



Information Literacy provision for Social Work

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Introduction

Initially the project involved the creation of web-based resources to support the development of research skills and independent learning for final year undergraduate students attending the Social Policy Research Project module. A dedicated web page was created to provide access to interactive tutorials on research skills and relevant Social Policy sites. The page was publicised to the cohort participating in the investigation, but as documented in the interim report, students' level of engagement with the site was low.

As a result of this permission was granted by SWAPItsn to shift the focus of the research from the development of research skills at degree level for Social Policy to provision of basic Information Literacy to Social Work students at certificate level (See Appendix A – Correspondence with SWAPItsn). During the summer, the Social Policy web page was restructured to include tutorials and assessment guidelines in support of IL provision for SW. This change was supported by the following considerations:

1. Social Work staff expressed interest in integrating IL skills in their curriculum (see Appendix B –IL strategy for Social Work).
2. Existing Information Literacy provision at first year level of the DASS undergraduate degrees could be customised to suit Social Work requirements.

Outcomes:

The following activities have been successfully implemented:

1. Summer 2003: integration of Information Literacy skills in the curriculum of the module SW131 Social Context of Social Work in practice in time for delivery in Semester A 2003.
2. Semester A 2003: IL was successfully delivered as part of the module SW131. The IL part of the curriculum consisted of two lectures and five workshops where students interacted with the web-based learning resources linked to specific IL tasks included in the assessed portfolio. One of the module aims defines IL skills as the ability to locate, evaluate and present information through effective interaction with communication and information technology resources available at the University. These competences are fully contextualised in the SW setting by the development of basic research skills to locate and evaluate the literature associated with specific service user groups (for full details of the module outline see Appendix C).
3. March 2004 Presentation of the project's findings in a seminar on e-learning sponsored by SWAPItsn and hosted by the Department of Applied Social Sciences, London Metropolitan University.

SS131 students' profiles and feedback on IL for SW

The cohort completed the web-based diagnostic questionnaire to test their level of Information Literacy skills at the point of entry. This produced a total of 67 responses and the following cohort profile¹: 61% of the students are full time, over 70% are mature and 81% are female. The majority of students (97%) have used a computer before the module, and most have basic skills of producing simple WP documents (95%) as well as basic navigation of the web (80%). This data shows that students are familiar with simple ICT tasks involved in the basic manipulation of Windows and a web-browser (able to create favourites 74%), 86% also use email. The score illustrates the students inability to accomplish more complex tasks such as using a metasearch engine or accessing the invisible web. 83% and 98% respectively could not accomplish these activities.

Results for searching skills follow a similar pattern and reveal that 83% of the students can do a basic Author/Title search using the library's OPAC, but 79% cannot use the Newspapers database and 94% do not know how to apply Boolean operators to an Internet search. Data for evaluative skills shows that roughly half of the cohort claims to be able to evaluate information in terms of relevance (56%) and accuracy (53%), although 68% cannot evaluate scope and 55% do not know how to assess the authority of a source. Three main issues have emerged from the students' feedback². (For detailed response to issues raised here by the module convenor see Appendix D).

1. According to students' feedback one of the main benefits of the module was their improved ability to access information using a range of sources. This increased their confidence in searching online databases and the Internet. However, a few students also complained about the lack of training on how to access full-text journals. This is a point that will be considered for future developments after full consultation with the module convenor. Overall students have found the learning resources very useful and claim that the skills developed in this module have increased their ability to find information relevant for their studies.
2. The IL sessions should be scheduled towards the end of the module rather than run at the beginning, that is from week 2 to 5. This would enable students to fully engage with the syllabus before they start searching for relevant information. The SW team is currently reviewing the module schedule.
3. IL provision should be made available to EBRs in their first year of study. This refers to EBR students on part-time mode who are currently attending their second year. This problem has been eliminated as EBRs starting their programme in 2003 have attended the new SW131 (with IL provision) during the first semester in year 1 of their study.

¹ NB this number includes 57 undergraduate and 10 postgraduate students who completed the questionnaire

² 31 questionnaires were returned, 54% of the total cohort.

