

The (Mis)match of a university-wide library program for PhD-students to students from the Faculty of Arts and Humanities.

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Abstract

The project «Information Management for Knowledge Creation» has resulted in a report: «PhD candidates and the research process. The library's contribution» (Gullbekk et al 2013) and a net based resource: PhD-on-track; phdontrack.net.

The web resource PhD-on-track contains three main parts: "Review and discover"; "Share and publish" and "Evaluation and ranking". Each of the main parts focuses on a different quality of the research processes of young scholars.

PhD-on-track seems to have a strong bias towards PhD-thesis in the form of a collection of published journal articles. However, in Norway, the format of PhDs may be as monograph, or as published articles with a summary. There are different preferences from the different faculties.

In this paper the authors will look closer at and evaluate how helpful the web resource will be for PhD students from the Faculty of Arts and Humanities.

During the period 01 January 2008 - 31 December 2013 124 students at the Faculty of Humanities, University of Bergen, defended their PhD dissertations. Of these 112 persons defended PhD monographs, while the 12 others defended article-based dissertations. One of the main questions of this paper is how the web resource PhD-on-track can be a useful tool both for article-based doctoral dissertations and for PhD monographs.

Keywords: PhD; Norway; Web-resource; information needs; information use; academic writing

1. Introduction

The web resource PhD on track is the result of a collaborative project between the libraries at the Universities of Bergen and Oslo, the Bergen University College and the Norwegian School of Business and administration, also in Bergen, Norway, and the library at the University of Aalborg in Denmark. These libraries had already collaborated for several years on developing other web resources for library training and education (see f.ex Sokogskriv.no; «Search and write») and had experienced that the students of the highest level – PhD-students – the third cycle, in Bologna process terminology, had radically different demands and expectations of library training and education.

The libraries suggested a project to research this problem and to develop a special resource for the PhD-students, and obtained funding from the National Library of Norway. The main goal of the project was to develop evidence-based teaching and training modules that the libraries could offer as part of their services for PhD-students, both in ordinary teaching situations (seminars etc) and online.

The first phase of the project resulted in a report, on how PhD candidates identify and evaluate academic resources and relevant literature, and how they use the services of their academic libraries.

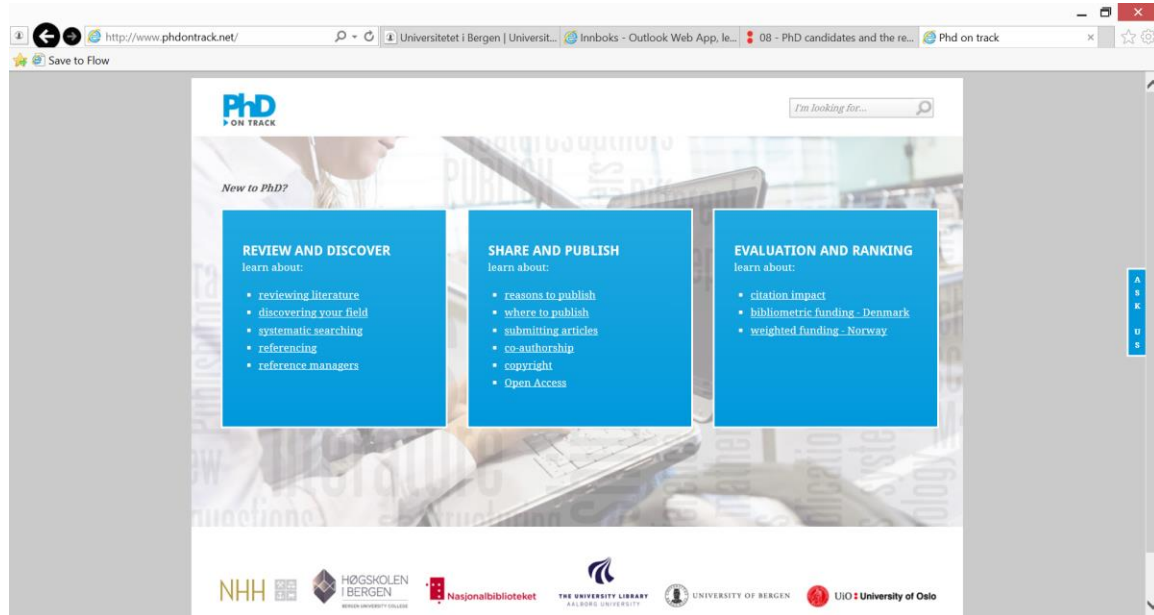
The report was based on research that was conducted as part of the “Information Management for Knowledge Creation” project (2010-2013). The project was a collaboration between the university libraries in Oslo, Bergen and Ålborg; the NHH library; and the Bergen University College Library. The project received development funding from the National Library of Norway (Gullbekk, Rullestad, Torras I Calvo 2013)

