

Learner-Centred Planning Redefines Approach to Information Literacy

For a number of years, Library staff at the University of Canberra (UC) had tried a variety of means to attract newly enrolled students to a range of Library tours and information literacy sessions. Consistently the statistics indicated only about one-third of students ever participated. Staff were spending an extraordinary amount of time and effort for what seemed too small a return, especially when the aim was to ease the transition of new undergraduate students to university-level studies. Strategies included new promotional campaigns, prize incentives, carefully scripted tours and training sessions, five-minute announcements in first-week lectures, slick PowerPoint presentations — with no significant percentage increase in attendance. Yet the students were telling us, through various internal and external surveys, they were not receiving enough assistance with 'how to use the Library', about how to find and use information effectively to support their studies.

In short, the answer lay in altering our perception of the problem. It wasn't about getting more students to come along to what was being offered, it wasn't a lack of desire or the capacity of Library staff to provide a good service nor was it the lack of support from academic staff to encourage students to take advantage of what was being offered by the Library. The problem was not the value being offered to students — it was the context in which we were trying to deliver that value. The new planning approach needed to be more learner-centred and the Library's Information Literacy Group began to use the concept of 'context-sensitive help' to redesign the services (an evaluation criterion we had long applied to vendors of online services and library systems!)

The new factors taken into consideration were the increase in online delivery of teaching and learning activities, the fewer hours spent on campus by a growing majority of students due to work commitments and the range of related 'help' services provided by other UC units. Information skills content was reorganised into four basic but integrated modules to align with the ANZIIL Information Literacy Standards. To ensure a sound pedagogical approach, a collaborative planning relationship was developed with UC's Academic Skills Program unit. This unit is staffed by academic learning advisors and is highly successful in tutoring students in

study and writing skills. Several Library staff were also funded to undertake a Certificate IV program in Adult Learning. The new modules can be delivered individually or as a package, offered as 'walk in' sessions or delivered within formal coursework tutorials. Their design has easily supported conversion to online tutorials for independent student access via WebCT and this work is currently underway, following the generous agreement of Queensland University of Technology Library to use their successful PILOT program as the design shell. With the addition of an assessment component, the modules can be incorporated into formal coursework if academic staff so desire.

The collaboration with the Academic Skills Program generated another solution responsive to the students' context. Difficulty with study and writing often includes difficulty with information seeking and information evaluation. Once again, the problem wasn't the lack of assistance available to students. The variety

of services supporting student learning from the Library, the Academic Skills Program unit, the Computer Centre as well as several school-

based learning resource centres providing peer-tutoring for first-year undergraduates was not the problem. It was the hidden assumption that students can define their difficulty well enough to choose the appropriate help service. In fact, they often needed help with a range of learning and research skills all at once to meet their needs at any one time.

It was decided to begin reducing the confusing choice by bringing together staff from both the Library and Academic Skills Program to provide regular 'Troubleshooting for Research and Writing' drop-in sessions. Rostered staff from both units responded according to a student's particular needs and also provided individual guidance about more formal training or other suitable services provided elsewhere within the university that were relevant to the student's development as an effective, independent learner.

The focus on learner-centred planning also generated new sessions such as 'Google and Beyond — Beyond Surfing to Using the Internet for Research' and 'Citations and Bibliographies — How to Read Them, How to Write Them and

the Reasons Why'. In one semester, the statistics (and standing-room-only sessions) demonstrated that even though Library staff were not delivering startling new knowledge, they were now delivering it within a context that was much more relevant to student needs.

UC is about to embark on a review of courses and curriculum which will re-inform the policy on Graduate Attributes, a number of which relate to problem definition, information seeking, information evaluation and knowledge generation. The collaborative planning work already undertaken by the Library and the Academic Skills Program will provide an effective base to continue developing an integrated approach to student learning support services — where learners are offered 'context-sensitive' assistance as much as possible.

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