

Abstract for RAILS 2015

Crossing Library Learning Boundaries at QUT: Flipped orientation for international students

Hilary Hughes, Faculty of Education, QUT
Megan Pozzi, Nerilee Hall, Sarah Howard, Ali Jaquet, QUT Library
Lio Lay, International Student Services, QUT

This paper reports the implementation and evaluation of an innovative project entitled *Crossing Library Learning Boundaries* at QUT. It aimed to welcome international students to QUT Library, support their transition to study in Australia and enhance their ongoing learning experiences and outcomes.

The first year of university study has been identified as being perhaps “the most crucial time for engaging students in their learning community and equipping them with the requisite skills ... to be successful and independent in their new learning” (Kift, 2009). While this can be a challenging time of transition for students generally, international students face the added complexities of coming to live and study in often unfamiliar educational and social environments. International students bring richly varied knowledge and capabilities to study at their host university. They may also encounter unfamiliar social and educational practices, whilst often negotiating life and study using English as an additional language (Karim, 2010; Montgomery, 2010). Libraries, whose core business supports learning across the university, are vital to international students’ transition (Wit, Kutner and Cooper, forthcoming 2014, n.p.). However, libraries can also be sites of challenge for international students due to unfamiliarity of the host library’s services and spaces, as well as the prevailing academic and information using conventions (Hughes, 2010, 2013; Peters, 2010).

Therefore, we developed the *Crossing Library Learning Boundaries* project to improve support to first year international students by:

- (i) Providing a library orientation program specially designed to assist their transition to study at QUT
- (ii) Contributing an evidence-base to guide the development of future library orientation and information literacy programs for first year international students

101 first year undergraduate international students participated in the project during Weeks 3, 4 and 5 of Semester 1, 2015. In place of a conventional tour and introductory workshop, 7 groups of international students, some with their tutors, participated in a ‘flipped orientation’ informed by contemporary flipped pedagogy (Fulton, 2014). Following a brief introduction by library educators, the international students were ‘let loose’ to explore the library using a *Library Learning Passport* as guide.

The *Passport* was designed to support and facilitate the sequence of independent learning activities. It posed questions related to basic library use and information needs, such as: locating books with a particular call number, identifying an item on academic writing via the Library’s online catalogue, identifying key support for learning services in the Library. The *Passport* also encouraged the students to interact with library staff by asking a question at the Help Desk. It considered international students’ comfort and leisure by encouraging them to seek out the library’s movie collection, interactive games room, as well as quiet study spaces with a view, and toilets. It also provided a social learning opportunity for international students to meet and work together. To enhance the fun element, the *Passport* invited students to take a selfie ‘under the ceiling of books’ on the main staircase. Following their self-guided library tour, the students met library educators for an informal workshop, where they shared their answers with each other and gained more

guidance. As part of the conversation, the library educators led hands-on exploration of key online services and information sources.

Formal evaluation of the program drew upon data gathered through student feedback surveys and written reflections by the 4 library educators who led the *Passport* sessions. Findings (still to be developed for the full paper) indicate generally high satisfaction among international student participants, who reported that they understood the library better and felt more confident about using it. The data provided by the library educators showed that the program also had significant benefits for QUT Library. First, the library educators found that these relaxed opportunities to interact with international students enhanced their professional learning and practice, by extending their understanding about the library and information needs of international students. Second, the program assisted relationship-building between QUT Library, International Student Services and academics who teach international students. Third, it enabled QUT Library to trial a new flipped pedagogical approach for orientation workshops and develop a model for future QUT Library orientation programs. The evaluation also indicated the following aspects for further improvement: involving first year coordinators of degree programs with a high proportion of international students in promoting the workshops; and slight changes to a couple of questions to reflect the concerns/questions raised by students who attended the sessions.

This project was funded by QUT's First Year Experience program. The findings contribute to a larger current research project about international students using libraries and information at QUT, a Chinese university and two US universities. The project findings and flipped orientation model will be of interest to academic librarians and information literacy educators who seek to enhance learning and information use among international students. They are also applicable more widely across culturally diverse student HE populations.

References

- Fulton, K. (2014). *Time for learning: Top 10 reasons why flipping the classroom can change education*. Thousand Oaks: Corwin.
- Hughes, H. (2013). International students using online information resources to learn: Complex experience and learning needs. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 35(1), 126-146.
- Hughes, H. (2010) International students' experiences of university libraries and librarians. *Australian Academic and Research Libraries*, 41(2), 77-89.
- Karim, A. (2010) International students in Australian universities: Gap between student expectations and realities. In *The International Conference on Education and New Learning Technologies*, 5-7th July, 2010, Gran Hotel Princesa Sofia, Congress Center Barcelona, Spain. <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/39994/>
- Kift, S. (2009). *Articulating a transition pedagogy to scaffold and to enhance the first year student learning experience in Australian higher education*. Australian Learning and Teaching Council Limited. <http://fyhe.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Kift-Sally-ALTC-Senior-Fellowship-Report-Sep-092.pdf>
- Montgomery, C. (2010). *Understanding the international student experience*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Peters, D.E. (2010). *International Students and Academic Libraries: A Survey of Issues and Annotated Bibliography*. Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press.
- Wit, S.W., Kutner, L., Cooper, E. (forthcoming, 2015). Mapping Academic Library Contributions to Campus Internationalization. *College and Research Libraries*. <http://crl>