

MANAGING MULTIMEDIA COLLECTIONS AND SERVICES IN IIUM LIBRARY: STAFF ENTHUSIASM POSITIVELY CONTRIBUTES

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ABSTRACT

Human heritage is kept in various physical formats. Before the 1980s, librarians handled mainly printed collections and very few non-printed materials such as microform, video and audiocassettes. With the advancement of information technology, especially after the late 1990s, information is now stored in a variety of physical formats, such as, diskettes CD-ROMs and DVDs. Ultimately, librarians must manage this variety of collections and offer related services. Although managing multimedia materials and services poses a great challenge, the author believes that human resources can overcome those challenges through continuous support and motivation from the middle and top managers. This article is written in order to share the author's views and experience of managing the multimedia collections and services from 2001 to 2004 at the Main Library of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM).

Keywords: Multimedia collections; Multimedia services; International Islamic University Malaysia; Academic libraries

OVERVIEW OF THE MULTIMEDIA SECTION

The Multimedia Collection is located in a controlled-access area at Level 3 of the Main Library building. The Multimedia & Special Collection Unit manages this collection as well as providing related services. The unit is established, firstly to organize a wide variety of electronic and non-print media in support of the current academic programmes of the University, and secondly to provide multimedia services to students and faculty members. In order to achieve these objectives, the Unit aims:

- to maintain and preserve the collection to ensure longevity of usage,

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- to maintain the necessary equipment and facilities to provide internal viewing facilities and to accommodate classes, presentation, seminar, etc.,
- to collect and preserve historical records of the University in whatever format available,
- to accumulate comprehensively publications written or contributed by IIUM faculty members, and to establish a database of these collections for easy retrieval, and
- to assist in the collection development of the multimedia materials and the special collection and to provide access to them.

As indicated in the unit's name, the multimedia section consists of two types of collections: multimedia collection and special collection. The former includes kits, videocassettes, audiocassettes, slides, VCDs, CDs, DVDs, diskettes, photographs, microfilms, microfiches, transparencies, maps, Braille books and flashcards. The latter includes collections on Islamic Economics, Islamic Education, Faculty Publications, Restricted Collection and the IIUM Archives.

Materials are mainly organized according to the Library of Congress Classification. However, some local codes are used in both prefix and suffix of the call number to designate specific physical formats/types of materials. For example, code 'dk' is used for diskette. In this case, if the code comes in the call number prefix, it indicates that the item is primarily diskette. But if the code comes in the call number suffix, it indicates that the item is accompanied by one or more diskettes. However, some types of materials are assigned accession numbers. As an example, audiocassettes in the Arabic language are assigned a 7-digit accession number. In accession number 11Y0001, the first three digits are physical format indicator while the rest represent the item number. These accession numbers will gradually be replaced by the Library of Congress Classification call numbers.

The Multimedia & Special Collection Unit is handled by one professional staff and eight supporting staff comprising of five library assistants, one senior technician, one computer technician and one general junior assistant. Some of the facilities include viewing rooms with a seating capacity from 6 to 30 persons, a multipurpose room which can accommodate up to 70 persons, an auditorium for 100 persons, a computer laboratory which has 50 PCs, some stations for microfilm reader, video viewer and audio listener, as well as

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equipment like VCD players, video players audio players, OHP, LCD projectors, PA system and microform readers/printers

The service of this section is open daily, from 8.00 am to 11.00 pm except on Saturdays, from 8.00am to 12.30 pm. The section is closed on the first and third Saturdays of every month, on Sundays as well as on public holidays.

CHALLENGES

Through experience, the author recognises that each type of multimedia collection has its own problem and requires separate attention and treatment. These are some of the major challenges that the author, as the Librarian of the Unit, encountered during her years managing the Unit:

- Facilities and equipment must be managed properly since the use of some types of multimedia materials depends very much on the availability and operational ability of these machines.
- Temperature and humidity of rooms where collections are placed must be closely monitored to avoid problems such as fungal growth..
- In order to ensure fair use of multimedia facilities, a reservation mechanism has to be installed. Failure to record reservation details, or cancellation of reservation would result in inconvenience and dissatisfaction among users.
- Shortage of staff has impeded the Library management's intention to extend the Unit's operational hours.

