

LM691

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Case Study Critique

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The introduction of an online information literacy (IL) programme at an Australian university was a novel approach as it merges IL programmes into a sphere that students have come to see as a vital part of their learning experience, namely the virtual learning environment [Blackboard] (Lonn and Teasley, 2009, cited in Katsifili, 2010, p. 19). This can be regarded as the overall strength of the programme as it facilitates learning at the pace dictated by the learner. However was this method the most effective way to provide IL instruction to this particular group? This report will give a brief background of the programme and then analyse its effectiveness.

The IL programme in this study was the result of collaboration between a lecturer and a faculty librarian. The two podcasts and two vodcasts that were incorporated into Blackboard's interface were designed for first year students. The pod/vodcasts were placed on Blackboard as opposed to the library website to emphasise the importance of information skills. It was not indicated whether the information skills found via the pod/vodcasts on Blackboard were specifically designed to facilitate successful completion of the students' first assignment. It was also not indicated whether this was stipulated to the students. Participation in the programme was on a voluntary basis and no extra credits were awarded for uptake. Of the nearly 300 students who agreed to be monitored only 23 per cent accessed the pod/vodcasts. All monitored participants belonged to a group that needed to submit their first assignment with a minimum of five references.

The first obvious weakness of this IL programme is the very low uptake by a group who would need IL tuition the most, namely first year students. It becomes quite clear on closer inspection that what this group of students received was library instruction not IL tuition. Andretta describes library instruction as focusing on "components of library activities that covered the use of information tools" (Andretta, 2005, p.6); all four of the pod/vodcasts can be described using the above definition. The longest and most detailed vodcast, namely

Wilson Web merely demonstrates advanced internet searching. Hundreds of similar vodcasts can be viewed on You Tube. By their nature pod/vodcasts lack real time interactivity; there is also no interaction between user and instructor. These particular resources are best described as basic library instruction regarding policies and basic information retrieval. If this is what the University was attempting to provide to the group then they succeeded. However if we use the framework outlined below for comparison, this cannot be regarded as an information literacy programme.

The University's programme will be analysed in relation to the ANZIL framework. This framework suggests that users develop six competencies in order to achieve information literacy. These competencies include the user recognising a need for information, finding the said information effectively and efficiently. The ability to manage information found is central to the framework. The user creates new understandings with this information and uses all of these competences ethically (Gunasekara and Collins, 2008, p. 5). This framework has been implemented in other Australian universities (University of the Sunshine Coast, no date). AZNIL, along with several other frameworks such as ACRL and SCONUL, is based on different pillars or competencies that the user must acquire before achieving information literacy. Common to all three frameworks mentioned is the requirement that the user recognise an information need. In the ANZIL framework this is the first "standard" (Bundy, 2004, p. 16). Only 23 per cent of the participants in the University's programme made the connection between the successful completion of the assignment and the tuition provided by the pod/vodcasts. This suggests that a need for information was not recognised. The programme does not compare the marks achieved in this first assignment between those who viewed the online instruction and those who did not. This appears to be another weakness as there is no way to measure effectiveness of the programme. All IL tuition programmes should have measurable learning outcomes (Redden, 2008) and the University's

programme clearly does not facilitate this. In fact, this ability to measure learning outcomes is a central tenet of all IL programmes. For example, if one of the programme participants does adhere to one of ANZIL's standards such as managing information collected correctly and compiles a correct reference list (which was a requirement), there is no way to know if this is a result of following the relevant pod/vodcasts or seeking this skill elsewhere. A further criticism of the University's programme is that no such referencing pod/vodcasts were provided, even though the importance of referencing was highlighted when the first assignment was given. When a comparison between the task that the students were required to do and the information skills provided to complete the task is made, the University's IL programme is lacking and fundamental weaknesses are apparent.

An online presence for IL is a positive development. However, it should be accompanied by one-to-one or group sessions (Tripathi, 2009, p. 10), the latter being the method most popular with students (Redden, 2008). This is not to suggest that online tuition cannot deliver results, in a study taken by the University of Rhode Island in 2007, students who completed their IL tuition online obtained similar results as students that had face-to-face tuition (Burkhardt, Kinnie and Cournouer, 2008, p. 9). The main weakness in this programme is the content of the pod/vodcasts and the fact that the IL tuition was not mandatory, accredited or incorporated. A study of three business schools in Canada found that a combination of mandatory embedded IL tuition and in class tuition delivered by a librarian best helped students develop research skills (Deltor, 2011, p. 8-9). However the pod/vodcasts fall short of this level of support. The article that discussed this programme also acknowledged the shortcomings of the pod/vodcasts; the authors concluded that "simply providing more information through embedded library modules in a given unit of study is not likely to be an effective strategy" (Dobozzy and Gross, 2010).

In this instance we can conclude that overall this method of information literacy instruction was not sufficient for a group of first year university students, at best it could be described as library instruction. The trial has confirmed that optional asynchronous tuition is not in this occasion the most effective method of IL instruction for this particular group.

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