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## ABSTRACT

New technologies allow universities to extend pedagogical practices, enhance learning experiences and develop self-managed lifelong learners. To take full advantage of evolving technologies, multi-skilled teaching and development teams are required with a merging and converging of academic and librarian roles. Conclusions are reported from the outcomes of such a partnership that has designed and delivered an accounting module at the University of the West of England (UWE), Bristol. The ResIDE Electronic Reserve (or short loan) project at UWE sought to examine such issues surrounding the implementation of an electronic reserve as copyright and management control mechanisms. ResIDE is an operational part of UWE's overall Library Services. Re-named the ResIDE Electronic Library, ResIDE now also holds a current awareness database, comprising the Tables of Contents of journals to which the Library subscribes, and a past examination paper database. The Electronic Reserve supports four original pilot Built Environment modules, one Faculty of Health and Social Care module, and three Bristol Business School modules through provision of core and additional readings and non-copyrighted module information networked to all facilities on all campuses. It gives simultaneous multi-user, multi-location, 24-hour access to a range of secure documents in a variety of electronic formats held on a library server. The research study based on ResIDE's support for a second year business elective, Information for Management Decision Making, is pioneering a new approach to collaborative working, moving away from traditional academic/librarian roles. (Contains 20 references.) (AEF)

# Converged Librarian/Academic Roles in the 'Wired' University

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## Converged Librarian/Academic Roles in the 'Wired' University

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### **Abstract**

*New technologies allow universities to extend pedagogic practices, enhance learning experiences and develop self-managed lifelong learners. To take full advantage of evolving technologies, multi-skilled teaching and development teams are required with a merging and converging of academic and librarian roles. Conclusions are reported from the outcomes of such a partnership that has designed and delivered an accounting module at the University of the West of England, Bristol.*

### **Background**

Many faculty are committed to providing students with the best possible learning environment through a comprehensive range of information provision and delivery. Many are willing and able to harness new technologies to support these aims. Some, however, lack knowledge or time to create new electronic courses and teaching/ learning materials or feel that their department's technical infrastructure, hardware or software provision would not support such developments. They may not understand the implications of using copyrighted information or may lack expertise in obtaining necessary clearance permission. Consequently, they are unlikely to create imaginative new computer-aided learning systems or explore new methods of pedagogic delivery.

### **Cultural Change**

Institutions can only reverse this situation if they are willing to encourage an institution-wide cultural change. A blurring of rigid boundaries, still existing in many UK universities between professional groups, would facilitate development of new teaching and learning methods. More exciting courses could be created, utilising new technological developments, if faculty were willing to work more closely with librarians who may possess the skills to exploit these tools. Traditionally, however, libraries have been perceived as support services to serve staff and students' research, teaching and learning; not as equal partners in the creation, design and delivery of courses.

Rapidly expanding technological advances have highlighted the need for librarians to accept new roles; reflected in a raft of new titles replacing the traditional 'librarian' (Bosseau, 1996). There have been moves towards converged services with increasing convergence of networking, telecommunications and information (Mendelsohn, 1996). However effective, nevertheless, this only merges two 'support' services. It does not address the wider issue of whether there should be a greater cultural change encompassing the merging of support and teaching functions.

Close collaboration of IT support and library staff is needed when new electronic library services are implemented (Geleijnse, 1996), but it may be less clear that there is an equally important need for the close and continual collaboration of academic and library staff before, during and after implementation of electronic library services (Creth, 1996). It may be even less clear to faculty that many new electronic library services are also teaching tools; not 'merely' media of information provision. Implementation of these services demands a cross-professional team for effective development and exploitation. Electronic information provision brings new responsibilities to the traditional librarian role (Rice-Lively & Racine, 1997), and offers academic librarians opportunities, if not responsibilities, to take more pivotal roles in framing their institutions' teaching and learning strategies. As technology drives change, academic libraries often change faster than their institutions (Riggs, 1977). They may be more aware of new possibilities for underpinning teaching initiatives or more appreciative of the need to integrate information provision and tuition for new courses which, increasingly, include larger elements of

self-directed study. Faculty may be less ready to recognise this. Yet, if librarians are to be the main agents of electronic development of the scholarly information system, they must be perceived as peers by academic staff (Crowley, 1996). Changing academics' perception of librarians' roles in teaching, which has been their monopoly, however, demands an enormous cultural change.

