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INCREASING LIBRARY VALUE FOR USERS BY REGISTERING A SHORT COURSE IN INFORMATION LITERACY

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Abstract:

Academic libraries increasingly need to add value to their universities and their strategic goals. Providing discovery tools and access to information is a key function that libraries are steering, but further to that is the importance of helping users find and make sense of information in an information overloaded society. Users are often unaware of what libraries offer in terms of information sources and tools, where to access it and how to use it. Therefore, information literacy teaching and all its facets is one of the core functions of a library ensuring that users can use the discovery tools and navigate the access to information. The Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) Council approved an information literacy policy in 2009. The CPUT policy states that all programmes must integrate information literacy within the curriculum. One of the ways the library has assisted faculties with this was to register a short course called Certificate of Information Literacy (CIL) which was offered in this format for the first time in 2013. The short course consists of five modules, which are: developing a searching strategy to access relevant information; information sources and tools to access peer-reviewed sources; evaluating of information; legal use of information and bibliographic referencing. Students are given many practical hands-on exercises during class time and have to pass a summative online assessment via a Learning Management System (LMS), in this case Blackboard, to receive the certificate. This paper will discuss the process that was followed, strategic partnerships that were formed, the administrative framework that had to be put in place, the curriculum, assessment instrument and implementation. It will highlight some challenges as well as comparing Information Literacy teaching statistics of 2013-2014 with previous years before the introduction of the short course. Areas for further research and strategies will also be discussed.

Keywords: *information literacy, certificate, short course, Cape Peninsula University of Technology*

Introduction and background

Academic libraries increasingly need to add value to their universities and their strategic goals. Providing discovery tools and access to information is a key function that libraries are steering, but further to that is the importance of helping users to find and make sense of information in an information overloaded society. Users are often unaware of what libraries offer in terms of information sources and tools, where to access it and how to use it. Therefore, information literacy (IL) teaching and all its facets is one of the core functions of a library ensuring that users can use the discovery tools and navigate access to information. The Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) Council approved an information literacy policy in 2009 (Cape Peninsula University of Technology, 2009). Hulett (2013, p. 160) also expresses the importance of having a policy to build upon. The CPUT policy states that all academic programmes must integrate information literacy within the curriculum. One of the ways the library has assisted faculties with this was to register a short course called Certificate of Information Literacy which and was offered in this format for the first time in 2013.

Information Literacy Certificate

The Certificate of Information Literacy (CIL) short course is available to all CPUT students and is arranged between the lecturer of the group and the librarian for that faculty. It is therefore offered to groups and not on an individual basis. This certificate is mostly offered to first year and Extended Curriculum Programme (ECP) students. The ECP is where first year subjects are offered over two years to provide extra support to students who need more time to complete a qualification ("Extended curriculum," 2015). For second, third year and fourth year students refresher courses are provided. The Certificate is available to fourth year students who had not done the certificate previously. The development of an Advanced Information Literacy Certificate is in process and it is planned for implementation to Masters and Doctoral students from 2016.

Curriculum:

The Certificate curriculum consists of five modules that are taught over a five week period, see table 1:

Modules	Description
Module 1: Searching strategy	Topic analysis, choosing appropriate keywords, drawing a mind map, use of Boolean operators, truncation, phrase searching and forming search strings
Module 2: Information sources and tools	Using information finding tools and systems such as the catalogue, databases, internet and Dewey Decimal Classification system. Using information sources such as books, journal articles, newspapers, dictionaries and more in printed and electronic format.
Module 3: Evaluating information	Facts vs opinion, authority, publishing body, currency, intended audience, popular vs academic, primary vs secondary sources and critical reading.
Module 4: Copyright and Plagiarism	Using information in a legal and ethical manner by applying referencing techniques to eliminate plagiarism. Refer to the Copyright Act No. 98 of 1978 and the CPUT Plagiarism policy.
Module 5: Bibliographic Referencing	Referencing styles and in-text referencing.