Feedback from the seminar

The outcomes of the project were presented at the Seminar on Research skills: making effective use of ICT, sponsored by SWAPItsn and held at London Metropolitan University on 3 March 2004. The research findings received a positive response and this is reflected in the evaluation forms returned at the end of the event. Participants found the focus of the seminar very relevant to their professional role and claimed that their practice would change because of this. In particular they commented favourably on the practical hands-on approach underpinning the presentation of both ilit.org and Research Mindedness and on the overall high quality of delivery. The small size of the group also encouraged active sharing of ideas and experience by the participants and promoted networking. Since the seminar, staff involved in this project, consisting of the SW team and Susie Andretta, have submitted an abstract for the JSWEC conference to disseminate e-learning practices used to support SW provision at certificate level.

Overall assessment

Despite the initial setback, this project has achieved a satisfactory outcome thanks to the review of the original research objectives and the willingness of Social Work staff to integrate IL provision in their undergraduate degree. SWAPItsn's flexibility and support was also invaluable in ensuring a successful implementation of this project. The feedback from the students clearly illustrates that the IL side of the

module was perceived as useful and that their learning experience was enhanced. This positive outcome is complemented by the module convenor's comments on the substantial improvement in the assessment results. However, the reason for the correlation between improved results and the introduction of IL skills is difficult to establish without examining the cohort that has participated in this study at year 2 and 3 or their SW degree. However, this issue and the impact of IL provision on SW practices of students attending the module on a part-time basis go beyond the scope of this project.

Appendix A: Correspondence with SWAPItsn outlining rationale for the project's change of focus

this sounds fine to me Susie. I am seeing Sue at the JSWEC conference on Monday and will have a chat to her then to check we agree, but it sounds as if both you and the sw staff will benefit.

Julia

Julia Waldman

Date sent: Fri, 18 Jul 2003 06:45:24 +0100

Subject: Project update

From: Susie Andretta <s.andretta@londonmet.ac.uk>

To: Susan Frances Orton <S.F.Orton@sussex.ac.uk>,
Julia Waldman <jw@socsci.soton.ac.uk>

Copies to: Susie Andretta <s.andretta@londonmet.ac.uk>

As previously indicated the Social Work staff had expressed an interest in incorporating Information Literacy in its programmes (at ug and pg levels). Following a number of meetings with SW staff I was able to help them amend two modules which will provide the platform for the delivery of ILSW (Social Work Info. Literacy) next semester.

I was wondering if I could use this development to test the site I have produced for the SWAP project given that I have not received any other offer of piloting the website. Would this be acceptable to SWAP? If so the change in direction would be fully documented in the final report.

Susie

Details of the change proposed:

Replace Applied Social Policy Research option with ILSW (Social Work Information Literacy). ILSW will support Information Literacy provision for SW undergraduate and postgraduate programmes at DASS, London Metropolitan University. Collaboration with SW staff has produced 2 amended modules outline (where IL provision is assessed directly), amendments in the learning and teaching approach adopted by both programmes (to ensure full integration of IL pedagogical approach) and printed information in the form of a handbook explaining the correlation between information literacy competences and the SW profession.

1. Reasons for the change:

As previously indicated the current project has experienced logistical and timing problems and attempts to pilot the site with other Social Policy departments have not produced the desired result despite intense advertising. The proposed change offers an 'in-house' solution that as JW noted would benefit all stakeholders involved in the project.

2. What happens next:

- I will restructure the page and work with SW staff to develop the learning activities that will integrate IL skills within a SW perspective.
- Full recording of the change through the collation of all documentation produced:

Modules outlines

Handbook on ILSW

Analysis of feedback from staff and students.

Appendix B: Information Literacy for Social Work (ILSW)

The programmes aim to equip students with Information Literacy (IL) skills to function as independent learners and, in the longer term, to contribute effectively to the social work community. The key aim of this strategy is to develop IL skills defined as the ability to:

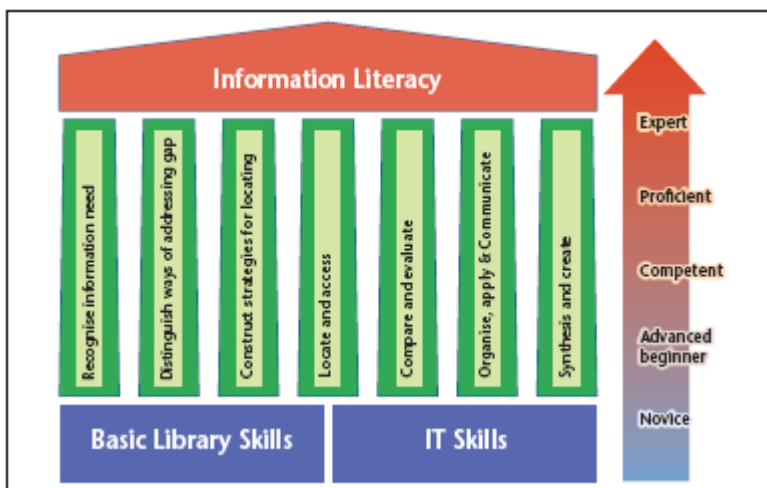
“.. recognise when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information ... Ultimately, information literate people are those who have learned how to learn.” (American Library Association, 1995)

