

Purpose

This discussion paper provides the background and rationale for the development of the Information Literacy Strategy and revised Information Literacy Policy.

Background

The Review of Australian Higher Education Report (Bradley Review, 2009) has highlighted the need to focus on quality student experience and high-level outcomes from Universities. Responding to this, while pursuing a process of curriculum renewal, La Trobe University has listed 12 recommendations in the recently published *Curriculum Review and Renewal at La Trobe University: White Paper*. Recommendations include the development of cornerstone and capstone subjects and the identification of 6 core graduate capabilities. The Library specifically addresses the graduate capability of inquiry/research in this Information Literacy Strategy, proposing a systematic, University-wide approach to its development.

The need for ensuring a good grounding in inquiry/research capability is likely to increase with the government's push for increased participation in higher education, particularly if a greater proportion of commencing students have low levels of information literacy. Any strategy to address graduate capability in inquiry/research will need to include methods for assessing entry and exit level skills to ensure that the approaches adopted meet the changing needs of students.

The process of review

The process to review the existing Information Literacy Policy and draft an Information Literacy Strategy began with an examination of relevant and recent literature. Small group discussions were held with Library Staff on what was successful and limiting in our current approaches, followed by a workshop of representatives from all campuses to discuss the central issues. Focus groups with academic staff at Bundoora and Albury-Wodonga were also conducted to gain further feedback on strategies to develop inquiry/research skills in a changing educational environment.

Current practices

The Library's Information Literacy program currently includes face-to-face tutorials, lectures, workshops and online tutorials in generic or faculty specific design. Individual assistance is provided face-to-face at Information/Research desks in the library and online via Chat, "Ask a librarian" or email.

Its strength lies in this diverse range of approaches and is grounded in the willingness of librarians to undertake the teaching of information literacy skills at any time and in whichever format is requested. However the current program is often not intentionally designed as a cohesive part of the curricula structure and does not give all student equal opportunities to develop information literacy skills.

- The success of the current program is particularly limited when;
- information literacy is perceived as an optional add-on rather than a foundation skill
 - effective collaboration is reliant on individual academic staff inviting librarians to participate in skill development

- Faculty Librarians, particularly at Bundoora where student numbers are large, cannot meet the rising demand for face to face classes
- students become disengaged by repeating similar skills instruction in different units or being asked to tackle advanced skills before foundation skills are mastered.
- ad hoc development occurs rather than coherent development over the course of an undergraduate program
- impact of the Library's intervention cannot be measured to inform future program planning and resource allocation

In 2009 a new approach was implemented in the Health Sciences first year curriculum which has been a way to field-test solutions to existing limitations. The evaluation of the approach in Health Sciences has provided evidence to inform the Information Literacy Strategy.

The Information Literacy strategy seeks to build on existing strengths, particularly the positive partnerships between academics and library staff, but to do so in a more scalable, sustainable and systematic way. The recommended strategy would be implemented as a whole of university activity, strongly based in discipline specific, embedded academic tasks and supported by informal and co-curricula activities.

Context and rationale for the Strategy

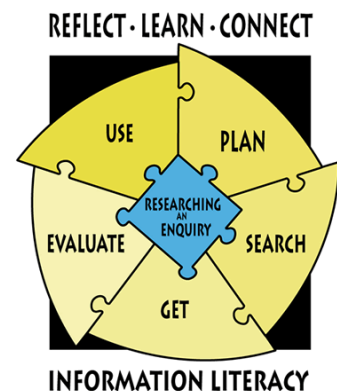
In 2008, the Library created its current Information Literacy Policy and Framework. The recently revised Policy explains why information literacy skills are crucial to independent learning and outlines the Library's objectives and responsibilities in contributing to the development of information literate graduates and staff. The library contribution to this endeavour sits within the broad domains of Student Experience; Curriculum design and evaluation; and Staff development.

The accompanying Framework offers a guide to the sequential development of IL skills, matching desired attributes with specific competencies. The first four attributes align closely with competency in inquiry/research, which is one of the University's graduate capabilities (*Curriculum White Paper: Design for Learning*, 2009).

