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Information literacy co-ordination: two dynamic approaches

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The libraries of the University of Melbourne and Queensland University of Technology have two different approaches to co-ordinating information literacy. During 1999, each library reviewed various aspects of their co-ordination processes, the result of which was the implementation of innovative approaches to managing their education and training programs. Although the libraries service the needs of parent universities with distinct educational agendas, they share a common focus concerning Information Literacy objectives and issues. Each library has an extensive teaching and learning tradition and demonstrates a strong commitment to student learning outcomes. Furthermore, as multi-campus institutions, the development, co-ordination and management of their education and training programs presents similar opportunities and challenges. However, each library has adopted distinctly different operational models. This paper presents an overview of the co-ordination models adopted by each library and analyses their individual rationales, within the context of their organisations, for applying these models. It summarises the redevelopment and implementation processes undertaken, including operational initiatives, managerial strategies, staffing and resourcing issues and evaluation and feedback methodologies, and analyses the success or otherwise of each model. It provides a critique of both approaches in terms of achievements, challenges and issues born as a result of each process. It also seeks to identify future trends and improvements to be undertaken in subsequent reviews.

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Comment

The University of Melbourne and Queensland University of Technology (QUT) manifest differences in institutional heritage, management practice and organisational culture. However, both universities are large, multi-campus institutions with a shared commitment to providing high quality teaching and learning experiences and ensuring exceptional learning outcomes for students. Such commitment is reflected in the responsibility each university library has assumed for the development of the information literacy knowledge and skills of their respective client groups.

Information literacy programs: an institutional overview

The approach of the Library of the University of Melbourne to information literacy is embodied in the Library's Strategic Plan (1997-2001). It is an approach that 'fosters partnerships with Faculties to identify the specific teaching and learning needs and expectations of the University community' and to ensure the 'information literacy program supports and reflects teaching and learning'. This approach has resulted in a multifaceted program that has both specialised subject-based and generic components.

The responsibility for the subject-based program rests with information librarians who are based in the twenty branches of the Library spread across four Divisions (Arts and Humanities, Sciences, Law, Education and Architecture). At the Branch level, information librarians work with academic departments to tailor and integrate the provision of information literacy into the curriculum. Information librarians are responsible for the design and delivery of the program and corresponding print and web-based support material.

The generic program, undertaken by students on a voluntary basis, includes the catalogue, Internet, generic searching skills, Endnote and specific database searching techniques. At the postgraduate level, the program is co-ordinated by the Postgraduate Research Consultant to ensure the specific research needs of this group are addressed. There is also a program for international students and secondary school students at the Victorian Certificate of Education level, which is developed and co-ordinated by the International Students Co-ordinator. Information librarians from all Library Branches work together to develop and deliver the generic programs.

QUT Library's Information Literacy Program emphasises a strategic approach relating to the broader information literacy agenda of the University. Its goal is to promote Information Literacy as a key competency for lifelong learning, fundamental to the teaching, learning and research focus of the QUT community. The Program aims to promulgate, throughout the University, models for evaluating information literacy initiatives in terms of students' learning outcomes, curriculum structure and assessment. As part of a University-wide information literacy initiative, the Library continues to develop collaborative partnerships to facilitate the integration of information literacy into the teaching and learning of the University.

The Library offers a range of generic and subject-specific information literacy classes and integrated courses to students, staff and external client groups. The Information Literacy Program provides a generic curriculum including catalogue, Internet and database classes and drop-in and subject workshops, as well as research-based courses such as Endnote, Net.train (the Library's Internet Training Program) and the credit-bearing postgraduate unit IFN001: Advanced Information Retrieval Skills (AIRS).

The teaching librarians assume responsibility for the design, development and delivery of the Library's information literacy programs and supporting resources. To ensure the achievement of teaching and learning objectives, they work in close partnership with faculty and support staff from other areas within the University.

As QUT Library seeks to broaden its teaching and learning role, it has recognised the need to address the specific educational needs of teaching librarians. In response, and commencing in 2000, teaching staff will undertake a modified version of the EdULib program (developed in the UK). This program will be offered in combination with other peer review procedures and staff development programs offered by the University.

