Food for thought

Lunchtime training at Limerick Institute of Technology Library

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INTRODUCTION

Limerick Institute of Technology (LIT) is located on the outskirts of Limerick city in the mid-west region of Ireland. It serves over 6,000 full- and part-time students from certificate to doctorate level. As outlined in its Strategic Plan, LIT is committed to an active learning ethos: 'the hallmark of our educational philosophy is active learning through a fusion of theory and practice' (Limerick Institute of Technology, 2011).

In line with institutional strategy, LIT Library is also committed to pedagogical approaches that put learner engagement at the centre of the learning experience.

LIT LIBRARY LUNCHTIME TRAINING

A case in point is the library lunchtime training programme, which provides an example of a student-centred training initiative. Interdisciplinary information literacy training is offered to students on an ongoing basis in the form of regular lunchtime training workshops (available on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays during term-time). Students are encouraged to sign up for the workshops and to attend voluntarily. They are also welcome to drop-in on the day.

Following a constructivist approach and broadly based on Lau's (2006, p. 27) guidelines, the information literacy workshops aim to be lively and focused, to promote active learning among students and to enhance specific and transferable study and research skills, for example, referencing and citation. They are of short duration, scheduled for when students have a study break during lunchtime, and have catchy names focusing on the actual content.

Examples of workshops on offer include:

- referencing, citation & avoiding plagiarism
- introduction to Endnote
- library resources for getting started with your thesis
- Summon, ebrary & other library databases
- critically evaluating journal articles ;
- introduction to the literature review

WORKSHOP IN PRACTICE

The referencing, citation and avoiding plagiarism workshop is one of the most popular sessions. It aims to raise student awareness of plagiarism and to introduce methods of citing and referencing using the Harvard style. It also demonstrates referencing tools such as the MSWord tool. See Fig. 1 for further details.

Referencing, citation and avoiding plagiarism – the Harvard referencing style	
Activity	Timing
The workshop begins with an outline of the learning outcomes.	3 mins
This is followed by a class-based discussion on plagiarism. The discussion is reinforced by a YouTube clip (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hdOYE-FLNuo) that highlights what plagiarism is and how to avoid it.	10 mins
The concepts of referencing and citation are then introduced using a series of explanatory slides and class-based activities with particular attention being paid to the Harvard style and with reference to LIT's Write it right guide (http://mislibsrv.lit.ie/screens/writeitright.pdf)	10-15 mins
Students work in pairs to complete a worksheet activity. The facilitator is on hand to assist with any issues.	10 mins
Live demo and hands-on practice of MSWord citation tool.	
Summary and recap	2 mins
Total time	**45-50 mins**

Fig. 1

BENEFITS TO STUDENTS

Aside from their practical value in teaching students critical information literacy skills, the workshops also play a social role in helping to alleviate library anxiety. This is defined as a serious emotional or psychological condition 'characterized by tension, fear, feelings of uncertainty

and helplessness, negative and self-defeating thoughts, and mental disorganization that appear only when students are in or contemplating a visit to the library' (Shoham & Mizrachi, 2001).

By familiarising students with the library, its staff and systems in a friendly and relaxed environment, the lunchtime workshops go some way towards easing student anxiety about the library. Feedback is very positive; for example, one student said that she felt most engaged with what was happening when the librarian started to go round the room talking to everyone individually and answering questions.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, the workshop facilitators also encounter an element of IAKT (I already know that) syndrome (Bell, 2007), a condition that occurs among students who feel they are technologically savvy enough to manage their assignments without any library assistance. These students may be initially resistant to attending lunchtime training, but when they do and are challenged in ways they did not expect, their feedback is generally positive. One student, for example, said that he found the class more helpful than he had anticipated, pointing out that it surprised him how much he did not know.

As the workshops are held regularly across the academic year at convenient times and are open to all students in all disciplines who wish to attend, they aim to accommodate students at 'point of need'. In this way, they provide a version of Kuhlthau's (2004) 'zone of intervention' and enable students to overcome information overload and enjoy information fluency. Several students commented on the 'good timing' of the referencing sessions which coincide with assignment due dates.

Lifelong learning

By encouraging students to take responsibility for their own learning and by providing a risk-free forum in which to practise their library and research skills and to directly engage with the process of information literacy, as it were, the core value of the workshops is that they 'allow students… to behave as lifelong learners not just to learn the information skills characteristic of lifelong learners' (Manuel, 2003).

We are hopeful that workshop participation not only helps students to develop a range of specific and transferable study and research skills but also helps them to understand the non-linear basis

of research. Consequently, by applying the skills and principles learned in the workshops, students gradually move beyond the basic idea of research as product (finding sources) towards a more advanced understanding of research as process: 'learning from and using information for a purpose' (Holliday & Rogers 2013, p. 267).

Following recent research by (Head, 2014), this kind of knowledge is sure to serve them well in various situations beyond their college careers in all aspects of problem-solving and decision-making in their working lives.

Feedback

Feedback from students following workshop participation is very positive. A sample of comments received include:

- *I liked the practical part of the class.*
- *I have a much greater understanding of the reference system now.*
- *Live demos were very useful and staff friendly and knowledgeable.*
- *Commentary and comments added a lot too .*
- *Very informative useful and interactive class.*

Lecturers also endorse the programme, with some even coming along to some of the sessions. Feedback is encouraging:

- *I attended two of the lunchtime sessions this week and found them really good.*
- *I consciously promote these sessions to students as I feel they are very relevant.*

Conclusion

Overall, our experience at LIT Library is that students enjoy directly engaging with the information literacy process in the form of friendly, focused workshops that promote lifelong learning skills. Based on its success to date, we plan to continue to offer lunchtime training for the foreseeable future.

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