

Case Study

The Kate Edger Information Commons – a student-centred learning environment and catalyst for integrated learning support and e-Literacy development

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Abstract:

At the University of Auckland the University Library has been a strong voice in lobbying for a more coherent and integrated approach to developing computer and information literacy skills across the university. Several plans and reports such as the Academic plan, draft IT and Information Literacy policy, graduate attributes and recommendations from the Student Life Commission and Curriculum Commission highlighted the need for collaboration between stakeholders to put plans into action. Progress in implementing recommendations and developing initiatives had been slow until the opening of the Kate Edger Information Commons at the end of April 2003. The Kate Edger Information Commons very quickly became the heart of the City Campus and a catalyst for change and collaboration. The Information Commons, the University of Auckland's leading edge student-centred learning facility, provides a collaborative interdisciplinary environment where over 500 full-productivity workstations, electronic classrooms, and an additional 500+ flexible study and social spaces have been combined with proactive, integrated learning support and e-Literacy skills development. It provides the infrastructure for the functional integration of the information and the technology services, information literacy, learning support and language skills development offered by the University Library, IT Directorate, Student Learning Centre and English Language Self-Access Centre, consequently creating an enhanced learning environment that reflects the transformations in higher education. The development of IT and information literacy (e-Literacy skills) is a key focus for the Information Commons and opportunities for skills development are integrated into all aspects of service delivery. The paper will look at new partnerships and new service models and initiatives that have arisen from the various collaborations, together with a growing integrated approach to e-Literacy development.

Keywords:

Information Commons; Information Literacy; IT literacy; Learning support; Student-centred

1 Introduction

In recent years, the term “student-centred university” has gained currency in a significant number of universities throughout the world. The term implies that universities should be

designed to enhance student learning and student life. The Student Amenities and Information Commons complex at the University of Auckland was designed to enhance the learning environment of the University as well as to create an attractive and convenient place for students to socialise and relax. The Kate Edger Information Commons, www.information-commons.auckland.ac.nz, presents a student-centred infrastructure for information services and learning support that facilitates the delivery of customised, comprehensive and convenient services reflecting the transformation of higher education, and trends in IT and associated electronic information resources. It includes facilities and spaces accommodating individual and group activity, integrates new technologies with services, and establishes dynamic and innovative partnerships between information and learning support providers on campus. The University of Auckland, established in 1883, is New Zealand's largest university. The University consists of four campuses, namely the City Campus, Medical & Health Sciences Campus, North Shore Campus and the Tamaki Campus. The City Campus of the University of Auckland, spanning an area of 16 hectares or 39.5 acres, is located in the Auckland Central Business District. In 2004, the University has over 35,000 students studying across eight Faculties – Arts, Business & Economics, Creative Arts & Industries, Engineering, Law, Medical & Health Sciences Science and Theology. In common with other higher education providers, University of Auckland students need to operate in an increasingly complex electronic environment as is evident in the growing amount of teaching, research, support and administrative information and services available on the web.

2 Key Drivers and Opportunities

The University of Auckland was faced with an urgent need to increase the amount of study space available in the central area of the City Campus as the libraries were overcrowded and the ratio of study space to students was out of alignment with that in similar institutions. Equally important was providing an acceptable standard of amenities and service to students. The existing Student Union facilities were developed in the 1960s and 1970s when the University's student roll was less than half its current size. The impact of student-centred teaching methods such as problem-based learning, evidence-based learning, reflective study and group work had resulted in a growing need for more flexible learning spaces. The Information Commons includes group work areas, private study spaces, open consultation and adaptable service points that allow a greater tolerance of noise and activity. The increasing rate of computer use for learning, teaching, research and communication has led to significant changes in student characteristics, needs and expectations. Although the University of Auckland is primarily a campus-based provider, the development of flexible or blended modes of learning and teaching is strongly encouraged. Cecil, a proprietary eLearning Management System, is widely used to provide more choice and accessibility in the way students engage with learning material. The demand for flexible learning options has grown rapidly and in addition students expect widespread access to computers that provide an integrated suite of tools and resources.

