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1-1-2020

University of Wollongong Library - Embedding Learning and Development as Part of Our Organisational DNA

Donna Dee

University of Wollongong, donnadee@uow.edu.au

Keith Brophy

University of Wollongong, kbrophy@uow.edu.au

Kristy Newton

University of Wollongong, knewton@uow.edu.au

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Recommended Citation

Dee, Donna; Brophy, Keith; and Newton, Kristy: University of Wollongong Library - Embedding Learning and Development as Part of Our Organisational DNA 2020, 1-3.

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University of Wollongong Library - Embedding Learning and Development as Part of Our Organisational DNA

Abstract

At University of Wollongong (UOW) Library we have a long standing and authentic commitment to supporting professional development. A regular series of professional development, learning and sharing sessions are an established part of our staff culture and part of our organizational DNA. Our development activities have often been a vehicle for facilitating organic learning as evidenced by the Digital Dexterity Program for Library Staff. This paper discusses the history and benefits of this program, and its continued evolution toward developing future ready Library staff.

Keywords

uowlibrary

Disciplines

Arts and Humanities | Social and Behavioral Sciences

Publication Details

Donna Dee, Keith Brophy and Kristy Newton, University of Wollongong Library - Embedding Learning and Development as Part of Our Organisational DNA, *International Information & Library Review*, 52(3), 2020.

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Abstract

At University of Wollongong (UOW) Library we have a long standing and authentic commitment to supporting professional development. A regular series of professional development, learning and sharing sessions are an established part of our staff culture and part of our organizational DNA. Our development activities have often been a vehicle for facilitating organic learning as evidenced by the Digital Dexterity Program for Library Staff. This paper discusses the history and benefits of this program, and its continued evolution toward developing future ready Library staff.

A phased approach to digital dexterity development

The University of Wollongong Library's exploration of digital dexterity began formally in 2016. The first phase, based on Sally Pewhirangi's Library Intelligencer online workshops, was highly prescribed and targeted to increase foundational levels of digital literacies within peer-based learning hubs. Staff met regularly to complete a series of eight Digital Literacy workshops. Phase II followed in 2018 and consisted of a further 18 months of programs and opportunities for staff to move through competency levels from digital literacy to digital dexterity. This was achieved by participating, presenting or engaging in a range of learning forums, events and activities. The 'phased' approach ensured our people could build their digital literacies, capabilities and dexterity from foundational to applicable levels. It has also catered for individual learning needs and preferences by encouraging group participation and by offering a variety of programs based on program evaluations and staff feedback. From these experiences, we learned that our staff enjoyed learning together in groups and sharing their knowledge with their colleagues.

Whilst Phase I leaned heavily on prescribed learning via available workshop and peer led learning hubs, it was during Phase II that we experienced high levels of engagement and self-directed learning by offering a variety of learning resources and connection points. Features of this phase included developing a website and publishing an aggregated newsletter of new content called the Digital Digest, growing Communities of Practice, and presenting workshops. However, by far the most popular and successful element in lifting competency levels was the Friday Features concept – a major Phase II attraction.

Friday Features and the 12 days of DigiDexmas

The Friday Feature was offered fortnightly as recognized 'downtime' and associated with our commitment to the *FIND15* Principles (Wedgwood), which encouraged staff to Find

15 minutes of development time in their daily work. Friday Features grew quickly and were acknowledged by all as a time to share, learn, observe and experience digital dexterity in an informal peer to peer based environment. After hosting these sessions every second Friday afternoon over more than 12 months, we saw a logical opportunity to incorporate digital learning with the festive season at the end of 2019. In keeping with the spirit of the Friday Feature concept, we ran a short and informal series of 5-minute presentations called “The 12 days of DigiDexmas.” They were presented as a digital dexterity advent calendar, with the theme for that afternoon’s presentation being written up on a communal whiteboard that morning.

The idea for the series was inspired by a colleague who had just learned something from another staff member and shared it with her team – it was a simple trick in Microsoft Outlook, but many staff didn’t know about the function and were glad to add it to their skillset. We realized that many of us had little tricks and tips with digital tools that we assumed everyone knew about and set about creating the series as a playful learning experience that would prompt people to start thinking about what they wanted to learn in 2020.

The brief was simple – a rotating group of staff would give a 5-minute presentation at 3 pm each day sharing a simple tip or trick that they found useful. No PowerPoint required, informal and fun, and timed to occur during the proverbial “3pm slump” timeslot with a cup of tea. We began the series with three or four presentations lined up and trusted that staff would jump in and contribute once they saw the format. And they did! The presentations covered varying themes from program shortcuts, to managing your digital privacy and security, to optimizing digital resources for accessibility. We completed the series over the twelve days, with the final day taking place at the campus bar as the Library closed for the year.

The Library’s Content Strategy team supported the sessions by attending and recording the key points from the session and collating them into a resource that is hosted on our internal SharePoint site. This has made it easy for staff to revisit the knowledge as needed and builds on our existing repository of resources for staff training and development.

Staff reactions/anecdotal feedback

One of the key factors in the success of the 12 days of DigiDexmas was its simplicity. The presentations were short and had an emphasis on sharing simple tips and tricks to make your digital life easier. For both presenters and the program facilitators, this simplicity made it easy to promote and engage with the program. Holding the sessions in the afternoon as the Library staff were preparing for the end of the year was also a factor – there were minimal meetings and external commitments for staff at that time of the day, and the camaraderie of having achieved a lot of common goals throughout the year provided the perfect environment for staff to take five minutes out to learn and share from each other. The reaction from staff was very positive – people commented that they enjoyed the topics and the format, and several staff followed up with the presenters to ask for more information after the session.

In line with our commitment to ongoing professional development, the Library participates in the CAUL Digital Dexterity champions network. Our UOW Digital Dexterity champion shared the results of the program with the network, and the reactions were also very positive,

and the champions network were quite keen to see how the program worked and share the resources more broadly.

2020 and the Future Ready Library

One of the Library's key strategic influences has been that of the Future-Ready Library (UOW Library, [2018](#)). This strategic approach targets the skills, services, and capabilities required of the workplace of the future, and is heavily influential on our staff development programs and activities. A particularly relevant goal has been to develop the digital-first Library, in which we prioritize the digital delivery of resources and services to enable equitable, scalable and sustainable services.

In 2020, the higher education landscape changed dramatically with the challenges of the COVID19 pandemic, which brought about the rapid development and adoption of remote working and virtual services. The professional development that the Library has undertaken in digital dexterity has meant that we have been able to transition into a predominantly virtual service model with relative ease. Staff have established networks of learning and development to draw upon and are already skilled in learning to navigate new digital spaces. We rapidly created a virtual office in the MS Teams environment and have continued to host Friday Features in this virtual space to assist staff in learning the various features of the Teams environment.

The formal digital dexterity program will continue its evolution toward a state in which staff is autonomously developing their digital dexterity, underpinned by our culture of learning. The next iteration of the program will be based around a series of loosely facilitated communities of practice and aims to support staff integrating their newly developed knowledge and skills as part of our Library service model. A lifelong learning model and a continuation of the culture of learning and development will remain important for staff in our strategic direction of providing digital-first Library services.

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