



BUILDING DIGITAL BRIDGES

Charles Sturt University (CSU) provides flexibility for LIS students to study at a pace and at a time that suits them. **CAROLE GERTS** and **CARROL ROGERS** fill us in.

The School of Information Studies (SIS) at CSU is a provider of online education for the information professions. It provides students with practical exposure to, and involvement with, the workplace and working professionals. Some students are already working in information agencies, and others are studying to join the profession for the first time. CSU Library has collaborated with academics to develop innovative methods to help those students get a taste of real workplace practice.

One of CSU Library's successful information literacy initiatives has been to embed a librarian in a subject or course. The primary role of the Embedded Librarian (EL) is to teach information searching and evaluation techniques through raising awareness of library resources and to develop research skills. Using webinar software, such as Adobe Connect, has allowed us to reach out to our online students and make this contact much more flexible and personal. Students get to know their EL, which encourages the more reticent student to ask questions and seek advice. While looking for ways to use this embedded connection more innovatively, we saw an opportunity to create a digital bridge between the world of study and the world of the workplace.

CSU Librarian and adjunct lecturer Carole Gerts recently redeveloped one of the subjects in the Bachelor of Information Studies course that focused on delivering reference and information services. Working with SIS academic staff and drawing on her own experience as a practising librarian, Carole has given this subject a solid

base of current, real-world examples. Another EL, Carrol Rogers, teamed up with the lecturer in the student online learning space to form a bridge from the theory into the dynamic world of a practising academic librarian. This was the first time we had tried to share professional workplace experiences rather than just information literacy.

Carrol used a number of strategies to engage students in an ongoing conversation. She responded to questions related to her practice of reference work and information literacy through an interactive discussion board. This also allowed her to spark discussions on topical information literacy tools and encouraged those already working in the industry to share their views. The real success was in the Q&A sessions, in which Carrol shared stories of her work as an information services librarian and drew the students into the conversation. Students already working shared their workplace practices and stories, thus creating a sense of community generally lacking in online study.

One of the learning module activities asked students to critique a CSU Library Resource Guide in terms of content and navigation. The responses were useful to inform future developments of the guides – an unexpected bonus for library staff – and students gained a sense of having accomplished an authentic task grounded in practice.

This digital bridge has now formed a flexible learning zone between the real workplace and Information Studies theory. Students are actively encouraged to engage, share and connect to information professionals in the workplace. Their enthusiasm for this experience was evident in the feedback we received. 🌱

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