
University Science and Technology Librarian's Group: Information Literacy event University of Sheffield 9 May 2011

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With Information Literacy (IL) being an ever-present interest for attendees of the University Science and Technology Librarian's Group (USTLG) events, this event (in the University of Sheffield ICOSS building) was well attended by librarians from both near and far away. This was remarked on by the event opener Heather Swift (University of Sheffield), who humorously noted that today was mercifully lacking in the floods or snow storms which seemed to occur whenever groups of librarians visit Sheffield. Without further disaster the event rolled on, and all presentations may be found at USTLG's website (<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/library/ustlg/index.htm>).

MORNING SESSION

First up was Sheila Webber, who gave a presentation about **Information Literacy and the role of the PhD supervisor**. This focused heavily on how librarians can benefit from knowing the IL practice of PhD supervisors, as this will play a huge part in knowing how librarians can support them and their students. The IL experience which tutors give will often be heavily influenced by that which they experienced themselves, and individual tutors may view very different goals as being the primary drivers of research: to research primarily for publication, to understand layers

of research and meaning or to uncover underlying issues and questions (Brew, 2001). Tutors also have different styles which will impact on the IL practice they project onto their students, which include (1) a project management approach, (2) a focus on embedding and introducing students to their research communities, (3) focusing on challenging their students' ideas to develop them, (4) a focus on trying to make the student into an independent learner and expert or (5) trying to develop a long-lasting relationship with the student. The role which the tutor plays will have a direct impact on a PhD student's development, as those who adhere to (1) will tend to send people on courses; exponents of (2) will spend more time guiding students themselves and fans of (3-5) will spend more time considering what good information practice is for the student. Generally, academics in different disciplines will often have very different attitudes to good information-seeking practice – librarians would be wise to combine this knowledge with the more generic Researcher Development Framework in order to develop IL within their own institution.

The next presentation was from Moira Bent (University of Newcastle), who discussed '**Rebuilding the Seven Pillars: a new approach to an old model**'. As part of the SCONUL Working Group on IL, Moira was involved in the recent analysis of SCONUL's much-publicised 1999 model, with a re-evaluation carried out to address some of the issues with the original Seven Pillars of Information Literacy. Amongst other issues, this model was often interpreted as being a more linear process whereas more cyclical movements were intended, as well as a feeling that there were gaps (RIN, 2009) and that another model could be used which helped librarians to market themselves more effectively. As a result the pillars have been re-assessed, and a new model drawn up (SCONUL Working Group on Information Literacy, 2011). This model defines IL as being about media literacy, data curation and information handling, alongside attitudes, habits and behaviours – it is not just about information seeking. Perhaps the key aspect of the new model is that understanding the user is given just as much emphasis as highlighting the skills which are needed. The resulting categories are: Identify, Scope, Plan, Gather, Evaluate, Manage and Present. The presenter highlights that this is very much a generic model, and that various lenses can be applied for specific purposes (for instance, a 'research' lens is currently being constructed); however, it seems clear that this model is much more in line with

current IL needs than the old one was, and that this will be a useful and welcome tool.

'**Research skills teaching across the Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences**', presented by Evi Tramantza, was a strong showcase of skills and activities which Evi has put into practice at the University of Surrey. Finding a disparity between the services which the library offered and the views which academics held of the library, Evi has been promoting her role by meeting with academics and negotiating for a greater role in terms of IL, which has involved greater representation on departmental committees, developing the role of academic library representatives, having a more active role in Faculty research and seeing all of the students in this Faculty for teaching sessions. Offering pointers to factors which have helped her to succeed – confidence in meetings, relying on fellow library staff, connecting with wider Librarianship, highlighting common ground with academics and using appropriate language – this was a useful summary of what subject librarians (whatever their titles) can achieve.