The University of Auckland Library, www.library.auckland.ac.nz, has a centralised corporate function (Administration, Biblio Centre, Document Delivery, Learning Services and Digital Services) but decentralised client service with 12 subject libraries and three Information Commons facilities. The strategic realignment of Library services and resources over the period 2000 - 2001 has resulted in the target client base for the General

Library (1 million volumes, 1000 study seats) being senior students and staff from the Faculties of Arts, Science and Business & Economics. This was achieved by amalgamating the collections and services of the Science, Biological Sciences and Geography Libraries within the General Library housing the Arts and Business collections. The primary target base of the Kate Edger Information Commons was undergraduate students from the same faculties, although the facility is open to all students and widely used by undergraduate and postgraduate students from all Faculties.

University documents and plans, published prior to the development of the Information Commons, refer to an integrated approach to IT and information literacy development. The Academic Audit (2000) recommended “that the University of Auckland treats as a matter of urgency the means of developing and coordinating a coherent approach to training programmes in computer and information literacy skills across the University of Auckland”. The University of Auckland’s Academic Plan (2001) states that the University is committed to:

- Developing an information literacy policy and support systems that enable students to locate, evaluate and use information effectively
- Identifying a level of computer skill that all students must acquire and the support systems needed to achieve these levels.

The graduate attributes defined in the same document point out that graduates should:

- Be able to recognize when information is needed and have the capacity to locate, evaluate and use this information effectively
- Have appropriate computer literacy skills
- Have a lifelong love and enjoyment of ideas, discovery and learning.

Learning support services for students were located in different buildings on campus. The Student Learning Centre, providing academic learning and performance skills development and some computer skills training, had no dedicated computer training room and inadequate teaching facilities and staff offices. ELSAC, the English Language Self-Access Centre, was located approximately 1.5 km (1 mile) from the centre of the City Campus.

An Information Commons concept was developed as part of the University Library’s vision for enhanced services to the University community and a discussion document was presented to University Management. The University saw that the proposed concept was complementary to the strategy to improve student facilities on the City Campus and the Student Commons and Information Commons Project was fast tracked early in 2001.

3 The Kate Edger Information Commons Building and Facilities

The Kate Edger Information Commons building is one part of a major building development at the University of Auckland. Construction commenced late October 2001 and the buildings were occupied during April/May 2003. The Student Commons building accommodates core student service functions such as retail, Health & Counselling, AUSA offices, Student Accommodation Centre, Postgraduate Lounge, and an International Student Centre. Retail services such as a bank, pharmacy, enlarged bookshop, hairdresser, travel agency, copy centre, cafés and an ethnic food court meet the needs of a

diverse and multicultural student population. The buildings fit within the limits of an urban campus development, complement the existing look and feel of the campus and the architecture mirrors the modern requirements for transparency. The University's vision was that the development would create a dynamic and vibrant heart within the campus and serve as a gateway to the rest of the City Campus. The buildings are linked by a glass atrium and there are walkways between the two buildings and clear points of entry into the different areas on all levels. The total development is 11,442 square metres (123,161 square feet) with the Kate Edger Information Commons taking up 6,847 square metres (73,700 square feet). A courtyard of 600 square metres (6458 square feet) provides outdoor seating and links to an indoor/outdoor café on Level 0 of the Information Commons. Architecture Warren and Mahoney were the principal architects for the project. The design architect is Thom Craig, previously a director of Architecture Warren and Mahoney, now from MAP. (The University of Auckland, 2001)

The main purpose of the Information Commons is to provide an integrated learning environment where students have access to electronic learning and information resources and appropriate support structures. The environment was specifically designed to combine learning space and service delivery around the integrated digital environment. The Information Commons includes group work areas, private study spaces, open consultation and adaptable service points that allow a greater tolerance of noise and activity.

The substantial size of the facility created the opportunity to co-locate related learning support services such as:

- The University Library's high demand print and video collection for Arts, Science and Business & Economics students. The collection consists of over 8,000 prescribed and recommended texts.
- The University Library's Information Skills team which provides information skills teaching.
- The Student Learning Centre which provides academic and learning skills development and computer skills teaching.
- The IC Help Service which was created by merging the IT Directorate's Electronic Campus Help Desk with the University Library's Learning Services and which provides roaming support in student computing and learning as well as manages student Internet and printing accounts at the IC Helpdesk.
- The English Language Self-Access Centre which assists and supports all students from non-English speaking backgrounds.