Information Literacy is therefore defined as an essential attribute of the successful independent learner. This is particularly true in a student-centred learning environment where students need to develop information handling skills required to interact effectively with a wide range of resources. In addition, as in all professional communities across the sectors social workers need to develop these IL skills to perform in increasingly Information-driven environments.

The IL skills are fully articulated by SCONUL in its publication on “Information Skills in higher education: a SCONUL position paper”. IL for Social Work is underpinned by the SCONUL model and is delivered by web-based learning strategies complemented by face-to-face support. The model, shown in the figure below, consists of seven IL competences resting on a foundation of ICT and library skills.

These basic skills are essential to develop the more complex IL competences and therefore students need to achieve these in order to progress onto the IL level.

SCONUL’s Information Literacy model



It is expected that undergraduate and postgraduate students on the programmes will achieve similar levels of competence when interacting with information systems as IT and Library skills belong to the lower end of the cognitive spectrum. However, the level and number of IL skills mastered by undergraduate students will differ from those achieved by postgraduate students.

For example, undergraduate students will learn to interact with a range of resources to investigate the role of Social Work through the application of simple evaluative strategies, while post-graduate students will be expected to engage with all the processes of investigation including the more complex ones of synthesis and analysis.

IL for SW offers a high level of flexibility in terms of delivery and encourage students’ active participation in the learning process. A diagnostic questionnaire at the start of the programme enables students to assess their learning needs in relation to the IL skills. Novice users are guided through a “slow track” route with full support, while expert users can operate entirely as independent learners by working through some or all the learning resources as required in order to complete the assignments with a minimum of support. Lectures and hands-on workshops in seminars and computer labs will constitute the main methods of delivery. Electronic learning resources are provided for all aspects of the IL provision and support from tutors is also available in both face-to-face and online modes.

Information Literacy not just IT

IT skills will be developed to an equivalent ECDL standards that are deemed appropriate to the Social Work profession. These competences are assessed through the accomplishment of tasks that require interaction with Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) as well as with information systems environments. IL provision for Social Work is based on the successful collaboration between Social Work, Information Management teaching staff and the Social Work subject librarian. This is in line with SCONUL's principle of full and active participation by all those involved in the delivery of the programme.

Appendix C: SW131 Social Context module outline

Module code and title: The Social Context of Social Work

Module level: Certificate

Semester in which module runs: A

Module aims

- To develop students awareness of the history of social work and social care provision in Britain, the social, political and economic context of measures to address poverty, exclusion and disadvantage.
- To introduce students to the social construction of social problems, and responses to these problems, sociological theory regarding the use of power and the role of social workers in mediating and individualising the application of social policy.
- To develop a basic understanding of some of the social mechanisms typically used to oppress groups of people in society and approaches to countering oppression in practice through the exploration of the relevant literature.
- To enhance the academic performance of learners by developing information literacy skills that will enable students to locate, manipulate, retrieve, evaluate and present information through effective interaction with Communication and Information Technology resources available at the University.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this module the student should be able to:

(LO1) Describe the socially constructed image of service user groups produced by information gathered from a range of resources

(LO2) Discuss how power is used to oppress service user groups on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, age, disability and sexual orientation.

(LO3) Develop basic research skills to locate and evaluate literature regarding service user groups.

Assessment strategy and instruments

Portfolio of research tasks assessing Information Literacy skills required to explore and evaluate the literature on the relationship between political/economic factors and the oppression experienced by specific service user groups. The tasks will assess the level and quality of interaction with a range of resources dealing with academic activities, as well as, exploring the role of the social work profession. For example, students will be searching the information systems offered by the university that support learning such as OPAC, the Newspaper database, and social work relevant sources such as the British Journal of Social Work and ASSIA to collect data regarding a specific service user group.