The Information Literacy Strategy acknowledges that student development takes place in a whole of university context through activities that are integrated into the curriculum and those that supplement the curriculum. It complements the existing Policy and Framework by outlining an action plan for using the Information Literacy Framework as the basis for developing a coordinated university-wide program for developing inquiry/research capabilities.

The draft Strategy is designed to;

- Support embedded research /inquiry skills in a constructively aligned curriculum
- Provide flexible approaches to teaching and learning including online, in-person, blended, at point of need
- Reflect sound pedagogical practice and evidence based teaching and learning methods



The Information Literacy Strategy is based on the following key principles;

1. Inquiry/research skills are developed most effectively in students when that skill development is embedded in the curriculum and reflected in assessment tasks
2. Library staff work in partnership with other University staff involved in teaching and learning to develop programs which contribute to the achievement of student learning outcomes related to the graduate capability of inquiry/research

3. The approach outlined is systematic and sustainable, within the current Library staffing and funding levels, aiming for consistent outcomes across the University
4. The Strategy builds on the Library's established reputation for customer service and responsive programs, while embracing new technologies and University initiatives
5. The Library will periodically review and evaluate the Strategy to reflect the changing University, educational and technological environment
6. Effectiveness of the Library's information literacy programs will be evaluated in conjunction with teaching staff and will use meaningful, measureable and transparent key indicators of student learning as an integrated part of the normal curriculum assessment process. In addition, the Library will assess client satisfaction and/or usability of programs.

Strategy for Undergraduates

Initial assessment of information literacy (inquiry/research skills)

The move towards a more Enquiry Based Learning (EBL) approach, together with the explosion of information sources and technologies means inquiry/research skills for students are changing rapidly. As part of the Health Sciences 1st year program in 2009 a pre-experience survey to assess students' entry level skills and knowledge of the scholarly information seeking process was conducted. The survey has provided compelling evidence that the majority of entry-level students do not have the basic foundation skills required for first year academic learning tasks.

"Fewer than 10% of incoming first year Health Sciences students could correctly answer more than 5 out of 10 information literacy questions"

Preliminary evaluation of Health Sciences Pre-test, 2009

The Information Literacy Strategy proposes the introduction of a diagnostic tool completed by all commencing students that both assesses student entry-level skills and make explicit skills that are expected. This information will inform intentional design and review of information literacy programs.

Compulsory foundation skills instruction (Inquiry /research skills)

The Information Literacy Strategy recommends a compulsory introduction to scholarly research and library services so that all students can acquire foundation skills at the start of their course of study. One way to ensure that all commencing students have the opportunity to access this information, is to make it available in a supported, online environment that students can return to as needed, enabling self directed study.

Ideally, students would complete a quiz or other form of assessment as a hurdle requirement to demonstrate competence in these foundation skills. Foundation skills for each faculty will be determined in collaboration with faculty staff, guided by the Library's Information Literacy Framework. This proposal sends a clear message to students about the nature of their role as developing scholars ready and able to undertake research activities and pursue inquiries from first year.

Integration of inquiry/research graduate capabilities into curricula

The Information Literacy Strategy recommends that Library staff should be included in the early design phase of the curriculum. This was the model adopted in the development of the Health Sciences first year curriculum. Preliminary results from the Health Sciences evaluation show that there was a marked increase in correct answers related to scholarly information seeking after students had the opportunity to work through the Library created modules. Students were asked to use the online information literacy modules, complete a quiz, access library support and reflect on the research process, all within the context of their

enquiries which were designed to facilitate the acquisition of some basic information literacy skills. From these results it appears that embedding information literacy in the curricula structure, particularly in cornerstone subjects, improves acquisition of library research skills across the whole cohort.

“Recommendation 4: That all programs develop and offer ‘cornerstone’ subjects – or provide the equivalent – in the first semester of enrolment, which will provide all students with a strong foundation for academic success...”

Curriculum Review and Renewal at La Trobe University: White paper

To provide students with an opportunity to ‘review, reflect on and reinforce the key knowledge and skills they have learned’ (White Paper, p.11), the Strategy also proposes that Librarians assist in the design and delivery of suitable curricula for inclusion in capstone units to test discipline-specific skills in inquiry/research.

