

## LIS USER EDUCATION COURSES IN AGRICULTURE UNIVERSITIES: AN ANALYSIS INTO OBJECTIVES AND REALITY

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*Discusses the LIS user education courses in eleven agriculture universities of India. Objectives of such courses, duration and course contents are discussed based on the data available in the syllabi followed by the agriculture universities. Concludes that introduction of such courses is an encouraging step towards user education.*

### INTRODUCTION

Libraries and Information Centres have been playing an important role in supporting the teaching, research and extension functions of the agricultural universities in India. By developing a useful collection of selected documents in print as well as electronic/digital form and by supporting it with various services, libraries have been strengthening and complementing the research and teaching activities of these universities.

Unlike the traditional universities, the agricultural university libraries are also supporting teaching work. The libraries are offering a unique one credit course for user education to educate the students on library use and to acquaint them with the various sources of information available in the library.

As libraries are going hi-tech with the use of information and communication technology, the relevance of these courses has become important. To use these automated libraries consisting of various databases and providing access to online databases and other digital collection, users need to be educated on OPACS and other techniques of information retrieval. The user education courses not only acquaint the users with various sources of information but also help them to be

less dependent on the library staff and prepare them to use the library independently and thus save their valuable time by doing self study in the library. The agricultural universities thus are a step ahead of the traditional universities as they are discharging the dual function of teaching as well as administrative functions of the library.

### OBJECTIVES

The present study was undertaken with the following aim:-

- 1) To analyse and evaluate the objectives of the user education courses offered to the students of agricultural colleges, and
- 2) To ascertain the suitability of the course in achieving the objectives laid down.

### SOURCES OF DATA AND LIMITATIONS

The data has been collected from the syllabus/course contents followed by various agricultural universities, offering these courses. The entire analysis and interpretation of the study is based on the data available in the syllabus followed by the agricultural universities. The idea of carrying out this study is to provoke further discussion and reflection rather than to sharply draw any conclusion.

### METHODOLOGY

The data collected from syllabi of various agricultural universities [1-11] has been classified, grouped and analysed to find out the various

dimensions of the study. For the purpose of the study, the course contents obtained from 11 agricultural universities across the country has been analysed.

## FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

To get the best possible view of the objectives and reality of the LIS user education courses in agricultural universities, the data has been analysed as follows;

### *Duration and Credit Hour of the Course*

The user education courses devised by the agricultural university libraries are offered for one semester particularly in the first semester to PG students. Some universities like Dr. Y. S. Parmar University of Horticulture, Solan and Acharya Narendra Dev University, Faizabad and CCS Haryana Agriculture University, Hisar are offering courses to the PhD students also. The Bekaner Agriculture University, Rajasthan, is teaching the course to undergraduate (UG) students only. The course contents of all the agricultural universities analysed in this study reveals that the course is compulsory and is of one credit hours. Only GB Pant University of Agriculture and Technology, Pantnagar offers the course on optional basis. In most of the Agricultural Universities, the course is graded in the final examinations. However, in Assam Agriculture University the course is non-graded. Annexure A shows the list of universities offering the course at UG/PG level alongwith the course title and the credit hours.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE COURSES

The basic objective of offering the user education courses by the agricultural universities is to acquaint the users with principles of library use and library ethics and to teach them to help themselves to retrieve the desired literature and information on their own.

In brief, the objectives of the courses may be summed as follows:

1. to acquaint the students with the principles and ethics of the library and its importance in the university education;

2. to train the students in the skills of using library catalogue both manual and OPAC in automated environment ;
3. to acquaint the students with various sources of information available in the library ;
4. to provide knowledge of various information systems and networks using electronic databases in CD-ROM and online databases;
5. information explosion and problems associated with scientific literature, scatter, languages etc.;
6. bibliographical control, knowledge of abstracting and indexing journals, CAS and SDI services;
7. knowledge of compiling bibliographies, preparing thesis/dissertation, writing scientific reports, proof reading, etc.

The agricultural universities offering these courses have combined the course content of library science with technical writing. Technical writing part provides knowledge about technical jargons in writing bibliographies, preparing thesis/dissertation, proof reading etc. Hence the course is the combination of library instruction and technical writing.

## COURSE CONTENT

The syllabus for one credit course has been designed keeping in view the basic idea of user education. The course content has been divided into two parts. The first part deals with topics of library and information science with slant to user education and the other part deals with technical writing.

The library part centers around subjects like role of library in university education, library rules and ethics, knowledge of classification schemes, use of library catalogue and OPACs; sources of information, knowledge of CD-ROM databases, e-mail; Internet; abstracting and indexing services; and CAS, SDI services etc. The technical writing part included in the course curriculum guides the

students in preparing their dissertations, writing scientific reports, knowledge of compiling bibliographies, and technical jargons like use of Latin abbreviations, writing foot notes, proof reading, etc.

### ANALYSIS OF THE COURSE CURRICULUM

The course content adopted/followed by various agricultural universities is more or less the same. It has been suitably tailored catering to the needs of the user community on library use.

However, there is no proper balance between the topics included in the library and information sciences and topics of technical writing. The analysis in Annexure B indicates that course content of G B Pant University of Agriculture and Technology; Pantnagar, IARI; New Delhi and Y S Parmar University of Horticulture; Solan have given reasonable coverage to library and information topics. The course content of Bekaner Agriculture University, Rajasthan is completely focussed on library science and does not include any topic on technical writing. Other universities, in particular, the Assam Agriculture University has emphasised more on technical writing giving major share of the course to the topics on technical writing.

