

Know it All! online – is it possible?

Angela Mare
Branch Manager
Waverley Campus Information Commons
Holmesglen Institute of TAFE
angelam@holmesglen.vic.edu.au

Abstract:

Holmesglen TAFE has developed an online Information Literacy tutorial in collaboration with the E-learning Unit. The paper explores the challenges faced as librarians worked with multimedia experts and the attempts to reconcile the expectations and aims of the two groups. Understanding the new pedagogy and tools required to successfully produce a dynamic tutorial, that gives similar depth to face-to-face tutorials, that content was comprehensive to cover Information Literacy standards, language appropriate for the target audience and information generic enough to deal with a variety of databases and interface also created challenges for the librarians. The result is Know it All!

Introduction:

In the new digital learning environment librarians must become not only providers of information but also teachers of information organization and use. (Zhang, 2002)

In 2002, the Information Commons at Holmesglen Institute of TAFEⁱ successfully tendered an internal submission to develop an online Information Literacy package. A similar submission had been tendered the previous year, but had been unsuccessful, as the Institute had given priority to the development of online teaching units and the transfer of existing course subjects to the online environment.

The Information Commons had strong reasons for wanting to develop an online Information Literacy package:

- It was recognised that even committed teaching staff were not likely to provide more than one hour for Information Literacy in their unit. Giving time to the library for Information Literacy meant that they had less time to teach the core content of the course
- Librarians have finite time themselves, so need to find a way in which they can teach Information Literacy skills to more students with no extra staff
- Provide students with a different and exciting format to learn new skills
- Many students, both international and local, commence late and often miss out on orientation tours and Information Literacy sessions
- Increase in the number of students who are learning online, who have high IT literacy skills and demand 24/7 learning and support.

The Information Commons proposal was not groundbreaking. University libraries have been developing online Information Literacy tutorials for a number of years, many of which are available freely on the Internet. A perusal of the library literature will show many papers that describe the process of developing these online tutorials. It was however unique at the time of the submission, as we were unaware of any other TAFE library which had created an online Information Literacy tutorial. Whilst developing our package, the Learn Network of TAFE Libraries in South Australia completed and launched their online Information Literacy website - the LEARN Information Literacy Initiative, known as LILI. It is, as far as I am aware, the only other TAFE to develop such a website and is a collaborative effort between all South Australian TAFE libraries.

The Holmesglen package, Know it All!, was developed by two Information Commons staff, Robet Hornett, now Library Manager at the Caulfield Campus of Monash University, and myself, in conjunction with the E-Learning Unit. Teachers were consulted in the process. This reflects the new partnerships on the E-Learning horizon. The partnerships with multimedia staff are in their infancy whereas working with teachers is certainly not a new concept and has been successfully achieved in a number of online projects both overseas and in Australia.

The importance of working with teachers was recognized many years ago. Saunders in 1999, (cited in Buchanan, Luck and Jones, 2002) was already stating “partnerships with teachers are more necessary in the virtual library than ever before to design learning experiences that

require multiple formats and critical thinking.” Zang (2002) claims that “the key to better integration of library resources is to develop an active collaboration among teaching faculty”. A perusal of the literature will show that librarians are finding many different ways of working collaboratively with teachers or are at least trying to strengthen the partnerships. Buchanan, Luck and Jones (2002) argue in their conclusion that “only when librarians and faculty work together can information literacy instruction be seamlessly merged with, not merely flow beside course content”. Rader (2002) states that “throughout the twentieth century and at the beginning of the twenty-first century ... librarians have worked diligently to form partnerships with faculty and teachers”

Partnerships with multimedia experts, on the other hand, are not pursued to the same degree. Many universities have qualified IT staff working within the library or have qualified librarians who have multimedia skills. TAFEs are certainly not as fortunate and therefore need to address this issue. Multimedia skilled staff and partnerships with multimedia experts are goals of the Information Commons at Holmesglen and this is reflected at the Institute level.

