



Start me up! Equity & engagement using e-learning

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In 2010 Unitec launched an institution-wide eLearning strategy as part of a reconceptualised approach to teaching and learning. In response the library embarked on two action research projects investigating the effectiveness of library services.

One project assessed the efficacy of online information literacy tutorials. Embedding online information literacy into Learning Systems such as Moodle are vital in the increasingly blended learning tertiary environment ([Adolphus, 2009](#)) ([Bongey, Cizadlo, & Kalnbach, 2006](#)). Considerable time and expertise is going into the development of these tutorials, so we want to ensure optimum use is made of them. What we produce must have value for students with differing learning styles and motivation ([Berk, Olsen, Atkinson, & Comerford, 2007](#)).

This action research project involved two classes of Diploma in Business students doing a business communications course watched a locally produced online video tutorial showing how to use an academic business journal database. These are typically “web generation” students: unfamiliar with academic texts and the reasons for their use ([Godwin, 2009](#)). They are often new to academic study and may not have completed secondary schooling, or there has been a gap since studying. The video demonstrated how to search for and save articles relevant to their current assignment. Subsequent to that, students answered a series of questions, using CPS ‘clicker’ software about how they would prefer to access and use the video tutorial, their comprehension of it, the language used, its technical quality and its relevance to their needs. Other studies have shown that these factors influence students’ opinions and use ([Jowitt, 2008](#)). In response to their answers, we modified the tutorial and for the implementation phase of the project we showed the new tutorial to the next cohort of business students and questioned them.

The other project examined distance students' engagement with library services and resources to determine potential barriers to equity of access. Previously, library services to distance students have been minimal. However, the growth of this section of our client base has increased and we want to meet their needs. Informed by the results of a survey, an intervention incorporating eLearning technology was introduced. The group was re-surveyed and individual interviews were conducted to obtain verbatim commentary about the efficacy of the intervention for increased engagement.

Our poster will show the results of the action research projects, issues we faced and our future plans.

Keywords: e-learning, distance students, information literacy, engagement, equity

Discussion

Student engagement with online library services and tutorials is most effective when there is collaboration with teaching staff and students. It is important that lecturers are involved so that library staff can develop resources that are tailored to the needs of particular courses or assessments. Information resources and tutorials are most effective when used at point-of-need ([Kimok & Heller-Ross, 2008](#)). This way lecturers can encourage and demonstrate to their students how and when to use the online tutorial resources.

Students need to be involved in the creation of the tools so that the style, wording, language, access point, speed and length of resources are appropriate to their needs. It also highlights to students the purpose and value of resources and allows library staff to discover what is needed or if there are any gaps.

This has been a small but valuable project, allowing us to fine-tune a particular resource, more importantly to discover for ourselves that targeted and embedded resources are, as we expected, the best way to go. It has also identified some more effective methods of teaching information literacy in the classroom and sown the seeds for greater collaboration with the teaching staff.

Project two established the engagement of distance students in a small Not-for-profit paper with the library services and resources. Survey results indicated the depth of engagement with library services and resources was non-existent which was disturbing given the prevalence of literature indicating the importance of these to distance students ([Ismail, 2010](#)).

Using eLearning technology we sought to increase the engagement of the students with library services and resources. As with the previous project, targeted embedded services and resources in the classroom, both physically and online were the most effective ([Bancroft & Lowe, 2006](#); [Bower & Mee, 2010](#)). This has implications for courses that are populated by distance students. Creating relationships with students is key to reaching out to distance learners ([Gall, 2010](#)) and this was particularly important for this class. As with other studies, technology difficulties created barriers for many in this cohort of students ([Lee, 2008](#)).

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Please cite as: Skilton, F. & Dugmore, P. (2011). Start me up! Equity & engagement using e-learning. In G. Williams, P. Statham, N. Brown & B. Cleland (Eds.), *Changing Demands, Changing Directions. Proceedings ascilite Hobart 2011*. (pp.1147-1150). <https://doi.org/10.14742/apubs.2011.1869>

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