

Chapter 4.3

Applying E-Learning Technologies to Library Information Literacy Instruction

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ABSTRACT

Academic libraries have adopted and adapted the e-learning technologies for delivery of their Information Literacy programmes. This chapter describes some of the ways in which academic librarians have been very inventive in using emerging technologies to enhance their instructional content. By using a case study of DkIT the chapter details how information literacy and the e-learning technologies emerged together. E-learning platforms like the virtual learning environments (VLE) are the natural place for libraries to use as portals for their IL instruction. This chapter argues that using the VLE (with the inherent instructional interaction made possible by this technology), and adopting some amalgam of the newer teaching styles like problem-based learning and blended learning techniques completes the IL circle for librarians. Librarians now have the tools at their disposal to finally fulfil the promises we undertook when we embarked on our information literacy programmes.

INTRODUCTION

We live in interesting times for librarians. The amount of information and means of access to this information has dramatically increased in volume and complexity. Methods of accessing this information and how people engage with the different information media are also in constant flux. This preponderance of networked information that has

become available to library users has necessitated the expansion of librarians' instructional role to help equip our users in the skills required to access information effectively. The librarian's remit has been broadened and this has compelled us to explore the possibilities of e-learning technologies to assist us in this extended remit. The demand for library instruction has also required librarians to really engage with the science of teaching and how we employ different methods of instruction. We as a profession now accept that the increas-

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ing volume of information is only of value to an academic community when it is employed in a meaningful way within the process of learning.

This chapter is an attempt to examine the convergence of the factors that led to the new outlook for information provision and will look at the possibilities for library instruction using the new e-learning technologies. I will be detailing our own case study in Dundalk Institute of Technology in an attempt to draw all the elements together and endeavour to show that no single element can be taken in isolation from the other. By detailing our own evolutionary experience with information literacy and e-learning, I hope to demonstrate that an academic library has the instructional imperative and the skills to design the necessary e-learning instruments for user support and training. I will also show that whilst librarians working within the academic environment have tried to address and fulfil our duty to our community, we have found that a new collaborative model of engagement with academics will be the best template for designing future library instruction.

The case history is also an attempt to show how different technologies were employed for all our digitally facilitated instruction and engagement with library users and how this culminated in a 'blended learning' approach to helping students become information literate. Blended learning is using a variety of learning methods, teaching resources and techniques and applying them in an interactive way for students. The case history is also an attempt to highlight that libraries' sometimes uneven implementation of information literacy and their idiosyncratic adoption of different technologies, as vehicles for library instruction, have created a new fresh dynamic for academic libraries. This dynamic has had the effect of placing libraries as central, once again, within the learning processes for students in academic institutions. Finally, I will be examining some ideas on what more libraries can do to support the community we serve. The future trends section is based on our own experiences to date and is informed by an

examination of some of the developments that may emerge from the current trends within teaching practice and how these can help shape librarians' use of available e-learning technologies. Utilising networked information to enhance knowledge is a complex human as well as technical process that requires some background explanation of what librarians are dealing with.

BACKGROUND

The term 'Information Literacy' (IL) is widely used by the library profession to describe what we believe is an essential attainment for students and staff to be effective scholars. For librarians the main aims of IL is to participate in developing students who can 'recognise what information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate and use effectively the information needed' (American Library Association, 1989). One of the main avenues being used to achieve the standards set by IL is e-learning. E-learning is defined as 'learning facilitated and supported through the use of information technologies' (Melling, 2006, p. XII). To date libraries have been exemplars in adopting and adapting the e-learning technologies available in the furtherance of the goals of information literacy.

Yet there hasn't been, nor can there be, a consistent approach within the academic libraries of Ireland to the delivery of IL modules and therefore no correspondingly consistent approach to using the technologies available in the delivery of their IL training. Even with librarians having approximately the same definition of IL, a common set of standards on how to work towards IL and the same set of available e-learning resources, each library has come up with a different set of learning support mechanisms for its particular institute. So why do people trained in the librarian profession produce such a wide range of different instructional products and material? This may be a result of all academic libraries being unique and

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