Online Learning at Holmesglen:

Holmesglen has a strong commitment to the development of online learning. An E-Learning Unit was established to develop quality online material produced by professional online development teams. Teachers assist as content developers. In conjunction with this, an E-Learning Facilitators (ELFs) programme was established. The ELF programme is a grass roots initiative to increase the use of technology and online resources within teaching centres. The programme is not focused on the development of online resources but on their use and a general increase in IT skills and usage. Finally, a laptop initiative was also established. This initiative is linked to the professional development of teachers, but the focus is more on advanced IT skills in education. This means that teachers with limited IT skills are encouraged to build their basic skills (Word, Excel, email, PowerPoint etc). Teachers with good IT skills are encouraged to learn about and implement online learning strategies in the context of the Diploma of Vocational Education and Training. There is some content development at this level, but again the emphasis is on identification and use of available material.

The end result is that Holmesglen is developing quality online tutorials through the E-Learning Unit and teachers are understanding and becoming more proactive in the use of online resources. These resources are incorporated into and complement face-to-face teaching. They are known by the old term of Flexible Delivery, or Blended Learning as they are becoming known in the United States. Students are expected to study online whilst in class, or use the resources in their own time as preparation for discussion at the next class. This type of online learning is being embraced widely throughout academia and is slowly merging into traditional mainstream courses. As Heller-Ross (1999, as cited in Zhang 2002) wrote, “the line between on- and off-campus courses is indeed blurring as technology is incorporated into all aspects of the classroom”.

Although Flexible Learning seems to be the preferred option within Holmesglen and TAFEs in general, universities are developing more fully online courses. Anecdotal evidence, however, seems to suggest that much online learning is still at the stage of posting assignments, syllabi, handouts, bibliographies, presentations, lecture notes and instructions on the Internet. Creating bulletin boards for students to post notices and email appear to be the

only interactive features of many online courses. There is a wealth of information detailing the pedagogy of learning online and excellent articles and websites that show how to incorporate interactive features into an online module, but it appears that teachers need to develop this expertise to a greater extent. Alternatively, institutions need to provide opportunities for collaborative support from multimedia production specialists within the organization - this is quicker, provides a collaborative environment, a much better result and is more likely to be successful.

Partnerships

In the same way as online teaching began with posting of print materials, many librarians began with the posting of print handouts and worksheets on the Web. There was little change from the original. As librarians gained the required skills and knowledge of the pedagogy for online learning, online library instruction soon incorporated hypertext links, graphical interfaces, audio, video and interactive features. Nancy Dewald emphasised, in two articles published in 1999, the importance of active learning when developing online courses. Active learning can be explained as *students interacting with information which helps them to remember more*. She quotes Brandon Hall from his *Web Based Training Cookbook* (1997) “interactivity makes the difference between a program that simply presents information and one that actually trains the user. Interactivity not merely requires the learner to push buttons; it engages the learner with the material in order to practice skills.”

Even before we started our project, we knew that our finished product had to be visually appealing with interesting designs and interactive features. It had to be generic enough to deal with a variety of databases and cataloguing systems without making it irrelevant, while ensuring that it does not date as databases and interfaces change. It also had to include all necessary information and the language and tone of the writing had to be appropriate for the target audience.

With all this in mind, the task initially seemed daunting but challenging. No formal training was provided for Robet or myself in online pedagogy, functionality or design. We had undertaken our own personal research and so attended the first day with a basic understanding of what was involved. It was expected that the E-Learning staff would provide this expertise and they had more than enough experience to ensure that the package was appropriate to online learners. Our package was to benefit from a number of previous packages that had been developed at Holmesglen and the evolution of the E-Learning Unit's relevant styles over a number of years.

Over the first two weeks, the mornings were taken up with informal discussions about the intent of the package and the elements we wanted to include. This would determine the style and layout of the package. A number of previous online packages were demonstrated to us with discussions on which packages worked and the various elements that did not and, more importantly, why they did not. In theory, their skills and expertise meant that once the design was in place and the content written, the time taken to complete the whole package would be reduced.