Co-ordination and implementation processes

In an academic environment, information literacy has a multifaceted role. The spectrum of activities encompasses the development of integrated collaborative partnerships, curricula and resources; promotion and marketing; staff development; provision of forums for the discussion of current issues and trends; and the exploration and experimentation with new models of flexible delivery and innovative methods of program delivery.

The challenge is to co-ordinate these activities at an institutional level while simultaneously supporting the information librarians working at Faculty level. Intermediate government of information literacy provision is essential to provide direction to, and ensure appropriate support is available for, the university community. Worldwide, approaches to co-ordinating information literacy programs and services vary from institution to institution. To best support the
teaching and learning goals of their respective organisations, in 1999 the libraries of the University of Melbourne and QUT implemented two different models of co-ordination.

**University of Melbourne Library**

Internal academic library committees are important as a mechanism for co-ordinating the diverse activities of individuals within organisations, improving communication and promoting creativity through the exchange of ideas[1]. At the University of Melbourne Library it was recognised that if the Information Literacy Committee (ILC) was to co-ordinate information literacy, it must be able to increase communication, interaction and productivity across functional lines. It must be action-based, productive and efficient. Committee members and senior library management wanted the ILC to be able to harness its output and demonstrate the benefits of its projects. A committee cannot be effective if considered one of the darker corners of library management[2] (p 15); rather, its structure and operations need to be based on a model of participatory management in order to achieve tangible outcomes. This recognition led to a restructure of the existing ILC early in 1999, in order to revitalise its strength and effectiveness.

The process of ‘systems thinking’ was used in the initial restructuring process. The ‘systems thinking’ exercise involved all committee members. Rather than simply focus on the process of co-ordinating information literacy, it focused on the system used and the performance of this system in the context of the wider institutional enterprise. Committee members were able to collectively restate the Committee’s values, mission and vision. They considered the Committee’s suppliers and customers, as well as a whole range of inputs and the processes required to transform inputs into outputs and produce results. The restructure resulted in a committee whose role is clearly articulated. It is action-based with two tiers of membership - representative and interest.

**Representative group**

- ten members
- attend ILC meetings
- IL practitioners
- are responsible for planning and co-ordinating a key strategy/working group as outlined in operation plan
- includes representatives from each discipline area

**Interest group**

- members do not generally attend ILC meetings
- unlimited members
- involved/meet in working groups to complete projects/strategies as outlined in operational plan
- contribute to policy etc. through division representatives/e-mail list
- include information literacy practitioners and other specialists

In its restructured form, the Committee serves as a vehicle for co-ordination and participatory management of information literacy services. It seeks to foster and promote supportive relationships between information literacy providers and is an effective mechanism for increasing interaction and communication between providers. The role of the Information Literacy Committee is stated clearly in its Strategic Plan:

> The Information Literacy Committee will provide leadership and support to those delivering information literacy programs in the University of Melbourne Library.

The Committee’s role is to support proactively and dynamically the endeavours of information literacy providers through a broad range of activities. The activities of the Committee are interrelated and interdependent. The values embedded in its role are:

- Commitment to information literacy
- Commitment to lifelong learning
- Customer needs are paramount
- Skills sharing
- Resource sharing
- Teamwork and partnership

Integral to the successful co-ordination of information literacy at the University of Melbourne Library is the manner in which the ILC functions to foster supportive relationships between all information literacy providers, not just representative group members. This is done through meetings, discussion groups, the committee Intranet pages and e-mail list, and project work.

Project work is the key method by which the Committee is able to achieve results. Each representative group member is responsible for co-ordinating at least one project. Project team members are drawn from the interest group and are co-opted or volunteer according to their expertise or interest. Ideas for projects are drawn from the wider group and the project list usually grows as the year progresses. Often a project is created as a way of tackling an issue that arises and needs to be addressed. Each project is linked to a key result area of the Library’s Strategic Plan.

