



The University Of Melbourne

Information Literacy: Trends

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A PAPER FROM INFORMATION SERVICES

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Introduction

The following paper discusses developments in the provision of information literacy programs for the University's undergraduate and postgraduate students since 2000, highlighting future trends in information literacy. The paper also refers to the skill requirements that will be required to enable librarians to support changes in content delivery of programs.

Graduate attributes

Since the publication of the University's policy document, *Attributes of the Melbourne Graduate*, (2003), librarians have redesigned information literacy programs to ensure that our students, undergraduate and postgraduate, develop knowledge and skills needed to find, evaluate, create, manipulate, share, present, use and manage scholarly information effectively. Embedding principles of academic honesty in these programs, students are also encouraged to have a strong sense of intellectual integrity and the ethics of scholarship

Long featured in many parts of the curriculum, library programs have evolved in response to learning, teaching, research and publishing needs. Uptake in library programs has spread throughout the disciplines as academics grapple with increasingly complex information environments and diverse publishing options. At postgraduate level, this is reflected in the continuing growth of the Library's workshops within the **UpSkills program** of the Melbourne School of Graduate Research. At undergraduate level, the information literacy program is extremely active although it has proved to be increasingly difficult to sustain the level of staff support to provide face-to-face workshops.

As the Melbourne Model gives our students increased opportunities to study overseas and to become active global citizens, being information literate will be fundamental to our graduates engaging in the major global issues – food, energy and environment security. Library programs will play a major role in supporting scholars working in an increasingly open access environment, collaborating across disciplines and across international boundaries.

Information literacy programs for postgraduates

The Library's information literacy programs for postgraduates were developed with the aim of supporting the University's policy document on graduate attributes. Librarians have designed, created and delivered coordinated information literacy programs through faculties and through the Melbourne School of Graduate Research (SGR) UpSkills program. This program has expanded markedly. In 1998 postgraduate students were offered 21 sessions which covered internet searching, effective search strategies and EndNote. The Library contributions accounted for ten per cent of the program. Ten years on, in 2007, the program has grown to over 200 sessions. Staff from Information Services contribute to over 55% of the SGR program. Analysis of the type of content offered demonstrates some clear trends and offers insight into future requirements. For example, the number of sessions devoted to bibliographic software support indicates the continuing need to store, manage, search, retrieve and link to citation data in order to produce research articles.

Since 1999 over 19,000 postgraduate students have attended information skills classes (Table 1).

**Table 1: School of Graduate Studies Support Skills Programs
Enrolments for 1999-2007**

Program	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Information skills classes*	2,119	2,149	2,286	2,263	2,450	2,986	1,304	2,050	2,337



Note: * Includes Research Consultant's individual consultations, modules, lectures and workshops outside UpSkills Program seminars

Information literacy programs for undergraduates

In 2000 library staff were organised into subject teams to focus on the delivery of information programs to both undergraduates and postgraduates. The structure aligned with the University's teaching and learning strategies and the aim was to embed information literacy programs into the curricula. Librarians partnered with academics. Examples of such faculty and school partnerships were: Nursing, Centre for Adolescent Health, Architecture Building and Planning, Education and Engineering.

These partnerships are critical to the success of information literacy programs as is indicated by Brown and Krumholz (2002) where they describe the merits of integrating information skills into the curriculum and underline the importance of the partnership between the librarian and the academic community. In these partnerships, both librarians and academics work together to improve the information seeking skills of students. Ivey (2003) adds an important dimension into the discussion about the academic/ librarian dynamic. The author conducted interviews with academics and librarians which revealed that the basis for healthy working partnerships rests on four key elements: shared common goals, commitment, enthusiasm and innovation (Ivey, 2003, p.102).

The new structure currently being implemented as part of the Library of the Future vision establishes discipline-based Libraries that directly reflect the needs of the Melbourne Model. The intention is that Librarians staffing these precinct libraries will be subject specialists who will be able to develop close liaison relationships with Faculty. This structure will facilitate the development of new partnerships with academic staff so that appropriate and targeted information literacy programs can be delivered to students. Building these partnerships in the new library model is a task for the next three years. Keeping information literacy programs relevant is an ongoing endeavour.

Online trends in information literacy

The internet has utterly transformed aspects of scholarly communication, and consequently has transformed the very nature of information literacy itself. Necessarily it has also transformed the way in which information literacy programs are delivered. Since 2000, the University Library has recognised the need for providing more information literacy programs in a variety of online formats. This strong trend will continue throughout the next 10 years, and librarians will continue to exploit available technologies to support these programs.

McLaurin-Smith, Ellis and Robertson (2005) stated "Despite being a campus based institution there is strong commitment and funding support for development of state-of-the-art multimedia educational experiences that complement face-to-face teaching and allow anytime anywhere access to course and instructional materials." Their conference paper reviews three products that were produced by librarians in collaboration with academic staff, courseware development experts and learning skills professionals:

- **Legal Information Skills Tutorial (LIST) and Advanced Legal Information Skills (ALIS)**
- **ArtSmart**
- **Post Graduate Essentials** (Table 2).

These products and others that teach Information Literacy skills and knowledge to university students in an online environment resolve several problems, including:

- reaching large cohorts of students and minimizing the time-consuming and resource intensive nature of delivering many repeats of the same class;
- a diverse student population with different learning styles and requirements;



- design with features that enabled customisation for different subjects where the same base product could be customised by lecturers to suit their particular subject (the model adopted in **ArtSmart**);
- built in 'chat' for students to exchange ideas and learn collaboratively, as in a traditional tutorial on campus (**Post Graduate Essentials**).