We also had definite ideas on how we wanted the tutorial to appear. Robet and I showed the E-Learning staff a number of existing online Information Literacy packages developed by universities. We hoped to emulate the style of a number of packages that we felt had appeal. From all these discussions, the graphic designers then drafted the first design. From the

beginning and throughout the project, there were times when we strongly disagreed with the proposed design and later with elements of the content that were being excluded. Considerable debate was sparked between the librarians, the web developers and the graphic designers. This was an interesting learning curve and healthy in the end, as we all shifted our position based on the discussion that followed the disagreement. The end result was a design that we all agreed upon.

The length of time it took to write the content from scratch was seriously underestimated. The funding enabled Robet and myself to be released from our duties, to spend one full day in the E-Learning Unit for ten weeks. This was extended for an extra two weeks at the expense of the Information Commons and it certainly did not take into account the additional time spent on the project in and out of working hours beyond that one day per week. The E-Learning Unit worked on the design and development of the package throughout the twelve weeks but not exclusively. They had a number of packages on which they were working concurrently. If Robet and myself were expected to undertake the design and development of the package in those twelve weeks, it would not have been completed. This is where the advantages of collaboration become obvious. Know it All! was completed within twelve weeks without sacrificing quality.

Elizabeth Dupais (2001) writes in her article, Automating Instruction, that the “planning and development for the TILT tutorial took over two years and included surveys, reviews and useability tests”. It was a collaborative process with 16 librarians from various subject specialities contributing to the project. The process was justified with TILT being recognised as one of the best online tutorials on the Web. Even with special funding, TAFE libraries are not in the position to be able to contribute that much time and staffing. Developing skills necessary to produce a truly interactive online product and the time required could impact on the effectiveness and quality of the product and could prohibit many of the smaller TAFE libraries from commencing such a project. Establishing collaborative teams of librarians, teachers and professional online developers may serve to improve products and develop effective partnerships between the various departments.

Challenges to the partnerships

The collaborative process at Holmesglen has many advantages but it also has disadvantages. The E-Learning Unit at Holmesglen is expected to produce a specified amount of online packages per year. The responsibility for the projects to come in on time and under budget belongs to them and they, by necessity, control the creativity and design of the projects. Robet and myself were regarded as nothing more than the content writers. The E-Learning staff also have tertiary qualifications and often felt they were qualified and experienced enough in research, to determine the content themselves. The final product was achieved by spirited negotiation on the part of Robet and myself, despite there being a process of consultation.

This initially produced the impression that we were not equal partners and the resulting negotiations and compromise become a time factor. Time spent in lengthy discussion, albeit thought provoking and a learning experience, took us away from writing the content, which we then needed to complete in our own time. Dunk, Van Eijk, and Deo (1999), in their conclusion to their article about their Web tutorial, stated that “working with a team committed to the same concept has been energising and sustaining” and that bringing together people of different backgrounds “creates an environment that is conducive to

innovation". If deciding to go with collaborative projects, ensure that all participants are equal partners.

An alternative to the process of collaborating with multimedia staff that can be considered, is to approach universities and seek permission to modify the content of existing online tutorials as a basis for your own.

This is an important consideration for librarians, in particular those who work at smaller TAFEs. Perhaps funding can be sought to adapt material from pre-existing online tutorials, as occurred with the LILI project. The project manager of LILI negotiated to adapt material from Cal Poly State University (California), Griffith University (Queensland) and the TILT website (University of Texas). According to Barnett, Bruner and White (2002) many academic education providers have drawn on these three websites, due to their generic nature and quality. TILT has become so popular that it has set up an Open Publication Licence (OPL), which allows visitors to download a complete copy of the TILT text, graphics, interactions and scripts with accompanying documentation. The OPL "turns TILT into an open source program allowing you to reuse or enhance aspects of the program." (Dupuis, 2001) No licensing fees are paid, the only condition is that you acknowledge the modified authors and agree to share your modified version. "Thus libraries build on what is already developed and share their improvements and additions for the benefit of all" (Dupuis, 2001). In the same way, LILI is available free of charge to any library that wishes to link to it or even modify and adapt it to their library.