Table 1: CIL curriculum

The minimum time required for the Certificate is 45 minutes per module, although most librarians and lecturers allocate one and a half hours per module. Librarians customize the course according to subject area and time allocation. In some cases there is a team-teaching approach between the lecturer and the librarian with them sharing the offering of the modules. It is suggested that a subject-specific essay assignment is given to the students before starting with the Certificate so that the teaching approach is focused around the topic of the assignment throughout all the modules. This is the most valuable approach because the experience is real for the students as they apply the skills they learn

directly to their essay assignment with the help of the librarian. It is important that this subject-specific essay assignment is marked with a rubric that includes information literacy to which a high weighting is allocated. In a study currently in process by the author, such a rubric includes a 30% weighting for IL. Rubrics can be defined as “descriptive scoring schemes” (Moskal & Leydens, 2000). Students will not necessarily apply their IL skills if they are not being allocated marks for it and if the IL weighting is low. They are often willing to lose those marks rather than putting in the required time and effort.

Assessment:

The assessment is a multiple-choice test made available to students via the Learning Management System (LMS), in this case Blackboard. The test consists of 100 questions, covering the content of the 5 modules. Students received a randomly selected 50 questions to answer. The time given for the test was one and a half hours. During 2014 a research study was done on the assessment data of 2013 to determine the validity and reliability of the test. The first part of the research study was to do item analysis on the test data of students who completed the test during 2013 (Lockhart, 2014). This highlighted weaknesses and problematic areas in the test. Based on the results, problem areas were addressed and the test was improved. The new test was used from 2015. This also led to the time given to complete the test was reduced to one hour.

Administrative process:

A well thought-out administration process had to be developed to ensure effective implementation. Students have to complete a registration form which is submitted to the Training Librarian. During the training intervention, the students have to sign an attendance register for every module attended. The attendance registers are sent to the Quality Assurance (QA) Librarian for recording and checking. The librarians also upload the information and statistics of the attendance record to the library’s statistical database (Lockhart & Becker, 2014). Once the assessment has been completed, the librarians forward the results (marks) to the Training Librarian. A standard for the submitting of results has been introduced from 2015 to improve the process. This includes the naming of files, preparing the EXCEL spreadsheet with a correct heading that includes the course name and adding a column for percentages, as the downloaded report indicates the mark out of fifty. The Training Librarian submits these result sheets to the Centre for Professional and Personal Development (CPPD) at CPUT who upload the marks and issue certificates to students who passed with fifty percent or higher. Once the certificates have been printed and signed, the Training Librarian collects and distributes these to the librarians. The librarians arrange delivery to the lecturers involved and often informal hand-over ceremonies are arranged in the classes. See figure 1 for the outline of the administrative process:

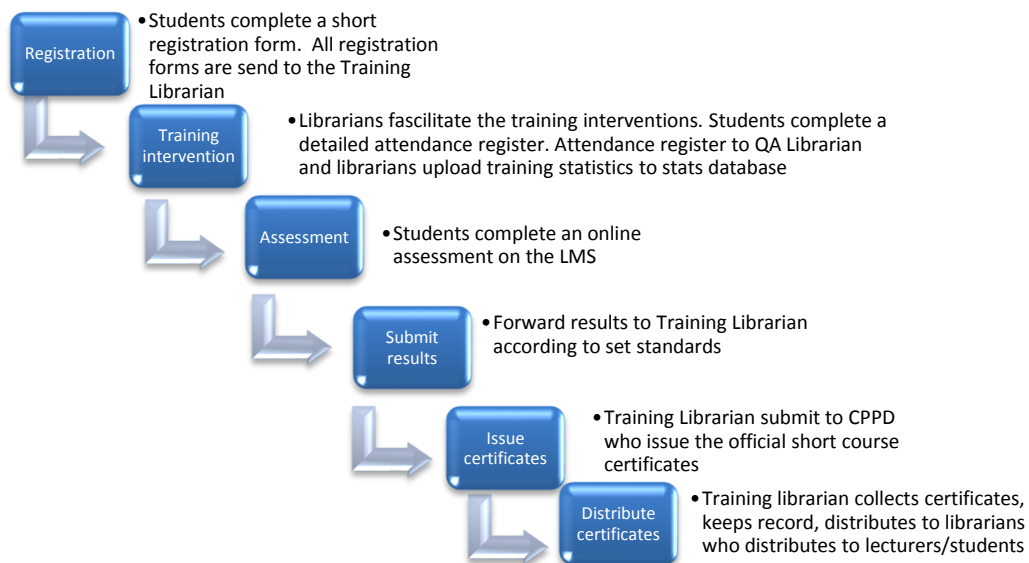


Figure 1: Administrative process

Statistics

The IL policy was approved in June of 2009 and the statistics in Table 2 indicate the total number of students trained and sessions per year. After the approval of the policy an awareness campaign had to be initiated. The policy also states that an Information Literacy Committee (ILC) be created, with the main role of monitoring the implementation of the policy in the faculties and curriculum. The policy has made a significant impact that can be seen since the 2011 statistics. When the CIL was introduced in 2013, it further increased the training statistics and the training offered by librarians became more formalised.

Total number of students and sessions per year											
2009		2010		2011		2012		2013		2014	
6673	361	6873	371	9577	436	12193	600	16206	935	18799	943

Table 2: IL statistics 2009 – 2014

Table 3 is a comparison between 2013 and 2014 with regards to the statistics for the IL Certificate.

Description	2014	2013
No of student registrations for the certificate	3079	2756
No of courses/groups registered	63	64
No of students completing test	2707 (88%)	1977 (71%)
Average % for test	66%	66%
Nr of students who failed	191 (7%)	91 (5%)

Table 3: IL certificate - 2013 - 2014

Challenges

Rolling-out a short course certificate to students university-wide is a challenge in itself. Many role-players are involved and it requires a team-effort. The uptake from the lecturers and faculties in 2013 when the certificate was offered for the first time, was significant and has grown even further during 2014. One of the challenges experienced was the increased teaching load for librarians. This is closely monitored by looking at the statistics per librarian and providing extra resources when and where required. In a paper by Lockhart & Becker (2014) they describe the different types of statistics being recorded for IL as well as how it is used for planning purposes. Availability of venues and scheduling of sessions go hand-in-hand and the creating of on-line booking calendars assisted with this challenge, although in many cases the venues in the faculties were also being used due to the increased demand on library venues. Teaching large classes is always challenging and classes had to be divided into a number of manageable groups, which lead to increased teaching loads and much repetition, for example explaining concepts and demonstrating catalogue and database searches to multiple groups in a course. Other ways of addressing this is to incorporate emerging technologies such as screencasts and podcasts into teaching. More librarians are incorporating these technologies in their teaching. Winterbottom (2007, p. 8) mentions that screen casting should not be used to replace fact-to-face teaching, but to enhance it. It is important to find a balance between implementing a quality programme and addressing the challenges in an effective manner.

Teaching skills for librarians

Continuous staff training and development is important to ensure that library staff is equipped with the necessary skills to perform their jobs effectively as well as to keep up to date with the latest trends. Over many years the library has invested much time and funding to improve the teaching skills of librarians involved with teaching information literacy skills to users (Lockhart & Majal, 2012, p. 130).

The importance of quality teaching is essential and is one of the underlying factors in ensuring the implementation of a quality course. Regular information sessions are also taking place to ensure that all librarians, especially newly appointed librarians, have the correct information, support and resources for teaching the CIL. All the relevant documentation is available to the group of librarians teaching IL on the

LMS. The documentation includes the curriculum per module, lesson plans, registration form, attendance registers or any other relevant information. In this group librarians are encouraged to share relevant YouTube clips, screencasts or any other resources that could add value to the teaching of the CIL.

A peer-observation system has also been introduced where librarians receive feedback from peers to further develop their teaching skills.

Conclusion

Having an institutional IL policy is key, but only the start. There needs to be a body that oversees the implementation of the policy, create awareness and unpack the meaning of the policy. CPUT Libraries wanted to support faculties with the teaching of IL skills to students and although this has been the case for many years, the registration of the CIL has formalised the teaching. This has also lead to a standard summative assessment, over and above the formative assessments that librarians use during their teaching. It is important to note that the CIL is to help students and give them a basic understanding of how to do their research and introduce them to the various library resources and tools, but further to that is that the academic programme needs to continuously incorporate and embed IL into the curriculum, and continue to test the IL skills of students. This can be done by incorporating heavy weightings for IL in essay assignment rubrics. The author is currently doing a research study to measure the application of the IL skills of students who completed the CIL. These students were given a subject-specific essay assignment.

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