The building is a highly glazed five-storey structure on the corner of Alfred and Symonds Streets. A stainless steel mesh screen along the Symonds Street façade provides a thermal barrier and privacy from the road. The student areas are large spaces facing the street with beautiful views towards the Waitemata Harbour and the green area of the Domain. The staff and training areas are on the other side facing the Student Commons. The facility, allowing for both group and individual study and relaxation, provides in different configurations over 1000 seats, including 500+ full-productivity computers. Level 0, the biggest floor with a café at the one end, consists of individual computers and group study tables. The University Library's High Demand print and audiovisual collection for Arts, Science and Business & Economics is located on Level 1, alongside the English Language Self-Access Centre (ELSAC). The IC Help Desk features prominently on

Level 2 with a computer training room, Students with Disabilities project room, 150 computers and casual seating. The Student Learning Centre is based on Level 3, together with a small computer training room, a seminar room that can be divided, 150 computers and casual seating. Level 4 is a relatively low technology area that is ideal for individual study. Another two computer training rooms, a divisible seminar room, a meeting room and the University Library's Learning Services department are also located on Level 4. All levels are equipped with wireless network access points, photocopiers and express workstations and on Levels 0, 2 and 3 students have access to printers and scanners. It is a welcoming, attractive and safe place to study and socialise.

The formal teaching spaces such as the computer training rooms and seminar rooms are well positioned throughout the building to prevent congestion. They have clear access points, comfortable seating, clean sight lines and good lighting and sound. Four of three computer training rooms have a seating capacity for 20 students each and the smaller room for 12 students. The seminar rooms are fitted with a divider for greater flexibility and can seat 45 and 60 students at chairs with tabloid arms respectively. All the rooms are equipped with state-of-the-art audiovisual and presentation technology. Each room has a smaller version of the e-lectern used in many of the big lecture theatres on campus. The s-lectern was designed for smaller teaching spaces and can consist of up to 4 audiovisual and presentation units with easy access to a control panel. All the s-lecterns are fitted with a data projector, networked computer with an internal DVD CD Writer, sound, video player and a document camera.

The Information Commons building was named after Kate Edger, who was the first woman in New Zealand to gain a degree. She was also the first woman in the British Empire to gain a BA. She graduated with a BA in 1877 and a MA in 1882. The Kate Edger Information Commons is different from most other Information Commons facilities in that it is a purpose-built facility and not part of an existing library building. It is the largest of its kind in New Zealand and compares very favourably with similar international facilities in terms of size and resources.

4 IT environment, implementation, support and management

The IC was a joint project between the University Library and the IT Directorate (ITSS) and is a new service that crosses departmental boundaries. Key members from both departments established an IC Steering Group in 2002 to facilitate planning for the new IT and customer services. Several staff members worked on projects such as; networking, property interface, disability requirements, software environment, student support services, student access and billing, desktop implementation and support and IT security. Detailed project plans were developed by the teams and approved by the IC Steering Group. The IC Steering Group met regularly to receive feedback and monitor progress. Successful working relationships were established and both departments worked together to provide a proactive learning environment for students.

The full-productivity computers selected for the student areas and computer training rooms are Dell Optiplex SX260 Ultra Small Form Factor with Intel Pentium 4 operating in a Windows XP environment. Flat panel high-resolution monitors are used to reduce heat and noise and maximize desktop space. The student desktop software image was developed by one of the project streams and finally signed off by the IC Steering Group in February 2003. The purpose of the student desktop software environment is to meet

the general student computing needs and is complementary to specialist faculty or departmental computer labs. Students are able to retrieve information from the library databases, e-journals and e-books, access course work through Cecil, the University's e-learning system, send email and browse the Internet, use MS Office and other specialist programs - all on the same computer.

Student electronic services at the University of Auckland are managed through the proprietary NetAccount authentication and authorisation system. Students have access to the Internet from within the University, University resources from outside the University, printing on campus and student email through NetAccount. All enrolled students have a login or NetID and password that they use to log on and identify themselves. User charges for Internet and printing are levied by direct debit to their NetAccount. The NetAccount printing environment allows for cost-recovery through a pay-for-print system. All students receive an annual allocation for Internet access and some departments allocate print credits to their students for printing course-related work and additional credits for Internet access. The Library pays for staff and student access to specified electronic resources, including web-based licensed databases, electronic journals, and some selected Internet resources. Students can deposit funds in their NetAccounts at the Information Commons HelpDesk and other points of sale on the different campuses. NetLogin software has been installed on all the computers in the Information Commons and students must log on to use a computer. Once logged on, students automatically have access to Cecil, the Portal, Library electronic resources and electronic course material readings.

