"Developing leaders for the digital age: capacity building for liaison librarians @ Deakin University"

Abstract

Professional development is essential for academic librarians to smartly navigate through options, opportunities and challenges in their professional career (Bell, 2015). Commitment from senior university library administrators' to champion staff development programs ensures that librarians are equipped to fully participate in a rapidly evolving information environment. Such a commitment signals the important leadership role that librarians can play in supporting academics with their research activities and in guiding students to become sophisticated users of information.

Deakin University Library is regarded by academics and senior university administrators as an essential service to deliver on the promise of "accessible, media-rich, interactive and active educational experiences designed for excellent learning outcomes and optimum employability" (Deakin University, 2012). In order to maintain such a leadership position, the Library Executive endorsed a professional development program for liaison librarians to build their capacity to work effectively and confidently with academics.

The following paper charts the development of the scaffolded liaison librarian training program based on an annual Training Needs Analysis (TNA); evaluation and the new directions of the program.

Keywords: liaison librarian training program; staff development; Training Needs Analysis; evaluation; learning circles.

Introduction

"Rules and roles aren't what they used to be. In fact, they change reflexively as education, technology, and knowledge-creation practices change, and change each other. Academic libraries have to make choices about priorities, investment, and disinvestment in a complex, continually emerging environment".

(Dempsey, 2015, p. 11)

Disruptive technology has profoundly changed the delivery of programs in the higher education sector. Students may elect to experience campus delivery, wholly online or a blend. The shifts in delivery of program offerings and utilising the technology to develop programs that engage, support and build student capacity to live and work in a digital environment has ramifications for the Library (Shupe & Phung, 2011). Such a shift in instructional models has changed the librarians' roles with academics. As noted by Shupe and Pung (2011), in this new dynamic, librarians are involved in a number of different types of activities - from classroom instruction, developing online resources through to being a member of a School based project team. The expanding and changing roles of librarians is exciting and also challenging as libraries need to recruit not only staff with skills, knowledge and capacity to adapt to new ways of interacting with students and academics but to also provide relevant ongoing capacity building training programs.

Given the rate and nature of change in the Higher Education sector, librarians need to commit to ongoing learning and refreshing of skills so that their new capabilities align with learning, teaching and research priorities of their university communities. Reading the literature, opportunities for capacity building staff are delivered in many ways and formats - in-house programs, workshops, seminars, webinars and conferences.   Authors acknowledge the critical role of staff training in equipping librarians to adapt to changing roles and responsibilities (Wilkinson & Lewis, 2006). The University of Auckland Library is an example of an institution which identified a need to support their subject librarians in developing a new suite of skills and competencies to support their academic community (Moselen & Wang, 2014). The goals of the staff development program, delivered over the year, were to capacity build the subject librarians understanding of information literacy; develop strategies for communicating effectively with academics; and become familiar with assessment and evaluation tools used in formation literacy teaching and evaluation. The Program has now become an integral component of the University of Auckland Library's staff development calendar.

Deakin University

The University's strategic plan *LIVE the future Agenda 2020, (2015b)* strongly articulates the University's vision to become Australia' premier university in driving the digital frontier by delivering a personalised experience with premium digital engagement, creating the power and opportunities for students to live in a connected

and evolving world. The Vice Chancellor's vision provides the framework for the academic community along with divisional partners to create courses and support services that deliver "accessible, media-rich, interactive and active educational experiences designed for excellent learning outcomes and optimum employability".

 Over 52,000 students are enrolled at Deakin University, twenty three per cent are enrolled in the Cloud Campus (Image One). The implications for the Library are numerous. Supporting the University's agenda of delivering and building digital literacy knowledge and skills of students and academics requires highly skilled and informed librarians. Delivering professional development programs that capacity build liaison librarians with the skills and knowledge needed to work effectively and confidently with academics is critical for creating resources and learning activities that align with unit and course learning outcomes.


