HEPPP to be square:
Sustainable social inclusion at Monash University Library

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Abstract

In 2011, Monash University Library created the positions of Learning Skills Adviser and Subject Librarian for Social Inclusion (HEPPP). Initial projects were completed by the end of the first appointments in 2013, but were not necessarily sustainable. This paper is aimed at presenting projects undertaken during the second contract beginning 2014, which are designed to target First Year HEPPP category students. To maintain equity and sustainability, programs are designed to fulfil the needs of HEPPP students but are delivered to the entire cohort through established Faculty Teams in the Library. Four principles are adopted: transparent work practices, equitable delivery, staff capacity building and the creation of programs and learning objects with reference to published advice by Devlin, Kift, Nelson, Smith and McKay (2012). Online learning objects are created to encourage First Year HEPPP category students to be competent, capable, and confident in pursuing independent research and study.

Introduction

In 2008 the Australian government produced the Review of Australian Higher Education or the ‘Bradley Review’ (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008). The review recommended increased participation of students from low socioeconomic status (low SES) backgrounds, as well as an overall increase in the number of Australians with university qualifications. To assist in meeting these aims, the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) was created. The program allocates funding to universities in order to assist social inclusion of low SES students through participation in university education, partnerships with secondary schools (Skene, 2010), and funding delivered through a ‘national priorities pool’ (Department of Education, 2014). Access Monash, a division of Monash University, delivers many programs using HEPPP and other funding to ensure the participation and support of students from diverse backgrounds (Monash University, 2014).

In conjunction with Access Monash, Monash University Library appointed two HEPPP specific positions to support students and academics in achieving equitable delivery of learning and research support: a Learning Skills Adviser (LSA) and a Subject Librarian (SL) for Social Inclusion (HEPPP). The first round of appointments was funded for two years, from 2011 to 2013. Upon completion, it was found that a great deal of research and several successful projects had been carried out, but without the promise of continuing funding, the sustainability of these projects was called into question. Therefore, in the second round of Library HEPPP Staff appointments, the sustainability of the programs and learning objects to be developed has always been emphasised and ensured through the implementation of four principles: transparent work practices, equitable delivery of programs and learning objects, library staff capacity building, and adherence to advice presented in the research of Devlin et al. (2012). It is the aim of this paper to present the projects undertaken by the Library HEPPP Staff at Monash University to support First Year students targeted by HEPPP funding. This
includes students from low SES communities, those who may be the first in their family to attend university, female students, Indigenous students, and mature-aged students.

**Learning Skills Advisers (LSA) and Subject Librarians (SL) at the Library**

The existence of LSAs (known elsewhere as Academic Language and Learning Staff) and SLs is common across universities. However, the approach of Monash University Library differs from most other Australian universities in that LSA and SL are co-located in the library and work together closely to deliver library and learning services as part of the Research and Learning Team (Smith, 2011). The team collaborates with academics in the faculties to provide co-curricular and in-curricula advice and guidance in the areas of research and learning skills, as previously outlined by Monash University Library staff in the FYHE International Journal (Taib & Holden, 2013). However, each position provides a different focus. LSAs are on hand to provide students and academics with advice in the areas of academic language and study skills. SLs, on the other hand, guide students and academics to understand the process of research and to build the library’s collections. SLs and LSAs throughout Monash University Library work with one or more of the ten faculties of Monash University – Art, Design and Architecture; Arts; Business and Economics; Education; Engineering; IT; Law; Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences; Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences; and Science. The ability to specialise according to qualifications and experience, combined with the professional relationships between SL and LSA, fosters a research and learning atmosphere that far surpasses the library’s function as a resource centre.

In this environment, the LSA and SL for Social Inclusion (Library HEPPP Staff) are unique in that they are not aligned to any particular faculty. Instead, as a collaborative partnership, they move amongst all SLs and LSAs at the various Monash University Library branches at Berwick, Peninsula, Parkville, Clayton and Caulfield.

