

Fan their flames: a collaborative model for information delivery to Indigenous students at the Victorian College of the Arts Library, University of Melbourne.

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ABSTRACT

In 2006, a new postgraduate course in Indigenous Arts Management was offered by the Wilin Centre for Indigenous Arts and Cultural Development, in association with the School of Production at the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA), Melbourne. This Graduate Certificate course aims to provide applied education in the area of Indigenous Arts Management and to facilitate empowerment and self-determination amongst Indigenous artists and community leaders who seek to manage, market and protect Indigenous arts product in local, national and international contexts.

This paper will examine the collaborative model used to provide library orientation, information literacy training, information services and collection building services to the specific cohort of students enrolled in this course and their teaching staff. Staff of the Lenton Parr Library at the VCA, and the Wilin Centre developed specific programs to assist students in accessing information requirements for their units. Students are sought and drawn from all over Australia, including remote areas, arriving with different educational achievements and information literacy levels as a result. Students generally require individual assistance, as well as encouragement in participative learning, at the same time developing their professional networks. It is this mix of requirements and differences that have inspired a more holistic program for this cohort of students. Issues to be examined include intensive delivery of information literacy using multiple teaching styles, remote resource access requirements, electronic resources, collection development and relationship building. These will be presented alongside an overview of the course and the generic skills students are expected to develop, as well as how these are aligned to their information needs while completing the course and beyond, to assist in lifelong learning.

Introduction

The Victorian College of the Arts' (VCA) commitment to Indigenous arts began in 1996, when it established a part-time liaison position to connect with potential students and community, as well as to support current students at its Southbank campus, across all six art forms taught at the College: (at that time) dance, drama/production, film and television, art, music and creative arts. The success of the programs established in this seven-year period, resulted in a five fold rise in student cohort. In addition, an Indigenous artists in residence program was established. These developments supported the call for more resources to implement long term strategies to impact a 'cultural transformation' at the College. In 1998 the VCA commissioned a study into the feasibility of establishing a course that trained Indigenous arts managers. Having achieved success in the Arts Management post-graduate program in its School of Creative Arts, the leaders of the College at that time employed consultants to undertake community-based consultation to establish the feasibility of such a program. Various proposals were examined during this time, but it was not until the formation of the Wilin Centre that the dream came into fruition.

In 2001 the College won a B'nai B'rith Anti-Discrimination Award for an Educational Institution and was approached by the anonymous Foundation to dream up a future for Indigenous arts at the VCA – with no financial strings attached. The result was a structure for a new centre – the Wilin Centre for Indigenous Arts and Cultural Development with four major strategies – cultural awareness, student support, student recruitment and access, community development and relationship building. This structure has grown over the past six years and has been endowed with a cultural name – the Wilin Centre – Wilin meaning 'fire' in Woi Wurrung, language of the local traditional land owners. The Centre continues to achieve success in exciting ways.

One of the founding ideas of the Wilin Centre was to establish Australia's first post-graduate courses in Indigenous arts management. The earlier initiative grew from evidence there are relatively low numbers of Indigenous arts managers running our Indigenous community-based arts organisations, and the need for artists to obtain skills to not only manage their personal careers, but perhaps aspire to manage larger enterprises. The need for Indigenous arts managers, working with and supporting Indigenous initiatives in the fine art, tourist art, and broader arts sector, was high. The Wilin Centre wanted to address these systemic sector-based issues, as well as supporting the graduation of uniquely talented Indigenous artists. It was decided that the Centre's role was to examine alumni professional activity, identify the sectors in which they were building careers, and also examine the issues pertinent to an Indigenous centre within a higher education environment.

The course developed formally as a Graduate Certificate in Indigenous Arts Management (GCIAM), approved by The University of Melbourne Academic Board and delivered for the first time in 2006. (From 1991-2006 the VCA was an affiliate institution of the University of Melbourne. In 2007 the VCA was integrated as a faculty of The University of Melbourne, and is now known as the Faculty of the VCA, The University of Melbourne.) The course is delivered in partnership with the School of Production. This was a necessary part of the process as the Wilin Centre is

not a curriculum centre, however the course reflects the Centre's key approach—to work in partnership.

The third intake of students is currently enrolled. We have had, and do have, students enrolled from each state and territory, with Tasmania the exception. The course is delivered in four one-week block intensives to make it as accessible as possible to the market sector of Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists and arts managers we are targeting. Two major decisions structure this course—firstly that it is entry-level post-graduate; and secondly that it is open to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. These two decisions were made to reflect the diversity of the sector and to invite previously excluded students to enter the academy.