This module is informed by the academic subject benchmarks for social work and will help you begin to meet the following national occupational standards in practice:

Key Role 1: Prepare for, and work with individuals, families, carers, groups and communities to assess their needs and circumstances

(Unit 1) Prepare for social work contact and involvement

(Unit 2) Work with individuals, families, carers, groups and communities to help

Learning and teaching methods

This module promotes an enquiry-based approach associated with the development of Information Literacy competences appropriate to Certificate level. Therefore the social constructed relationship between social work and service users will be explored through a range of delivery strategies. These include lectures exploring the social construction of social work, measures used to address exclusion and oppression and the needs of service users. Interactive seminars/lab-based sessions will be used to further the exploration of theoretical perspectives through the practical application of investigative strategies. Web-based learning resources, existing and customised, will support these activities.

Syllabus

- An overview of the history of social services delivery
- The role of social workers and the construction of service users in the context of political/economic history
- Structural issues underlying the generation of service users
- Sociological concepts related to anti-oppressive practice will be outlined for their usefulness in working with service users.
- The location of contemporary social work both within its historical and comparative perspectives including European and International contexts
- Interaction with academic and professional online systems
- Searching and evaluation skills in relation to resources from a range of media

Indicative bibliography

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Payne, M. (2003) *Social Work: Continuity and Change*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Sharkey, P. (2000) *The Essentials of Community Care – A Guide for Practitioners*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Online resources:

British Association of Social Workers <http://www.basw.co.uk/>

Child Poverty Action Group <http://www.cpag.org.uk/>

<http://www.ippr.org.uk/home/> ippr is the leading UK independent think tank on the centre left.

<http://www.ilit.org> Funded by SWAPItSn this site contains Information Literacy tutorials to develop searching and evaluation skills using a number of online resources. Links to major Social Policy sites are also available and students will be encouraged to explore these through formative activities.

Resource Discovery Network a set of online tutorials designed to help students, lecturers and researchers improve their Internet information literacy and IT skills. Work in your own time at your own pace - no one is monitoring you! There are quizzes and interactive exercises to lighten the learning experience (SW is included).

<http://www.vts.rdn.ac.uk/>

European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) 1.2 - Waltham, Ma. : Educational Multimedia Corporation, 2001 CD-ROM

Appendix D: Extracts from the Monitoring form for SW131 Social Context of Social Work produced by the convenor of this module

(NB this form covers issues raised by undergraduate SW students only).

General comments:

This module has been taught before in the Dip/SW programme as SW124 Social context of Social Work Practice and has been adapted to the new BSc programme this year for the first time. WebCT was used to deliver the module for the first time. Two significant changes have been introduced. First, the social policy context has been reduced and the sociology content expanded, e.g., the focus on the social construction of service users. The reason for this change was that in this new programme, we have introduced SP152 Social Policy Themes and Issues as a compulsory module. This module is taught outside the Social Work programme.

The second change has been the introduction of an information literacy component. Students were required to use information literacy skills to complete a portfolio for their assignment.

There has been a considerable improvement in the students' performance this year. For example, out of 57, 40% of the students were awarded As and Bs compared with 25% of the last year cohort. Similarly those who failed this year totaled 17% compared with last year's failure rate which reached 27% of the total cohort.

a.) summary of student comments and your response to these 27 out of 35 student feedback responses received (77%) indicated that they enjoyed the module. What they said they found useful was the history and context of social work practice. Most students enjoyed the ILIT component and could see its relevance in their further studies in other modules. Some said they found the concept of social construction of service users difficult to grasp. Suggestions from students included comments that more direct input regarding social constructionism should be given earlier in the module. They thought that the ILIT material should have come later in the module. Placing the lab sessions early in the module came before they knew what they were looking for. Students said they appreciated it when the OHP's for a lecture were available on WebCT before the lecture. EBR students in the second year of their Dip/SW programme indicated that they thought they should have had this module at the beginning of their programme. Incoming BSc EBR students will have it in the first year of their programme.

b.) Proposed developments for the future

Staff teaching on the module have decided to give students a list of suggested titles as some students seemed to experience anxiety about the choice of the title for their essay. The issue of where to best place the ILIT material also needs to be addressed. Placing it in the middle of the module next would be better than at the beginning. The issue of whether to have the four lab sessions in consecutive seminar sessions or interspersing them with conventional seminars also needs to be addressed. Staff will spend more time in the labs to help students make the connection between ILIT techniques and resources and the content of the module.



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