STUDENTS BY COURSE TYPE		COURSE ENROLMENTS BY CAMPUS	
52 388	COURSE ENROLMENTS	27 115	BURWOOD (MELBOURNE)
12 001	POSTGRADUATE	12 519	CLOUD (ONLINE)
11 550	COURSE COMPLETIONS	7095	WAURN PONDS (GEELONG)
8088	INTERNATIONAL	4533	WATERFRONT (GEELONG)
1752	HIGHER DEGREE BY RESEARCH	1024	WARRNAMBOOL
87%	OVERALL COURSE SATISFACTION		
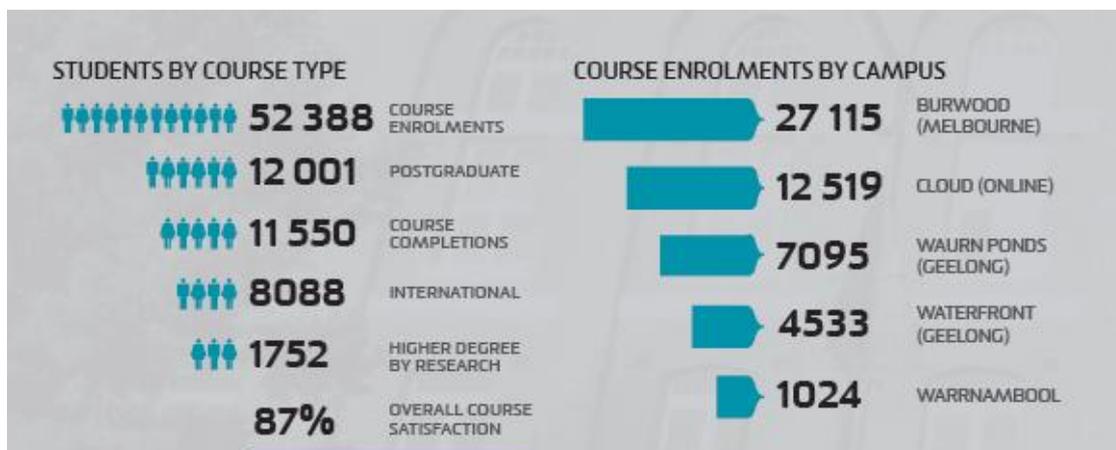
Image 1: Deakin at a glance 2015 (Deakin University, 2015a)

Impetus for a structured capacity building liaison librarian program

In 2012 the University launched *LIVE the future: Agenda 2020 which set* targets for learning, teaching and research and at the same time commenced a university-wide course enhancement process that required that all courses were personal, relevant and engaging wherever learning took place—on campus, online and in industry settings. In the review of courses, academics were required to articulate unit and course learning outcomes. Library seized this opportunity to play an active role in working with faculties to provide resources and learning activities that evidenced digital literacy and digital scholarship. While such opportunities encouraged greater engagement with academics, there was a need to develop a digital literacy framework to enable the liaison librarians to discuss with teaching teams how digital literacy could be scaffolded across year levels.

The Library developed the University's digital literacy framework. This was informed by extensive literature review of digital literacy and by research carried out by Dr Pauline Hagel an academic at the University. The Framework gave the liaison librarians a structure with which to work and engage with academics. However, the success of gaining a shared university –wide understanding of digital literacy required liaison librarians to not only understand the concept but be confident in leading conversations with School academics and divisional colleagues.

Method

The then Director, Digital Scholarship and Deputy University Librarian, understood the vital role that liaison librarians would play in developing academics awareness of digital literacy. The challenge for the Library, however, was to develop a training program that partnered with divisions and faculties to capacity build liaison librarians with new skills and knowledge. In this way the Library would be seen as a relevant and essential service that is integral to delivering on the University's mission of a "borderless and personalised relationship, creating the power and opportunities to live the future in a new world" (Deakin University, 2012).

Considering the time constraints and workload of liaison librarians it was important that a training program was seen as relevant and valuable. From the senior library executive point of view, the desired learning outcomes were developing a cohort of liaison librarians who could confidently engage with academics on evidencing digital literacy in their units and courses. A Training Needs Analysis (TNA) was developed. The questions were based on Liaison librarian position descriptions and required the Liaison librarians to rate their current skill levels on a rating scale of 1 – 5. The lowest skill = 1 and the highest skill level= 5. The areas covered communication skills; digital literacy; publishing and scholarly communication; research quality and impact assessment; research data management; and professional practice. The liaison librarians were also asked to highlight three key skills or areas of knowledge that they identified as being important to address in the program.

