

# Partnerships in planning

## Curriculum design for information literacy and lifelong learning

*'We have created a complicated superhighway of information for very high speed travel, without training drivers ... or training them how to use a roadmap' (Bundy, 1998\*)*

Within our competitive capitalist society, the shift away from production economies to knowledge economies has accelerated the demand for an educated, learning workforce. Information literacy has become a critical aspect of education, since a student cannot be seen to be competent in a field without the appropriate level of information literacy associated with that field.

Yet the teaching of information literacy is still being left to chance. It is still being interpreted as the need to 'add-on' yet more content skills in an already overcrowded curriculum. The traditional 'library orientation' which gives the teachers half an hour free time and allows them then to proceed with their teaching in the fond expectation that their students now know all there is to know about locating information, is still the norm in many situations. It is time to re-think, and for teachers and library staff to take responsibility for ensuring that information skills are taught in context. The primary task of today's educators is to provide a learning framework which facilitates information literacy.

Information literacy is defined in the Council of Australian University Librarians' *Information Literacy Standards* as a survival skill in the information age which calls for a restructuring of the learning process itself to ensure that, in addition to basic literacy, the students are equipped to:

- know when they need information;
- identify what information will address the problem;
- find the needed information;
- evaluate the information;
- organise the information;
- use the information effectively; and
- can transfer these skills from the academic fields to the workplace.

Since library patrons, collections and campuses span all disciplines, librarians are uniquely situated to develop and deliver learning support strategies which foster new ways of teaching and learning information literacy.

A group of staff members at the Institute of TAFE Tasmania has responded

positively to the challenges of incorporating information literacy into teaching and learning. Campus libraries have joined Small Business Management staff in developing an holistic approach the creation of a learning environment which integrates communication, collaboration and information technologies. It is not an add-on or a new administrative maze, but a collaborative effort to implement information literacy within the concept of lifelong learning by integrating it into the core modules.

One of the first units studied by students enrolled in the Certificate IV of Small Business Management is 'Research Business Opportunity, (incorporating research skills)'. It is a thirty-hour competency which requires students to undertake considerable background investigation and market research in preparation for the writing of a business plan for their nominated small business.

Library and teaching staff at Launceston, Devonport, Burnie and Hobart campuses have co-operatively designed a comprehensive, integrated series of assignments which will enable the students to steadily increase their skill level as they work through the tasks. The involvement of library staff from the outset ensures that the exact resources which will support the students in their learning are readily available and easily located. The more complex tasks are introduced as the students become more confident and competent in their research skills.

A three part library training program utilising progressively more advanced information skills will be delivered over three weeks. The sessions are 'Using the library catalogue', 'Using the InfoTrac database' and 'Using the Internet'.

Because the TAFE Tasmania libraries are linked to the statewide Tasmanian Automated Library Information Service (T@LIS), the total resources of all the libraries will be available to the students. This includes the resources of the Australian Bureau of Statistics and databases available through the State Library of Tasmania such as the Tasmanian Index and the Index of Community Organisations. A resource bibliography, previously prepared by the library staff, will also assist students in locating relevant material.

The InfoTrac database is a subscription service providing access to the

contents of more than 2000 journals and newspapers. The full text of many of the articles is directly available for downloading or printing and the coverage of information is from 1980 to the present. This database will be of inestimable value to the students as they begin a SWOT analysis and develop a mission statement for their proposed business

The World Wide Web is composed of hundreds of millions of documents and its size is increasing daily. There is no catalogue, no index and no way of ensuring that data placed on the web is authoritative or even true (try <http://www.dhmo.org> to enjoy an elaborate hoax). Students will be taught advanced searching skills and evaluation techniques which will assist them in not only in the completion of their assignment tasks, but in all future study applications.

Having identified the core skills required for the successful completion of the research module, the students will be well equipped to apply these skills to the remainder of their course and to transfer their new-found information literacy to other areas of their lives, including leisure activities and the workplace.

### Conclusion

The need for information literacy skills becomes increasingly important as the volume of information and misinformation available grows exponentially, and mushrooming technologies ensure that anyone can (and usually does) put anything up on the web regardless of accuracy or typographical errors. With just a little planning, teachers and library staff in any educational institution are able to seize the opportunities offered by the information age to collaborate in the education of students so that they will become truly information literate and equipped to survive on the superhighway for life.

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\* Bundy, Alan, (1998) *Information Literacy: The key competency for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*, paper presented at the annual conference of the International Association of Technological University Librarians, Pretoria, June 1998