

WORKING TOGETHER: THE IMPORTANCE OF COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE TAFE LIBRARY AND TAFE TEACHERS

Julie Barkman

Sydney TAFE, Library and Information Studies, Ultimo College.

julie.barkman@tafensw.edu.au

ABSTRACT

Funding cuts to TAFE colleges have impacted on all areas of teaching and learning. College libraries have not escaped the axe, but nevertheless still provide important spaces and resources for teachers and students.

Like any library, TAFE college libraries need to continually assess the community they serve to remain relevant. They need to be innovative and resourceful in providing services and materials for their community. This is where liaison and collaboration between teachers and library staff is of utmost importance, and these rolls are changing as well.

Areas of collaboration include the more traditional areas of collection development – consultation on the selection and de-selection of resources, to the development of specialised subject guides, assistance with copyright especially in relation to digital resources, online information literacy skills packages, and support for learning management systems, just to name a few.

For teachers of Library and Information Studies, library staff can prove to be invaluable as industry consultants for course content and assessment validation. The library can be a space for students of any discipline to showcase their work.

This paper highlights some of the positives of working together.

BACKGROUND

Where it all started

For more than 6 years I have been the teacher liaison for Library and Information Studies (LIS) teaching section and Ultimo TAFE campus library at Sydney TAFE (Technical and Further Education).

What does this role entail? Usually I am the “first point of call” and will disseminate information to the other LIS teachers about the library. This ranges from new resources acquired by the library, vendor lists of forthcoming titles, to the co-ordination of events for Library and Information Week. Specific examples are outlined below.

Collection development – visits to bookshops, de-selection of materials, and suggestions for purchase. The latter has been of great value with the LIS section extending its teaching to offer online professional development courses for commercial delivery in co-operation with

ALIA and the State Library of NSW. Most of these courses are based on existing units of study from the Diploma, however the content extends beyond the para-professional focus of the mainstream delivery and requires extensive new resourcing. Additionally, content for all courses requires regular updating to keep abreast of trends, issues and challenges in areas such as collection management, promoting library services, reference services, digital repositories, RDA, Web 2.0 and more. The inter-library loans service is regularly used by LIS staff. In addition the library and LIS section share the subscription cost for one specialist database.

Engaging with industry - staff from Sydney TAFE libraries participate in various ways with the LIS section. These include:

- Talks to students in class groups about their library experiences and career paths – this links directly to units in the Certificates 3 and 4 and Diploma
- Library and Information Week activities include an afternoon tea and information session for LIS students hosted by the library. This is usually held on Library Technicians Day.
- Industry placement host libraries for Diploma students
- Consultation relating to current workplace practices and the assessment validation process, this being especially useful with the development of new units for the CUL11 training package. Two Library Managers from Sydney TAFE libraries are members of the LIS Course Advisory Committee. [This committee is comprised of approximately 15 librarians and library technicians from a cross-section of libraries in the Sydney metropolitan area. Meetings are held 3 times a year.] These sharing experiences are extended to LIS teachers speaking at Sydney TAFE library professional development days.

The library's physical and virtual spaces are utilised for teaching and learning by the LIS teachers and students. The physical library is a space for students to practice shelving skills (this is mutually beneficial to the library staff), identifying, locating and retrieving items in various formats and collections, displays and promotional activities and may also include a "behind the scenes" tour. This is extended to the online library as teaching and learning incorporates the library catalogue and the extensive range of e-resources.

Reflecting on these areas of collaboration and library use highlights library services that LIS teachers do not regularly use, for example library orientation tours and information literacy skills tutorials for students and for teachers literature searches. Is this due to LIS teachers being librarians and we have these skills and knowledge thus automatically assimilating these into the teaching and learning process? Or are we under-utilising the library services available to us?

It is also important to consider here the *Smart & Skilled* reforms being introduced to TAFE NSW. Funding for teaching sections will be based not only on the number of student enrolments but also on student retention and rates of completion. The pricing structure for TAFE courses will increase dramatically, for example, the Diploma of Library & Information Studies is costed at \$9,380. (*Smart and Skilled: 2015 prices, fees and subsidies*, 2014) Funding for TAFE services like the library is uncertain. TAFE libraries have already undergone budget cuts resulting in a reduction in staffing levels and resource budgets.