A significant improvement was made in the area of student file storage. Central file storage is provided to all enrolled students in the Information Commons and students are also able to access their faculty or departmental file storage on any computer in the Information Commons and in departmental computer labs.

The Information Technology infrastructure in the Kate Edger Information Commons is designed to provide maximum flexibility to adapt to changing teaching and learning technology requirements. The building is fully wired to each study space, allowing the provision of desktop computers as well as the use of student-owned laptops. Although the design is based on conventional wired networking architectures, provision has been made for future developments in the area of wireless technology by the installation of several base stations on all levels. Wireless access points were installed throughout the building during January 2004 and students are able to access the university network via their own laptops and IC laptops that they can borrow from the IC helpdesk for use in the Information Commons.

The IT environment in the IC is managed and supported by IT Directorate (ITSS). Desktop support is provided by 3 IT staff members based in the IC. A Service Level Agreement between the IT Directorate and University Library was developed to formalise the partnership and manage expectations and outcomes. The partnership with ITSS works very satisfactory and monthly meetings are used to monitor developments and discuss issues.

An IC Software Governance Group, consisting of representatives from Faculties, was established to advise on the student desktop software environment. Students and Faculty are encouraged to make recommendations for the addition of new software to the suite

available. The Governance Group reports to the University Teaching and Learning Quality Committee.

5 New Partnerships, Innovation and New Service Models

The stated vision for the Kate Edger Information Commons is to provide a highly visible, modern and unique facility which will inspire students to acquire new skills so that they can participate more actively in the learning process. This is facilitated by access to advanced, integrated information resources, systems and services. Strategic partnerships and collaboration between student learning support providers resulted in an enhanced and attractive learning environment.

In building collaboration with other organisational units, you should accentuate what you have in common, rather than what divides you. The University Library, IT Directorate, Student Learning Centre and the English Language Self-Access Centre are working together to provide a proactive integrated learning support environment for students. The development of computer and information literacy skills in the University community, especially undergraduate students, is a key focus area of the Information Commons. The University Library's Learning Services department seeks collaboration with faculty, the Student Learning Centre and other University units to develop the IT and information literacy of students.

5.1 IC Help Service

A small team consisting of key staff from the University Library's Learning Services department and ITSS started scoping the support service in April 2002. Information on current support services in the Libraries, Student Computer Labs and other Information and Resources Centres on campus was gathered and analysed. Formal student surveys done by the University Library, International Office, Graduate Centre and Student Life Commission also provided useful information. Recurring negative feedback on specific areas of service and support was easy to extract from all these.

The planning process consisted of several steps, with the Information Commons vision, desired outcomes and customer needs as the guiding elements. Existing roles were examined, identifying each team's strengths and weaknesses. A new service model, based on all information gathered, was developed in draft format and submitted to key stakeholders and managers for comment. The draft proposal outlined the components of the service, proposed management structure, new procedures, standards, training requirements and the budget. The benefits that the new service model will bring to the client group were highlighted. Questions were answered; feedback was considered and integrated into the final model.

Many Information Commons facilities in North America have separate reference and computing services desks staffed by experts in specific areas. Staff at the Leavey Library of the University of Southern California found that students were frustrated by the need to distinguish their questions between computer-based or research-based and that the boundary between computer and research assistance had become vague. Because of these factors and a recommendation from the Leavey Library faculty advisory board, an integrated service was developed with appropriate staff training as an important component of the service. (Crockett, 2002: 181-186)

The Kate Edger Information Commons student support service is a new model that is based on the merger of existing services and newly developed positions. The Electronic Campus HelpDesk service, the customer service arm of the ITSS NetAccount department, merged with the University Library's Learning Services to form the IC Help Service. The service operates in a cross-functional multi-skilled team environment and consists of two components. The highly visible IC Help area is the help desk providing walk-in support to students, NetAccount sales and open consultation space which could be used by staff members from the different student support departments. For example, representatives from Student Administration use the consultation spaces to assist with enrolment during core times. The other component of the service, providing first tier roaming support, is the IC Consultants. The service is managed by the Help Desk Manager and Help Desk Supervisors.

