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Published in:
Nordic Journal of Information Literacy in Higher Education

2013

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
Zettergren, A.-S., Voog, H., & Corvellec, H. (2013). To make a kick start together – A PhD course co-developed by librarians and professors. *Nordic Journal of Information Literacy in Higher Education*, 5(1).
<https://noril.uib.no/index.php/noril/article/view/201>

Total number of authors:
3

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To make a kick start together – A PhD course co-developed by librarians and professors

This paper presents a PhD-course called “Kick start to academic life - Information Management and Publication Process for Social Scientists”, a collaboration between the Social Sciences Faculty Library at Lund University and professors at the Faculty. The objective of the course is to provide PhD candidates with generic knowledge about how to effectively conduct their PhD studies when it comes to information management and the publication processes. The course combines an introduction to the process of managing one’s need of information as a PhD student, and an introduction to the process of managing the publication of one’s results.

The librarians have been involved in the development of this PhD course, from the first idea of a course in generic competences and on to the actual implementation. The Faculty of Social Science came up with the idea of a course like this in 2009, and asked two teachers/professors and two librarians to make an outline. We choose to focus on students in the beginning of their PhD studies, who would benefit most from it. We have now run it for 3 years (2010-2012), developed the course as for content and size, from demands from students and faculty as well as from our own experiences.

Designing the course together, librarians and professors gained an insight into each other’s competences and area of expertise. We used previous experiences from working with PhD students, like the providing of shorter courses, seminars and workshops. We choose a course design mixing lectures and workshops, in order to make the course both theoretical and practical. The course design also helped emphasizing aspects of the subject being discussed. One example is by adding a practical workshop in reference management program given by the librarians just after a lecture given by a professor about how and why academics cite. Another example is when we invite an editor of a high ranked peer-reviewed journal to talk about article submission from the journals/editors point of view and then follow up with a more practical session on where, how and what kind of information you search in order to find relevant information about possible journals to send manuscripts to. This course design creates dynamic connections between the more classic way of academic lectures/discussions and tools that improve the PhD students’ generic skills. As a result, valuable connections are being made and it is also a way of visualizing how academia works and how the culture is communicated in different ways. This includes everything from demystifying the “back-stage processes” of academia as well as finding relevant tools to navigate in a rapidly changing publication process. Both workshops and home assignments are built upon the idea of constructive alignment. The students are to focus on their respective subject field when working with the assignments, to make them matter to the individual.

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