The advantage of such a fluid project list is that the Committee can respond and act on important issues as they arise. The drawback is the lack of funding for these additional projects. The budget allocated to the ILC is dependent on the action plan the Committee submits in October; for 2000, funding was sought for twelve projects. Funding for projects may include backfill for project team members, fees for outside trainers, laboratory hire or printing costs. Already in 2000, two important additional projects have emerged which were not factored into the original action plan. Funding for these projects will need to be sought elsewhere or alternatively the project team members will absorb costs. Funds may sometimes be limited, but fortunately the dedication of committee members ensures that these projects succeed.

A major focus of the ILC is the bringing together of library-wide activities to present an integrated face to customers and other stakeholders. An example of how the Committee has been able to co-ordinate the efforts of frontline information staff is the web-based booking system and database for information skills classes (http://xena.lib.unimelb.edu.au/cgi/cil/class) developed in 1999.

To support the delivery of programs, the ILC co-ordinates the production of a range of generic instructional material. As a producer of such products, the Committee's output includes print and web-based publications, generic guides, tutorials and web templates. In general, the Committee provides a framework to support and complement work done in the Branches. With the large number of Branches in the Library system, it is important to be able to co-ordinate programs, training needs and support products to ensure duplication of effort is minimised and successful strategies can be shared.

The Committee also supports information literacy providers by raising awareness of professional development issues within the Library and acting as an advocate for the training requirements of information librarians. Training needs may be met by University or Library initiatives or by committee projects to develop staff training programs with other internal committees and groups (such as the development in 1999 of web training and an instructional writing course for information librarians).

For the University of Melbourne’s Information Literacy Committee, enthusiastic involvement is the key to the Committee’s success. In the second semester of 1999, the ILC completed twelve projects. The workload for each project involved planning and developing strategies to achieve stated outcomes. Committee members were expected to regularly report on progress and motivate their project team members. This process has resulted in an additional workload for committee members. Cost in terms of staff time is an often-quoted disadvantage of committee work[3] (p 513). However, in this situation, time spent is seen as complementing the committee member’s core responsibilities at the local level. A high level of involvement is expected from committee members to ensure the Committee is action-based and the ability of the Committee to transform innovative ideas into action depends on the commitment of its members.
As yet, the Library has not formally evaluated the ILC as a method of co-ordinating various aspects of information literacy. In a sense, the Committee’s restructure was an experiment to determine what could be achieved. Through the restructure, the Committee reinvented itself as a mixture of a traditional consultative committee and a myriad of working parties. The Committee has launched into 2000 on the strengths of its successes in 1999. At the end of this two year period, it may be appropriate to reflect on the ILC as a model of co-ordination.

**QUT Library**

In 1998, the Library initiated a review of its Information Literacy Program. This review, conducted by a consultant from the University of South Australia, emphasised a strategic approach for the Library relating to the broader information literacy agenda for the University. Recommendations referred to the Program’s goals, policies, communication and evaluation mechanisms and future directions, including:

- The promotion of Information Literacy as a key competency for lifelong learning, fundamental to the teaching, learning and research focus of the QUT community;
- Information literacy should be clearly defined to enable a shared understanding of the concepts throughout the QUT community;
- Models for evaluating information literacy initiatives in terms of students’ learning outcomes, curriculum structure and assessment should be promulgated throughout the University;
- As part of a university-wide information literacy initiative, stakeholders responsible for fostering information literacy are identified, and collaborative partnerships be developed to facilitate information literacy curriculum development and teaching strategies.

The Review also identified a strong need to strengthen the leadership for the Information Literacy Program in order to provide clear directions and a defined focus for future initiatives by:

- Placing a strong emphasis upon involvement with training, staff development and mentoring both within the Library and for the QUT community;
- Ensuring Library staff are positioned as advocates of information literacy within the University.

A key element of the Review was the recommendation to reclassify the established position of Information Literacy Librarian to a higher level of Information Literacy Co-ordinator. Such a position was seen as essential to strategically raise the profile of the Library’s information literacy programs and initiatives.

The Library’s Information Literacy Co-ordinator is responsible for the development, implementation and management of the Library’s Information Literacy Program. This role includes advice and recommendations on policies and procedures for the provision of, and client access to, information literacy programs and services across QUT Library and the University. The Co-ordinator works collaboratively with Faculties and academic and Library teaching staff to provide assistance with, and advice on, effective strategies for the integration, delivery and evaluation of information literacy competencies within the University’s curricula. The role also encompasses strategic networking within the University to ensure that information literacy maintains a high profile on the University’s Teaching and Learning agenda.