Taking these factors into consideration, will the much valued library service be sustainable? Is there a way teachers and library staff can work more closely together in the future to ensure quality of services and resources for teachers and students?

A quest for more information

The literature search

The literature search took several different paths:

1. to gather some additional documentation about the future directions of TAFE and *Smart & Skilled*
2. source recent articles focusing on TAFE libraries and services for students and teachers
3. recent articles about academic libraries and collaboration with teaching staff

“Conversations” with TAFE Library Managers & Teachers

1. Library Managers from 6 Sydney TAFE libraries completed an email questionnaire and this was supplemented with informal conversations either before or after the questionnaire as required
2. TAFE teachers – the 6 were from various colleges and teaching disciplines – 3 were interviewed by phone and 3 responded via email. It is acknowledged this is a small group is not viewed as a representative sample, but rather an avenue to obtain additional information about liaison between the libraries and teaching sections beyond that of the LIS section.

Both groups were asked similar questions relating to the liaison between library and teaching sections and specifically to collection development and review, course research guides and the Learning Management System (Moodle), services the library offers to teachers and their students – library tours, information literacy training, copyright and licencing information, literature searches, etc.

Background information about Sydney TAFE

TAFE NSW has 10 institutes and 107 libraries, with 9 of these libraries within the Sydney Institute – Ultimo, Petersham (2), Enmore, Eora, St George, Randwick and Sutherland (Gynea and Loftus). TAFE delivers courses from HSC, TVET, Certificates, Diplomas, Advanced Diplomas and more recently has moved into the higher education market delivering Bachelor degrees. Commercial courses tailored to industry needs are also delivered by Sydney TAFE.

In 2013 Sydney TAFE had 69,251 student enrolments (11.9% of all enrolments for TAFE NSW) with 16.9% enrolled in Diploma courses or above, 40% in Certificates III & IV, 10.2% were apprentices & trainees, and International students comprising 3.9%. Of these students 39.4% have English as a second language, 9.6% are students with disabilities and 30.1% of students combine work and study. (Source: <http://sydneytafe.edu.au/about/about-sydney-institute/facts-and-figures>)

A report by the ALIA TAFE Advisory Committee (2009) identified a number of issues and trends that are relevant for TAFE NSW including the uncertainty of student numbers and as a consequence funding for TAFE services like the library, and the competition from private training providers. The value of TAFE libraries is highlighted in *Let's talk about TAFE* (2013). "Students and teachers made wide ranging comments about the importance of support services in quality provision and student access. The most commonly accessed support services were libraries...." (p. 17) TAFE has an advantage over many other training providers as student support services are well established and an integral part of each college. It is therefore important to promote these services to potential and existing students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature search focused on, but was not confined to TAFE libraries, and includes some literature relating to university libraries. This is relevant as TAFE is now a provider for higher education qualifications. The currency of the literature was also considered, with most being published in the past 5 years. The major areas of focus include information literacy, learning management systems (LMS), pathfinders and collection development.

Of particular interest and relevance are previous ALIA conference papers by Aroche and Sin (2010) and Aroche, Browne and Rendell (2012) as they focus on Sydney TAFE. *Moodling along with libraries: supporting flexible online delivery in TAFE NSW* (2010) provides an overview of a project whereby pathfinders were integrated into course Moodles. Consultation between teachers and library staff is imperative for the review of course content and in the identification of relevant resources for courses. The result, a "one-stop-shop" of customised resources for teaching and learning. This is particularly important for students studying online and in the workplace.