The main purpose of the Information Commons Consultants is to serve as primary student support staff in the Information Commons. They provide a roving consultation service by assisting students using the public workstations in the Information Commons, work shifts on the IC Help desk, and assist with special projects on a point of need basis. Information Commons Consultants are expected to have a general knowledge of electronic resources, software and databases in the Information Commons, on the Internet, and on the campus network. They are required to know how to use and support the major electronic resources available in the Information Commons, including WWW resources, and on-line databases. They are well trained in MS Office type software, and are able to provide qualified assistance to users in creating documents, spreadsheets, and other production-related issues. They provide general PC skills support (e.g. accessing files from drives), scanning, assisting patrons in the use of the NetAccount authentication system, basic Cecil and nDeva usage, as well as supporting the print, scanning and photocopying system. Cecil is the University of Auckland's learning management system and nDeva is the PeopleSoft student administration and online enrolment system. Difficulties beyond the scope of the Help Desk Manager, Help Desk Supervisors and Information Commons Consultants are referred to the appropriate department using an agreed method. Procedures for the referral of problems were developed in consultation with partners, available online and other tools are used to report and track referred problems. Appropriate cross training to develop skills in many areas is crucial to the delivery of the service. The experts in the associated areas of service offer the training. Ongoing training and refreshers are provided at regular intervals.

There are no dedicated Reference Librarians based at the IC HelpDesk but Subject Librarians use the electronic classrooms extensively to deliver information skills courses. The General Library, across the street from the Information Commons, operates an Enquiry Desk service and there is close cooperation between the two service points. The Information Commons differs from many others in that it is a purpose-built facility and not part of an existing library.

The IC Help service is managed as a joint venture between the University Library and ITSS. The University Library takes responsibility for the day-to-day management of the walk-in and roving support in the Information Commons. ITSS takes responsibility for NetAccount support and remote student assistance directed to the ITSS Service Desk. An Information Commons IT Advisory Board was established to advise on the direction and

management of the student support and IT services of the facility and to assist in the resolution of any question, dispute, or difference.

5.2 The English Language Self Access Centre

The Elsac was set up in 2000 with the help of a Teaching and Research Infrastructure Fund awarded to the Department of Applied Language Studies and Linguistics in the Faculty of Arts. The role of the Elsac is providing support to all the University's significant and growing number of "English as another language" students and to help them improve their English language skills through guided self-study in an electronic learning environment. The Electronic Learning Environment (ELE) is a programme that gives students access to learning resources and also monitors their learning and aids in the development of successful self-study skills.

The Centre's originally geographical location impeded usage, as students found the Elsac to be cut off from other support services and difficult to find. In 2003 a decision was made to transfer the Elsac to the University Library's Learning Services department and the centre was relocated to the Information Commons. It was considered very important to maintain a link with the Department so as to continue to benefit from academic support, continue the academic role of the Elsac, and maintain links with staff members who had been involved in the development of the Elsac. A memorandum of Understanding was signed which outlined responsibilities for both the Library and the Department.

5.3 The Student Learning Centre

The Student Learning Centre, www.slc.auckland.ac.nz, located on level 3 of the Information Commons, assists University of Auckland students with the development of learning and performance skills. The Centre caters for the learning needs of all students and tailored support is provided to undergraduates and postgraduates through workshops and individual consultations. Specific programmes include Te Puni Wananga (Maori students support), Fale Pasifika (Pacific Islands students support), Business Communication Skills, Language Exchange, Mathematics and Statistics, Postgraduate, Skills Development, Doctoral Skills Development, R.EAL (Results for English as an Additional Language students), Computer Skills Development, and Summer School. Students are required to register with the Student Learning Centre.

5.4 Integrated learning support

The new building and associated services provided opportunities for the blurring of traditional boundaries at the operational level resulting in the integration of some services. Facilities, resources, services and student support were integrated to varying degrees with the IC Helpdesk service and the ELSAC the most successful to date.

Benefits of working collaboratively include:

- The opportunity to focus on a more student-centred, integrated seamless support service.
- Interworking across sectors or domains resulting in a cross-functional multi-skilled team environment.
- Sharing of resources and skills.