A further challenge developed when the project had been completed and Know it All! was promoted. It received excellent feedback and many teachers booked Information Literacy sessions to have Know it All! demonstrated to their students. Many also requested to have it linked it to their online learning modules.

It was at this point that we learned that the Information Commons does not hold the copyright to Know it All!. The issue of copyright illustrates a complication that can result from a collaborative project. We were bound to accept the Institute policy on copyright that stated that any online package developed by the Institute is to be available to Holmesglen students only. Without any authentication process, this has resulted in our online package being accessible on campus only. The Information Commons is presently negotiating to have it accessible off campus.

Target audience

In a TAFE environment students come from a wide variety of backgrounds. Holmesglen is no exception. There are international students who are challenged by the language, society, culture and education in the Australian context and the concept of research. There are apprentices and vocational students who often come into the library ill prepared, for example, without pen and paper, and also bewildered that they are expected to do research, when all they want to do is work with their hands. There are mature age students who left school at an early age and are confused by the new technology. In addition to these groups, there are young students who are IT-savvy and demand online resources and support, and other students who are planning to articulate to university.

Many of the international students come from developing countries where library services are not well developed and, as a result, they are not skilled in using library resources. They may be used to consulting only one textbook that the teacher may have copied for all the students. They may also be used to receiving all information solely from the teacher. And they may also live in areas in which Internet connectivity is not available or only recently made possible. Each of these students approach research with different cultural and educational attitudes. Many of the students are unfamiliar with how to research analytically, critically and on their own.

Know it All! was designed for this incredibly diverse range of students and capabilities. The logistics of meeting the needs of all these students and the design elements that were essential to the success of the package generated considerable debate but ultimately were achieved.

Project design

When the E-Learning staff examined the outline of the package we were proposing and the existing online tutorials we showed them, they were concerned about our “linear” approach. They were determined that the Holmesglen package would move away from this approach. They also had concerns that the content was too text based. They already had some experience with a similar online tutorial that they had created for international students. This tutorial guided these students through the process of preparing for written assignments. It was the first project for the E-Learning Unit and was too complex and text based. This experience meant that future packages had to be broken up into as many smaller and self-contained modules of information.

They proposed a two-method approach - *Projects* and *Quick Find*. The tutorials and quizzes in the *Quick Find* and the *Project* sections are identical. What changes is how you choose to access this information.

KNOW it ALL!
understanding the research process

[About](#) [Glossary](#)

 **Project**
Choose a project topic to research.

 **Quick Find**
Shortcuts to tutorials, and quizzes.

Welcome to **Know it all**, the resource that provides you with all the skills and knowledge you need to research successfully.

There are two ways to use **Know it all**. You can find a tutorial or quiz quickly by searching through **Quick find**, or you can work through a project, learning what you need as you go.

Either way, you will end up knowing more than when you began!

The *Quick Find* section enables students to access all the tutorials and quizzes which are arranged alphabetically.

In the *Projects* section, the tutorials and quizzes can be applied to six broad topics, while the seventh is a generic, choose your own topic. Some projects relate to a subject area taught at Holmesglen. This satisfies one of the main characteristics of good online instruction, that the online tutorial be course related, thereby reinforcing the relevance of Information Literacy to teachers and staff. (DeWald 1991, ACRL 2000). Other topics are of personal interest to hopefully stimulate and maintain the attention of any student and to make learning fun and to satisfy a further characteristic (ACRL 2000).



The screenshot shows a web interface for 'KNOW it ALL! understanding the research process'. The page is titled 'Project choices' and features a navigation bar with 'START', 'About', and 'Glossary' buttons. The main content area is divided into two columns. The left column contains three paragraphs of text: 'If you are studying, you will often be asked to do research for a project, such as a report, an essay or a presentation.', 'We have provided you with several sample project topics to research, so that you can apply the information within Know it all to a 'real-life' situation.', and 'Just select a project topic from the list that you are interested in.' The right column is titled 'Select a project' and lists seven options, each with a small icon: 'Research the history of your favourite music style', 'How have new technologies changed advertising?', 'Do childcare centres have a negative impact on children? Discuss.', 'Smoke free legislation: has it worked?', 'What are the energy efficient principles to consider when building a house?', 'What is the possible impact of global warming on Australia?', and 'Own topic.'