In the report the different research traditions from different subject areas are not discussed specifically. The report contains a discussion of how PhD candidates relate to the publishing of their own research, what they find challenging

in these processes, and what they expect in terms of support and counselling from the research libraries.

2. The web resource

The web page itself (www.phdontrack.net) contains three main headings



Review and discover; Share and publish; Evaluation and ranking; and each of these have sub-headings.

Under «Review and discover» the sub-headings reviewing literature, searching your field, systematic searching, referencing, and reference managers are to be found. Reason to publish, where to publish, submitting articles, co-authorship, copyright, and Open Access are found under «Share ad publish» while «Evaluation and ranking» contains the sub-headings citation impact and the two different funding mechanisms where publishing counts in Norway and Denmark.

During the development there were a lot of attention paid to feedback from the users. This influenced the design, and what issues that were covered. (Gullbekk 27.03.2014)

The resource contains two short animations. It has text for each subject, that may be expanded if there is special interest, and also dilemmas, where the PhD-students themselves must reflect on issues of controversy.

3. Use and spread of PhD-on-track

The web resource was launched in May 2013, and information about it was rapidly distributed on social media. As well as information and marketing from the collaborating libraries, the rector of University of Oslo wrote about it on his blog, and other university officials also.

PhD-on-track is made public with a CC BY-NC-SA-licence, enabling others to use it further. Presently, more than 30 universities around the world link to the resource.

4. PhD-on-track and academic libraries

Information literacy is a subject most Norwegian academic libraries are familiar with, and there are some successful web tutorials of good quality developed. The National Library has funded evaluation of three such tutorials, Viko, Søk og Skriv, and Råd og vink, and also the resulting further development of the tutorials (Hyldegaard et al, 2011). One of the issues that emerged from the evaluation was the progression through the study cycles, where the librarians was

made aware of the quite different needs from PhD-students, as opposed to students at Bachelor and even Masters level.

Even if Norwegian academic libraries traditionally has some staff with academic backgrounds, there are few that has gone through a PhD-study themselves. On this basis, a different approach for development of resources was taken.

Both the report and the web-resource are made available open access, and the web resource can be used as a background for the academic library's teaching program in the third cycle, incorporated in the program to larger or smaller extent, or just made available as a resource. The report contains important evidence-based information for anybody planning trainings for this group, and is a resource for the academic library in itself.

5. PhD-on-track and students/academic staff

The web-resource has some aspects that are useful for students and academic staff in general, and some that are more specific for students in different stages of their PhD or in different subject areas. In the following we will look at the usefulness from the point of view of academics within the Faculty of humanities.

6. The monograph tradition and Humanities

In the humanities and legal faculties the monograph genre is very strong; it is the genre that dominates PhD-dissertations. Very few doctoral candidates in the humanities defend article-based dissertations. However, the article-based dissertations dominate in natural sciences and medicine, dentistry, psychology and economics.

There are several reasons why the monograph genre is so strong in the humanities – from January 2008 to December 2013 112 of totally 124 PhD dissertations defended at the Faculty of Humanities, University of Bergen, were monographs. Mainly, it is because humanist research differs from research in other faculties. In the humanities, the candidates make an individual choice of theoretical basis and scientific method. This individual initiative is often leading the candidate to perform a comprehensive registration before she or he can finally go ahead with her or his own registration or data collection. This phase has often a strong theoretical scientific character, the candidates have to read a lot of theory of science, and the goal is to put their own scientific work into a larger historical and philosophic context. Also, they have to justify their choice of academic approach, methodology and operationalization of research questions. This work takes much time and has to be done before the candidate can start to write her and his specific dissertation.

