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**INFORMATION LITERACY - COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
AND THE POTCHEFSTROOM UNIVERSITY FOR CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION**

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Over the last decade, the university of Pretoria has changed in terms of its student profile and policies. From having been a "Whites only " institution, with tuition in Afrikaans, it is now a multiracial, (with a significant proportion of the students being black) multicultural institution where most courses are offered in English **and** Afrikaans. The changing profile of the student body has resulted in a number of vital changes in attitude and approach, as well a growing understanding that there are a number of issues that need to be addressed to enable the students to benefit fully from their university education. One of the issues that is addressed is that of information literacy.

Another factor that has influenced the change that occurred was that the students from disadvantaged backgrounds very often had had little or no exposure to books, let alone libraries. Combined with poor basic education and the fact that most study in English and not their mother tongue, these students face enormous obstacles. These same students are further disadvantaged in that the schools they attended have very few computer facilities and many do not even have electricity. They are faced with the enormous task of catching-up. This places additional pressure on the students, who are generally very stressed. Many have enormous logistical problems of getting to and from the university every day, others have extremely unreliable sources of funding and many are on budgets so tight that any unforeseen expenses cripple them. They also do not have study facilities at home, as many share sleeping and living arrangements with many other people, very often not members of their own families.

Nonetheless, the University has recognised that all its graduates should be computer literate and that information literacy skills are vital and to this end have embarked on a formal programme called Computer and Information Literacy (CIL).

Previously there have been various initiatives by the Academic Information Service (Library) at the University of Pretoria, to promote information literacy, but none which addressed the issue on a university-wide basis. Most attempts were ad-hoc, and driven by the librarians for specific disciplines, usually on the request of the academics concerned., the consequence being that the students' exposure was very largely dependent on the enthusiasm of the academics and the librarians concerned. The main problem with implementing a campus-wide information literacy programme was logistical. There are 26000 students at the university, 19000 of whom are undergraduates. The Library cannot be expected to teach such a course to that many students, nor could the Department of Information Science be expected to cope.

In 1998, with the recognition of the growing need for computer literacy, a decision was taken by the University of Pretoria to implement a campus-wide information literacy programme. Damelin Computer School was approached by the University to assist in the teaching of computer skills to undergraduate students. They were approached as they specialise in computer literacy, and therefore were in a better position to teach the great numbers of undergraduates who require such training, and it was decided to include information literacy programme in the curriculum that Damelin Computer School would teach.

Damelin Computer School is a private organisation that teaches basic computer skills. It was decided to use their services as the level of tuition required for the computer courses did not justify the use of university academics.

Three computer skills courses were developed, the first being an introduction to computers, the second dealing with word processing using MS Word and the covering the database and spread sheet software of Microsoft Excel and Access. At the time it was decided that an information literacy component should also be introduced, and is now offered as the fourth component of the Damelin courses.

There was customised course material available for the first three courses, which the University of Pretoria got permission to use, but for the Information Literacy, (CIL 174) no course material had been developed.

The Department of Information Science was given the task of producing the material. A collaborative effort was implemented, with the Departments of Information Science, Informatics and Computer Science as well as the Academic Information Service being involved in the development of the course.

The brief was that it would be a 12 hour course (six two-hour sessions to be taken over six weeks) and which would be taught by the Damelin Computer School trainers during the fourth quarter. The course was to be more than a user education course that would restrict them to being able to use the Academic Information Service and not other libraries or databases. It was to be a mainly practical course, but with a theory component so that the skills that the students acquired would be well grounded, and thus transferable.

The information literacy definition that was used was that of the American Library Association Presidential Committee on Information Literacy, 1989 which is as follows:

'To be information literate, a person must be able to recognise when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate and use effectively the information needed. Ultimately information literate people are those who have learned how to learn. They know how to learn because they know how knowledge is organised, how to find information, and how to use information in such a way that others can learn from them. They are people prepared for lifelong learning because they can always find the information needed for any task or decision at hand'.