Once a *Project* is selected, the student is taken to the *Project Steps*. These steps are repeated for each *Project* and include:

- Analyse your topic
- Sources of information
- Searching for information
- Preparing information
- Referencing
- Presenting information

KNOW it ALL! understanding the research process START About Glossary

Your project is: Research the history of your favourite music style Project choices

Project steps

Now that you have chosen your project, you need to find the right information.

Place your mouse on each of the steps to learn about the research process.

Analyse your topic → **Sources of information** → **Searching for information** → **Preparing information** → **Referencing** → **Presenting information**

Among the more interesting features of Know it All! are the last three steps. When writing the content for these steps, it was agreed that teachers would be consulted in the process. Although included in the Information Literacy Standards issued by the Council of Australian University Libraries (CAUL), teachers have a greater responsibility and interest to ensure that students are proficient in these areas. Robet and I were also keen to encourage teachers to accept shared responsibility for Information Literacy. Once the content was written, it was given to teaching staff for comments. In the case of Referencing, it was more for their endorsement and acceptance of the examples we incorporated. It is expected that teachers will be able to use these tutorials with their students in a proactive manner, without having to book a session with a librarian.

Within each *Project Step* there are a number of tutorials and quizzes, which will vary from *Project Step* to *Project Step*, eg. Under *Analyse your topic* there is only one tutorial and two quizzes. Under *Searching for information*, there are five tutorials and five quizzes.

KNOW it ALL! understanding the research process START About Glossary

Your project is: Research the history of your favourite music style Project steps

Presenting information

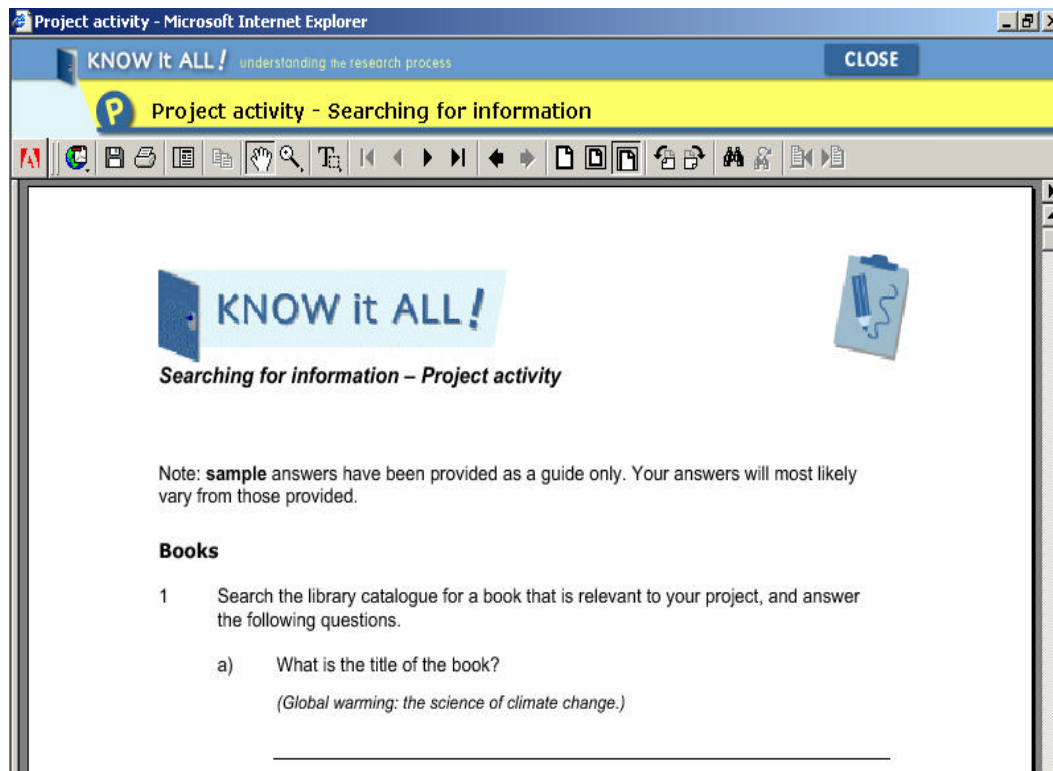
This step outlines the final stage in the research process - the presentation of information. This may occur in the form of an oral presentation or a written assignment.