- Developing and/or adapting standards.
- Innovation

It is a challenge to develop a successful, fully integrated service. The expertise, support and cooperation of many stakeholders on campus are very important. Partnerships are being further developed to ensure that high service levels are maintained, appropriate staff training is provided and changes and developments in services and products are communicated to all stakeholders. The environment and partnerships are still evolving and will undoubtedly continue to improve and adapt to remain relevant in an ever-changing higher education environment.

6 “The coolest place on campus”.

“Vibrant new heart” – the description of the Kate Edger Information Commons on the cover of the University of Auckland News (Wilford, 2003: 3-4) published one month after opening. Some student comments from the same publication:

“It gives an extra place to work in addition to the Library, and it’s good to be able to access email, and do work towards assignments here. The Information Commons is well-designed because it feels spacious. It is also an advantage to have the bank and shops nearby.”

“The workstations here are very useful because I haven’t got a PC at home. I’m using it to learn computer skills. Compared with the facilities offered at the two overseas universities I have attended, this is a fabulous and very helpful resource.”

The IC provides a general learning environment that is considerably different from others on campus. There is a greater tolerance of noise and group collaboration, social activities, and relaxed but monitored food and drink guidelines. It is likely to be closer to the working environments that students will experience in their ensuing careers than anywhere else on campus. It accommodates different styles of learning and the open and flexible nature provides students with greater choice of where, when and how they learn.

Student feedback on the new learning environment in the IC was very positive from the beginning. Students used the electronic suggestions box on the web site to complement the facility and provide suggestions for enhancing the physical and software environments. Feedback presented through the Rodski customer satisfaction, first-year and final-year undergraduate student surveys proved that the IC significantly improved student life on the City Campus.

However, the success of the IC created a demand and expectations from students that will be very difficult to meet. It developed into the most popular study space on campus and it is challenging to accommodate all the students who want to use the facility.

6.1 Student usage – some facts and figures (May – Dec 2003)

Number of people through doors (May – Dec 2003): 2,141,385

Monthly occupancy data by level suggest that the group work levels 2 and 0 are the floors most utilized:

Pages printed (May – Dec 2003): 2,058,869

Network logins (May – Dec 2003): 837,427

Peak login months: Aug & Oct – average of 4600 logins per day

IC queries (May – Dec 2003): 38,721

74% of queries are answered by IC Consultants roving on the levels, 16% are answered at the IC Helpdesk

Course material issued: 154,621 - 42% increase in usage compared to 2002

October was the busiest month in 2003 in terms of occupancy, network logins, queries, pages printed and course material issued.

7 e-Literacy at the University of Auckland.

7.1 Information Literacy

The University Library offers a multifaceted information skills programme that has both specialised subject-based and generic components to students, staff and external client groups, such as the Foundation Studies students at the NZ International College. The Library Manager (Learning Services) and the Information Skills team, based in the Information Commons, work closely with Subject and Client Service Librarians across the Library system to design, develop and deliver the Library's information skills programme, initiatives and resources. The responsibility for the subject-based component rests with the Subject Librarians who work with the academic departments and Learning Services to tailor and integrate the provision of information skills into the curriculum. The generic programme includes courses on Voyager, LEARN, Internet, EndNote, Student Computing, Information Commons IT Facilities, generic searching skills and specific database searching techniques. Students undertake the generic programme on a voluntary basis. The information skills programme is coordinated by the Information Skills Librarian to ensure standards are maintained system-wide.

An Information Literacy focus group has been established in the Library to facilitate collaboration between the various library teams and to aid the implementation of information literacy strategies across the University. The terms of reference of the focus group are:

- To serve as a forum for discussion and information sharing
- To ensure open channels of communication between the faculty-oriented library teams and the Information Skills team in order to foster a co-operative and coordinated approach to the support, development, delivery and promotion of new initiatives and existing generic and team-specific programmes
- To identify and recommend on staff development opportunities where appropriate
- To aid the implementation of information literacy strategies across the University
- To offer, or advise on, recommendations for action
- To identify and work on collaborative projects to develop Information Skills products and services.