A monograph dissertation thus reflects important characteristics of the traditional disciplines in humanities. The candidate has to obtain an extensive technical overview, to be able to see the great relationships and draw the big pictures. The candidate should also see his own scientific work in an overarching historical perspective, and moreover in a historical and scientific theoretical critical light. This ideal has been kept alive up to the present, and constitutes a defining characteristic of the humanities tradition and doctoral monograph genre in humanities.

At the same time, even though there are far fewer doctoral thesis in the humanities in article-based format, there are still PhD-candidates publishing articles or chapters in anthologies parallel to writing a monograph for their PhDs.

7. Supervision at the Faculty of Humanities at University of Bergen

At the Faculty of Humanities there is a long tradition of having one mentor and individual counselling. Only in recent years it has become relatively common to have both a supervisor and one assistant supervisor, but most doctoral candidates still have only one main supervisor. Individual tutoring is more or less predominant in the humanities.

In special contexts, where doctoral candidates are related to a major project, collective supervision including two or more candidates may be found. However, collective supervision will in such case only be a supplement to the individual supervisions. Collective supervision may also be related to academic seminars that are linked to a larger research project. In such joint seminars the supervisor or supervisors may discuss the project or chapter drafts from the candidates, or they comment the candidates' analysis and interpretations. At the local and national research courses for PhD-candidates there often will be collective supervisions. Here the doctoral candidates can present chapter drafts or theoretical and methodological issues for one or more teachers and fellow students and receive feedback on these, which can have a direct impact on design of their doctoral dissertations.

Otherwise, the individual supervisions are dominating both at the doctoral level and the master level in the humanities. The doctoral candidate takes the initiative by making an appointment with the supervisor in advance. The number of

meetings that the candidate may have with the supervisor, is often embodied in local regulations at the individual universities and colleges. Moreover, several supervisors have regular supervision days and regular supervision time. Many supervisors are still fairly flexible with regard to the number of counselling sessions and time for instructions. The most important thing is that the supervisor is available while the candidate needs to discuss current issues related to the dissertation or to give response to a specific draft or specific chapters.

In the individual tutorials different aspects of theoretical basis, hypotheses, methods and operationalizations, data collection, data processing, analysis, interpretations and conclusions will be discussed. Individual counselling is thus a comprehensive activity that puts great demands on both the candidate and the supervisor. Occasionally there may be a dispute between the candidate and supervisor regarding the implementation of the doctoral project as a whole or various parts of the project.

8. Which qualities of PhD-on-track promote article-based dissertations?

PhD-on-track has as a primary purpose of facilitating the doctoral candidate's ability to orient oneself and search in the large amount of literature found in books, journals and electronic form online. The structure of the PhD-on-track, demonstrates explicitly how a candidate can proceed to orient him or herself in the available literature. PhD-on-track has three main modules: 1) *Review and Discover*, 2) *Share and Publish*, and 3) *Evaluation and ranking*.

The first main module, *Review and discover*, has five sub-modules. The candidate will gain knowledge about these aspects: a) *reviewing literature*, b) *discovering your field*, c) *systematic searching*, d) *referencing* and f) *reference managers*. Each of these modules have specific strategies that candidates should use to identify literature that are relevant to the overall topic being studied or to specific issues addressed in the thesis.

The second main module, *Share and Publish*, has six sub-modules. Through these, the candidates will gain knowledge of a) *reasons to publish*, b) *where to publish*, c) *submitting articles*, d) *co - authorship*, e) *copyrights*, and f) *Open Access*. Researchers are expected to communicate results by means of formalizing and publishing within informal channels, and in these modules they will learn about strategies to find the most relevant and useful publisher their own research results.

The third main module, *Evaluation and ranking*, have three sub- modules. Through these knowledge modules, the candidate should obtain knowledge of a) *citation impact*, b) *bibliometric funding* (Denmark), and c) *weighted funding* (Norway). Research publications are continuously evaluated. Research is also subject of performance-based funding. This demands awareness of where to publish and where to register their publications. In this module the candidate will learn more about how publishing activities are measured and ranked.

