Chapter XIII

Terms of Engagement:
A Case Study of Instructional Designers in a Faculty of Law

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Abstract

In this chapter we tell a story of a discipline-specific instructional design unit located in a Faculty of Law of a large Australian university. This unit is engaged in the instructional design and development of a variety of units/subjects, courses and projects for undergraduate, postgraduate and professional practice programs as well teaching a Graduate Certificate in Law Teaching. Other activities in this specific community of practice include assisting staff with new approaches to their teaching, developing longer-term relationships with teaching staff and fostering reflective practice. The story of practice will attempt to describe the challenges and ways in which this small "band" of instructional designers has embedded themselves in the life and directions of a Law Faculty.

Introduction

Instructional design practice and research are eclectic. They draw on a range of disciplines, theories and models. This chapter takes a further step in this eclectic practice by considering the terms of engagement for a small discipline-based education unit within a Faculty of Law. In this endeavour, it employs a more human-centred and narrative perspective. It, therefore, highlights the human factors essential to success in working in another discipline. These factors were previously not considered as instructional design strategies and features. Instructional design is not alone in progressing this view, as many other disciplines have sought to incorporate human factors and human centredness into their strategies to achieve an improved outcome.

This chapter underlines the benefits of a discipline-based human-centred approach to instructional design within a Faculty of Law. The argument for such an approach is situated in the current debate about the need for the restructuring of the present legal education, and also for the provision of teaching support to legal academics. Some of the issues that the community of instructional designers have faced, will be shown in the experiential stories of the director of this instructional design unit and an instructional design team member. These stories will be counterbalanced by a story of a law teacher and his experience with law-specific instructional design.

The Education Unit described in this chapter is engaged in the design and development of a variety of units/subjects, courses and projects for undergraduate, postgraduate and professional practice programs. It also offers a discipline-based teacher professional development program and a Graduate Certificate in Law Teaching. Other activities in this specific community of practice include, for instance, assisting staff with new approaches to their teaching. This story of professional practice will attempt to describe the challenges and ways in which a small "band" of instructional designers have embedded themselves in the life and directions of a Law Faculty. It will examine the ways in which the unit has managed to establish integrity and credibility in an often adversarial, suspicious and reluctant to change practice environment.

The first of these challenges was the actual establishment of the discipline-based unit within a university that had previously located this type of support centrally. The second challenge was defining the ways in which the unit would relate to the Faculty and also the existing central support units. Other forces that may have impacted indirectly on the unit's establishment within a community of practice included the dramatic increase in online learning, and the blurring of boundaries between on-campus and off-campus learning and teaching. At the same time, universities were tackling the issue of adoption of "immature," large-scale online management systems, with increasing access for all teachers to a form (albeit restrictive) of online materials and resources. These factors contributed to a rethink and changes in teaching approaches by the academic staff, and escalated the need for "in-context support." The higher education sector we work within is complex and dynamic, with reduced funding and increased entrepreneurial needs.

The third challenge was the establishment of the unit within the Faculty. The unit was faced with differing degrees of acceptance: some academics have welcomed such support whereas others were strongly against the unit, which was perceived as an intrusion to their traditionally developed practices. Finally, it needs to be pointed out that the issues and challenges that the

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