**Social Inclusion at Monash University Library**

For the Library HEPPP Staff, the emphasis of their specialisation is not directed at a particular university discipline. Instead, they aim to embed considerations of social inclusion and an awareness of its implications in all areas of the library’s programs and learning objects. Both the HEPPP LSA and SL work collaboratively with their colleagues in the different Library Faculty Teams to deliver research and learning skills. The overarching goal of both positions is to work together to deliver at least one project targeting each of the ten faculties by the end of 2015. The emphasis, however, is for each project to be continued upon cessation of funding at the end of the appointment period. The sustainability of the projects implemented is made possible by the adoption of four principles expanded upon below.

**Principle 1: Transparent work practices**

In order to guarantee the sustainability of projects undertaken, Library HEPPP Staff have adopted a commitment to the provision of transparent work practices. As mentioned above, the Library HEPPP Staff are required to provide and produce learning objects and materials that are sustainable. In doing so, the most favoured initiative is to work with Faculty Teams in the library, along with HEPPP coordinators in various faculties, to produce online learning objects. It has been indicated that best practice for libraries in working with low SES students is to embed research and learning skills into courses via the Learning Management System (Horn, Maddox, Hagel, Currie, & Owen, 2013). However, as Library HEPPP Staff are relative outsiders to the workings of academics and their colleagues in the library, embedded
practices can only be achieved by working through relevant Library Faculty Teams. To build trust, the Library HEPPP Staff must be completely transparent.

Starting from the commencement of the second batch of Library HEPPP Staff in January 2014, the LSA and SL have produced several online objects in collaboration with diverse relevant parties throughout the university. Collaboration began with a meeting with the relevant Library Faculty Team in order to brainstorm the identified needs for the entire cohort in question and possible solutions to provide a proactive approach to fulfilling that need. The inclusion and generation of ideas by the Library Faculty Team ensured appropriate buy-in. Each project has been documented and shared via a Google site containing all activities completed, in progress, or in development. This site provides a level of detail that allows all ongoing projects and activities to be transferred to another staff member at a moment’s notice.

**Principle 2: Equitable delivery**

Library HEPPP Staff have referred to the work of Devlin et al. (2012) in their approach to providing guidance to students who are identified as low SES at Monash University. Instead of approaching low SES students as being “deficient” in their understanding of the tacit expectations of university study, programs are delivered to the entire student cohort unless otherwise negotiated by Faculty HEPPP Coordinators. This main principle aligns neatly with Monash University Library’s overarching aim of providing combined learning and research skills training in a way that emphasises “a positive, inclusive, and empowering approach, rather than a remedial one” (Smith, 2011, p. 249).

One of the projects delivered by Library HEPPP Staff is an online self-audit skills questionnaire with semi-automated individualised feedback for students in the Faculty of IT. The questionnaire was developed by the Library HEPPP Staff in coordination with the Library Faculty Team for IT and delivered to students of low SES background as identified by the HEPPP Coordinator in the Faculty. Individualised semi-automatic feedback is provided by the Library HEPPP Staff to students’ email addresses based on their individual responses to the questionnaire. Thus, each student is able to identify their own needs in terms of developing their research and learning skills. As each step is done online and is semi-automatically set up, the questionnaire has become a sustainable and holistic approach to students’ understanding of expectations in regards to research and learning at university.

The Library HEPPP Staff have also produced online learning objects, with Library Faculty Teams, which are accessible to all students. For example, an online orientation video for First Year Science students was developed based on a meeting to brainstorm ideas amongst members of the Library Faculty Team. Through a similar collaboration with the Library Faculty Team for Pharmacy, an online research skills module embedded within the Learning Management System was created to cover the basics of navigating research tools needed by First Year Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Science students.