Staff motivation: booster mechanism

Most of the challenges encountered were handled together by all staff of the Unit. The author spent her first year in the Unit reacting to some of the situation. With time she came to realise that staff feedback played an important role in identifying the real problems and in solving them. Hence, she encouraged staff to convey to her any problem that they or the users encountered. She stressed that all problems in the Unit were their problems and that they should work as a team and have a sense of belonging. She also encouraged all staff to contribute ideas on how to handle certain problems. In this case, she organised frequent meetings, initially everyday, but later, when things were a bit settled, once or

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twice a week. As a result, the staff became more proactive in their approach to the challenges.

It was also realized that staff contribution of ideas and willingness to work as a team and to cooperate with one another should be rewarded. This was to ensure that staff was motivated and stimulated to give more and to further improve their level of contribution. Hence the staff was encouraged to compete for the 'Excellent Staff of the Month Award. Ten criteria for the selection of the monthly winner are:

- Responsibility,
- Cooperativeness,
- High motivation,
- User-friendliness,
- Punctuality,
- Independent-ness,
- Creativity & initiative,
- Sense of urgency,
- Reliability, and
- Cheerfulness.

Every month, the staff would evaluate each other and rank their performance on a scale of 1 to 10 according to these criteria. The winners were selected based on the highest accumulated marks. Initially, only one winner was selected but later this increased to three. Each one of them received a token. Every month the names and photographs of the winners were posted at the multimedia counter as information to the users. The competition succeeded in stimulating the staff to contribute more ideas as well as to cooperate among themselves. As a result, even very simple value-added service to users was discussed for implementation. Among the ideas they discussed and implemented were improvement of signage and decoration of the new arrivals exhibition cabinet. This competition helped the author in managing the Unit. While acknowledging the importance of subordinates' continuous support and cooperation, support from the Library management is essential.

Users' complaints were closely scrutinised. One such feedback was the time taken to fetch materials from collection rooms, resulting at times in a long queue. This was because the staff was involved in a variety of services offered, namely, borrowing/returning of materials, reservation of rooms and stations, reservation and usage of PC, request for Astro, provision of headphone for single viewing/listening station as well as general enquiry.

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Simultaneously, multimedia collections were placed in three separate rooms. The nearest room housed multimedia collections such as video and audiocassettes, kits, CDs, diskettes, photographs, slides, and transparencies. The second nearest room housed the map collection, microfiches and microfilms, as well as IIUM Archives. The farthest room housed special collections. The most frequently requested materials included video, kits and the Islamic Economic collection.

The first step taken to solve the complaints was the rearrangement of the collections. This involved placing the frequently requested titles on shelves just behind the counter which included top movies and highly demanded CDs, kits, and other items. It also involved switching of the collection rooms. Since videos and kits were in demand more than other types of multimedia materials, they were placed in the first row of shelves. Since the Islamic Economics collection was highly demanded by the library users, this collection was moved from the farthest room to the nearest room. The Islamic Education collection was small at the time but it was predicted that this collection would be just as popular as the Islamic Economics collection and was therefore shifted to the nearest collection room.

The next step was putting the counter into order. The counter was divided into two sections. The first section handled loan activities, while another section handled reservation of rooms, stations and PCs, Astro requests as well as general enquiries. Proper signage was created so as to direct users to the appropriate sections. Related to this decision, the third step was to allocate two staff to man the counter, each being in-charge of a specific section. When one staff is taking materials from the collection rooms, another staff would entertain the users. These three steps succeeded in shortening users' time queuing at the counter.

Another common complaint received was the inability of users to access information stored in diskettes. The staff discovered that the shelf life of diskettes was approximately one year. After a year, some diskettes were corrupted or could not be used. Hence, a special project was undertaken whereby all diskettes in the collection were checked. The corrupt diskettes were labelled 'deteriorated'.

In conjunction with this project, the Unit forwarded two proposals to the Technical Services Division. The first proposal was to request the Division to indicate the item status as 'deteriorated' in the system and this information would appear in the OPAC or WEBPAC. This piece of information is useful to

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the users who were saved from feeling frustrated upon borrowing a diskette only to find it could not be read. The second proposal was to make a backup of each diskette in another medium of better longevity such as DVDROM.

CONCLUSION

The author has gone through a very interesting part of her career. Managing the multimedia collection and services has indeed enriched her experience and her gratitude goes out to all the staff in the Multimedia & Special Collection Unit as well as her colleagues and superiors who have given her the chance to improve herself professionally, to develop her leadership quality and her ability to optimise existing resources to produce more results. Managing a multimedia collection and services is not as simple as sounds. It requires dedication and perseverance and demands a great understanding of the variety of the collection, the methods to properly manage and preserve the collection as well as how best to serve the users.

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