The establishment of the centralised Information Skills team has resulted in improved co-ordination of library teaching activities and resulted in a number of new information skills initiatives. A major focus has been bringing together the various library-wide information skills activities into a coherent programme of activities for students, staff and other stakeholders. Considerable progress has also been made in improving the overall quality

of the information skills programme. There has been an increase in the number of tailored, hands-on library courses; a substantial increase in the use of Cecil as a delivery platform; more web-based instructional tools; evaluation of all library courses; increased capability for staff and students to book courses online; improved marketing; and the addressing of the educational needs of librarians in a teaching role through the development of a new programme via the Centre for Professional Development. Standardised PowerPoint presentation slides, together with cover sheets of handouts with learning objectives, have been developed for all library courses and the practice is being applied system-wide. All these initiatives have improved the quality of the programmes offered and increased the pathways to Library collections and services.

Although a wide range of generic information skills courses is available, attendance at these courses is optional and relies on the recognition of students that they need these skills. The Library facilitates attendance through marketing, a flexible timetable and online bookings.

Subject Librarians work in close partnership with faculty to achieve the desired teaching and learning objectives. The Davis Law, Tamaki Campus, North Shore Campus and Engineering Libraries have excellent models of curriculum integrated information literacy components at undergraduate and postgraduate levels designed, taught and assessed by Library staff. Information literacy courses are an integrated part of Foundation and New Start programmes. The North Shore Campus Librarian has developed a strong partnership with the academic staff teaching on the BBIM programme. This has helped to ensure that computer and information skills are integrated, wherever possible, with curriculum-based assignments.

Subject Librarians use Cecil, course resource web pages and face-to-face teaching to deliver information skills teaching. Web based instructional tools such as course resource web pages are used successfully to deliver online learning support to students. These pages are updated regularly as student needs become evident to the Subject Librarian.

A significant development in 2002 was the design of an online bookings database, www.library.auckland.ac.nz/booking. The development of the database was a joint project of the University Library's Information Skills and Digital Services teams. The patron registration for library course bookings matches closely Voyager, the library management system, patron login and students require no additional training to use the database. Not only has it allowed the Library to replace an out-dated paper-based booking system, it has also raised the awareness of library courses amongst students and led to an increase in attendance. The online bookings database permits librarians to schedule subject-based and generic library courses, limit number of participants according to room size, set prerequisites, check course bookings and email reminders to registered patrons. Statistical data can also be obtained from the database as it also records details of all subject-based and generic courses as well as feedback received through the course evaluations. Participants are requested to evaluate all library courses at the end of each session. The Information Skills team maintains the database and provides quantitative and qualitative reports to teacher librarians and management. The database is used to generate official annual report statistics.

In 2003 there was a 36% increase in student attendance of all library courses compared with 2002. 17924 students attended 1527 library-taught courses. The increase could be

attributed to improved and increased marketing, excellent teaching facilities and higher visibility of the courses in the IC, more tailored courses on offer and ease of course booking. The significant increase in the attendance of optional generic courses, 109% compared with 2002, indicated that students value library courses and are becoming more aware of the importance of developing information skills to enhance their learning. Attendance at course-related library courses also increased in 2003 with 16% compared with 2002.

The University Library strongly lobbies for the systematic integration of information literacy skills across degree programmes as it provides opportunity for the incremental development of skills. Integrating information literacy into the curriculum requires the acknowledgement by faculty of its importance and close cooperation with librarians to ensure that the information skills components are delivered at a point of need and in context of the coursework. Although some excellent examples of integration exist, most of the information skills courses at the University of Auckland are still delivered during the first weeks of semester. Students find it difficult to transfer the skills they learn and to put them into the context of their coursework.

7.2 IT literacy

It is widely acknowledged that IT literacy is becoming increasingly important as a basis to support learning, teaching and research. Most students in higher education require a diverse range of IT skills, particularly skills in the use of applications and technologies relevant to their discipline.

The Student Learning Centre offers a range of courses covering introductory computing, Microsoft Windows, Microsoft Office (Word, Excel, PowerPoint), EndNote, SPSS, N4 Classic, Nvivo, SAS and Latex. The IC HelpDesk team offers an IT Access and Support course which teaches students how to use NetAccount ID, UoA E-mail, Portal and Cecil. The IT Facilities at the Information Commons course teaches students how to get the most out of the extensive Information Technology facilities available to students at the Information Commons, UoA Computer Labs and the Library as well as the basics of the available software, saving, printing, photocopying and scanning.