The **tutorials** explain the two main ways of presenting information. You can use the **quizzes** to assess your understanding of this step.

You can apply the skills and knowledge from this step to your project by completing the **Project Activity**. If you want to check how you went, consult the **Project Answers**.

P	PROJECT ACTIVITY	Q	QUIZZES
	Project activity		Presenting information True or false
T	TUTORIALS		Presenting information Drag and drop
	Presenting written information		Oral presentations Multiple choice
	Oral presentations		PowerPoint comparison Multiple choice

For each *Project Step*, there is also an *Activity Sheet* that is a PDF file that can be downloaded and printed. This activity sheet is the only thing that changes with each project. The questions within the activity sheets do not change, but the examples given to guide students to the correct answers are unique to each project. These sheets can be given to students by teachers or Information Commons staff in the classroom or prior to an Information Literacy session. They can also be used for assessment.



Another interesting design feature, which actually grew out of misinterpretation of what the E-Learning staff were expecting, is the *Student Tips*. These are a series of quotations from “students” outlining anecdotal evidence of the incorrect and correct way of researching. The original intention of the student tips was to emphasise important elements of each tutorial. It was felt that the finished result added a fun component to the tutorials and spoke to students in their own language.

A further feature of the package is the *Checklists*, which are also PDF files that can be printed by teachers and students. We had hoped to include pre-tests as well as post-tests for self-checking, but lack of time prevented us doing this. The *Checklists* act as both pre- and post- tests. They are designed to inform students of essential skills and competencies required for successful research. As a pre-test, the intention is to assess their Information Literacy skills prior to them undertaking the tutorial and to determine the need to complete the tutorial. As a post-test, it is designed to ensure they have achieved the stated objectives and goals of the tutorial.

Good design elements

In 2000, the Instruction Section Teaching Methods Committee of ACRL published its “Tips for developing effective Web-based library instruction” These included:

- Outline the objectives and outcomes
- Provide a clearly defined structure
- Include interactive exercises
- Give attention to the concepts behind the mechanics
- Incorporate contemporary language and topics, be as succinct as possible, and don’t be afraid to entertain
- Provide a way to contact a librarian
- When the tutorial is used, try to make it course related.

These points held no surprises and most did not create problems for Know it All!. The exception was the fifth point. *Incorporate contemporary language and be as succinct as possible* caused considerable concerns. As content developers, we spent hours writing the content, being particularly conscious of trying to include as much relevant and clear, information as possible for each of the tutorials. The E-Learning Unit staff on the other hand were concerned about the amount of text on the page, perhaps they were also a bit surprised about how much there was to know about Information Literacy. Wherever possible there was to be no scrolling up and down. The text had to fit on the page. The number of screens per tutorial was also of concern. Each tutorial had to be short, as the number of screens the online learner has to go through determines the success of the tutorial. Many students get bored very quickly and will not complete the tutorial if it takes too long. There are a number of tutorials that ended up with PDF supplements so that students could download more comprehensive notes if required.

As we were working in conjunction with non-library staff, they ensured that we avoided library jargon and technical terminology. We attempted to provide information that was clear and challenging enough to hold the student’s attention without being overly formal. We wrote an extensive amount of content and text that went off to the E-Learning staff and was often returned completely stripped of everything but its bare essentials. Often we had to argue for information to be retained. If it went over the screen we had to justify every word. This was another area where collaboration was very challenging. It is also where we discovered the real differences between learning face-to-face and learning online.