Table 2: PhD students enrolled in *Postgraduate Essentials*, as percentage of total enrolment in the online program for the years 2005-2007

Faculty	PhD candidates	%
Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences	234	32.5
Arts	165	22.9
Science	86	11.9
Education	54	7.5
Engineering	54	7.5
Architecture, Building and Planning	36	5.0
Land and Food Resources	28	3.9
Economics and Commerce	17	2.4
Victorian College of the Arts (VCA)	16	2.2
Veterinary Science	9	1.3
School of Graduate Studies	6	0.8
Law	5	0.7
Music	5	0.7
Melbourne Business School (MBS)	3	0.4
TOTAL	718	

One of the issues attached to the development of online products is the need for constant updating and maintenance. In the past this has been patchy, depending upon continuity of staffing and technical expertise from multimedia technologists. This has meant that some products have been more resilient than others. For example, ArtsSmart has not been integrated for the LMS platform although there may be some plans to do so. The development of tools such as the LMS means that creating and maintaining online learning materials is now much simpler so this may not be such an issue. However, if librarians are to create quality online resources, then staff will need to be dedicated to this task.

Melbourne Model and Information Literacy

The University has an obligation to offer all students the opportunity to develop their information literacy. Yet one of the major challenges faced by information literacy educators in the past has been our inability to reach all students while still providing programs that are contextualised and relevant to a course of study. The introduction of the Melbourne Model undergraduate degrees together with developments in educational technologies (particularly the LMS and the Student Portal) will solve some of the problems that have been endemic in embedding information literacy within the curriculum. The LMS now has a minimum subject presence for all undergraduate subjects and this offers the mechanism for distributing information materials to students that can be tailored to their disciplinary needs. As a starting point, one of the Library's primary objectives for the next three years is to develop and refine suites of quality online resources within foundation and breadth subjects. These will be delivered through the LMS and will include a full range of available media formats.

Progress has already been made in 2008. For example, this year the new generation, multi-disciplinary degree, the Bachelor of Environments was introduced as part of the Melbourne Model. Combining disciplines of the built and natural environments, students are offered a broad



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range of subjects, delivered by several faculties. They will use print, electronic, and other formats located in five different libraries on campus and three off campus. To draw together library services for these students and support engagement online, a Bachelor of Environments Libraries Communities module is in development for the LMS.

Similar initiatives under development include a Victorian College of the Arts Library Community Page with discipline-specific and cross-disciplinary online resources and tutorials in the visual and performing arts. With little electronic teaching presence prior to the integration of the VCA into the University of Melbourne in 2007, this initiative has been successfully linked and promoted by a number of academic staff through the LMS, including for the VCA breadth subject "Poetics of the Body". Another community site that is under development in 2008 is the ArtSmart community page that will serve the Bachelor of Arts

These trends confirm one of "The Top Ten Assumptions for the Future of Academic Libraries and Librarians" as stated in Association of College and Research Libraries *Environmental Scan 2007* that "Online learning will continue to expand as an option for students and faculty – both on campus and off – and libraries will gear resources and services for delivery to a distributed academic community."

Sustainability

Despite our best efforts, it has been difficult for the University Library to sustain an information literacy program that meets the growing needs of the University community. Over the last three years, the number of librarians engaged in information literacy has reduced and accordingly our ability to provide services has declined. Between 2006 and 2007, the number of classes offered decreased from 1076 to 916. The number of participants in information literacy classes has declined from a peak of 20,000 in 2003 to 10,000 in 2006. Of course, 10,000 is not an inconsequential number, but it does represent a significant decline. For this reason, over the next 10 years, the library will dedicate greater resources to developing online materials that can be delivered to larger cohorts. However, there is still a significant demand for face-to-face presentations and in a campus-based University this should remain an option for the University community. In order to provide quality programs in the virtual or physical space, the Library needs sufficient numbers of professional librarians who have the appropriate suite of skills to promote the important academic function of information literacy.

Skills for the profession: current and future

Librarians have adapted and extended their skills to respond to new technologies and scholars changing needs and expectations and this is a continuing process. Librarians will continue to need traditional professional competencies such as subject expertise and information literacy instruction skills while developing and extending their knowledge and skills to support the increasing use of technology by academics, researchers and students to find, access, create and manage scholarly information (Fisher, Hallam, & Partridge). In future the abilities to be adaptable, flexible, and innovative are likely to be critical attributes for information professionals (Australian Library and Information Association, 2005).

It is widely accepted that change, most significantly in the past 15 years, is the norm for information professionals. Information and communication technologies have largely been the driver for this change (McCarthy, 2005). Such change is likely to continue, as noted by Allen (2005, p. 293) information professionals for the 21st century will require a "diversity of skills and technological proficiency". This supports one of the ten assumptions in the Association of College & Research Libraries *Environmental Scan 2007*, namely, that "the skill set for librarians will continue to evolve in response to the changing needs and expectations of the populations they serve, and the professional background of library staff will become increasingly diverse in support of expanded service programs and administrative needs" (ACRL Research Committee, 2008 p. 4,9). This assumption is appropriate to apply to our own library professionals and needs to be



taken into consideration in relation to future staff development opportunities and recruitment strategies.

In summary

Librarians of the future:

- will continue to build on traditional professional competencies (subject expertise and information literacy instruction skills);
- will continue to develop and extend knowledge and skills in electronic information delivery and educational technology;
- act as guides and supporters for academics/researchers and students in the management of scholarly information;
- be adaptable, flexible, and innovative.



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Document Control

Title	Information Literacy paper for Information Futures Commission
Short Title	IL paper for IFC
Project Ref	
Author	Georgina Binns ,Mary Coghlan, Jenny Ellis, Lynne Horwood, Peta Humphreys, Sabina Robertson, Trish Wilson, Debra Vickers
Status	Working
Version	V2.1
Version Date	07/05/08
Origination Date	21/04/08
Change History	* BW, SJ, JE, TW