Get the edge, get ahead: QUT Library's approach to learning support

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Abstract: *In 2010, the QUT Library has broadened its integrated literacies services to a broader learning support model. A number of initiatives have been launched to further enhance the Library's role in providing learning support to students. Driving these changes is an aspiration to move to a developmental model, rather than remedial model of learning support. The Library is striving to provide learning support in a proactive and positive manner, which emphasises that learning support is "for everyone" [not just "at risk" students], and is relevant to and complements the curriculum. It is, therefore, an essential element of their student life.*

The Queensland University of Technology (QUT) has identified competencies that every course supports students to achieve – these competencies are known as 'graduate capabilities'[1]. The graduate capabilities are:

- knowledge and skills pertinent to a particular discipline or professional area
- critical, creative and analytical thinking, and effective problem-solving
- effective communication in a variety of contexts and modes
- the capacity for life-long learning
- the ability to work independently and collaboratively
- social and ethical responsibility and an understanding of indigenous and international perspectives
- characteristics of self-reliance and leadership

QUT Library has had a strong information literacy program in place for some years and has been recognised for its achievements in the provision of learning support. As indicated above, one of QUT's graduate capabilities is the "capacity for lifelong learning" and specifically the skills to search and critically evaluate information from a variety of sources using effective strategies and appropriate technologies. The Information Literacy Framework & Syllabus[2], which was developed by the Library, articulates a strategic approach to information literacy within the University context and promotes the achievement of the competency of lifelong learning.

In 2008, the information literacy program was broadened to encompass academic skills, and was renamed "integrated literacies". Integrated literacies may be defined as the blending of academic literacy and information literacy in terms of learning and teaching purpose, process, products and outcomes. Peacock[3] provides a detailed report on the strategic partnership between the Library and Teaching and Learning Support Services (TALSS) which resulted in the implementation of the integrated literacies model. Initially, librarians [from the Library] and academic skills advisers [from TALSS] were involved in jointly implementing the program. The transfer of the academic skills advisers to the Library in 2009, however, enabled a more "integrated" program to emerge. One of the objectives in the Library's strategic plan is to "*Facilitate the development of informed and independent learners*", and the resulting initiative was the development and implementation of an Integrated Literacies Action Plan. A minor refurbishment program at one of the branch libraries resulted in an Integrated Helpdesk. This initiative saw the co-location of librarians, peer advisers and lending services staff at one desk. Helpdesk staff were provided with staff development opportunities for cross-skilling and skills development to enable them to assist students with study related enquiries.

On reflection, however, although the Library has implemented an integrated Helpdesk and an Integrated Literacies Action Plan – we are essentially continuing to deliver learning support by two professional groups. Academic skills advisers continued to deliver workshops

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[1] http://www.mopp.qut.edu.au/C/C_04_03.jsp, accessed on 8 May 2010 at 14:45
[2] http://www.library.qut.edu.au/services/teaching/infolit/framework.jsp#framework
[3] Peacock, J. (2008) Not yours, not mine… but ours: integrating learning skills for integrated learning. *Proceedings of the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) Biennial Conference: Dreaming 08*, 2-5 September, Alice Springs, Australia, 2008.

on academic literacy skills, and librarians continue to deliver information literacy workshops and tutorials on information literacy skills. In addition, face-to-face access to academic skills advisers was based on referral from a disability officer, personal counsellors and academic staff, librarians and to students who "self identify" their needs.

A new Library model emerges in 2010

In 2010, the Library is developing and implementing a new service model, known as its *Learning Support Model* which is achieving true integration in service planning and delivery. Driving these changes is an aspiration to move to a *developmental model*, rather than remedial model of learning support. The Library will be striving to provide learning support in a proactive and positive manner, which emphasises that learning support is "for everyone" [not just "at risk" students], and is relevant to and complements the curriculum. It is, therefore, an essential element of their student life.

A number of initiatives, to support the Learning Support Model, were introduced in early 2010, and others will be progressively introduced in 2010 and 2011. Of course, the model will continue to evolve based on continuous assessment of services and feedback from clients.