### **ResIDe Electronic Reserve**

Fostering cultural change was one of the UK's eLib programme's aims, although defining 'cultural change' was and remains difficult (Davies, 1997a). An early study of eLib's impact on cultural change reached no firm conclusions as to its progress (Davies, 1997b). The eLib programme was created by the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) of the Higher Education Funding Councils as a response to the Follett Report's IT recommendations (HEFCE, 1993). One of its funded projects was the ResIDe Electronic Reserve (or short loan) at the University of the West of England, Bristol which sought to examine such issues surrounding the implementation of an electronic reserve as copyright and management control mechanisms. ResIDe is now an operational part of UWE's overall Library Services. (Information about ResIDe is available on ResIDe's web pages: <http://www.uwe.ac.uk/library/itdev/reside>).

Re-named the ResIDe Electronic Library, ResIDe now also holds a current awareness database, comprising the Tables of Contents of journals to which the Library subscribes, and a past examination paper database. The Electronic Reserve supports four original pilot Built Environment modules, one Faculty of Health and Social Care module and three Bristol Business School modules through provision of core and additional readings and non-copyrighted module information networked to all faculties on all campuses. It gives simultaneous multi-user, multi-location, twenty four access to a range of secure documents in a variety of electronic formats held on a library server (Dugdale, 1998).

### **Research Study**

A research study based upon ResIDe's support for a second year business elective, Information for Management Decision Making, is pioneering a new approach to collaborative working; moving away from traditional academic/librarian client-provider roles. The module has been designed by faculty and librarians to develop students' IT, presentational, evaluation and research skills, improve and reinforce their understanding of, and critical approach to, management accounting whilst encouraging and developing an inquisitive mind and fostering life-long learning skills that students will need later (Dugdale, 1999b).

This partnership has produced a teaching/learning 'package' that integrates information tuition and information provision in a way that would have been very difficult without such close collaboration. Staff are now able to draw upon an imaginative and stimulating mix of traditional teaching methods and self directed learning supported by print and electronic resources. The two module leaders would have concentrated more upon a traditional 'talk and chalk' approach through lectures and workshops using print manuals and overheads. They would have expected librarians to provide print copies of recommended items and to offer database training sessions, but would have neither expected nor welcomed anything more. Had librarians attempted to support the course more pro-actively, they may have provided electronic sources to enhance the learning experience (Davies, 1997), but would have lacked the necessary specialist knowledge to create a relevant information and skills training package to meet module objectives.

In using each other's different, but complementary skills, knowledge and experience, academics and librarians have designed a module that provides students with a well-balanced mix of teaching and learning methodologies. Students enjoy face-to-face contact with colleagues and with lecturers who have specialist knowledge to provide stimulus and personal help in lectures, workshops or laboratories. Exclusive concentration upon learning through technology would not be successful (Porritt, 1997). Lecturers, however, also use innovative teaching methods supported by ResIDe and students have the benefits of more self-paced individual study through materials held on ResIDe.

An important element of the module, introduced as a direct consequence of this academic/librarian

partnership, has been the joint setting and assessing of an entirely new assignment that tests students' subject, presentational, search, bibliographical and evaluation skills. Students need to find and present information using a wide range of media and explain which resources were used, how and why they were used in preference to other media and other resources and then evaluate them. Students, in groups, examine a related series of documents on a chosen subject. Each summarises one article with critical comments. As a group, they justify their document selection and describe their literature search, identifying used sources and how they were found. Critical analysis of the relative usefulness and ease of use of different sources is rewarded. There is sufficient material in the library's print collection to successfully complete the assignment and students are not penalised for not using electronic sources if use and value of print resources is justified, but many documents are also found on ResIDe and some are only found in electronic resources. Students are encouraged to find both print and electronic copies of documents and to compare the advantages and disadvantages of each format. These business students had never been set this type of evaluative work before, although they will need to develop analytical skills and to differentiate between and evaluate a range of information in their future working lives.

### **Successful Outcomes**

A number of immediate administrative advantages accrued to library staff from the pattern of co-operative working established through 'course' meetings (Dugdale, 1999a). Academics explained module objectives, submitted essential course documentation and reading lists early, provided lecture time for librarians to promote, explain and train users and regularly 'endorsed' ResIDe during lectures. Consequently, library staff have provided their students with a service far better tailored to their needs. Having a much clearer understanding of module objectives they have been able to make more informed purchasing decisions. Database training is more relevant and information more likely to be assimilated. Well attended sessions were scheduled during lecture time and heavily 'publicised' by the module leaders.

Librarians were able to demonstrate that some recommended articles were available on databases to which the library already subscribes. These have not been scanned into ResIDe. Nor have they been placed in the print Academic Reserve. Instead, hypertext links to the databases have been added to ResIDe's module information. Library staff have, thus, been freed from providing a wasteful duplication of information. This has given them more time for individual training and help for the students on the course. They were also able to help academic staff to find additional relevant and more up-to-date sources of information, including new media and visual aids, which have been incorporated into teaching programmes. Consequently, students have a quick and easy access to a wealth of additional information and academics have been able to set assignments based upon a wider variety of topics; no longer being restricted to the library's print holdings. Lecturers have re-discovered a valuable source of information for their teaching and research that they had not been using to full advantage and are now encouraging colleagues to use them more frequently.