The TNA revealed that the liaison librarians lacked some confidence in most of the areas identified. Based on the feedback a structured and scaffolded training

program was developed. Over eight months, April to November, all the faculty liaison teams attended monthly half day training sessions.

The training sessions

The initial design features of each of the sessions were presentations incorporating a learning activity, time for reflection and feedback. The first year of the training program focussed on skills acquisition and sessions included identifying and presentation of Digital Literacy concepts in course forums; creating scripts and storyboards for video 'cloud concepts'; engaging with online learning theory and pedagogy and the use of apps for learning and teaching. One training session immersed the liaison librarians in undertaking a newly developed learning activity, "Assessing the reliability and accuracy of information". This Active learning experience provided librarians with firsthand experience of student skill development and level of engagement in the tasks. Each training session progressively built skill, knowledge and confidence levels.

Results

Evaluation at the end of each of the Liaison Library staff training session provided opportunities to improve and better target future training sessions. Support documentation was provided at each session and also made available on the liaison librarian wiki for referral. The final month the staff training session in 2014 included reflective practice incorporating use of the TNA to inform the program for 2015. Comparing results from the TNA carried out in March 2014 with the November TNA

2014, revealed a major improvement in skill level and positive shifts of confidence in the following areas:

- Ninety –five percent of liaison Librarians indicated that they were able to discuss knowledgably The Library's current Digital Literacy Framework with academic University colleagues

- Eighty nine percent indicated that they could use the Digital Literacy Framework to inform Unit program development in addressing graduate learning outcomes

- Eighty three percent indicated that they were able to deliver presentations and learning activities appropriate to different cohorts, levels and abilities within classes and seminars.

The maturing of the program

Image 2: Infographic of 2015 liaison Librarian training program

The training program has matured. The sessions have developed into more open ended collaborative training. In 2015 the format moved away from in-house library presenters to guests from faculty and divisional partners to ensure an inclusive view of the topic and collaborative approach to the training. This has been a significant enhancement for the training program as we have created a shared understanding of faculty and library roles, built closer relationships and developed new partnerships to support graduate learning outcomes at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Inviting faculty and divisional colleagues to lead our sessions has created further opportunities for liaison librarians to collaborate and embed digital literacy in learning activities and resources. At the final training session for 2015, the TNA was re-administered.   The following graph (Graph 1) summarises the liaison librarians' self-assessment of their skill levels. The areas that demonstrate liaison librarians self – assessment of their highest levels of skills and knowledge were in the areas of collections; research quality and impact assessment; communication skills; practice and digital literacy.

The liaison librarians, based on the TNA and from unsolicited feedback are:

- confidently engaging with academics in suggesting ways in which digital literacy may be evidenced in learning activities adopted across several faculties;
- increasingly involved in capacity building workshops for students and academics in demonstrating how their research profile may be improved;
- confident users of citation databases to evaluate and identify discipline-appropriate publishing options.

Areas of skill which were still self-assessed as low were research and data management and ERA and grants.