1. **Studywell**

    Studywell, an online learning portal provides access to a suite of learning resources for both information literacy and academic skills. It has been developed to meet the information and study skill needs of students, particularly first year undergraduates. Launched in Semester 1 2010, *Studywell* has already proven to be a very successful service – with very positive feedback received.

    > *THANK YOU SO MUCH! I am currently in my 4th year here, and I WISH there was something like this at the beginning of my course. You guys are amazing! Keep up the good work. :D* [client feedback received Thursday, April 29th 2:51am]

    Academic staff have also responded enthusiastically to the new resource, by integrating it into their teaching and learning strategies.

Home page of Studywell

    As an online resource, *Studywell* http://www.studywell.library.qut.edu.au/ is available 24/7, however, its value is in its use by library professionals in their workshops and tutorials. Following the sessions, students have full access to the presentations that were used – in their own time, and in their own space. Tools include PowerPoint presentations, handouts, links to web resources and multimedia resources.

Usability testing for *Studywell* is scheduled for June 2010, and outcomes of that testing will be considered in the further development and enhancement of the learning resource.

2. **Study Solutions**

The introduction of a one-on-one consultation service, known as *Study Solutions*, provides the opportunity for students to make appointments to discuss their learning needs. Whereas previously Academic Skills Advisers have focussed on assisting students identified as "at risk", this service is open to all students.

In the pilot phase, February – June 2010, each campus offers students 25 minute appointments with a library professional. Appointments are available between 11:00 and 15:00 and bookings are made online via the Library's event registration system, kickSTART, studySMART. The appointments take place in the foyer lounges of the libraries which reflects our aim to make our staff accessible, but also to demonstrate that "learning is for everyone".

The service is promoted as an opportunity for students improve their skills in study and research.   Students are invited to bring their assignment topics to enable targeted assistance. Initially, librarians and academic skills advisers are jointly providing the service. This has proven to be an effective way of cross skilling our two professional streams of staff, as well building stronger relationships within the teams.

Throughout the pilot, evaluation will be undertaken.   Planned changes for Semester 2 include: sessions offered each weekday for a longer span of hours, sessions offered evenings and weekends, and there will be single staffing [rather than librarians and academic skills advisers jointly involved in the consultation]. To facilitate the evaluation, a number of key processes have been put in place to ensure confidentiality of student enquiries. It is intended to follow up with students approximately 4-5 weeks following the appointment to ascertain if they thought the appointment "made a difference".
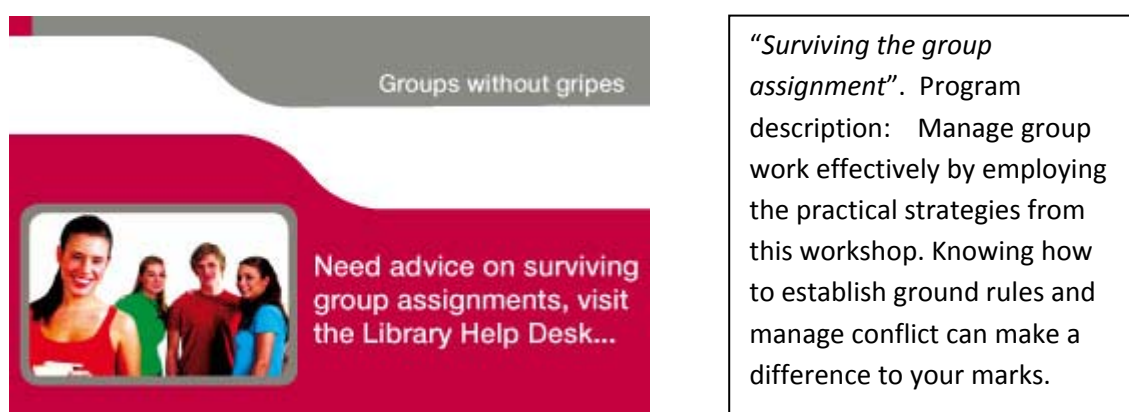
3. **Generic program**