Strategy for Postgraduates

Postgraduate students can be a more difficult group to access as they are often not required to attend campus regularly and are encouraged to be independent in their studies. They also enter with a diverse range of skills and may be completing coursework or independent research. The Information Literacy Strategy seeks to improve the opportunities for postgraduate students to build on their existing skills and to know how and where to access further help when needed.

Initial self-assessment of information literacy (inquiry/research skills)

The Information Literacy Strategy proposes the development of an online checklist which postgraduate students can access to identify whether there are any gaps in their present knowledge base and link to appropriate tutorials or support to develop the desired skills.

Cohesive set of information and links to skills development

To provide all postgraduate students with access to essential information about services and skills needed for advanced levels of research, the Library will work collaboratively with academics and the Graduate and Research Office to develop an online postgraduate support program, such as Postgraduate Essentials. This will allow students who may not have regular on-campus contact to access relevant information and links to further support. <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/research-pg-essentials/documents/pghome.html>

Customised research advice

Because of the importance of facilitating high quality research and learning outcomes in postgraduate students, the Library suggests augmenting the online tutorials with the opportunity for individual support via liaison with the relevant Faculty Librarian. The Library has recently changed the staffing structure to allow more time for professional librarians to spend on research support and appointed a series of team leaders to work closely with faculty to understand their teaching and research needs. Faculty Librarians will continue to offer tailored programs to meet the needs of discipline based groups, in collaboration with academic staff, and to offer research consultations with individual students.

The Library will also develop a program of research skill seminars offered across the Library. These will be available to postgraduate students on a voluntary basis.

Strategy for University Staff

The strategy for staff focuses on building on the partnerships already established, particularly with regard to collaborative design of curriculum, and continuing to keep staff informed of appropriate resources and services to strengthen their teaching and research.

To ensure that all staff have knowledge of the range of library resources and services available, all commencing staff will receive a 'Welcome to the Library' pack. This pack includes a brochure on "Library services to new staff" and initial contact from the relevant Faculty Librarian.

This will be supplemented by offering sessions on resource awareness and advanced research skills to interested staff, as well as designing and conducting a session for new academic staff as part of the 'Introduction to University teaching' program.

The Information Literacy Strategy also recommends developing a toolkit for use by academic staff in embedding skills of inquiry/research into the curriculum. This will consist of case studies of good practice at La Trobe, links to various tools that can be used by academics and ideas of possible inquiry/research teaching and learning activities.

Concurrent and future initiatives

The Library could enhance its role in building capability in inquiry/research by a greater participation in the following areas of academic life.

Undergraduate students

- **E-portfolios:** To encourage a reflective approach to building information literacy skills the Library could support and contribute to University e-portfolio initiatives. For example the development of an e-portfolio template related to information literacy skills or an information literacy self-assessment checklist would help give students a more explicit awareness of their growing capabilities or help them identify areas for further development
- **Closer liaison with Language and Academic Services:** In order to provide a multi-faceted approach to building academic skills the Library aims to work collaboratively with Language and Academic Services and build on existing relationships.
- **Transition or pathway programs:** In conjunction with other areas of the University the Library could explore and collaborate on transition or pathway programs for students who do not start their course at the start of first year.

Postgraduate students

- The library would like to explore the development of a 'research advisor' role to offer a more proactive service to interested students. Research based Masters and PhD students would be invited to register their research topic with a Faculty Librarian in the early stage of their study so that the Librarian could offer advice on relevant resources and offer support at key points in the research process.
- The Library will explore new technologies, such as Elluminate, as an alternative platform for providing one on one or small group tuition and support.

University Staff

- **Involvement in tutor training:** As the curriculum in many Faculties moves towards Enquiry Based Learning approaches, tutors need to be able to direct students to authoritative sources, and also to be able to guide them in evaluating information sources. In collaboration with other areas the Library could explore how to contribute to tutor training so that tutors have a greater knowledge of relevant sources and can guide students appropriately.

Library Information Literacy Coordinating Committee

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