



»The road to excellence is always under construction«

first ideas about reconstructing education of information professionals at the Fachhochschule Hannover

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Introduction

The following presentation will give an overview to the actual phase of change at the Department of Information and Communication. As the appropriate picture to this situation we quote Clive James and choose the title: »The road to excellence is always under construction«.

Some remarks to the situation of today. All of us are aware of the changes in the information field during the last years. I will not repeat these aspects. We all see the paradigm shift coming up and we have some idea how it will challenge our profession in the future. But how the road to excellence - in education of information professionals in the future - will look like?

When we look around to the institutions educating information professionals in Germany it

is mentioned that the curriculum has been revised, is just changing, new courses of studies were implemented, others change the names.

Today the Department of Information and Communication supplies six different courses of studies: librarianship, documentation, biomedical documentation, technical writing and the new courses starting this semester journalism and public relations. Since the beginning of the department in 1979 it was the objective to educate information professionals for the present and the future. Our mission statement says »Education of information professionals is a part of the dynamic evolution of knowledge society«. Although this mission statement was established last year, we always have seen education as a dynamic process as well. So the curriculum was changed several times and the turnaround of the time distance between a changing curriculum was shorter each time.

During the last two years the members of the department are aware that it is high time to work out new curricula. And we came to an agreement that the new revision must lead to a more fundamental change in structure, contents, and degrees. The revision of the curriculum concerns all the courses of studies without the new ones (Public relations and Journalism).

Objectives for the revision of the curriculum

Reorganisation of courses of studies

We think about a new structure of the courses of studies appropriate to present and future job settings for information professionals. Up to now the courses of studies are guided to the suitable institutions, for instance the academic library. But today the relationship to the institution gets less important. Information professionals like documentalists, librarians, journalists, and editors work in institutions like companies, research institutions, governmental institutions and nearly every kind of organisation or they start their own business.

In 1979 we started with partly integrated curricula for librarians and documentalists. Since 1983 the different courses of studies are separated. Of course there are overlaps in contents, but the students mostly are educated separately and it's not quite easy to change from one course of study to another.

Implementation of new curricula

The implementation of a new curriculum should impart demanded core competencies for all jobs where information specialists need knowledge, attitudes and skills to manage information efficiently. Therefore the educational program must lay a broad foundation that stresses theory over application.

In consequence there will be changes in contents: new or intensified lessons, others with less importance and all up to date.

Furthermore the new curriculum should include both imparting the professional competencies and training the personal competencies for instance communication skills.

Besides the core competencies we have to define the special competencies demanded from the different job settings in the information fields: the academic library, information centres, information brokerage, technical editor, and the public relation department.

Efficiency and quality of education

We just started a quality management project this year. The dean Mrs. Schlünz will give a report about it at this conference too. Anyway for most of my colleagues it is a custom to evaluate the courses since several years.

Internationalisation

A further goal is to strengthen internationalisation. We already implemented the European credit transfer system three years ago, but there are not so much foreign students at our department. So we think about giving lessons in English. European projects, international semesters together with our European partners, and international summer schools have been practised.

To implement international degrees like bachelor and master is far more complicated. This will be a great task in the future.

New methods of education

Until now we made good experiences with field work and student projects, which run one year. But perhaps shorter projects might be added into regular lessons. Case studies and tele-teaching are getting part of our teaching methods too. For the future we must check which forms of education fit to the different professional and personal competencies. Because we are expected to graduate our students in a way that they can make good use of their knowledge and skills and that they are prepared for lifelong learning we have to continue our education in new teaching methods.

Aspects of new curricula development

In the discussion on restructuring courses and new curricula different aspects came up, or there are several tools to build the road to excellence:

- Integration
- Specialization
- Step-by step-model
- Modul System
- Network System / Combination model

Integration and specialization are the most important aspects.

Integration

We all see the trend of integration in the information field, in using the same methods and tools, working on similar tasks. There is no doubt of the fact that there must be integration in educating information professionals too, for today's students face a world that will demand new knowledge and abilities which are important for all information professionals. But on which level integration should be realised?

When we discussed a new structure of the courses of studies, we tried to change the focus from traditional structure to future job settings. From this perspective we listed all competencies related to the different information jobs: the information broker, the information specialist working in a special library or information unit, the technical writer in a company, the librarian in an academic library and further more. The result was an voluminous list of competencies. But most important was to identify the large overlaps in fields like computer science, business administration and soft skills.

