

Monash University Library & E-Learning: Shaping the Future

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INTRODUCTION

Monash University Library has made significant and purposeful contributions to shaping the University's e-learning landscape over several years, through the identification, development and implementation of innovative services and resources. These include acquiring and providing access to a growing collection of electronic resources, such as e-books, e-journals and databases. Increased use of this material over a number of years has been demonstrated. The Library also provides online reading lists, past exams and podcasts of recorded lectures as Lectures Online. Enabling technologies used in these services are changing from static, one dimensional tools, to engaging and interactive tools to enhance the student experience. A new, user focused resource discovery layer is being implemented to make it easier for library users to find resources. This provides a rare opportunity to transform the staff and student information discovery experience. Library users can opt in to the SMS notifier service for reminders about their loan due dates, overdue items, booked classes, etc. Included in the Library's growing range of online resources and services are the ask.monash FAQs and email help, online chat, a tablet PC lending trial, and publishing and research data management initiatives across the University.

More recently, the Library is transforming its e-learning capabilities through the appointment of an E-Learning Coordinator. This position works with the Librarians, Learning Skills Advisers and other professional staff to build e-learning capabilities, including using a variety of accessible technologies in pedagogically sound ways [1]. The Library has established coordination roles in a range of areas including information research skills, learning skills and e-learning. These staff work together and with co-ordinators in other areas, such as research data management and lending services, and with the Library's branch managers and disciplinary based faculty team leaders, to drive development and implementation of initiatives that enhance the University's education strategic directions [2].

This presentation will provide an overview of the Library's role in shaping future e-learning directions through its e-learning framework, with a few practical examples of e-learning projects.

BACKGROUND

Monash University Library works with students and faculties to develop students' information research and learning skills, to achieve the Monash Graduate Attributes [3]. Doing this effectively and sustainably is challenging within a large and complex Group of Eight university. There are eight libraries in Victoria, plus two overseas campus libraries, and around 59,000 students, studying in many subject areas, on and off campus in a mix of full and part-time. The Library has focused on increasing its use of technology to help meet the challenges.

A framework has been developed to handle this complexity. The framework includes pedagogy as its cornerstone, while not forsaking practicality and logistical requirements. It needs to incorporate quality, evaluation, and professional development for staff including opportunities to use new technologies in teaching. The framework needs to incorporate e-learning products, and a targeted approach to exploring learning tools and environments so that staff can stay current with technological advances and innovative uses of technology in teaching and learning.

E-LEARNING FRAMEWORK

Reeves and Hedberg [4] maintain that "the concept of complexity is exceedingly relevant to evaluation within the context of instructional design." They argue that simplistic evaluation methods are often used in instructional design models yielding a poor success record because important decisions about design, implementation and maintenance can be overlooked. They contend that their *eclectic-mixed methods-pragmatic paradigm* is capable of "handling the complexity [...] of contemporary society and technology." Monash University Library has adopted this approach to guide its e-learning framework and its application.

The framework is flexible in order to accommodate varying learning approaches and different situations. It allows for multiple and mixed quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods, provides a collaborative design and quality assurance process that is formative with continuous improvement, and allows for design principles to be created from the documentation generated by each project. The Library's e-learning framework is grouped into the following four broad categories: (1) development, (2) capacity, (3) content and (4) exploration of tools and learning environments.

Within the first category, development, there are three targeted areas. 1. Blended e-learning content to complement face-to-face classes. For example, in an Engineering orientation program, Library staff created a suite of online interactive activities to be used in face to face classes. These activities provided online feedback and allowed the students to complete and redo the activities as necessary, during or after the class. 2. Standalone e-learning tutorials, to be used independently of any face to face program including by off campus students and those who do not attend the face-to-face equivalent classes. These are usually developed with an active learning approach. One example is the Library Arts Orientation tutorial [5]. 3. Online collaborative learning within the various learning management systems and collaboration tools used by the University, such as Blackboard, Moodle and Google Apps. The approach to learning design in these environments draws on social (constructivist) learning, as advocated by Vygotsky [6] and the Research Skills Development Framework [7]. An example of a project being initiated in this area is an extended online workshop on writing a literature review. Students will be guided by Librarians and Learning Skills Advisers, and will make use of Web 2.0 tools, such as discussions in Moodle and peer review opportunities afforded by Google Docs.

Due to the number and scale of existing and potential e-learning projects, the framework needs to provide means for developing staff capacity to create their own e-learning content, the second category. Technology enhanced teaching is encouraged at Monash. With varying levels of staff technological expertise, the framework includes mechanisms to support staff to design and develop e-learning content, through training, tools and standards, and consultation. The E-Learning Coordinator collaborates with Library staff to conduct workshops on a range of topics to facilitate staff initiated projects. Examples include: how to write a storyboard, how to use development software, such as Adobe Captivate, how to do mind mapping with software and so on. There is a wide range of e-learning templates and guidelines available in the learning and teaching objects repository (in Equella) and on the intranet to help staff create material. These templates define the layout and design of the media, while retaining flexibility for staff to apply their own creativity. Lastly, the E-Learning Coordinator works informally with individuals or small groups of staff to facilitate projects.

The framework's third category, content, is a means to identify Library e-learning initiatives and includes the following components: (1) an online tutorials page [8], (2) a public learning objects repository [9], (3) learning environments, such as Blackboard, Moodle, and Second Life, (4) a help function (e.g. simple online interactive clips to replace explaining complex journal database searches over the phone or via online chat), and (5) communications where e-learning promotes and informs staff and students about Library services.

The final part of the framework targets exploring software tools and learning environments. With so many new technologies being developed, it is difficult to stay current and not be overwhelmed with choice. There are associated concerns with having to change approach and recreate resources and materials to benefit from new technologies. The Library's approach incorporates the view that software can be used as a tool for thinking, in a similar way to Jonassen's concept of mind tools [10], to be used by students to study, or equally by staff to perform planning and other work activities. There are overlaps with other areas of the framework, but this part of the framework includes: (1) presentation tools/platforms (e.g. LibGuides, Moodle, etc.), (2) development tools (e.g. Adobe Captivate), (3) hosting/repository tools (e.g. Equella), (4) thinking and learning tools (e.g. Freemind), (5) teaching tools (e.g. LAN School), (6) learning environments (e.g. Moodle, Google Apps, Mahara), and (7) operational tools (e.g. KB Publisher, Google Sites).

INITIAL FINDINGS

Findings across such a broad area are complex, however we are able to provide an overview of these taken from evaluations undertaken across different projects.

Participant observation reveals that there are many challenges, including varying levels of staff technology expertise, competing professional interests and staff priorities that reduce time for e-learning projects. There are also concerns by some staff that there are too many steps involved in producing good e-learning products. There have also been some indicators that the framework is a useful tool that prevents haphazard development and use of e-learning. Many staff have the capability to create high quality e-learning interactions, which have been heavily used by students and staff. For example, the Geography LibGuide [11] has had over 6,500 views from March to October 2010. Staff further report that the use of templates and quality processes help them to complete projects more easily and that the e-learning content helps them in their teaching. Feedback from students through focus groups and surveys reveals a similar positive trend, with students valuing the visual appeal of the e-learning products, the active engagement they afford, the short and focused attention to the learning goals, and the authentic learning activities.

While more quantitative feedback is required for the Library to refine and develop its future directions in this area, it has found that Reeves and Hedberg's [4] approach provides more than simple click statistics and surveys which provide little useful information. The holistic approach embraced by the framework addresses environmental complexity and encourages viewing of the work from multiple perspectives, which is essential for constant improvement.

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