The E-Learning staff felt completely justified in cutting out large tracts of information that they felt were irrelevant or too long. It was this constant clash between wanting the final product to be what we wanted, to include the content that we knew the students needed and that we saw as critical, and the need to conform with correct online pedagogy and not detract from the attractiveness and useability of the product, that was challenging. From the developers’ point of view perhaps they saw us as too wordy with our content and were more interested in the design and technical elements. Therefore to cut bits out, to accommodate space or design issues, was in line with their priorities. This was a culture conflict that had to be worked through and controlled to ensure satisfactory outcomes.

Another concern was that in reducing the text we were “dumbing down” the information. A considerable amount of effort went into investigating the tonal quality and the language to ensure that it was succinct and clear without being patronising.

Maintenance

We tried to keep the information as generic and as general as possible to reduce the amount of time involved in updating the content. Rather than discuss databases subscribed to by Holmesglen, it was decided that we would discuss the process of searching databases. The searching strategies skills learnt could then be applied to a number of databases.

The quizzes were disappointing in terms of the number included in the final package. Robet and I had spent hours writing a variety of quizzes, which, due to time constraints, were never incorporated. A future aim is to revamp and extend the quiz section so that students, when making mistakes, are able to undertake further quizzes without repetition. We also hope that in the future, quizzes will not only be self-assessing but also self-recording. Assessing students with a mark provides students with a further impetus for completing the tutorial.

As Know it All! was created using HTML, Information Commons staff can make minor adjustments to the package. If major revamping or additional information is required, we can submit for further funding and the E-Learning Unit can work on it as a separate project. Since the beginning of the project, the Information Commons has been proactive in recruiting staff who have IT skills. This was achieved by redesigning positions to include a high level of multimedia and web design skills and to develop these skills within existing staff through professional development.

Implementing Know it All!

Know it All! provides the Information Commons with a variety of exciting possibilities and opportunities to implement Information Literacy into the curriculum. It will assist in addressing the issue of time and crowded schedules, and its promotion and implementation will hopefully result in teachers appreciating the value of Information Literacy.

Know it All! has been available since the beginning of 2003. Information Commons staff embarked on a series of promotional sessions for teaching staff, showcasing Know it All!. It was also promoted at workshops attended by E-Learning Facilitators (ELFs) and at a meeting for Heads of Centres. During this first year, the first semester was spent primarily in demonstrating the tutorial, but not specifically on working with teaching staff to incorporate it into the curriculum. By second semester, we felt that we needed to actively use Know it All! in our Information Literacy sessions. It was decided that we would trial it with one class and survey the results.

The group chosen comprised Youth and Alcohol and Other Drugs students, who were actually doing their second year and should have been familiar with research. They had previously attended Information Literacy sessions. These students were selected as they were a balance of mature aged and young students, were doing a Social Research Module and it was felt that their skills in research were still very basic and they needed further Information Literacy sessions. Part of the evaluation will be to compare the level of Information Literacy skills after completing Know it All! to their previous skills.

The students were expected to work through all *Project Steps* and complete the *Activity Sheets* based on the topic they had chosen for their individual research. Students participated in two sessions prior to commencing; the first was conducted by the teacher explaining social research, and the second session conducted by myself, explaining the research process in relation to a literature search and social research. The students were then introduced to Know it All! and given a timeline to complete the tutorials and the activity worksheets. The teacher was present at this session.

It was felt that, in order for the students to accept Know it All!, both the teacher and the Information Commons staff member needed to be present when it was introduced and that a mark would be assigned to the assignment. Donaldson (2000) wrote that co-presenting reinforces the fact that it is a collaborative effort supported by the library and teaching staff, that it is “course (not library) driven and that completion is important to their final marks”. It is anticipated that the results will enable Information Commons staff to utilize Know it All! more extensively in 2004 with a number of departments.