All three main modules are suitable for candidates who write article-based dissertations. The first main module provides a useful starting point for a doctoral candidate to get on with the job, no matter what type of genre the candidate writes within. The last two main modules are particularly well suited to the candidates who write an article-based dissertation, because the articles that go into the article-based dissertation primarily should be published in a scientific journal or accredited in scientifically accredited publishers.

9. Which qualities of PhD-on-track promote monograph dissertations?

As shown in paragraph 8 above, PhD-on-track are divided into three main modules: *Review and Discover*, *Share and publish*, and *Evaluation and ranking*. All three main modules are relevant to candidates who write article-based dissertations, but for candidates who write a monograph it is particularly the first main module, *Review and discover*, that is interesting.

There are two important differences between a monograph and article -based dissertation. One is the formal structure. The other is the academic context of the content.

The formal structure: An article-based dissertation is composed of academic articles – which in principle should have been published in an accredited journal or by an accredited publisher. A monograph, on the other hand, is a formal unified treatise in which all the parts are chapters in a larger overall publication.

The academic context: An article-based dissertation is composed of individual articles, usually 3–4, each of which deals with a specific topic or research question. These articles should have an internal academic context that is signalled by means of a “cape”, i.e. an introductory text that makes an account of a general academic context, but these articles can be relatively independent of each other. In a monograph, on the other hand, there is an internal scientific

relationship between all chapters of the publication, and the thesis is built up so that it makes a natural progression from the beginning to the end. One chapter is based on the former chapters in the thesis. Few or none of the chapters can be separated from the overall context, but they must be read and understood in the overall context. This is in contrast to the articles in the article-based dissertation in which articles can be read independently.

The way the PhD-on-track is structured favours the article-based dissertations, because only the first main module, *Review and discover*, have direct relevance to the candidate who writes a monograph thesis. The monograph should not be published in advance, and it is not required that chapters or parts of chapters will be published in advance. This would also be contrary to the monographs objectives.

Therefore, the other two modules, Share and publish and Evaluation and ranking, are primarily of little interest and relevance to candidates who write monograph dissertations. But the first module, Review and discover, is very useful and of high interest for these candidates, especially because candidates who write monograph dissertations – in addition to narrow-related topics – also are dependent on a broad orientation in intellectual history and science theory. Here the module Review and discover works well. Ideally, this module should be refined so that it became even more useful for these challenges.

10. What challenges exist for PhD-on-track to be the best optimal tool for both article-based and monograph dissertation?

The main challenges for the PhD-on-track to become the best optimal tool for both article-based and monograph dissertation, is to make the three main modules relevant for both kinds of dissertations. To do so, we think that the first main module has to be modified, and that the two next main modules have to be reorganized.

First, the modification of the first main module, Review and discover, can be done by structuring access to the content so that the candidates can more easily find relevant material related to similar topics, intellectual history surveys, epistemology, ontology and scientific theory.

Second, the two others modules should be reorganized to continue to promote the interests and needs of the candidates who write article-based dissertations, simultaneously as they are relevant for candidates who write monograph dissertations. Focussing on how the candidate theoretically, structurally and very practically may proceed in the preparation of scientific texts, and not singularly towards how and where it is most useful to publish finished texts or papers, would make this tool even more useful.

PhD-on-track is even today a good and useful tool and an essential complement to the way supervision of PhD-candidates is happening and to the way PhD-candidates are working. By modifying, supplementing and reorganizing PhD-on-track, it will become a better guidance tool for supervisors and more effective working tool for the candidates. The greatest challenge to accomplish this is to do PhD on-track more focused on the dissertation process, on the writing process and on the design of an academic product.

Academic libraries can use tools such as PhD-on-track to become more attractive and useful for both PhD-candidates and supervisors. This is important for the quality of research. Thus, the libraries will be more closely integrated in the research support in humanities faculties. This is one way academic knowledge will be made available to the candidates. At the same time, libraries will become an even more important scholarly arena in the candidates' work with the dissertations.

Litterature

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