It's common that competencies in these mentioned areas get growing importance in the future and so it should be for future curricula. Therefore integration can be implemented on the level of courses for the different courses of studies. It's an agreement at the department that this will be realised within lessons in computer sciences for instance. Universities of applied sciences usually organise education on the base of different courses of studies. We think about going one step further: integration on a higher level. There are several possibilities: either there will be three courses of studies with titles like librarian, information manager, and editor or perhaps much broader one general diploma title for all graduates (information manager). But there is a great number of people who would vote for retaining the term »Librarian / Bibliothekar« and »documentalist / Dokumentar« for these names are common. But it should be mentioned that some universities of applied science already renamed their courses from »Documentalist / Dokumentar« to »Informationswirt or Informationsmanager«.

When we discussed new models of integration, the idea came up to integrate particular courses of different departments at the university of applied sciences. The survey of competencies shows that all information professionals need at least basic skills in information technology, and business administration. Why not taking the core competency of the partner departments, the department of business administration or the department of computer science and teaching all students in basic economic and IT courses? We think that's a good idea for the future. But it would take a lot of time and negotiation to build up this structure with dependence on other departments. An other difficulty would be the transfer from general theory to application to the information profession. So it might be a future concept but not suitable for our project now.

Specialization

Future information professionals will work in a broad variety of workplaces. It's our objective not only to teach the basics (that means the core competencies) in information science, information technology and so on, but to impart special issues important for specific workplaces too. Therefore we think specialization is necessary.

Specialization usually is expressed through defining a course of study. However this means that students have to make their choice before they start studying. So it's the authors opinion that specialization should be realised on a subordinated level, let's say a special

field.

So this might be a future model: Three courses of studies with different diploma like librarian, information manager, and editor. On the next level each course of study is subdivided into special fields. We think of these special fields as future job markets. I give you some examples: The department wants to continue education for librarians. But not all graduates will choose a civil service career with particular requirements in field work and law of the civil service. A growing number of librarians and information professionals looks for jobs in information units and special libraries.

For the information manager or documentalist subject specialization might be offered. Medical documentation will be continued, perhaps a business documentation will be a second subject area. Besides the technical writing students there could be an addition the general editor, who can take part in courses of journalism.

In practise the variety of information jobs is much broader than the special fields listed above. There are job descriptions like: information broker, knowledge or information manager, online searcher, web-designer, database specialist, network consultant, electronic services specialist ...

Optimum education for these jobs could be realised by working out special profiles with the appropriate elective courses.

Five years ago we implemented the first model of specialization within the course of librarianship. It is very successful and from this experience we plan to extend the opportunity of specialization in general.

The new structure should realise both - integration and specialization. It should strengthen integration between the variety of information professionals and second it should offer the possibility of specialization with intensified knowledge in one particular information field.

The three other models (step-by step-model, module System, and network system / combination model) vary the possibilities of constructing the courses. The new curriculum must provide a perspective on information science that is sufficiently broad to prepare students for a variety of possible job settings, both for the present and in the future. For the students there will be the opportunity to select a concept of study which fits ideal to their planed job. It prepares students to design their own professional development plan - starting with education and continuing throughout the length of their careers.

Change ...

There will be some change caused by this concept:

- The students must assume personal responsibility for seeking lifelong education and professional development opportunities.
- For the staff this concept of study causes more consulting to enable each student to

choose the best, individual way.

- For the department strategic planning gets more important. The more the students choose courses and lessons, the more difficulties to plan the capacities.

It is very important to mention that for some of the basic courses and very specific courses there should be co-operations with other departments of our University or with other institutions. For basics in computing and web publishing the students could take part in the lectures held at the Department for Computer science. It should be possible that our students attend some basic lectures at the Department of Business Administration. For advanced features of multimedia production and web design it would be very useful that students can work together with students of our Department of Design and Media. There are already some co-operations with other departments but only due of one s own initiative.

Outlook ...

Until now the department has generally concentrated on new students and to teach them in courses finishing with the diploma degree. In the future we have to plan new programs: a masters program and perhaps other programs for practitioners to respond to ongoing educational needs.

We have to do more public relations: for our programmes to recruit right students with the imagination of the information profession of today and in the future. On the other hand we have to attract future employers for our graduates.

But there is danger to re-invent the wheel! Many of you have thought about curricula development.

For us it's the great goal of this congress to discuss new ideas for curriculum development with you. Therefore I finish the presentation now and ask you for your ideas, comments, and experiences to find the road to excellence in educating information professionals for the future.

Thank you very much!