2015 TNA responses: mean calculations

	Comm. skills	Digital Literacy	Pub. & Scholarly Comms	Research Quality & Impact	ERA & Grants	Research Data Mgt	Collections	Practice
■ mean	3.63	3.46	3.46	3.69	2.78	2.86	3.86	3.60
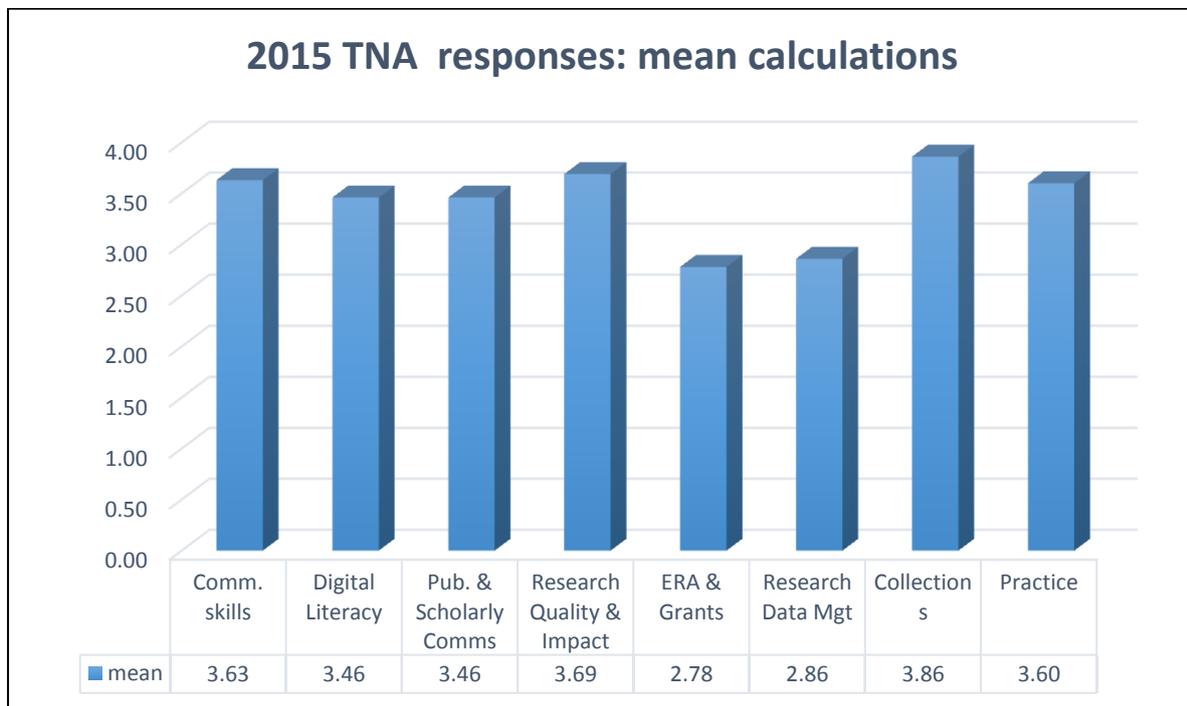
Graph 1: 2015 TNA: A summary of liaison librarians' self-assessment of their skill levels: mean calculations (rating 1 -5)

The TNA also sought comment from the liaison librarians on skills or professional development that they would like addressed in the following year. The 2014 TNA elicited few responses. However the 2015 TNA, yielded thoughtful responses which marked a shift from passive to active participation in the program. The following comments from discipline areas are indicative of the future content and structure of training sessions:

> *"I like the sessions we have had from other university areas detailing what they do and how the library may be able to collaborate with them to provide greater support for staff and student. I would like these to continue in 2016"* (a liaison librarian from the Faculty of Health team)

> *"I found the showcase of digital literacy initiatives in Oct very useful and educational. Good to know what others are doing"*
> (a liaison Librarian from the Faculty of Science Engineering and Built Environment team)

2016: Embracing change
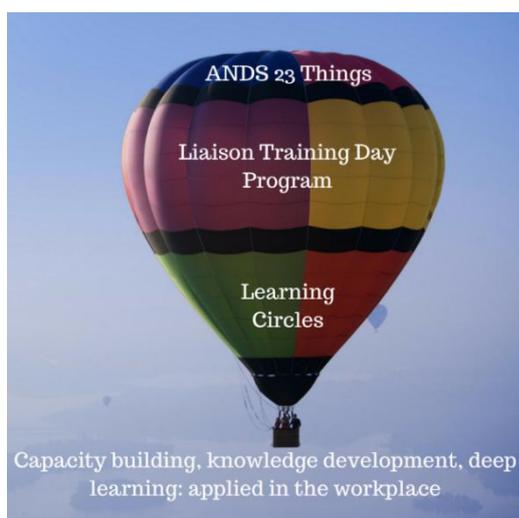
Image 3: Pictorial representation of the 2016 liaison librarian training program

Now in 2016, as the liaison librarians have grown in confidence they have embraced the problem based style of instruction that has been incorporated into the training program. Each of the training sessions are designed to progressively scaffold skill and knowledge acquisition and address topics such as developing a personal philosophy of learning and teaching; understanding discipline specific pedagogical approaches; designing learning experiences for the online environment and performing action research. Each of the training sessions seeks active participation of liaison librarians. This includes showcasing of innovative programs by faculty liaison librarians and their use of learning platforms such as Smart Sparrow in either

research practice or learning and teaching.   The participation encourages liaison librarians to take ownership of their learning, demonstrating their successes and application in their work with unit chairs and students.