The delivery mode of block-intensive style is the first of this type of delivery at the VCA. This has resulted in a substantial learning curve for the administration and teaching of a course such as this within an arts training studio-based institution (with programs designed as full-time course with a practice-based teaching culture). In particular the intensive mode has provided for the recruitment of highly skilled practitioners to teach, including Terri Janke (Indigenous solicitor specialising in intellectual and cultural property rights), Leilani Bin-Juda (Torres Strait Islander Arts manager and curator) and Tiriki Onus (Koorie artist, curator and teacher). Bringing together a diverse practicing group of practitioners has been the foundation for this course.

The student cohort is typically 60% Indigenous Australian and 40% non-Indigenous. We have an exciting Indigenous alumni including Mariaa Randall (Company Manager for Ngapartji Ngapartji), Mark Cole-Smith (actor, film-maker, musician), Janawarri Forrest (Didjerido artist), and Kye Macquire (jewellery maker). Non-Indigenous alumni include Anna-Maree Malone (Axis Arts Indigenous Consulting) and Sara Twigg Patterson (Manager of Papunya Tjupi Arts Centre). Our current cohort includes Indigenous women from Queensland and Western Australia, both in education and social services, as well as two Queensland based non-Indigenous Australians – an Iranian educator and Papua New Guinean TAFE coordinator.

The educational background of the student cohort is as diverse as their personal backgrounds and art-form interest. Some students are post-graduate educated and others have been in the industry for many years without a qualification post-high school. The selection criteria of the course is informed by the VCA talent-based entry approach. Applicants are asked to articulate a Bachelor degree qualification or other post-secondary qualification and/or 3–5 years experience in the field. A broader approach to the recognition of 'talent' and interest in this area is also a consideration. Applicants are further asked to complete some writing which addresses their reasons for wishing to follow a career in Indigenous arts management including the articulation of their long and short term career goals and their commitment to Indigenous arts – their production, protection and marketing.

The Wilin Centre supports the student cohort in the broadest of ways – from facilitating travel and accommodation, catering for events in the Centre with students, visiting teachers and community during the block, and coordinating the course

teaching, materials, learning environment and guest speakers program. The support services available to the students are wide ranging, both within the Centre and throughout the campus. Most important is the relationship with the VCA Lenton Parr Library and the ongoing collaborative program of information resource development and information literacy access workshops. There is a strong collaborative commitment established between the Centre and the Library to provide support to Indigenous students, and the development and delivery of the GCIAM has strengthened this further.

The development of the supporting information literacy program

Before outlining the program and its outcomes, it is important to place it in the contextual framework of information literacy recognition. In 2002 a learning and teaching plan resulted in *The Nine Principles Guiding Teaching and Learning in The University of Melbourne* (The University of Melbourne 2003) and included 'Attributes of University of Melbourne Graduates' (revised in 2007). These attributes include the requirement:

to be adept at learning in a range of ways, including through information and communication technologies; reach a high level of achievement in writing, generic research activities, problem-solving and communication; [and] be critical and creative thinkers, with an aptitude for continued self-directed learning. (The University of Melbourne 2007)

In 2003 the Academic Board endorsed the Australian and New Zealand Institute for Information Literacy (ANZIIL) Information Literacy Standards as 'a guide for curriculum planning'. (Bundy 2004) This has been implemented with a range of programs including embedded information literacy with collaborative partnerships between the library and faculties for undergraduate programs in Nursing, Centre for Adolescent Health, Architecture Building and Planning, Education, Music, Visual and Performing Arts and Engineering; and the UpSkills Program in the School of Graduate Research. (McLaurin Smith, Ellis, and Robertson 2005; Binns *et al.* 2008) The recent call for submissions for the Information Futures Commission at The University of Melbourne, and the imminent endorsement of the resulting report *Melbourne's Scholarly Information Future: a 10-year strategy* will strengthen and support a new generation of strong scholarly and information literacy frameworks in a university with new degree programs, strong focus on research outcomes and an increasing need for global outreach and relevance. (The University of Melbourne 2008)

In addition to the Graduate Attributes guidelines, the GCIAM Guidelines provide specific reference to the expectations of information literacy and written skills required by the students on completion of each unit. These include:

Be able to research through competent use of various information sources, and be able to define the areas of inquiry and methods of research in the preparation of seminar presentations and marketing projects [and]...Demonstrate practical skills in respect of critical analysis, problem solving, report writing, team work and oral and written communication. (Wilin Centre for Indigenous Arts and Cultural Development 2008)

These guidelines provided the reference point for library staff to initiate a collaborative model for information literacy to this particular cohort of students.

A Collaborative Model

The collaboration began with the submission of the new course proposal to the Faculty Curriculum Committee. A standing requirement for submission with this proposal is the Library Impact Statement, to be completed by the College Librarian. The document enables contact to be established with the course co-ordinator and the College Librarian to assess the impact of a new course on the library in terms of library resources. The impact statement includes the following assessments:

- of existing collections to support the course;
- of expected reading/viewing/listening lists against existing holdings;
- for seeding funding to start a new area of collecting, or to expand this particular collecting area; and
- for information literacy requirements.

