How libraries and librarians can support student engagement

This AUSSE Enhancement Guide makes suggestions about the role libraries and librarians have in enhancing student engagement.

How are libraries and librarians relevant to student engagement?

There's very strong evidence to suggest that students tend to be more engaged with learning on the whole if they engage with library resources, interact with library staff, and spend time using libraries. The graph below displays data from the Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE) and provides insights into the link between using the library and student engagement. The graph uses data from the 2008 AUSSE to show that students who report using library resources on campus or online are often more highly engaged with university, and are less likely to have considered leaving their university before completion.

Frequency of library use by student engagement and outcomes measures
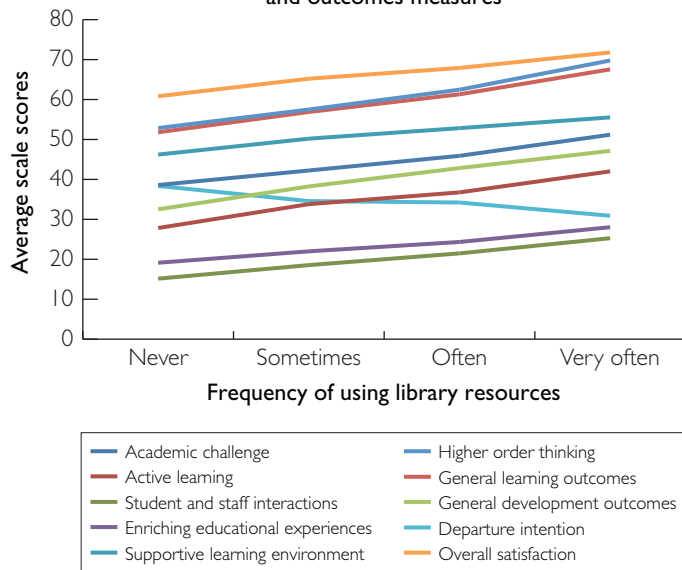
Libraries can engage students with learning in many ways. The physical space itself can be used to ensure that there are sufficient resources available to students, enough independent study areas, collaborative learning spaces and sufficient numbers of computers or wireless access areas. Libraries also exist in the virtual world, allowing distributed learning to take place, and allowing access for external, distance and online students, and for more flexible kinds of learning. Librarians also contribute to student engagement by providing expertise to students through formal workshops or tutorials and by providing guidance informally. Librarians help students learn the best ways to access and use quality information and resources, help them to enhance their study and research skills and explain how to use the latest technologies to enhance their learning.

Increasing student access to library resources

Increasingly, even at campus-based institutions, students are doing more study part-time, online, externally or by distance. As a result, university libraries increasingly are becoming distributed learning spaces to cater for more flexible learning, and for part-time, distance and external students.

Frequency of using library resources
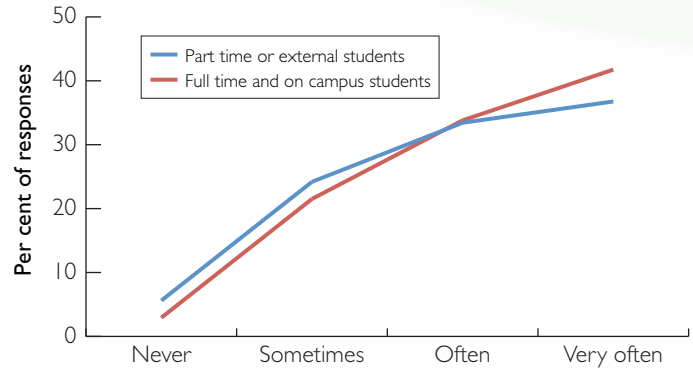
Data from the 2008 AUSSE show that the majority of part-time or external students report using library resources often or very often. But we know that more is better, and there are many things libraries can do to try to increase the use of library resources, especially for students who are not campus based, or regularly on campus.

Many university libraries now keep their students up-to-date on new acquisitions, upcoming workshops and classes, and changes to opening hours via social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter. Students who add their university library to their Facebook or Twitter receive these updates as part of their newsfeed. Other universities use an RSS feed that keeps students updated, or send out targeted emails to students to keep them updated on what's happening at their library.

Allowing students to access databases and search the library catalogues wherever they are, and whenever they need to, is one way to encourage more students to access library resources. Students are now used to accessing library resources via the web whenever they want. Universities are making accessing library resources even easier and more flexible by allowing students to add their catalogue search function to iGoogle, or by letting students search the catalogue using Facebook for instance. Some universities have even created a mobile web version of their library website and catalogue, so students can literally access their library wherever they (and a good wireless connection) are.

Libraries also make it easier for students who can't come on campus to access librarians and their knowledge. Libraries do this in various ways, through online functionality like chat-to-a-librarian or Instant Messaging ask-a-question, online forums where they can ask library related questions, and through podcasts or vodcasts of classes or tips on researching, referencing and using library resources.