An integral component of the training program is the reflective practice of learning circles. The first session was led by an academic from the research group Collaborative Reflective Experience and Practice in Education (CREPE) who guided the development of critical reflective practice. The groups include membership of up to six colleagues who represent cross faculty, Learning and Teaching and Research Services teams.   The learning circles meet between each training session as well as on the training day. The anticipated outcome of this practice is deeper engagement with skills and knowledge gained through the liaison librarian training program, the online program, *23 (research data) Things* delivered by Australian National Data Service and application of skills/knowledge gained by these programs into the workplace.

Examples of two sessions from the 2016 liaison librarian Program
The following examples provide an insight into the content, variety, depth and participation of our academics in the training program.

At the first training session in April 2016, one of the senior academics in the School of Education, led a session "Understanding yourself as learner and teacher". The session explored the different learning styles of students and how our life experience as learners influence the way in which we teach. A practical activity, was

incorporated during which librarians responded to a six point checklist for constructivist learning activities. This gave the liaison librarians an opportunity to examine the way in which they could approach developing meaningful learning activities that would engage students in deeper learning. Following on from this segment, liaison librarians from the Business and Law Team showcased the online digital literacy module that formed part of a unit in the Bachelor of Commerce Degree. In the afternoon academics from CREPE facilitated learning circles. Evaluation of the session generated very positive and encouraging feedback. One hundred per cent response was the highest that we have received for any one of our sessions. The following table and comments illustrate the high level of engagement from the liaison librarians.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
Clear and easy to follow	55.00% 11	40.00% 8	5.00% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	20
Offered sufficient opportunity for hands-on learning	61.90% 13	33.33% 7	4.76% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	21
Included an appropriate level/amount of content	47.62% 10	47.62% 10	4.76% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	21
Lasted an appropriate time/duration	42.86% 9	47.62% 10	4.76% 1	4.76% 1	0.00% 0	21

Graph 2: liaison librarian evaluation of the April 2016 training session,"Understanding yourself as learner and teacher"

Participant comments:

"..made me think about how differently people learned, which needs to be thought about when designing classes. The learning circle session was very helpful to nail down a topic and get some clarity"

"…presentation was excellent and hope to apply, wherever possible, some of the concepts around social constructivism to digital literacy workshops and in the creation of online resources".

"I think I got more out of that training day than any previous one. Di Toe was great and the activities that Shelley and Peta facilitated were very constructive in helping us with our research thinking. I felt very motivated at the end of the day"

'The training day was great. It is always good having activities to help reinforce the learning"

The Research practice - The Connected Researcher

In one of the training sessions in 2015, the Library's Research Team developed and delivered the session, Forensic investigation into online profiling. The focus of the session was to inform the liaison librarians on how they support academics and researchers in their schools to create online profiles using ORCID and Google Scholar to maximise their researcher profile. Outcomes of the session included liaison librarians becoming informed in the processes of creating profiles and the power of social media to increase their research impact thus becoming confident in advising and leading training for their school academics in establishing digital profiles.

Conclusions

The value and importance of staff development programs that foster capacity building is critical for librarians to work effectively and with confidence within their academic communities.

The Deakin University Library liaison librarian training program has evolved from monthly instructional style program to a problem based style learning in which the liaison librarians apply their learning into their practice. The sessions have also created opportunities for the liaison librarians to engage in deeper learning through

participation in learning circles. While this is a new development in the 2016 program, the liaison librarians are engaging in the exploration of a research topic and are applying their skills and knowledge learned through the training sessions and the *ANDS 23 things* program.

The ongoing scaffolded training program, based on analysis of training needs, has provided a solid framework of support for liaison librarians who are now taking a more active and leading role in developing conversations and opportunities for collaboration with academics. Liaison librarians at Deakin University are now driving innovation and design in teaching and learning. They are leading the conversation about the changes in scholarly communication and demonstrating the role that librarians can play in equipping students, academics and researchers to develop skills and knowledge to fully participate with impact in our evolving digital world.

Ten years ago it was thought that there would be no need for liaison librarians. However delivering a structured ongoing training program with an outcomes focus ensures that liaison librarians not only 'add value' to their faculties but become indispensable in supporting the university strategic agenda, thereby future proofing library careers for tomorrow.

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