

Adopting e-learning technologies at Monash University Library

Monash University Library has eight libraries spread across a number of campuses in Victoria. There are also two overseas campus libraries in Malaysia and South Africa and altogether the student population is approaching 60 000. The library is responsible for increasing the level of information literacy, as well as engaging students in improving their learning skills. Furthermore, there is a multitude of student cohorts and individual study units that impact upon the library's commitments in learning and teaching. These factors present challenges, such as minimal class contact time, customised learning content for individual units, optional attendance, high volume of face-to-face sessions and reduced opportunities for students who cannot attend the sessions.

This article describes how library staff are empowered to use technology as a partial solution to provide increased and more flexible access to information literacy and learning skills programs and content.

Providing flexible learning content

Instead of relying on external vendors and/or specialist multimedia developers, which would be too costly and time-consuming Monash University Library is taking steps to empower its staff to develop e-learning content. However high-end technological tools, costly development time, high maintenance, low levels of exposure to e-learning pedagogy, and other logistical constraints make it difficult for staff to provide effective e-learning products. For these reasons, the library provides e-learning pedagogical guidance, templates, software training, and procedures to support staff.

In this pragmatic approach, the unique attributes of each learning situation are assessed and a solution recommended. The solution may range from highly interactive collaborative modules incorporating web 2.0 technologies to step-by-step drill and practice style software simulations, which library staff may develop themselves, or may create in collaboration with other library or academic staff.

Two of the technologies to create and deliver e-learning content currently being trialled are LibGuides and Adobe Captivate 4.

LibGuides and Captivate

LibGuides offers librarians and learning skills advisers the ability to create subject pages (websites) and tailor them to suit the learning skills and information research needs of their student cohorts. These sites have the potential to be more than the current standard subject guides. Staff can incorporate various multimedia formats and web 2.0 tools such as comments and voting. There is an intention to blend information literacy and learning skills content, and the flexibility afforded by LibGuides enables the use of common or generic elements in multiple places, as well as tailored content specific to a faculty or subject. Another of the attractions of LibGuides is the ability to use tabs across the top of the page, enabling easy-to-follow page navigation.

The library has initiated a trial phase and implemented a LibGuides checklist and template to assist staff to effectively manage the creation and quality assurance processes.

Adobe Captivate 4 is a rapid development tool, reducing reliance on highly skilled multimedia developers and programmers that are usually required for creating e-learning content. Captivate enables the creation of interactive simulations, as well as other e-learning activities and is continuously evolving to include more

functionality, but does not yet have the flexibility of high-end tools such as Adobe Flash. Nonetheless, it puts the power in the hands of staff and also works well with other tools such as Flash and graphics applications. In addition, staff can place published Captivate learning content wherever they need it: in LibGuides, in learning management systems, or even as a link in a face-to-face class. This content can then be accessed later by off-campus students and students who could not attend the classes, as well as for ongoing practice.

The library has embarked on creating a number of templates to help staff create their own learning content, to provide consistency in look and feel and functionality, and to move closer to providing active learning situations for students. These templates include software simulation type activities that are interactive and require student input, as well as more conventional self-review quiz type activities.

Early Conclusions

While still early in the process, staff report that there are many steps to follow to arrive at a good e-learning outcome. Coming to grips with new software in a time-intensive workplace is challenging, but the templates and procedures help to get them on their way. A number of high quality learning interactions are starting to emerge and some should be ready for student uptake in the first semester of 2010.

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