The difficulty comes in including an evaluation component idea was also that the students would be taught not only to retrieve information, but

also to evaluate it, so an evaluation component was included in the course. The ideal here would be to get the academics involved, so that discipline-specific material evaluation can be included. To this end there is a concerted campaign to ensure that information literacy becomes an "add-in" and not an "add-on" in all teaching departments.

The course is aimed at undergraduate students who complete the unit in either their first or second year and as such the coverage of material is not done in great depth but rather is generic, with the option of offering more specialised courses later. Also as there are students from many different disciplines doing the course, the material has to be generic, but with subject specific databases being introduced once the basic information skill have been mastered.

The course material is presented in a book that the students have to purchase. They attend lectures where the theory and the practical material is covered. To this end, all students are introduced to information retrieval on the AIS catalogue UpexPlore which is an Innopac product, and the Dialog version of ERIC, where they use the command language to retrieve their information, as well as various SilverPlatter products such as Social Sciences Index, UMI (ABI/Inform) and JutaStat for South African legal information. The students are all trained on UPexPlore and ERIC and then may select the databases that are appropriate for their own disciplines.

The course consists of 6 sections:

Section A	Information
Section B	Finding Information
Section C	Computerised Databases
Section D	Search Strategies
Section E	Internet
Section F	Evaluation
Section G	Practical Database Searching

Evaluation

As there are in the region of 1900 students registered for the course annually, it was decided that evaluation should be electronic. The theory component is covered by multiple choice, matching concepts and definitions and true/false questions, all of which should require more than simple guesswork. The workstations can be configured so that the student has to conduct a search before the items for selection are displayed, thus ensuring that they have at least mastered some information retrieval skills.

The CIL course had been made compulsory for many courses but students who are already computer literate may write an exemption examination so that their time may be spent more productively. and more attention can be paid to those students who really need assistance.

Internet access

A cause for concern has been the problem of Internet access. The students are required to learn to use the Internet effectively, but Damelin could not get their Internet connection to support all the computers in the school. This meant that the students had demonstrations and no hands-on Internet searching. This is a matter that will need to be addressed before the next course is offered.

Evaluation of retrieved material

Having completed one term, a number of problems have arisen, which has resulted in the complete reformulation of the course material using the Big6 as a framework. This arose out of the collaboration with the PU for CHO. The librarian responsible for user education there has developed training material and a number of computer assisted instruction packages that are designed to reinforce skills. There was a two-day workshop in which the material was merged, then re-evaluated and re-formulated in accordance with the Big6. The PU for CHO has a similar problem in terms of their changing students body, and were very happy to co-operate with the University of Pretoria and to combine expertise rather than to "go it alone". The existing course material will be adapted to meet the requirements of both institutions with institution specific material as well. A computer assisted instruction package to supplement the course material will be developed and the course will be offered in the second semester.

The main headings of the Big6™ are:

- Task Definition
- Information Seeking Strategies
- Location and Access
- Use of Information
- Synthesis
- Evaluation

Most of the course will be focussed (for the time being) on units 1-3, because until we get the teaching staff involved in the courses, we are not in a position to cover units 4, 5 and 6 in anything approximating the depth that we would like.

Feedback

There has been some feedback from the students who have indicated that this course material is very useful. One student said "The more I use it the more valuable it is."

Having taught information retrieval to second year information science students who have completed the CIL courses, but more significantly CIL 174, the progress is obvious. The students come in with more of an idea of what information retrieval is about and how to use information effectively, which makes the Information retrieval course much more accessible.

Trainers

The trainers are Damelin employees, who teach the computer skills courses and the Microsoft applications. They were given a weeks training in the CIL 174 course material, which with hindsight was probably not enough. We envisage using trainers with a background in LIS in future, in order to enhance the quality of the training.

Conclusion

Owing to the time constraints this course cannot be a detailed course, but it does provide an introduction to the topic and the hope is that the students will follow up with more subject related searching, as

their course work requires it. Remembering that becoming information literate is a process and not an event and bearing in mind that the skills are aimed a lifelong learning; the students are only given a glimpse of the possibilities.

References

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