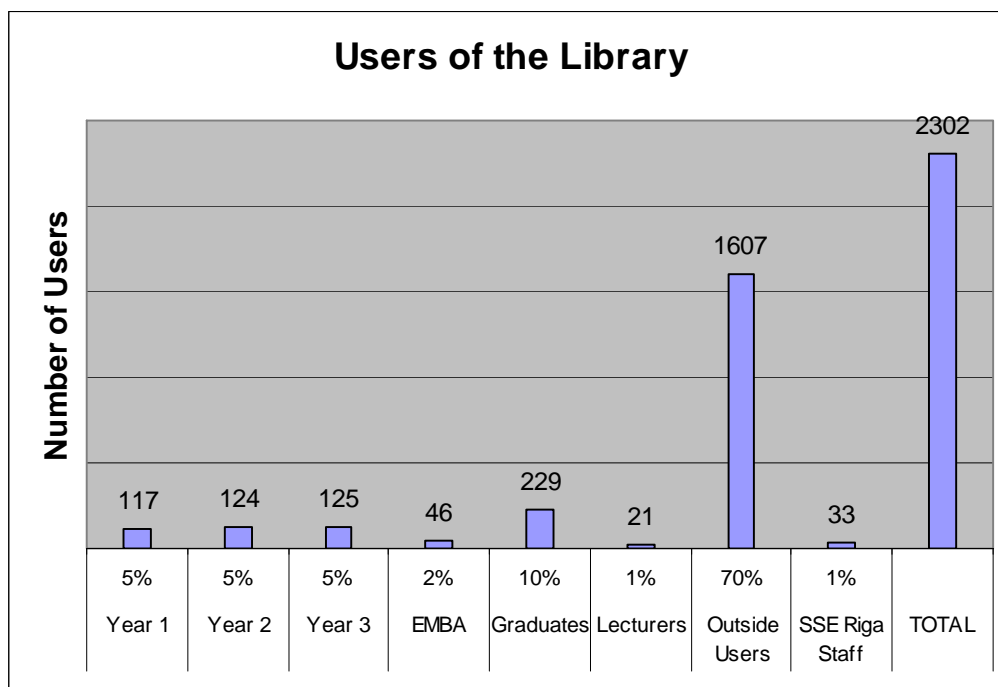


The responses to the question about other resources included comments on having special instruction sessions on particular electronic resources e.i. Lursoft, Reuters, statistical databases, career development resources.

These comments triggered us to invite specialists, who work with the particular databases to explain in more detail the opportunities of their resources. Such training was provided for Lursoft database, which offers a very expensive service and the users have to be very careful to formulate their needs in order to rationally spend their money. Reuters database was used by the members of our students' Investment fund and they also had a special training how to use the stock indices more efficiently.

The librarians as trainers mostly teach how to use the online public access catalog, EBSCO and Countrywatch databases. Our training sessions, which are offered for the 1st year students are only 2 academic hours – 45 minutes for general introduction to different resources and their accessibility, 45 minutes for introduction into online OPAC and electronic databases. Our students consider it not enough for efficient usage of resources.

I should mention also that our library is open to outside users and we are heavily engaged in teaching our visitors how to use our resources. You may see that our students and staff constitute only 19% of the total number of our users. 70% of all are from outside. They also need to learn how to use not only the library and its printed resources, but also our online catalog and databases. We do not have any special courses, it is done individually for each customer. You can also see that 10% of our users are our graduates, who say that they became information addicts while studying in our school. They have discovered the importance of information in business, education and daily lives. They understand that there is no use to invent the bicycle repeatedly, one only has to access what is already available in the information cornucopia in printed and electronic format.



All in all I may say that our visitors and new students are computer literate. They know how to use the information technologies. Our task is to teach specific things how to search, evaluate and use information for academic purposes. Our library web site serves as a distance learning tool. First of all, the OPAC is provided with a lot of explanations and examples how to use the catalog, where to start the search and how to do it effectively. OPAC offers an extensive Help system. Our electronic catalog is the only one in Latvia, which offers the possibility to put hold on borrowed books and file a request for those, which are on shelves. This function makes our users life easier, allowing to use the library remotely, thus saving their time. We in our turn can show what additional services are available in the libraries nowadays. The online databases are also included in the homepage, so that the remote users may visit the site although they do not have the ability to have access to full-text information. They can investigate the source and then decide whether it is suitable for their purpose. Nowadays all databases offer extensive Help functions. In order to obtain remote access to databases or exchange information our readers may use the function E-mail Librarian on our website. We also offer our local databases of bachelor and master thesis in .pdf format. It is an additional source of electronic information available for all our users. Some of our school's Working papers are offered full-text. All these features serve as an additional reminder that the library is not a room full of dusty books and journals.

Another aspect I would like to talk about is the cooperation between the library and the faculty of the school. I am grateful to our school's administration which understands the importance of information literacy in its broadest sense of meaning. Library instruction is considered important, but we have still to convince our administrators that the students, who participated in the survey, have expressed their wish to extend the course. We are ready to expand our instruction throughout the 3 years of studies and accommodate them to the particular needs at the given stage of studies. We also understand that the syllabus is tough and it is hard to find time for additional lectures. But the survey we have completed shows that the number of students, who wish to have additional instruction is big enough to offer them an elective course in information literacy. Our local lecturers are well-informed about the library instruction and often include library tasks in their lectures. Students have to find an article from Harvard Business Review or find out whether the library has in its collection the monograph suggested for additional reading in the subject. This way we try to expand the given time for library instruction and incorporate it into the whole study process.

Who is teaching students at the information literacy lessons?

Our library employs 2 full-time librarians and 2 assistant librarians, who work on weekends or sometimes in the evenings. Only one of our librarians has got master's degree in library science. So it has been important for the library to get opportunities to engage in systematic and continual professional development. All our librarians regularly attend training sessions offered by the electronic database developers and providers. We attend courses dealing with information technologies and Internet developments. We enjoy ongoing training sessions, but also listen to our students' opinions and ask for their assistance if needed.