Other methods of implementing Know it All! include:

- Arranging for students to work through one of the Know it All! *Projects* or through individual tutorials prior to attending face-to-face sessions and completing the *Activity Sheets*. This will ensure that students have an understanding of research and the sessions could be more practical or advance the students conceptual knowledge of research
- Utilizing the *Quizzes* in face-to-face sessions to provide a fun and practical method of learning
- Encouraging staff to make it compulsory that all students who commence late, or for any reason, miss out on a face-to-face library session to complete Know it All! This will give all students the same opportunities and reinforces the importance of research skills to students
- Using the *Checklists* in face-to-face sessions to stimulate discussion or to ensure that students leave with the required competencies – or, at the minimum, a basic understanding of what they are required to achieve to become fully literate in research.

Information Literacy online – is it possible?

The answer is not a simple one. Given normal time constraints and budgets, is it possible to develop an online package that covers *all* aspects of Information Literacy in-depth? As informative and instructive as online packages are, they are more effective when used in conjunction with face-to-face sessions. Even the award-winning tutorial TILT is seen as a supplement to library instruction. Students are expected to complete TILT prior to attending library sessions and the result has been that students are more familiar with library concepts and can therefore participate in class discussions. Librarians are able to concentrate on advancing students’ skills (Dupais, 2001). In the conclusion to their article, Can an Online tutorial pass the test for library instruction? Churkovich and Oughtred (2002) wrote, “contact with and instruction by a librarian is desirable for the best learning outcomes and confidence in the development of Information Literacy skills. We attribute the success of the class groups to flexible instruction, variety in presentation styles and reinforcement of concepts by a librarian.”

Yet, one of the aims for developing Know it All! was to use it as a stand-alone tutorial when face-to-face was not possible. We have attempted to address as many of the CAUL Information Literacy standards as possible and to make it an active learning tool. Given that many students are often only exposed to a one hour face-to-face session, Know it All! provides a viable alternative and comes closest to a hands on session.

Where face-to-face interaction is not possible, the library must provide a variety of online support. In an environment where many subjects are taught online and students may not be, or may choose not to be, on campus, the library needs to develop comprehensive, innovative and attractive online support services. The library has a responsibility to provide these students with support in resourcing their information needs and the development of lifelong learning skills, and this must not be compromised. It is simply not satisfactory or appropriate for the library to only provide Information Literacy and reference service to what is fast becoming a minority group, the users who visit the library.

The other issue is of course that libraries are spending more and more of their budgets on electronic resources. Many students cannot use these effectively. Simply providing the information online and expecting by some miracle that users will find and use the information they need is not good enough and is, in the end, a waste of money. These resources need to be properly supported at their point of use.

Given that Know it All! has only recently been implemented, it is too early to draw any qualitative conclusions about the programmes effectiveness in meeting its objectives. However the success of Know it All! will not be so much about the success or failure of the content in developing Information Literacy skills in students, but more to do with achieving student usage of the product. The extent to which we can get teachers to recognise, value and promote the development of Information Literacy skills within their subjects and courses and require the students to demonstrate these skills will determine our success or failure.

Conclusion

Having worked collaboratively with the E-Learning staff, I can conclude that despite there being disadvantages, it was a worthwhile exercise. It resulted in a quality product which given our staffing and time constraints we would not have been able to achieve. However, if planning to work collaboratively with other departments, ensure that all parties are committed to the same goals and as equal partners, and determine prior to commencing, copyright and ownership issues. Another alternative is to investigate the possibility of funding to negotiate the rights to purchase and modify the content of existing tutorials. A more preferable and long term solution would be to develop the multimedia skills of library staff. This gives more autonomy and flexibility to create and maintain your own online learning.

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Endnote

ⁱ Australian TAFEs are providers of Vocational Education and Training, that is, education for work. This was traditionally seen as post secondary, non-university education and training, focusing on apprenticeships. Programs offered today are diverse and range from Certificate to Advanced Diplomas in a variety of areas, many with a strong link to University study options.