The final session before lunch was presented by David Stacey (University of Bath), entitled '**Creating an online tutorial for academic writing skills**'. A need was identified to supply better online support for academic writing development, tailored to the needs of the University of Bath's undergraduates and reflecting the views of staff – as a result, a bid was successfully tabled enabling a Fellow of the Royal Literary Fund to write and develop this content, which was then managed, developed and tested by the Science Faculty Librarian along with a Chemistry Teaching Fellow. In all, 6 modules focusing on evaluation, writing an essay, writing a report, developing arguments, plagiarism and citing/referencing were developed (accessible to University of Bath users only), and it takes roughly 6 hours to complete the whole suite. David also outlined the software used, and how this may change in the future. Resultantly, some departments have directly taken this software for use with students, and many departments are publicising it to students as a useful study tool. The library is also promoting it amongst staff to raise its profile. Feedback has been good, with student evaluation reporting that it had improved their understanding of the issues involved.

AFTERNOON SESSION

After a break from the packed schedule (involving a very fine lunch), event sponsors British

Standards Institution provided attendees with an insight into **Standardisation within higher education**. Areas such as the technical and medical sciences can obviously benefit from the use of standards, and presenter Newell Hampson-Jones proposed that the teaching of standards could be of benefit in these (and further) subject areas, with general crossovers occurring between all regarding research and management. Certainly there is a great deal of information within these standards. Questions from those attending – as with any resource – highlighted that the BSI resources (the same as all other information resources) need to identify their worth, and that librarians would like supporting evidence where possible to take to their institutions when needed; this was a good and timely discussion, which was very apt under the current financial circumstances.

A fine example of collaborative working was presented in '**A reusable online information skills tutorial for researchers: a collaborative approach**', given by Jenny Coombs (University of Nottingham) and Liz Martin (De Montfort University). They presented an initiative undertaken by the East Midlands Research Support Group, which came about from a feeling that there was a lack of support for researchers, and that institutions either had or were looking to cover the same ground, so it would be more useful to collaborate on a shared resource. Key partners are the Universities of Nottingham and Coventry, Loughborough University and De Montfort University, with another four intuitions taking an observational role. In total there are 7 potential sections for this tutorial, which will cover primary information, secondary information, information issues for projects, promotion of research, writing skills, management of information and a section on people support (which will be institution-specific). To date the prototype 'Promotion of your research' module has been written using the open-source Xerte (the module is currently under assessment), and dissemination of this is due in Autumn 2011; the next stage will be to look at how the other modules can be produced, and how more funding can be found to pay for the rest of the development (the prototype has been produced with internal institutional funding).

The final session was presented by Elizabeth Gadd (Loughborough University), and was entitled '**Improving the teaching of the literature review in Civil Engineering**'. A showcase of how to deal with a recognized issue, this detailed how (around December 2009) the Civil Engineering department highlighted that students were

producing poor literature reviews - 50% of staff rated them as poor or very poor, with references being deficient in number, type, depth and age. There was an additional theory that this might be partially influenced by a lack of search skills amongst students. To investigate this, staff and student surveys were conducted to collect views about literature reviews, observations were held to watch students search for info and previous literature reviews were assessed for content/quality. The in-depth findings can be found in various papers (cf. Gadd's presentation on the USTLG site – some publications are forthcoming), though – in a nutshell – staff had far less confidence in student's skills than the students themselves, with students thinking that they had no problems at all in constructing good search strategies and evaluating information. Students instead expected to find problems relating to information overload and locating specific bits of information (leading one to assume that they were often using vague general searches). Overall, findings were that little time was spent teaching students how to assess information (which led to problems), students had limited search skills (as detailed) and citations listed in final work contained many errors. As a result, 5 of the 7 programmes in this Faculty now offer first years 3 x 1 hour lectures on the value of information, search skills and citation skills, with additional drop-in sessions also being offered. The overall mark for literature reviews has gone up very slightly, though the overall marks on coursework have gone up by about 16%, leading to the assumption that these skills are far more widely applicable than just on literature reviews.

In summary, this was a very useful event which packed in a lot of information. Covering IL theory and practice for all levels of user, many attendees left with some new ideas to take back to their own institutions. IL remains a key issue for HEIs, and it is heartening to see that there is much good practice in the sector.

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