**Principle 3: Staff capacity building**

The Library HEPPP Staff also conduct programs that are designed to build the capacity of other SLs and LSAs in creating innovative approaches and more inclusive practices. For example, collaboration in the development of online learning objects has allowed library staff members at different branches of the Library to learn from Library HEPPP Staff. This has been done through both through active learning and apprenticeship-like sessions. In active learning mode, Library HEPPP staff guide other library staff through the process of creating a
learning object. Meanwhile, in apprenticeship-like sessions, Library HEPPP Staff are trailed by other library staff in the production of video content. In a more structured manner, the Library HEPPP Staff also deliver peer-learning sessions as part of Monash University Library’s Staff Development program.

**Principle 4: Creating programs and learning objects with reference to Devlin et al. (2012)**

Several aspects of the research undertaken by Devlin et al. (2012, pp. 16-48) apply not only to teachers and institutional leaders, but also to SL and LSA in general. This especially holds true to Library HEPPP Staff. When providing education and support to students of low SES backgrounds, the Library HEPPP Staff consider the following advice crucial, and have implemented suggested strategies into the projects undertaken.

1. **Know and respect your students.** In order to assist the Library Faculty Teams to understand their students, the Library HEPPP Staff have provided relevant demographic data. This encompasses data on the number of students from broad equity groups, including those of low SES areas, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, those with disabilities and from various language groups.

2. **Offer your students flexibility, variety and choice.** The Library HEPPP Staff aim to implement library programs that reflect the flexibility, variety and choice of learning and assessment already available within Monash University courses, by providing a blended approach (Zhang, Watson, & Banfield, 2007). In this case, the Library HEPPP Staff ensure that interactions with the library occur face-to-face and online, to account for a variety of learning needs and levels of technological literacy. The Library HEPPP Staff have provided easily digestible edited recordings of First Year Law Study Skills seminars as YouTube videos to increase accessibility for a cohort of several hundred students. Additionally, Library HEPPP Staff have collaborated with SLs and LSAs for Science and Engineering to create videos that make up online learning modules to appeal to the time-poor.

3. **Make expectations clear, using accessible language.** Although this advice was initially designed for teachers engaging in the development of curriculum and assessment, it is also pertinent to the library, as SLs and LSAs can assist in making the expectations of university learning and research much clearer. By talking about the kinds of independent research skills required by universities and explicitly calling attention to the goal of autonomous research as exemplified by the Research Skills Development Framework (University of Adelaide, 2013), Library HEPPP Staff and Library Faculty Teams can contribute to the success of all students.

4. **Encourage “help-seeking” by students.** With ten faculties and over forty SLs and LSAs across four campuses, it can be difficult for a student to know where to ask for help. As Library HEPPP Staff present trainings/workshops and collaborate with staff at all campuses, they have become the face of the library both in promoting help-seeking behaviours and offering a friendly outreach service. This integrates seamlessly not only with the Library Faculty Teams, but also with other Monash University units including Access Monash, the Yulendj Indigenous Engagement Unit, and Monash Postgraduate Association.

**Expected impact for First Year students and implications**

Upon delivery of the projects mentioned above, it is expected that First Year students at Monash University, especially those targeted by HEPPP funding, will become more competent, capable, and confident in their research and learning skills as required to succeed
in tertiary studies. The fact that the projects expand upon programs that are already in place and/or are delivered online has provided a possibility for them to be sustainable. In addition, the capacity building for staff at each library branch has also provided a “domino-effect”, as these local staff members are now more knowledgeable and confident in their ability to create online learning objects relevant to their specialised areas. This will guarantee the sustainability of programs, even after the Library HEPPP Staff appointments cease.

Further investigations are needed to measure and enhance the effectiveness of ongoing programs. There needs to be an in-depth investigation of patterns of core skills that fall under the domain of library services as needed by HEPPP category students. Although Devlin et al. (2012) have provided general recommendations regarding approaches to teaching the low SES cohort, further investigation is required to determine the best practice in the delivery of core research and learning skills in the library context.

References