A "*degree of difference*" (2012) focuses on higher education and the integral role the library plays in the accreditation of higher education courses at TAFE. The library and teachers worked closely together "in research and development of HE courses, including reviewing resource lists and conducting subject searches ... creating online subject guides and Moodle resources to support online delivery ... providing a range of training materials and information literacy workshops ... supporting the management of digital repositories (Equella) ... and copyright requirements." (p. 3-4)

Information literacy in the TAFE sector, is explored extensively by Fafeita (2006), Leong (2007), and Kloppenborg (2010 & 2013). Fafeita's study explored the information literacy programs provided by Australian TAFE libraries. Fafeita concluded "the information literacy programs provided by TAFE librarians were found to generally resemble library skills or information skills programs" (p. 4) and that "TAFE teaching staff were found to have a fairly superficial level of involvement with the development of information literacy programs. Lack of interest and lack of time on the part of teachers were seen by librarians as factors affecting their involvement." (p. 41)

Leong investigated the understanding of information literacy by TAFE teachers and how programs could be developed in collaboration with the library. She discovered teachers and librarians "did not speak the same language" in relation to information literacy, nor did teachers perceive the library having an educational role, viewed more as a service. (p. 1)

Kloppenborg (2013) addresses the introduction of HE courses to TAFE and the different information literacy requirements that exist between vocationally based and higher education courses. Areas covered by this survey include engagement of teaching staff in information literacy programs, the linking of library resources to curriculum content and embedding LibGuide links and online tutorials to the LMS (p.9). To cater for both VET and HE students there is a need for a “hybrid library model” for information literacy training. (p.12)

Student retention and course completion is integral to the *Smart & Skilled* framework. This is addressed by Hagel (2012) with a correlation between the retention of students being extended beyond the discipline teachers to the provision of other professional services such as the library, ESL support, counselling and mentoring schemes. This mirrors the findings from *Let's talk about TAFE* (2013) where the library was ranked as the most important support service. Hagel emphasises the importance for libraries to create and maintain close partnerships with discipline teachers “to ensure students have both access to resources and services they need and the literacy required to make effective use of them.” (p. 219) Hagel sees one of the most effective methods of integrating library support is via the LMS. Embedding library resources into the LMS is reinforced in the literature by Daly (2010), Jacobs (2010), Fletcher (2010), Dunbar (2011) and Kirkwood (2011).

Jacobs highlights the need to step outside the library to serve patrons, “... in order to remain relevant libraries are challenged with providing resources and services when and where they are needed by our users” (2010 : 9). This is supported by Dunbar, “the library message has to appear in the interface and on the pages the students spend most of their time looking at, and it must be properly dynamic... Students want to learn but often not good at searching for and finding the most relevant resources on their own” and “teaching staff want to deliver courses efficiently and effectively, providing materials that reference the most relevant learning resources, but they are not used to collaborating with the library and may not know what is available.” (2011: 23-24)

Finally, an article by Donham and Green (2004) *Developing a culture of collaboration : librarian as consultant*, extends the role of the librarian to that of a consultant, and by “adopting the consultant role creates the power of equity [between the teacher and the librarian] appropriate for genuine collaboration.” (p. 315) Similar to Leong, Donham and Green highlight the importance of mutual respect and the integration of skills – those of the teacher who has an in-depth knowledge of the curriculum and is a subject area specialist, and the librarian, who has the knowledge of resources, information literacy skills and the research process. The importance of teaching staff being actively involved in the collection development process is also highlighted here.

FINDINGS THE LIBRARY PERSPECTIVE

It is not surprising that all Sydney TAFE college libraries provide similar services to TAFE teachers and in turn the students. There are some variations between the libraries, with this relating to staffing levels and the size of each library.

1. Relationships between the library and the teaching staff

All responded the library staff have an excellent relationship with teachers and other campus staff, for example the Student Association, Disability consultants, Marketing and Business units, and for special events like Library Week activities, TAFE Open Day and orientation day. Petersham Library liaises closely with teachers of the Foundation Studies program running competitions for story writing.

Staffing levels was highlighted as one of the issues in extending liaison outside the physical library especially during term time. Coordinating times that suited teaching staff and library staff was becoming increasingly difficult to organise, especially for the smaller TAFE libraries.