Students access internal and external databases, such as the library's own resources web pages and full text journal article databases, from ResIDe. The module guide, available in print and on ResIDe, clearly states where each document can be found - whether in print or electronic format, whether in more than one format or held in more than one place. Students, therefore, know that certain items will be found on a particular database and are more likely to continue a search after encountering a problem. Having, successfully, accessed and retrieved information from other databases from however a 'safe' and user-friendly environment, students develop more confidence in their ability to use online resources. They might also develop the habit of searching for information in other sources for other courses and in their later working lives. This should improve student IT and search skills and help them to develop lifelong learning skills.

### **Problems**

Some problems have, inevitably, been encountered during the study. Despite close collaboration between academic and library staff, a number of misunderstandings and communication breakdowns have occurred. These have been highlighted in the course of an internal Teaching and Learning project within the Business School. This is examining the ways in which IT can be harnessed for teaching



programmes and is comparing different systems available within the Business School (Collett et al, 1999).

Staff and students completing a questionnaire noted a number of practical problems in relation to ResIDe, chiefly around access issues, especially, password control for copyrighted material, lack of hardware, especially printers, and Netscape's 'crashing' or working slowly. These issues, however, can all be addressed. The main difficulties remain centred around communication problems between staff.

Although many courses are now team taught, academics have, traditionally, often worked alone and do not have the same ethos of sharing which seems almost endemic amongst librarians. It has proved difficult for both groups to appreciate these differences. One of the systems being compared in the internal project, is a initiative led by the module leaders in the partnership study. They set up a directory on a shared drive so that materials such a visual aids could be deposited and shared amongst staff. So far, this has proved a one-way process. Consequently, although librarians are anxious to place material on the Electronic Reserve that could be used by other academics and students, these lecturers are hesitant to do so. In addition, having given librarians large amounts of course material, the two lecturers did not see any need for further regular meetings or provision of more information and found librarians' requests for additional reading lists intrusive. Library staff were unaware that students were being given material not submitted to them for ResIDe.

Problems also arose because the two lecturers did not fully understand how to access all information on ResIDe. In particular, they access ResIDe through a very circuitous route rather than using the URL. Library staff are unable to understand why they do this or persuade them to use the URL. As they demonstrate this to colleagues and students, many find ResIDe too complex to access. This problem probably arises because ResIDe, however closely library staff work with academics, is a library system available university-wide. This is one of its greatest strengths in that students studying cross-disciplinary modules are able to use ResIDe for different functions and for modules in different faculties through one familiar interface. Individual academics, however, do not feel a same sense of ownership as with systems they have created and mounted on their own departmental intranets and, therefore, are less willing to exploit them fully. Where libraries are able to provide electronic learning material, academics are often reluctant to allow them to be networked (Revill, 1998). One objective of the Teaching and Learning project was to compare ResIDe's service with the lecturers' own (often duplicated) system supporting the module. At the outset, faculty were very sceptical about the advantages claimed for ResIDe and have only just begun to appreciate the obvious benefits of a university-wide system. Though they appreciated innovative library input into the assignment and access to ResIDe's copyrighted document holdings, they were convinced that they could devise a much more user-friendly and module-tailored system.

## **Early Results**

The mix of teaching and learning methods and learning resources has proved more informative, helpful and stimulating than sole provision of either traditional 'chalk and talk' or new open-learning methodologies. It develops subject knowledge, lifelong learning skills and IT skills. Assessment of completed assignments has already indicated that students are using a much wider range of information sources than before. A questionnaire completed by this group of ninety five students at the beginning of the year suggested that very few had used many business databases. Yet, almost all referred, quite knowledgeably, to a set of approximately six databases. They may not continue using these, of course, but have now learnt that they are easy to use and give access to a wealth of information. The lecturers are very impressed with the quality of the work received and have already decided to use the same exercise again next year.

## **The Future**

The two academics teaching this course are now convinced of the value of having an institution-wide system and enlisting help and advice from librarians to make it more central to their course. Their report will strongly recommend that the Business School makes more use of ResIDe and that other academic and library staff forge closer working partnerships. It may, however, be some time before this happens.

- It will require a cultural 'shift' involving a recognised 'institutional change'; possibly imposed from the highest level. For the foreseeable future, there will be academics unwilling to recognise librarians in anything other than a support role and librarians unwilling to leave the confines of the library and accept new teaching challenges.

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