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Online education program for transitioning students

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Abstract

Preliminary findings from research into the information skills of students transitioning into a university educational environment indicate divergence between confidence and ability. A small group of librarians from the University of Wollongong are researching better ways to support new undergraduate students starting tertiary studies. A literature review examining best practice around the world provided a starting point for the research journey. Other approaches used include: creating an online survey to assess new student skills at enrolment; hosting a seminar for teacher librarians from the local Wollongong area and Sutherland Shire to provide an opportunity for information sharing; mapping information requirements to fulfil HSC assignments against those for a range of university subjects; and running focus groups of new students to ask specific questions about problems they experienced in adapting to the demands of a scholarly environment.

Disciplines

Arts and Humanities | Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Early indications show that students transitioning from high school to university have a high confidence level in their ability to source information. The teacher librarians suggested Google is the main tool used for research for assignments at school and there is apparently little knowledge of, exposure to, or indeed need for scholarly resources required to inform their research requirements. Incoming students appear to have a high awareness of plagiarism due to the *All your own work* program implemented at all high schools, though it appears they are not confident with in-text referencing and are worried about unintentional plagiarism once in the university setting.

For over a decade, the University of Wollongong Library has been integral to the design and delivery of a successful compulsory online program for teaching information skills. In spite of prior success with the program, we recognised that earlier approaches were no longer sufficient, and that a major review was required to accommodate the needs of incoming digital native students. A new online program was introduced for the start of the 2010 academic year. *StartSmart – essential academic information skills[1]* (is module-based and interactive using multimedia and learning activities to reinforce learning. The redevelopment process was underpinned by extensive collaboration with academics, students, staff from Learning Development, web designers, graphic designers and animators. A consultant expert on learning assessment was also contracted to ensure a strong, pedagogically sound

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[1] StartSmart url: **http://www.uow.edu.au/student/services/fye/resources/startsmart/UOW070056.html**

and rigorous approach was taken to creating both program content and an evaluation framework.

The resulting program is designed to introduce new students to the principles and necessary knowledge to transition into the university academic environment. The four guides, *Academic Culture*, *Finding Books*, *Finding Journal Articles* and *Academic Integrity* are designed to support specified learning outcomes. Academic support for the program was pivotal and guides one and four include podcasts from a number of academics from different disciplines. Peer support is also beneficial and Guide 1 includes advice from students, just finishing their first year of study, on the benefits of using the Library and support materials supplied by subject coordinators. Guide 4 includes an amusing student video to illustrate the issue of plagiarism for students in a light-hearted but thoughtful way. The program has an objective to start students on the pathway to becoming *independent learners*, one of the University of Wollongong's *Graduate Qualities,* by supporting them in the basic skill developments required to see them through their first few weeks at university. The program will be evaluated and refined over the coming year.

A quiz, compulsory for all new undergraduates and requisite for the fulfilment of this zero credit subject, is hosted on the Moodle open source Content Management System. To ensure rigour, the program provides randomised question sets and answers. As the program is designed as a learning tool, all questions are based on content in the guides and students are given a chance to test their learning as they progress. Links to the guides are embedded in the quiz, taking students back to the relevant guide to facilitate revision of any questions that are answered incorrectly. Students must achieve a score of 100% to pass the subject.

Comments received from staff and students, such as, "Thank you so much! I'll keep the lessons of SmartStart fresh in my mind by frequently using the library's catalog and databases", show that the program has been positively received by the university community.

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