2. Liaison librarians

All Sydney Institute libraries assign librarians to teaching sections / faculties. Liaison librarians consult with teachers on the selection of library resources to support their subject areas, information requests, general library facilities and services, orientation and library education sessions. However the level of collaboration between library and teaching staff does vary across colleges. At Loftus TAFE for example, the liaison librarian attends teaching section staff meetings once a term. This was evaluated as an effective way to promote new library resources and services. Library Managers also liaised via Head Teacher meetings. Where possible, librarians retain their allocated teaching sections / faculties in an attempt to sustain continuity and allow the librarian to become progressively familiar with subject areas. This may extend to the liaison librarian being the staff member delivering information literacy sessions for students in that subject area.

3. Examples of collaboration

Collection management

This is an area that was ranked highly by both the library and teaching staff, with the majority of library resources purchased following consultation with teaching staff. Liaison librarians regularly email vendor lists to teachers, teachers may accompany librarians to bookshops on “buying trips”, and in some instances library suppliers visit the library. Teachers are also encouraged to place requests for resources they have sourced elsewhere. Librarians may complete bibliographic searches to ascertain new and available resources on a subject and work with teachers in the selection process. A part of the accreditation process for higher education courses is the provision by the library of relevant course resources for students and teaching staff to access. Library staff also consult with teaching staff prior to the removal of library resources.

Course research guides

While librarians are responsible for the update and selection of materials to be included in these course guides, teachers may be involved in several ways. They may be consulted on the relevance of materials prior to inclusion and recommend websites that can be added. Several of the Library Managers indicated while teacher input was encouraged, very few did contribute.

In 2009 Sydney and Illawarra Institute libraries worked with several teaching sections to develop course guides using Springshare Libguides software, and embed these in selected Moodle courses (Aroche & Sin, 2010). Library orientation and information literacy skills tutorials were also embedded into these course guides.

A recent example collaboration between the liaison librarian and teaching section is modification of the *CourseGuide for Management & Marketing* (St George TAFE) to include additional tabs relating directly to units of study - Microbusiness e-reserve, Auditing e-reserve, Diploma of management (flexible). These provide students easy access to these subject specialist resources by simply clicking on the link. The resources lists were developed by the liaison librarian in close consultation with the teaching section.

Moodle (Learning Management System)

A library “presence” on Moodle courses is not consistent. Several Library Managers indicated the liaison librarians may need to be more proactive and initiate contact with teachers. Library staff offer support to teachers to add links from the library website, library catalogue, course guides and relevant e-resources to the Moodle courses.

Training sessions for teachers

All libraries offer training sessions for teachers and range from orientation sessions for new staff, information literacy and research skills, copyright and licencing, and introduction to new resources and technologies. Participation rates were quite low with this being attributed to teachers being “too busy” and many part-time teachers spending limited time on campus. Taking the staff training to the teachers was one solution, however part-time teachers were often not in attendance.

General comments

At some colleges there had been a decrease in the number of class groups brought to the library for orientation tours and information literacy skills sessions. This was attributed to the cuts in teaching hours per unit, and teachers no longer having the “luxury” of spending a lesson in the library. An alternative is to take the library to the classroom, introducing the “roving librarian” concept. The successful implementation of this would be reliant upon library staffing levels.

FINDINGS ... THE TEACHER PERSPECTIVE

The findings from teaching staff provide a “snap shot” and are by no means a representative sample. However responses supplement and support the information provided by Library Managers and there are direct correlations with the literature.

Teachers indicated they are using the library for many of the traditional roles – referring students for study skills and computer workshops, and would participate with students in orientation and research skills workshops. Teachers with higher education courses had requested literature searches and these lists had been added to the course Moodle by the library. One teacher commented “... all my Moodle courses have links to the library and subject guides and the library staff helped me embed the induction video for our campus.” Further comments confirmed the inconsistencies of a library “presence” on Moodle courses and this is identified as an area that needed to be developed and “formalised”. None of these respondents had contributed to or collaborated on course guides.

All noted the relevance of participating in collection development, and several had played an active role in this area to support higher education and commercial courses.