   In 2009, the generic teaching program was structured using academic milestones as the framework for content and delivery. Each week focused specifically on a different academic process, e.g. "beginning your assignment", "surviving the group assignment". By aligning the workshops to the teaching program the Library is providing information and skills development at the time that is relevant to the student. In addition to the generic workshops, Liaison Librarians and Academic Skills Advisers also undertook a significant range of faculty-integrated teaching and learning activities. To support this initiative, an integrated program for cross skilling of professional staff has been provided. In total, over 34 000 students attended the Library's classes or workshops in 2009, of which 42% were undergraduates. Library staff collectively recorded over 800 hours of teaching across 1 400 teaching events.

   In 2010 the generic workshops have been "deconstructed" and "reconstructed" as a workshop program. These workshops will be delivered by both Librarians and Academic Skills Advisers.   To support this aim, we have continued our program of cross training the professional staff. Implementation of the *Study Solutions* [as outlined in point 2] supports the cross skilling.

   Groups without gripes

   Need advice on surviving group assignments, visit the Library Help Desk...

   "*Surviving the group assignment*". Program description: Manage group work effectively by employing the practical strategies from this workshop. Knowing how to establish ground rules and manage conflict can make a difference to your marks.

4. **Training and skills development**

   To ensure consistency in the delivery of Helpdesk Services, compulsory training for all frontline staff has been provided. In fact, the appointment of Peer Advisers, was conditional on their ability to attend the training sessions.

   Prior to the commencement of Semester 1 2010, all staff who are rostered on Helpdesks were required to attend 1.5 day Helpdesk Training Program. Day 1 focussed on general information and overview of new services. The half day component was delivered at each branch library and focussed on resources relevant to the disciplines taught at that campus. A comprehensive evaluation has provided recommendations for the development of the 2011 Helpdesk Program.

   Throughout 2010 further training sessions will be provided to support staff in delivering Helpdesk services. A *Needs Analysis*, which asks staff to identify their knowledge level in a range of services and resources, has been conducted. Based

on the results of that survey, a comprehensive program will be developed and implemented.

5. Helpdesk model

In Semester 1 2011, a new Helpdesk service model will be introduced. The new Helpdesk will be staffed predominantly by *Learning Advisers*, rather than higher paid Faculty Librarians. This shift is significant it that for the first time we will have a position within the Library structure that is recruited specifically for service delivery from our desks, rather than an additional duty for our Reference Librarians or Faculty Librarians. To maintain familiarity with undergraduate students, Faculty Librarians will be rostered for desk shifts for approximately 3-5 hours per week.

Our objective is for the Helpdesks to become "learning and study support" desks – the emphasis will be providing advice on information and study skills, and effective ways to access our collections and services.

The new staff group of *Learning Advisers* will comprise qualified librarians, generally new graduates, and graduates from other disciplines. The foundation of this service delivery model is that Helpdesk staff must have experience as tertiary students and are therefore able to relate to the Library's client base.

QUT students have been recruited as Peer Advisers for the Library's Helpdesks and play a key role at the Helpdesks. Peer Advisers assist fellow students to make the transition to academic study, and are selected on their basis of their ability to relate to other students. The Library's Peer Adviser team is representative of the student body and has representation across all faculties, age groups, and social, cultural and language backgrounds. Peer Advisers have received training in basic academic and information skills, reference service, lending procedures, and managing client expectations. To support them in their role, the Library offers ongoing comprehensive training.

A significant change to the service precincts will be the discontinuation of Lending Services Desks in the new service model. To minimise the need for clients to have lending service interactions, a number of changes were put in place in early 2010:
- borrowing conditions were reviewed. The loans limit for students was increased – staff no longer need to override loan limits when students are borrowing for their practicum sessions; items can be renewed more times;
- a target of 95% for self checkouts was set. Achievement of this target requires staff to promote and encourage client use of the self checkout service points. Staff are also recording the reasons why staff intervention is required in the lending process, so that we can review processes to ensure that the requirement for staff intervention is minimised in the future.

