



Evidence Summary

Better Collaborative Working is Likely to Increase Uptake of Library Resources in a University Setting

A review of:

Hightower, Barbara, Carolyn Rawl, and Michelle Schutt. "Collaborations for Delivering the Library to Students Through WebCT." *Reference Services Review* 35.4 (2007): 541-51.

Reviewed by:

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Abstract

Objectives – To ascertain the extent to which university faculty members are integrating library resources within the WebCT course management system / managed learning environment. Also, to identify the reasons why faculty members are not integrating library resources within WebCT, and to explore their willingness to do so in future.

Design – Case study with survey questionnaire and selected interview follow up.

Setting – Urban campus of Auburn University in Montgomery, Alabama, United States of America.

Subjects – One hundred and two members of faculty received a questionnaire. Five follow-up interviews were conducted.

Methods – One hundred and two members of faculty with WebCT-supported courses received a questionnaire. They were asked to indicate if they linked to library resources, and if so which specific ones (e.g. library homepage, online catalogue, etc.). If they did not link to library resources they were asked to indicate the reason why not, either by selecting one or more of five pre-selected reasons, or by detailing their own.

Follow-up interviews were conducted with five respondents, two of whom (Education and Nursing) linked to library resources, and three of whom (from Business, Education and Science) did not.

Server log reports were also examined to identify how many students were entering library resources from WebCT.

Main Results – The survey response rate was 28% (29 individuals), and of these Nursing and Sciences were the highest users with 7 individuals in each faculty.

Of the 29 respondents only 7 (24%) currently linked to library resources. Nursing were the biggest group with 10 links (38% of the total), Science with 6 (23%) and 5 each from Liberal Arts and Education (19%). The resources chosen to link to were

- Article databases (6)
- Library homepage (5)
- Ask a Librarian e-mail service(3)
- Net library e-book collection (3)

Six other library resources scored lower and two were not linked to at all.

While few respondents actually provided links at present, 77% of those did express an interest in doing so in the future. Almost a third of respondents asked to be contacted to learn more about how to provide links and to learn more about library services.

Only 57 incidents of students linking through to library resources from WebCT occurred in the study period.

Conclusion – Numbers of faculty currently providing links from WebCT to the library is very small, and few students find their way to library resources via this route. However, interest generated by the survey and follow up indicates that this may be a valuable means of promoting library resources.

Commentary

This is a curious hybrid study. From the outset the main purpose of the article is identified as three-fold: to present survey

results, discuss collaborative efforts, and consider methods to get faculty on board. This three-pronged approach does unfortunately mean that the piece emerges as something of a curate's egg: good in parts but lacking overall.

Due to the case-study elements there does seem to be a great deal of scene setting, but then not a lot of meat on the bones for an eleven page article. While the research element is only one part of the piece, the authors don't help their case by the way in which they present their results. We never do find out how the survey was distributed - e-mail, paper, or some other way? Likewise selection criteria for the five respondents chosen for follow-up interviews is never explained, and we are not given any detail whatsoever about the format of the interviews. These gaps in describing the methodology are frustrating, and detract from the value of the article.

Qualitative data can be wonderfully rich and informative, but here the reporting of the data from the interviews is cursory at best, with disappointingly little space devoted to it. I expected the interviews to follow-up such areas as why the Nursing faculty were the keenest to signpost library resources. While there is some hypothesis regarding nursing students' lifestyle and use of WebCT earlier in the article, we learn next to nothing from the interviews about the Nursing faculty's relationship with the library.

The article is also at times poorly set out on the page. The survey is helpfully reproduced in full, but it leads immediately into a figure detailing results, and it is easy to be confused on a first reading. Parts of the paper are devoted to describing events which happened after the study had finished, and again it can be difficult to distinguish results of the research led by the authors from observations following the

study. We learn that the numbers of students accessing library resources from WebCT rises dramatically when the library is involved in developing a module for the Nursing faculty. It is not made clear whether that is actively intended as part of this study, or coincidentally happened soon after. This somewhat muddled reporting does the authors a disservice.

One really useful message which does come through loud and clear is the reminder that libraries cannot work in isolation and that "librarians should be more proactive in promoting our services." (548) It is worrying, and perhaps at the same time strangely reassuring, to read of the familiarity of the challenges faced by our colleagues. It is good to hear of the ways in which they are striving to improve the services they provide, and the authors clearly remind us of the importance of collaborative working with the services libraries are there to support.

I did struggle at times with the authors' scattergun approach and found myself wondering quite what readers might take away from this. Anyone with a few years' experience behind them will find themselves facing something of an anticlimax and have an overwhelming feeling of, "Well, no real surprises there." While this article does certainly contribute to the evidence base, it is perhaps best viewed as an interesting case study rather than a robust piece of research.