Innovations and Collaborations in Information Literacy and Academic Skills

Managing expectations

Finite resources

"There are 150 of you, there are 22 copies of the core text in the Library. You need to know how to manage this."

Problem
The demand for Library resources exceeds supply.

Solution
With a frank statement about the limited numbers of resources [see left], this project used practical activities to help students understand how to use requesting and booking facilities for texts (pragmatic solutions to the problem of limited resources).

Activities
Rather than being presented with a series of screenshots or a presentation, students were asked to complete tasks using a dummy reading list on the VLE - with a Toy Story theme - to familiarise themselves with the requesting and Key Text booking procedures.

Student feedback

NSS Q16 "The library resources and services are good enough for my needs."

81%
of Sociology 3rd years agreed

Problem
Students provide feedback and see no action, negatively impacting satisfaction.

Solution
Module evaluation forms prompt feedback on Library resources and services, which are then sent to the Academic Liaison Librarian for action. Third year students are surveyed about their experience of Library resources and services.

The survey is an opportunity to show the many facets of the Library (e.g. online resources) which may not be explicit in NSS questions about the Library.

Academic Liaison Librarians respond with a list of actions, suggestions to overcome problems and explanations for how things work. This is posted on the VLE.

Effect
Improved awareness of Library services, improved communication between Library and Department, and Library NSS results better than other Departments.

Going beyond Google

Problem
Students dependency on Google, and Google Scholar for information searching.

Solution
Practical, structured activity to engage students in the use of "proper" bibliographic databases, explaining the 'hidden web' and peer-reviewed subscription journals.

Activities
Students work collectively to find resources using different search engines and databases after initial training in constructing search strategies.

Students are asked to consider the benefits and drawbacks of each resource tool, in particular how efficiently they can find quality resources.

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Providing access to resources

FELT-funded roll-out of EARL in SPSW

56%

preferred EARL over paper lists (47%) or PDF lists (16%)

65%

did not think using EARL discouraged looking beyond the reading list

57 students from three Year 2/3 modules using EARL were surveyed

What we did

EARL online reading lists were rolled out across all first year Social Policy modules and all postgraduate Social Policy and MRes modules.

Benefits of the process

Converting lists to EARL encouraged staff to revise their reading lists, in particular updating resources, structuring lists by topic or activity, and labelling resources on their level of importance.

Staff responses

"The key benefit for me is being able to add items as I come across them whilst teaching. I can also use it in combination with VLE announcements to communicate this new material to the students."

"I actually worry that the more we process stuff the more likely students will think the only things they should read are those that they can download."

Student responses

"It's nice that resources are mentioned as background reading, recommended or essential. Helps ground focus when essay writing."

"Although doesn't encourage you to look for own resources, makes you use a wide range of books because list is quite extensive - up to lecturer to make it work."

Conclusion

EARL facilitates reading list construction and dissemination, though there are indications that more work needs to be done with regard to reading lists in general and their use as a learning tool for students. In particular, a further investigation on how students are encouraged to use resources beyond the reading list is worth taking forward.

Supporting access through supplementary online material: video tutorials and guided exercises

Problem

The time pressure of classroom-based tutorial sessions on Library resource tools may lead to some tools being overlooked or not fully understood. Furthermore, Library training is rarely able to be provided at the exact point when students require assistance, e.g. when working on an assignment.

Solution

A bank of online video tutorials was created, specifically for Social Policy-related resource databases. These mirrored the classroom-based activities and, in conjunction with step-by-step guides, provided an alternative way for students to refresh their knowledge of the systems.

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Case study: Academic Skills for Social Work

The course: additional sessions for first year BA Social Work students

Aim

To bring together key academic and information skills training into a series of sessions, targeted towards the academic and professional needs of social work students. The programme specifically addresses issues around how to engage students from a variety of skills backgrounds with the demands of degree-level academic study.

Methods

Student input as the design process

- Discussion around students' current information literacy and academic skills
- Shape course to address needs of particular cohort

Involving the subject expert

- Avoid abstraction of skills training
- Use subject lecturer to validate why these skills are relevant to social work practitioners

Coping with different levels of IT confidence

- 'Trial-and-error' and 'step-by-step' approaches for different learning preferences
- Follow-up material available online

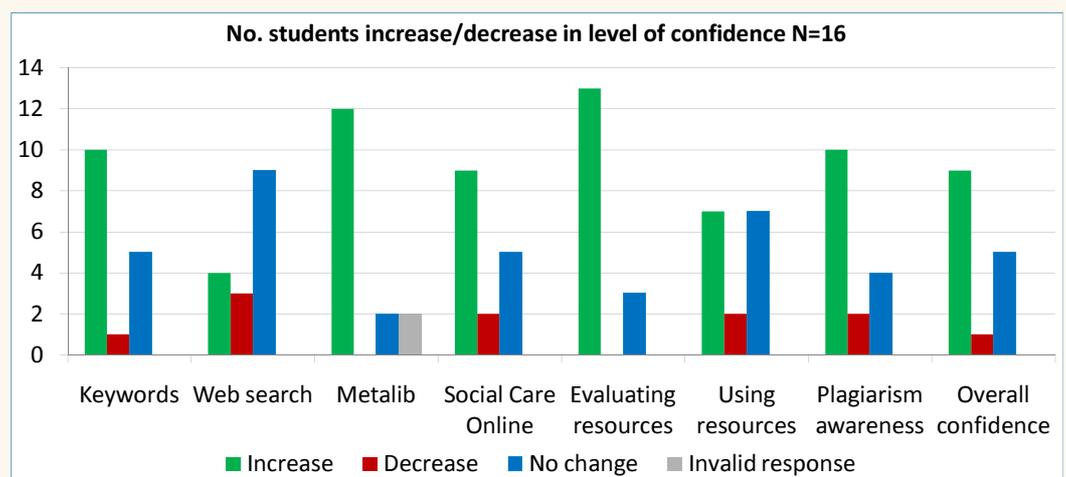**Ensuring openness and understanding**

- Include time for discussion built into programme of study
- Tutors to use discussion to identify problems early on

Outcomes

Student confidence levels

The confidence level of specific information literacy and academic skills tasks were measured on a 5-point scale both at the start and end of the course. 16 students provided comparable before/after results.

Selected elements are shown below indicating a general trend of an increase in confidence.

No. students increase/decrease in level of confidence N=16

	Keywords	Web search	Metalib	Social Care Online	Evaluating resources	Using resources	Plagiarism awareness	Overall confidence
Increase	10	4	12	9	13	7	10	9
Decrease	1	3		2		2	2	1
No change	5	9	2	5	3	7	4	5
Invalid response			2					

Poster authors

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