7.3 e-Literacy challenges and opportunities

There are several challenges that confront an institution in advancing e-Literacy (Martin, 2003: 3-23). Several strategic University documents and plans, published prior to the development of the Information Commons, refer to an integrated approach to IT and information literacy development. (See: Key drivers and opportunities p.2) Although these documents and policies advocate a clear commitment to IT and information literacy skills development, evidence of a coherent and systematic curriculum-based implementation is still limited. The integration of information literacy into the curriculum has been more successful than the integration of IT literacy. There is a low awareness of the institutional policies, plans and graduate attributes amongst faculty, and the successful communication and uptake of these is a challenge facing University and Faculty management structures. Another significant issue is the time delay for a policy to go through all the committee structures and be approved. The IT and information literacy policy, which will be instrumental to the coherent development of these skills, has been on the agenda since 2002.

Providing adequate resources to implement the institutional plans and policies is a challenge as it may require additional funding for new units or redesigned services, depending on the approach taken by the institution. The cultural and political challenges of collaboration between e-literacy providers require careful planning and the working towards a common goal, while acknowledging the different teams' strengths and weaknesses. Ensuring that the specific e-literacy skills of faculty are recognised and appropriately developed is a staff development challenge for professional development units and the library. Faculty are often not aware of the gaps in their e-literacy skills. The complex nature of e-literacy requires research and the ongoing evaluation and reflection. (Martin, 2003: 3-23).

The University Library has been a strong voice in lobbying for a more coherent and integrated approach to developing computer and information literacy skills across the university and use institutional plans, policies, surveys and developments as support. The development of general education components in undergraduate education provides an opportunity for coherent e-literacy development in all undergraduate students.

A Curriculum Commission was appointed in March 2002 to examine ways in which the University could broaden the educational experience of undergraduate students and further develop high quality and innovative academic programmes. The introduction of a general education component in undergraduate degrees was recommended. (University of Auckland, 2004) After a period of wide consultation with faculty, the introduction of a 30 point general education component in all 3-year and 4-year first undergraduate degree from 2006 onwards was approved. General education courses will be 15 points and students will be required to take general education courses outside the general and specialist areas of their degree. It is envisaged that general education would provide the opportunity to develop graduates matching most of the skills and capabilities outlined in the Graduate Profile of the University of Auckland. (7) It was, however, disappointing to note the omission of the following core attributes:

- An ability to recognise when information is needed and a capability to locate evaluate and use this information effectively.
- An ability to make appropriate use of advanced information and communication technologies.

The University Library and Student Learning Centre will continue to lobby the Board of General Education to broaden the principles and objectives of the programme. IT and Information Literacy capabilities in University of Auckland students are best developed through an integrated curriculum approach. In order to facilitate such an outcome the following recommendations were presented:

- The systematic integration of IT and information literacy skills across degree programmes through general education courses. General Education courses should provide opportunities for the incremental IT and Information Literacy skills development
- That the Student Learning Centre staff and Librarians work in partnership with curriculum development teams and academics to ensure that all general education courses are designed to include IT and information literacy components

8 Conclusion

It is clear that the student-centred resources, facilities and attractive spaces in the Kate Edger Information Commons have greatly improved student life at the University of Auckland. Beagle (1999) defines the information commons as “a new type of physical facility specifically designed to organize workspace and service delivery around the integrated digital environment”. Integral to the success of the Kate Edger Information Commons is an integrated help desk and support service that is pro-active, clear and intuitive to the students. Students want immediate help to meet their information, learning and research needs, not an inflexible support structure that expects them to categorise their queries and might send them from Helpdesk to Helpdesk. The integrated service model implemented in the Kate Edger Information Commons has been successful and it meets the needs and expectations of students to date. Several areas for improvement have been identified and the proactive ongoing development of this service is based on purpose and role, not structure, with end user feedback and needs guiding the service levels.

The ultimate success of the Information Commons concept and vision at the University of Auckland will depend on its ability to integrate all of its services, capabilities and potential into the learning process. It also depends on the realisation amongst faculty of its potential to improve student learning and skills development and faculty commitment to integrate e-literacy into the curriculum. The driving principle in growing the Information Commons’ service philosophy is to continually look for opportunities to integrate the physical learning environment, the virtual learning environment and learning support, with coursework.

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