This shift also recognises that loans are decreasing – between 2005 and 2009 loans have decreased by 15%, and we anticipate that this trend will continue. The Library is also actively increasing its expenditure on electronic resources. In 2010, electronic collections account for 80% of our collection allocation.

6. Communications plan

Underpinning the new learning support model is a Communications Plan that promotes the Library, and specifically its learning support services as relevant to all. The tag line used for all learning support initiatives in 2010 has been "*get the edge ... get ahead*". It has been used on all signage, as well as on merchandise such as water bottles that were distributed to all commencing students during Orientation Week.

A range of communication channels have also been incorporated into the communication plan:

- Twitter – there are tweets about workshops, new resources, and activities. Using www.twuffer.com library staff schedule tweets in advance, negating the need to be composing and sending tweets during peak periods. All planning can be done in advance, which also enables communication 7 days a week.
- Digital signage – LCD screens through the Library and other gathering points promote library services and workshops.
- Lift signage – all Library lifts have perspex holders that enable A3 posters to be displayed and regularly changed.
- Web site – all activities and resources are promoted on the Library's web site. In 2010, we also commenced using home page advertisements that link to additional information. Again, these advertisements promote a positive message and highlight the relevancy to students.

Peer Advisers at your Library Help Desk

can assist with:
- getting organised
- writing assignments
- working in groups

Advertisement on the Library Home Page to promote Peer Advisers.

The images are current QUT students who are employed as Peer Advisers.

All images used are strong positive images of both students and Library staff. In line with the University's vision of "*a university for the REAL world*" – we have strived to use photographs of our staff and students. Promoting the expertise of Library staff has also been a priority. Our campaign to promote Peer Advisers, for example, has been based on images of our current Peer Advisers in life size cut outs in Library foyers, library web pages, and as adhesive displays on glass walls.

7. Capital works program supporting service innovation

In 2009, the Library secured funding to support upgrades at both the Gardens Point and Kelvin Grove campus branch libraries. Whereas, the Gardens Point project has enabled the refurbishment of one level of the building only, the Kelvin Grove project is an upgrade, which will result in redesign of four levels of the building.

The service precinct at Kelvin Grove will reflect the new Learning Support and Helpdesk models. Reflecting a contemporary service philosophy for providing client support that is both transparent and inviting, the new Helpdesk has moved beyond the traditional large counter in favour of a precinct. Located centrally on the main entry level of the Library, the precinct offers a highly visible destination comprising three service pods and two consulting spaces, as well as storage for support equipment and items necessary for the delivery of library services.

With most loans anticipated to be by clients at the self service check points which will be located throughout the building, the Helpdesk precinct is able to evolve as an interactive venue for learning and the sharing of library skills.

To deliver a full service to clients, each of the three service pods will have the capability to perform lending enquiries, whilst also providing a dual height counter allowing for a full range of sit / stand interactions between clients and Library Advisers. Able to accommodate a range of client experiences from lending enquiries to lengthy screen focused discussions by one or many clients, the pods will provide an equitable and supportive physical environment.

Similar to the service points experienced in dynamic retail environments, or professional offices, the strategy for the precinct taps into how face to face information exchanges can happen that are both equitable, effective and efficient, and perhaps most importantly enjoyable, thus enriching the human side of the library experience.

Changes within the University context

Whilst the Library is considering how it delivers learning support, so too is the broader University community. Together with the Office of Teaching Quality, the Library is co-leading an audit of the University's learning support programs and initiatives, as part of a broader review of learning support. An anticipated outcome of this Review is that there will be a commitment to an integrated approach to learning support that acknowledges the shared responsibility of faculties and divisions for the provision of learning support. Opportunities to improve communication to both students and staff regarding the full range of learning support programs will also be investigated. A single point of access for information about all learning support services, e.g. a learning support portal, would achieve this objective.

As the Library continues to review its provision of learning support and broaden its service delivery model, it is well placed to support the University teaching and learning, and research aspirations.