

THETA

The Higher Education Technology Agenda

A brave new world: libraries innovating to improve the student IT support experience at the University of Western Australia

A world-class student experience is more important than ever in the current Australian higher education environment. The potential deregulation of the academic sector, coupled with reductions in government funding and increasing course fees mean that students expect support that is fast, agile and client focussed. Internationally, the student experience is high on the agenda too, with improving student outcomes for information technology identified by Educause as the number one issue in its list of “Top 10 IT Issues” in 2013. This remains at the top of the list in 2014.

The authors of this paper will report on several major change initiatives undertaken at the University of Western Australia (UWA) between 2012 and 2014 to implement new and improved models for student information technology support. Leveraging the organisational integration of information technology and library services, student information technology support at UWA is delivered by library staff based in the six subject libraries. The changes have resulted in a more in-depth and improved level of student support and a consistent, equitable and efficient operating model. New services, such as student support in the development of digital literacy skills in using a range of technologies, are now being implemented.

The integration of student information technology support with traditional library services was an ambitious goal directly aligned with the UWA strategic aim of an enhanced student experience. The changes have had their challenges along the way but have provided many opportunities and improvements to student use of technology and student learning. Implementing the new model has required strong leadership, engagement and change management skills. As part of the new model many staffing changes have been made including re-shaping, re-organising, up-skilling and re-training. As a result the changes have

provided library staff with opportunities to develop new skills and access to career paths not usually associated with more traditional library roles.

The paper will describe the challenges and opportunities of the new student information technology support model through analysis of student and staff survey data and feedback. The paper will also explore and provide an overview of student information technology support models in Australian universities, benchmarking the UWA model in the context of the broader environment. The importance of librarians, information technologists, learning skills advisers, student bodies and educational developers working together to achieve positive outcomes for the student experience will be explored and emphasised. Finally the paper will reflect on lessons learnt and how student information technology support outcomes can be improved in the future.

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