



Collaboration and creation of digital pathways for academic literacy: student-centred elearning at Western Sydney University

Key Words

academic literacy, collaboration, elearning, interactive learning activities, learning experience,

Abstract

This paper will critically reflect on the development and implementation of a new academic literacy online learning site at an Australian university, with a focus on the cross-departmental collaborative challenges and opportunities encountered along the way, and the broader context of providing academic language and learning support in higher education. Online learning offers many benefits and drawbacks. In the context of academic language and learning, Nallaya and Kehrwald note that 'an online platform allows the acquisition of academic literacies in a non-threatening environment' (2013, p. A-81). However, a number of skills are often required to produce successful online courses or resources. Academic language and learning practitioners may not have the technical skills necessary, while learning designers may not have the necessary content knowledge. Collaboration is often required, and indeed collaboration is one of the themes identified in the NMC Horizon Report: 2017 Higher Education Edition as 'key for scaling effective solutions' to issues in higher education (Adams Becker et al., 2017, p. 2). In 2017 the Library Academic Literacies team at Western Sydney University began a joint project with the University's Central Blended Learning team. The aim of the collaboration was to transform existing self-help academic literacy resources into a flexible, stimulating and interactive learning resource that gave students ownership and control over their learning in an online 'safe space'. Collaboration between the departments and with students (the project included a student focus group) was vital to ensure the success of the project as a student-focused self-help academic literacy resource. Multiple collaborative approaches were trialled, including having design experts work on content, and the relative successes of these trials will be discussed. The new Study Smart elearning site focusses on 4 key areas of academic language and learning: preparing for assignments, general writing help, working in groups, and general study skills. These are presented as digital pathways which students travel at their own pace, completing activities and creating a record of individual learning. Each pathway has been carefully designed to develop students' skills at a workable pace, with the option for students to move back and forth as desired. This paper will discuss the collaborative process that led to the new Study Smart elearning site, from the concept and design phase through to the launch and beyond. The available analytics will be discussed as a measure of student engagement with this new resource. The paper will also describe some of the challenges encountered and the solutions that were implemented, such as managing multiple stakeholders, facilitating staff and student engagement, collaborating across University departments, and upskilling the project team. The lessons learned offer vital information for anyone undertaking similar collaborative and digital projects on academic language and learning in higher education.

References

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