Previous to the Review, an informal system of Branch-based organisation was adopted in an effort to regulate services and programs at a local level. Communication and co-operation between the four Branch libraries was predominantly confined to the weeks prior to, and immediately following, Orientation each semester. Although program planning and resources were shared whenever possible, duplication of effort proved inevitable as each Branch endeavoured to meet local needs. There was also a tenuous and inadequate association between Branch-based activities and broader Library information literacy programs such as AIRS and Net.train.

The appointment of the Information Literacy Co-ordinator in early 1999 subsequently provided the opportunity to review current practice and implement a more efficient centralised system. Improved channels of routine communication between the Branches was recognised as the key to enhancing the utilisation of resources and service provision, and it became clear that central co-ordination would prove vital to the implementation of a comprehensive University-wide program.

The initial step in the process was to formalise the system of Branch sub-co-ordination. A call for expressions of interest preceded Branch nominations of Information Literacy Sub-co-ordinators (ILSCs), appointed for a two year period (due to a larger clientbase, the city-based Gardens Point Branch appointed two positions). In March 1999, the team of Sub-co-ordinators, the AIRS Librarian and the Information Literacy Co-ordinator united to form the Library’s Information Literacy Advisory Team (ILAT).

It was felt that this name reflected the overarching purpose of the group, while keeping it outside, but in keeping with, formal Library committee structure guidelines. ILAT’s Terms of Reference are:

1. To serve as a forum for discussion and information sharing;
2. To ensure open and clear channels of communication between the Branches and the Information Literacy Co-ordinator in order to foster a co-operative and co-ordinated approach to the support, development, delivery and promotion of new initiatives and existing generic and Branch-specific programs;
3. To develop and foster reporting mechanisms between the Information Literacy Co-ordinator, the Information Literacy Sub-co-ordinators, Reference librarians and Reference Service Managers across all Branches;
4. To provide guidance and leadership for the Reference librarians with regards to curriculum design, development and evaluation to ensure that:
   1. learning theory continues to inform practice
   2. the use of staffing, resources and educational technologies is maximised
   3. QUT Library’s Information Literacy Program supports the Teaching & Learning objectives of the University;
5. To identify and recommend on staff development opportunities where appropriate;
6. To aid the implementation of information literacy strategies across the University;
7. To offer, or advise on, recommendations for action;
8. To work on collaborative projects to develop Information Literacy products and enhance services;
9. To identify, initiate and foster collaborative partnerships outside the Library structure (eg: Teaching and Learning Development Unit, Division of Information and Academic Services and academic staff).
Although the ILAT does itself produce a number of specific resources, its primary role is to oversee the implementation and ongoing development of the Library's information literacy programs, services and resources. In this capacity, it seeks to work in close consultation with the Reference librarians, as well as all levels of management when applicable.

The planning and project role of the Team is diverse. An ongoing responsibility of the ILAT is to plan a schedule of generic classes and courses for each semester, a task which requires high levels of team communication, consultation and commitment to achieve the desired result. In 1999, the Team co-ordinated a number of minor and major projects, including the development of PILOT: Your Information Navigator, the Library's principal online information literacy tutorial, and the eLearn Education and Training website. The ILAT also works closely with other committees charged with information literacy responsibilities, such as the Net.train Planning and Courseware Groups, and they will prove to be a crucial element in the development of the Library's Information Literacy Framework and CoRe Strategies in 2000.

As with the University of Melbourne Library, enthusiastic involvement and a high level of professionalism on the part of members is central to the success of QUT Library's ILAT. Although monthly meetings are pre-scheduled at the beginning of each academic year, the Team meets more frequently as need demands. Members maintain close communication via e-mail in the interim periods.

