
Information literacy on the move



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INTRODUCTION

My brief was to develop a more formal information literacy (IL) programme for our higher education students at Middlesbrough College (MC): some elements were to be in place in September 2008 and the rest by January 2009, when we would receive a second cohort of students. Previously we have tried to give every student, regardless of course level, an online induction (at differentiated levels) to the learning resources centre (LRC), with more in-depth sessions on topics such as referencing, internet use, use of Blackboard, specific databases and so on being encouraged and done on an ad hoc basis at the request of the lecturers.

Until last summer Middlesbrough College was based on four campuses; there was variation in content and delivery; and the only 24x7 access to IL topics provided was through basic articles included on our wiki. Many of the part-time students on the higher education courses could only attend odd sessions and not the complete range we offered. The need for more IL training was further reiterated at a staff-development session that my colleague and I attended in March 2008, at our local university, the University of Teeside, with whom we run our higher education courses. Now we have moved into a purpose-built single site and we needed a more formal (and therefore consistent) programme, accessible through Blackboard, allowing all students to work at their own pace in their own time.

WHAT DO OTHERS DO?

To research the topic, my plan was to read around the subject on familiar and trusted websites (in order to gain a better feel for the subject), to learn what was expected from an IL programme and

to pick up on references to expand my research further. I also decided to e-mail a professional discussion list I belong to, to find out:

- What do other colleges and universities do?
- What information do they cover and in what depth?
- How successful are they?

A third strand was to ask the lecturers at MC to say what they would like to see on the programme. To get their views I conducted a brief questionnaire using SurveyMonkey that ran for a month in June 2008.

From the responses I received from people on the discussion list, I was able to see various examples of what was available and compare them, not only against each other and my own ideas of what I thought should be included but also against SCONUL's seven pillars, my assumption being that these would have been the criteria used to base many of the other IL programmes around.

FINDINGS

My findings from this exercise were as follows.

Most online tutorials are timed at between 20 and 60 minutes, with some of the longer ones broken down into timed sections.

Most cover the following 'pillars':

- recognise a need for information
- construct strategies for locating information
- locate and access information
- compare and evaluate information obtained from different sources
- organise, apply and communicate information to others in ways appropriate.

There are varying degrees of animation and interaction on the modules and they usually include some level of formative or self-assessment. Nobody mentioned the success rates of the tutorials.

From the SurveyMonkey questionnaire, it was determined that the main reason for not booking any IL sessions was lack of time and that more interactivity would improve sessions.¹

WHAT WE DECIDED TO DO

From my findings it was decided that a series of short tutorials should be made, covering LRC ori-

entation, how to use the online catalogue and how to access the most popular databases, with more complex issues such as referencing to be covered at a later stage.

Due to the move, the LRC was restructured and was merged with the e-learning team. This was a blessing as it meant we had instant access to expert help in the form of e-learning manager Fiona Jennings, who is one of our biggest advocates and a very enthusiastic team member. Now that we had Fiona on board, we started to discuss what form the tutorials would take.

Originally we had thought about an audio tour and a virtual tour of the LRC. However, after discussing this at length it was decided that we would end up duplicating work and instead decided to do a vodcast. This was going to be our priority tutorial, as it could be used to orientate users during induction. Sadly, by the time we had everything physically in place we had ran out of time to do it. After a manic first term in our new LRC, it has been put on hold until this summer because we will be reorganising and I did not want to waste staff time.

We have now turned our attention to the online catalogue and the databases, in an attempt to provide something that will be useful to the users for the remainder of this academic year. The idea of screencasts was something that caught my imagination, having read a recent article about them. I took my idea to Fiona to see if we already had the technology available to produce them. She pointed me in the direction of ActivStudio, the software we use with our interactive whiteboards, and Audacity, a free open-source audio editor and recorder package. Again, as with our vodcast, Fiona is hugely supportive and eager to try something new.

Over the past few weeks we have spent time practising. This has involved trying to perfect a smooth technique of moving through the images we want to capture at a pace that is not too fast to take in but not so slow that the users will lose interest, preparing and recording a script in tandem with the images. We are now in a position to record them properly.

It is intended that we should start off by doing screencasts of how to use the online catalogue, to access Athens and to use DawsonEra (the e-books system), as all will tie into the promotion drive we are getting ready for our e-books. If this is success-

ful, we will roll it out to other appropriate areas of our IL programme.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From my experience of this project I would advise anyone undertaking a similar programme to:

- include animation or moving images for visual impact
- try to include interaction and/or some kind of self-assessment to reinforce learning
- do it in bite-size chunks, so that it is easy for students to dip in and out as their needs dictate and also so that it holds their interest
- consult with your e-learning experts to see what resources you already have to produce the tutorials with
- avoid trying to do it when you are moving into a new building! The time element is always going to be a big issue for any project and in this case we just managed to open with all our basic services in place, let alone new projects!

REFERENCES

- 1 Tracey Totty, *Information skills survey*, Middlesbrough: Middlesbrough College, 2008 (available on request)