The physical library space

Although students increasingly are not campus-based, it is still important to consider how the physical library space can best engage students with the library and with learning. Are the collections easy to access? Do the opening hours meet students' needs? Are there enough computers or areas where students can connect to the internet wirelessly? Are the silent study areas and collaborative learning spaces adequate? How could they be improved?

Australian Council *for* Educational Research

A key focus for libraries is on the review and design of the physical library buildings to develop contemporary, attractive, flexible and accessible spaces that engage students and provide opportunities for meaningful learning experiences. Learning spaces are being designed and adapted to meet the changing needs of learners. Building functions are being rethought; for example, more libraries now include social spaces and areas for students to interact with each other. Also, more technology-enriched spaces are being incorporated into libraries to facilitate both individual and collaborative learning. These spaces allow students to have access to the latest computing equipment and easier access to institutional wireless networks, all of which supports students' learning.

Another key focus for libraries is to provide more opportunity for peer-to-peer connections and peer support within the library. Peer support programs may include roving student helpers who are employed by the library to help students with a wide range of library, IT and university inquiries. Having student rovers in the library also helps to break down barriers for new students, increases opportunities for peer-to-peer learning, and helps to create opportunities for interaction between students of different backgrounds, undertaking different courses and at different year levels. What's more, these programs enable the students who deliver the services to contribute to the academic success of fellow students, and at the same time they are building their own knowledge and developing future skills for the workplace.

Relationships between library and academic staff

Libraries actively contribute to students' awareness, understanding and capabilities in using, managing and working critically with information. Librarians can work in partnership with academics and others to enhance students' overall engagement with university.

Librarians can work with academics to develop programs, adapt curricula and create learning activities that expose students to information and resource discovery, and provide regular and ongoing opportunities for students to actively develop their information skills. Librarians' active engagement in faculty or department reviews of program design and quality creates opportunities for embedding contextual information literacy skills. Librarians and academics can also collaborate on the development of online learning materials and objects, such as self-paced interactive modules and tutorials to support flexible learning and information skills capacity building.

Academic staff can also speak with librarians about using emerging technologies to deliver their programs and learning activities in innovative ways. Another way librarians can enhance students' learning with the help of academic staff is to contribute to the development

of effective online learning environments by integrating relevant and recommended information and library resources, and supporting these training materials.

Improving students' engagement with the library

Because students' engagement with learning is related to students' engagement with their university library, increasing access to the library, and encouraging students to use quality information and library resources may help increase students' overall engagement with university.

Look at the AUSSE data – this will tell you whether there are certain students who are not accessing library resources as frequently as others. Perhaps a large number of students in a particular degree are reporting 'never' using the library. It may be that they feel the library is not addressing their needs as a student, or perhaps they simply are not aware of the resources and the help that are available.

Students who 'never' access library resources by field of education
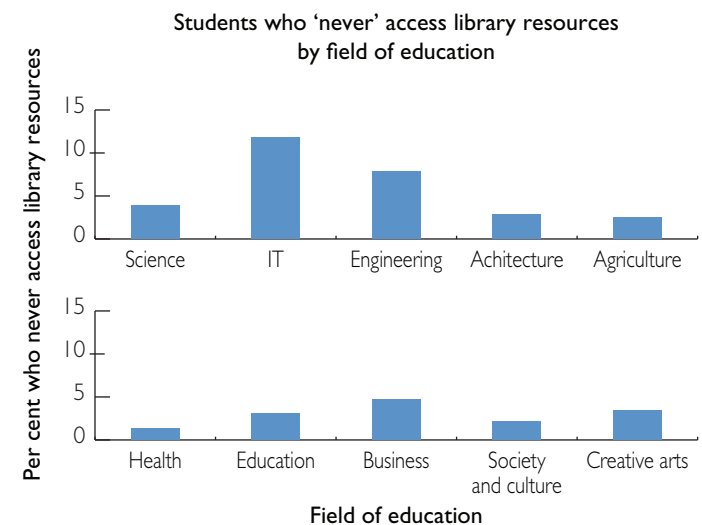
Bringing librarians in early in the cycle of course development, discussing student learning needs and developing curricula that foster information skill development will support engagement over the long term. To address particular needs, - special workshops or training opportunities conducted as part of the academic program introducing students to the library and the resources they need for their study could be designed in conjunction with their course co-ordinator or other teaching staff. Teachers could facilitate student attendance and attend themselves. Students who are using the library resources often could be asked to be advocates of the library and give first-year students guided tours of the library during orientation.

About this guide

This AUSSE Enhancement Guide forms part of the suite of resources developed by ACER and the broader AUSSE community to enhance students' engagement in effective educational practices. Many thanks to Anne Horn, University Librarian, Deakin University and Bernadette Lingham, Manager, Faculty Library Services, Deakin University who contributed greatly to this guide. Visit **www.acer.edu.au/ausse** for further information about the Australasian Survey of Student Engagement.