“The library is an integral part in the accreditation process for higher education courses, a reduction in services or resources could mean the loss of accreditation for HE courses.”

“Commercial business customers have high expectations and consequently a high demand on the library services and resources ... placing higher pressure on the library services as these students expect a quality library service.”

“With the increasing number of courses being delivered online students require 24/7 access to library resources and training this can be achieved by providing links to the library on Moodle.”

While these teachers are all supportive of the library and have a high level of collaboration with library staff, they commented they are aware of a number of teachers and other TAFE staff who do not utilise the library as a space, or the staff expertise and resources. The general consensus was a need for enhanced collaboration between teachers and library staff, and this could start with better developed communication channels between the two groups.

Several teachers expressed concerns over the reduced allocation of teaching hours per unit thus forcing teachers to introduce different teaching methods, including the “flipped classroom” and a greater emphasis on blended learning. For many students this would mean a greater reliance on the library as a learning space and computer access. Budget constraints may force libraries to reduce opening hours that would further impact on the students. This was well summarised by one teacher - *“the library is vital in achieving higher course completion, customer satisfaction and allows teachers to be well resourced and deliver material flexibly.”*

Increasingly TAFE is offering fee-for-service based courses and training. One respondent sees the role of the library expanding to include value-added services in an attempt to *“capture a new audience from non-teaching TAFE staff as they increasingly require tailored*

research and the production of bibliographies to promote and facilitate commercial needs and 'win' this training."

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER AND WHERE TO NEXT?

There is some uncertainty currently surrounding TAFE NSW in relation to the *Smart & Skilled* reforms.

Will the increased cost of courses be a deterrent for students?

Will there be a change in the expectations of students to services available to them to support their learning?

How will the new funding model impact on teaching and learning resources and TAFE support services like the library?

Students are entitled to quality teaching and learning resources and many are reliant on the additional services that TAFE has traditionally provided namely libraries, career counselling, disabilities and language support. Student retention and completion rates have been linked to students having access to these services, in particular library services.

The library needs to be visible to all students and this can be achieved by working with teachers to promote the library services and resources to students. Students also need to understand that the library can play an integral part in their successful study.

From the literature and the feedback from library and teaching staff, the benefits of working together are imperative. It is evident there is a healthy liaison between the libraries and teaching sections at Sydney TAFE. However it appears not all teachers (or teaching sections) are optimising all services offered to them by the library, LIS section included.

A number of areas have been identified to target for increased collaboration between the library and teaching staff.

Information literacy skills tutorials "tailored" to cater for the various qualification levels offered by TAFE (certificates, diplomas, advanced diplomas and degrees). Tutorials are more relevant if the examples and resources are linked to course content and assessment tasks. This would require a close liaison between the teachers and library staff. All students should have equal access to information literacy tutorials and this can be achieved with online tutorials that are readily accessible via the library website, and possibly the learning management platform.

Similarly, teachers and teaching sections to work closer with the subject liaison librarians in developing course guides, with the possibility of aligning these with specific units of study or topic areas as required. This is two-fold with teachers being proactive by providing subject specialist learning resources to be added to the course guides, and the librarian linking to relevant library resources.

Taking the library to the students. This could be achieved by library staff organising with teachers to visit classrooms, to introduce themselves and library services to the students. This could also be a way to enhance liaison between the librarians and teachers.

Students often need to be reminded about the library, and what better way than having a library presence in their online learning environment. Links to the library catalogue and Course guides embedded into Moodle courses would provide a “one stop shop” for students (and teachers). The library is then only “one click” away, with a majority the learning resources readily accessible from the one platform.

Conclusion

As a teacher, who is also a librarian, it is difficult to imagine how it would be possible to develop and deliver teaching and learning materials without access to the physical and online resources available through the TAFE library. It is also difficult to imagine what it would be like without this close working relationship with the library. I am looking forward to extending our collaboration to include course research guides, information and digital literacy skills tutorials, and embedding the library into Moodle courses we teach, ensuring students can easily access library services and resources.

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