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The Library Treasure Hunt: Reach for the Stars. Introducing First Year Students to the Landscape of Scientific Information

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Abstract. One important task for the librarians at Physics and Astronomy Library at Lund University is to teach the students about the library and its resources. The traditional lectures and tours of the library just weren't working. The library competes with many other introductory activities, such as general orientation, and social events. The aim of the Treasure Hunt is to present the library in a useful and amusing way for new students at the start of their studies. Divided into small groups, the students carry out various tasks at stations in the participating libraries. The hunt takes about two hours and a treasure (a goody bag) waits for them at the end.

The evaluations show that the treasure hunt is highly appreciated by the students. They become familiar with the librarians and get to know essential aspects of the library resources. The treasure hunt is important in the students' later studies as it paves the way for further development of their information retrieval skills. A crucial factor to success of the Treasure Hunt is the cooperation of committed teachers. A challenge for the future is to have the Treasure Hunt integrated in all courses as a compulsory element.

1. On the ground

Lund University, founded in 1666, is situated in the south of Sweden and, with 47.000 students, is one of the largest universities in Northern Europe. Astronomy has been an important subject from the start. Professor Andreas Spole was "Cosmographus et Ptolemaicus" and also established the first observatory in 1672. A new observatory building was introduced in 1867, but it gradually became too small and unsuitable for the activities. The department moved to its present location in 2001, with the new Astronomy building next to the old water tower.

One big advantage of the location is the proximity to the Physics Department, which has strengthened the collaboration in both research and education. We have a joint library organisation, the Physics and Astronomy Library, but have kept our separate physical libraries. We are closely connected in a network with the other Science and Technology libraries at the university, and of course also part of the Lund University Libraries organisation.

2. Mission

Lund University has extensive education in Physics, and there are around 400 new physics and astronomy students each year. The task for the five librarians at the Physics and Astronomy library is to present the library and its resources directly at the start of the students' studies. The library introduction used to be done in a more traditional way, with lectures to large groups that showed the library and demonstrated its facilities. The librarians were active and the students were passive, very passive sometimes. The librarians are competing with a lot of introductory activities for the students during their first weeks (including many parties and social events). This introduction to the library was simply not working and for a few years we have tested a more radical approach, the Library Treasure Hunt.

The philosophy of the new approach is to package the library introduction in an exciting and fun treasure hunt, which includes learning by doing, on the spot assessment, and an evaluation and reward system. The students are now active and the librarians are there to guide them if needed (Figure 1). The treasure hunts are tailor-made for the different student groups. Other libraries, such as Technology, Chemistry, and Mathematics are involved if it meets the requirements of the students' curriculum.

3. Takeoff

For the task, librarians divide the students into small groups, with preferably no more than three in each group. This will be an opportunity for them to practice teamwork with new people. The group is given a treasure map and tasks at the various stations in the participating libraries. Examples of assignments include:

- How to access the library
- Finding a book on the shelf after looking in the catalogue
- Searching for an electronic article

The group communicates their results at each station directly to the librarian and gets feedback on their answers. They then receive a library stamp on the map and a new assignment to continue on their quest.

The highlight is a visit to the top of the observatory tower guided by astronomers (Figure 2). The students appreciate the fantastic view (especially the bridge to Denmark) and the chat with the astronomers, who also enjoy this opportunity to meet the newcomers.

The hunt takes around two hours and a treasure waits for them at the end. The treasure consists of a bag with various things, such as an apple "(of knowledge)," sweets, a pencil, a key chain, and information brochures about the library services. The treasure is highly appreciated, especially the sweets.

Before receiving the treasure, the students have to (anonymously) hand in an individual evaluation where they give their overall impression of the hunt on a scale from "Black Hole" to "Intergalactic." A vast majority of the feedback is positive and many students give the hunt the highest score. The librarians have received spontaneous comments from the students that the hunt is an "awesome" way to get to know the library and its resources.



Figure 1. Students have fun working together at the Astronomy library

4. Landing

Once back on ground, the librarians discover that a good relationship has been established with the new students. They know how to find the libraries, and this is of special importance to the Astronomy library. Without the hunt, it may have taken some time before the students discovered that there was an Astronomy building full of astronomers and a library well equipped with books and journals. Another advantage is that both staff and students know each other when passing by each other on campus. This personal connection is not to be underestimated. The students know the services the librarians can offer and they are not afraid to ask questions. The threshold to the library is considerably lowered, and one positive result of this is that the students are using the library a lot afterwards.



Figure 2. Lund Observatory tower. Photo: Francois Polito CC BY-SA 3.0

5. Success factors and challenges

The development process has been very enjoyable, but also very time consuming. However, it has been worth all the effort and we can really recommend the concept to others. The logistics are not easy, but after some years of practice (and a lot of mistakes) we now have a reasonable control of things and can handle the situations that may arise. It is a challenge to have a hundred students moving in some sort of order between several places and have them understand the tasks as well. It is also a challenge to coordinate a

group of librarians, and it takes a lot of preparations to make it all work. The process is now running rather smoothly, and we can concentrate on making the hunt even better.

A crucial factor is to establish good collaborations with the teachers. It is also very important to integrate the hunt into the students' introductory program and make it a compulsory activity, because otherwise a lot of students will not attend. The librarians at the Physics and Astronomy Library are working hard to achieve this, and it is a continuous challenge.

6. Reach for the stars

We are aiming to continue with the treasure hunt and are striving to make it better all the time. It would be useful to have a systematic and more in-depth evaluation of the effects of the hunt. At present, there is only the poll that the students fill in directly after the hunt. One aspect we also would like to focus on in the hunt is how technology — for example the iPad and e-readers — can enhance the use of the digital collection.

It is very important that the librarians are integrated in the planning of the students' information skills at all levels. We strive to reach this goal. The hunt is the “stepping stone” for further development of the students' information skills. This means that we need to collaborate even more with the head of the department and with the teachers. That would be the true treasure for the students — learning by doing and having fun at the same time.

Find our poster, questions, poll and contact information on the web: <http://www.fysik.lu.se/english/library/treasure>.