Although universities have suitably covered relevant topic of user education in their syllabi, the course contents of some universities lacks updating according to present requirements, for example, CCS Haryana Agriculture University, Jawahar Lal Nehru Agriculture University, Jabalpur, Bekaner Agriculture University, Jobner; Dr. Panjab Rao Deshmukh Krishi Vidhalaya are yet to include use of information technology in libraries particularly in terms of using electronic databases, computerised search formulations, online information retrieval information networks, e-mails, etc.

Dr. YS Parmar University of Horticulture offers the most updated course content providing knowledge of networking, national and international information systems and centres, use of e-mail, Internet, etc., followed by GB Pant University. A few universities have included topics that are not relevant from users point of view, for example,

Bekaner Agricultural University is offering practicals on preparing catalogue cards, added entries, etc., using AACR II. Five Laws of Library Science have been included in the course content of Dr. Punjab Rao Deshmukh University, similarly the IARI teaches the students about document selection, acquisition and their technical processing, etc. These topics are more relevant to the students of library and information science.

The University of Agriculture Sciences, Dharwad has included interesting topics in their course content like complexities of books and periodicals, technically reading a book, etc. Dr. Punjab Rao Deshmukh has included studies of various agencies in the field of Agriculture Science and Technology.

Regarding technical writing, most of the universities except Bekaner Agriculture University, have included the techniques of compiling bibliographies, preparation of thesis, scientific reports use of Latin abbreviations, foot notes, proof reading etc.

### OBSERVATION AND DISCUSSION

The following observations can be drawn on the basis of the findings of the present study.

1. The study shows that library and information science courses offered by various agricultural universities is the right step towards user education. The courses highlight the importance of library in university education and acquaint the students with various sources of information and prepare them for self study in the library.
2. The course has been divided in two parts. Part one deals with topics on library and information science from users' point of view and Part II deals with technical writing which covers topics like writing of bibliographical references, preparing dissertation, writing scientific reports, foot notes etc.
3. The course content followed by most of the agriculture universities is more or less same except for few universities like Bekaner Agriculture University. The course content

- followed by this university is exclusively focussed on library science, and does not include any part of technical writing.
4. The courses offered by the agriculture university libraries is of one credit hour and offered in the first semester. The course title varies from university to university for example IARI, Delhi offers the course by the title "Agriculture Information System", Himachal Pradesh Krishi Viswavidhalaya by "Literature and Technical Writing", G B Pant University of Agriculture and Technology by the title "Storage and Retrieval of Scientific Information"; CCS Haryana Agriculture University by the title "Library Science and Technical Writing" and University of Agriculture Sciences, Dharward by "Library and Information Usage" etc.
  5. The user education course are offered by the university libraries and as such there is no department of library and information sciences. In some universities like GB Pant University of Agriculture & Technology, the course is offered by Department of Humanities & Social Sciences but taught by library staff.
  6. The library staff in agricultural universities unlike the traditional universities shares the responsibilities of teaching, administrative and technical works of the library.

## SUGGESTIONS

1. To achieve objectives of user education in agriculture universities, due emphasis should be given to bring uniformity in the course content. There should be proper distribution of topics in library and information sciences and technical writing. This is suggested as some of the universities either emphasise more on library science aspects (eg : the Bekaner Agriculture University) or technical writing (eg : Assam Agriculture University).
2. The course may be restricted to the post graduate students who are likely to be more dependent on library resources for their

thesis and research work. The course should be graded and made compulsory for all PG students.

3. The course contents followed by the universities should be updated frequently, keeping in view the ongoing changes in the library management with regard to application of information and communication technology.
4. The course outline, like practical work on cataloguing and classification, laws of library science, document selection, aquisition, technical processing etc. should be discouraged as these topics are not important from user's point of view.
5. As the libraries are getting complex in nature with electronic and digital collections, it is suggested that a separate one credit course should be offered on information retrieval and library use. The technical writing part may be combined with the courses offered by English department of the universities.

## CONCLUSION

Attempts made by the agriculture university libraries to introduce a course on library use is an encouraging step towards user education. Their attempt to device a suitable curriculum to train the students in library use and acquaint them with sources of information is commendable. The basic objective of these courses is to acquaint the students with library literature and guide them in techniques of retrieving it from the library so that they are able to use the library on their own for better self study.

## REFERENCES

1. Syllabus "Literature and Technical Writing-501" of Himachal Pradesh Krishi Vidhalaya. Palampur.
2. Syllabus "Storage and Retrieval of Scientific Information" GB Pant University of Agriculture and Technology, Pantnagar.
3. Course Content Dr. Y. S. Parmar University of Horticulture and Forestry, Solan.

## USER ANALYSIS IN AGRICULTURE UNIVERSITIES

4. Syllabus "Library Science and Technical Writing" CCS Haryana Agriculture University" Hisar.
5. Course Content "Agriculture Information System-AIS" Indian Agriculture Research Institute, New Delhi.
6. Course Content, Jawaharlal Nehru Agriculture University, Adhartal, Jabalpur, MP.
7. Syllabus "Introduction to Library Science" Bekaner Agriculture University.
8. Syllabus "Library and Information Usage" University of Agriculture Sciences, Krishinagar Dharward.
9. Syllabus "Scientific Report Writing and Use of Library -613" Dr. Panjab Rao Deshmukh Krishi Vidhalaya, Ankola.
10. Course Content "Technical Writing and Library Use" Assam Agriculture, Jorhat.
11. Syllabus "Use of Scientific and Technical Literature -511" Acharya Narendra Dev University of Agriculture and Technology, Faizabad (UP).