It is also widely recognised that the success of the Library's Information Literacy Program is dependent upon the Reference librarians' commitment to the goals and objectives of the Program, and their ongoing involvement in the implementation and development of services and resources. In addition to their core teaching responsibilities, this role entails volunteer participation in information literacy projects, publications and promotion. In support of the Reference librarians, the ILAT seeks to eliminate duplication of effort and maximise resources.

While project funding has occasionally made it possible to backfill staff engaged in various projects, participation relies heavily on the support of management and the Reference librarians in terms of alternative sectional staffing arrangements and individual contributions. At this stage, financial resourcing is project-dependent and relies upon comprehensive action planning each year. Due to limited central funding, the costs of ongoing activities are defrayed across the Branches and, to date, this system has not inhibited the Library's information literacy activities and initiatives. However, such an arrangement is not ideal and may prove to impede the achievement of the Program's goals and objectives in the long term.

After only ten months in operation, there has been little opportunity to undertake a formal evaluation of QUT Library's system of information literacy co-ordination. However, due to the Library's accomplishments in 1999 in relation to information literacy, it is reasonable to claim that this model of central co-ordination has been highly successful. It is envisaged that, based on staff input and program evaluation, the process will be reviewed and refined over time.

Visions of co-ordination: current and future practice

Information literacy fosters a broader role for each Library as a key teaching and learning force within their institutions. The successes, or failures, of the Libraries to secure this role are contingent upon a range of issues.

Successes

The success of the University of Melbourne Library's ILC depends on the motivation of members and the leadership of committee executive members. The advantage of this Committee is its ability to co-ordinate people and programs effectively. By involving large numbers of practitioners in its projects, the Committee has been able to take advantage of wide-ranging input that is representative of all disciplines. It is emerging as a representative voice on information literacy matters, a reference point for library staff, library management and other library committees. It has enabled information literacy practitioners to take responsibility for the direction of information literacy services and co-ordinate those services. The Committee has been successful in promoting and gaining support for the information literacy agenda at the level of senior library management, primarily due to significant representation by the Library Division Head to which it reports.

Likewise, the success of QUT Library's Information Literacy Program in 1999 has been largely dependent upon the professionalism and dedication of the Reference librarians and ILAT members. Their collective drive, creativity and ingenuity have enabled the development and implementation of a number of core information literacy initiatives at QUT, including PILOT and eLearn. Outstanding individual contributions and dynamic teamwork have proven to be key factors in the Library's current and ongoing achievements.

However, the realisation of the Library's information literacy goals and objectives to date is also due to the vision and commitment of the Library's senior management. The Library sought to secure a teaching and learning role in the changeable and highly competitive educational environment of QUT. By actively supporting and encouraging the initiatives and activities of the ILAT and Reference librarians, the Library has succeeded in establishing itself as the leader in information literacy within the University.

Challenges

It is clear from past experience that the future of information literacy at both universities is dependent upon the libraries ongoing co-ordination of their respective programs, regardless of the form this governance may assume. For the ILC and ILAT, the challenge will be to maintain the momentum and sustain the involvement of staff and committee members in an increasingly diverse and complex range of activities.

Ultimately, however, the fate of the Information Literacy Programs at each institution may rely on future resourcing. The co-ordination, development and delivery of programs is, and will continue to be, extremely resource-intensive; the ramifications of increasing staff time and sophisticated resources in the information literacy activities of both Libraries have yet to be fully realised. Without appropriate and ongoing funding, the future of the programs is tenuous.

Conclusion

Both university Libraries have acknowledged the need to provide an integrated and co-ordinated framework to replace diverse systems which have previously resulted in duplication of effort and a fragmented approach to program delivery. They also recognise that, without the benefit of a committee or centralised group co-ordinating activities and initiatives, many opportunities for innovation may be lost due to lack of communication and communal reflection.

The University of Melbourne Library's ILC and QUT Library's ILAT have been very successful in co-ordinating the efforts of teaching staff, supporting the information literacy providers and completing a diverse range of projects. Both methods have created environments that are open to change, flexible and self-monitoring. It is envisaged that, with the continuation of such centralised and co-ordinated guidance, the efforts of both libraries will continue to be directed towards promoting information literacy as central to lifelong learning at the institutional level.

References


Program management and implementation.

Endnotes


4. Working title

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