

Library planning using online group discussions

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In 2006 by reference, librarians at the University of New England trialled a Yahoo online group to assist in their annual planning. Staff posted issues for discussion and made online comments on each topic.

We used the technology to enhance staff awareness of its potential, to become confident in using an online group, to allow all to participate, irrespective of roster commitments, and to enable everyone to get in an equal word without being interrupted. 10 of 12 staff participated in the online group, of the two who did not participate, one was heavily involved in an unrelated task and one was close to retirement. We were pleased to find that competence in using online groups increased significantly.

At the conclusion of the process we used polls within the Yahoo group to discover staff response to using this technology. Seven to nine people responded to each poll. Interestingly, 57 per cent of respondents believed that 'the online group was more democratic, i.e. removed some of the impact of dominant individuals.' The remainder felt it was about the same. Staff had varied feelings as to how well their points got across, compared with face-to-face meetings, indicating that the online process was very helpful in this area for some, but not all, group members.

There was a wide spread of opinion regarding the effect of using the group on the spread of topics discussed and on the efficiency of the online group process, with the average seeing the impact as positive. On both questions, 50 per cent of

staff rated the process as better and 25 per cent as about the same. It should be noted, though, that most topics for discussion were initiated by the Department head, although all staff were encouraged to suggest discussion points. At the point of pulling all the opinions together for documentation there was a big efficiency gain, as it was very easy to see everyone's views topic by topic.

In response to the question, 'Would you support use of online groups for future planning?' all responses said they would. All but one chose, 'Yes, in conjunction with some face-to-face'. One voted for 'Yes, love it.' It appears that online groups can offer a good contribution to a planning exercise, but they are best used in conjunction with face-to-face meetings. ★

Launch of CIT training library

The Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) Faculty of Business and Information Technology training library was formally launched by Ms Roxanne Missingham, Vice President of ALIA and Parliamentary Librarian, during a well-attended social function on the evening of Thursday 14 September 2006.

The training library is the first of its kind in Australia. It provides a realistic workplace environment for students enrolled in the Library and Information Services programs at CIT, complementing and preparing students for their work placements in libraries around Canberra. Much of the delivery of the CIT Library and Information

Services suite of programs, starting with Certificate III and IV offerings, will move to a more flexible, student-centred, work-based focus using this new facility which represents Vocational Education and Training (VET) 'best practice' pedagogy.

To create an authentic workplace environment, CIT upgraded the physical layout, furniture, technology, print collection, and web-based digital resource access. Libraries need library technicians and assistants able to work with increasingly complex technologies. The training library has access to a large number of online bibliographic and full text databases including the Horizon

Integrated Library Management system. When placed in the context of the new CIT LIS Advanced Diploma with its ICT emphasis, and existing industry practicum placements, the new training library ensures that technician graduates are as work ready as possible when they enter the LIS industry.

For further information please contact Andrew Shiells, Program Co-ordinator, Library and Information Studies at CIT via andrew.shiells@cit.act.edu.au. For CIT's IT courses, go to <http://www.cit.act.edu.au/study/choose/programs/bit/informationtech/>.



Roxanne Missingham opens the library, with Colin Adrian, Chief Executive of Canberra Institute of Technology.



Inside the training library: quiet, students at work!