Two specific areas were highlighted in the GCIAM Library Impact Statement:

- the need for an increase in purchase of Indigenous arts related publications; and
- the need for focussed information literacy for the cohort of students which were envisaged to come from diverse backgrounds and experience, some with secondary schooling, or university or life-long learning skills.

The collection building and development was easily solved with an injection of 'seed' funds to the Library from the Wilin Centre to purchase prescribed and recommended reading and ongoing collection building in Indigenous arts and arts management related publications and electronic resources. In addition, a greater focus on Indigenous arts was written into the library collection development policy to emphasise the requirements of this new course, and to better reflect the activities and profile of the Wilin Centre within the VCA. Ongoing collection building and awareness across all format/media types continues.

In addition to this collection development initiative in 2006, the integration of the VCA with The University of Melbourne Library collections in 2007, facilitated expanded collection access. A self-directed online request service was established with a daily courier service delivering materials from collections at the Parkville campus libraries including the Baillieu Library and the Education Resource Centre. These collections include extensive Indigenous collections in history, sociology, anthropology and media. Other access points to library collections also expanded to include the CAVAL Reciprocal Borrowing Scheme, allowing students to borrow from any Victorian University library; the University Libraries Australia (ULA) service, allowing students to borrow from any Australian University, and the BONUS system, a co-operative scheme of university libraries in Victoria and NSW using the Innovative Interfaces Library system. ULA is a particularly important service for the cohorts of students enrolled in the GCIAM as the students are more likely to be living

in other states – most used collections are the Charles Darwin University Library, NT, and the James Cook University Libraries in far north Queensland.

The information literacy requirements are a key point for establishing student information needs. As this was the first course to be offered directly by the Wilin Centre, it was the first time that Indigenous student information literacy needs had come specifically to the attention of the library. Indigenous students were enrolled in courses across the college including art, dance, music, drama, film and television, and puppetry, but not specifically in an Indigenous focussed course, such as the new GCIAM course. These students received the general orientation offerings of tours, catalogue introductions and some embedded subject specific information literacy sessions in class time with tutorial hurdles.

Library staff worked with Wilin staff to develop an appropriate information literacy model. The key elements required and identified were:

- Action and reflective-based learning incorporating activities around project/assessment requirements;
- The need for students to feel ‘at home’ as soon as possible in the library environment, to make the most of their time on campus, due to the short week-long teaching blocks. This includes the need for library staff to build relationships with students quickly;
- Flexibility of delivery – diverse education backgrounds with differing technology skills, and from all over Australia – provided a matrix of complexity with adequate services and resources to ensure students have what they need, when they need it;
- Close working relationship with the Wilin Centre staff and visiting lecturers; and
- Recognition of Indigenous knowledge as a component of information literacy – not necessarily the mainstream academic sources.

The program

In conjunction with the Wilin Centre staff, library staff developed a program of focussed, flexible and intensive delivery to commence in the first block mode session, to be built on as the course progressed. The sessions were embedded into the teaching program, with appropriate time allocation and were ‘stand alone’ – outside the standard library orientation programs offered at the beginning of each semester. The four week-long blocks required for the completion of the course are timetabled throughout the year and outside the general university commencement orientation programs.

Multiple and flexible teaching styles were planned to respond to the students’ individual requirements. The first time the program was offered, the program was considered a trial, but one that we were confident would be flexible enough to cater and support each students needs. A tiered approach (with a minimum of two group sessions) was developed to provide flexibility but appropriate intensity.

The sitting of the first meeting in the library in ‘round table’ mode was important in presenting the library as a comfortable, friendly place, where talking and discussion were allowed, library staff were seen as friendly and approachable, and plenty of spaces allowing students to work collaboratively were available. (Giles 2003) The added advantage of having these sessions in time slots outside main semester teaching time, provides a quieter library environment, where staff have more time to provide intensive consultations and advice. The importance of a welcoming library environment with consideration for library layouts for Indigenous students is highlighted in a number of studies. (Byrne et al. 1995; Anderson 2000; Pusey 2003) This style of welcome was in contrast to the usual general orientation program, with large numbers and groups of students taking tours and catalogue classes.

This first session provided a relaxed opportunity to introduce the students to the library as a starting place for finding information to support their studies. After a brief welcome, each student explained their story briefly - who they were, their arts interest and where they had come from. Students were encouraged to talk about their experiences of libraries, which assisted in highlighting particular individual needs. Some had never been in a university library environment, perhaps only experiencing a small high school library, a small public library, or none at all, but some students were university graduates and felt confident in the larger academic style library. This casual, information session designed around a story/narrative framework proved very successful (as inspired by Novak and Robinson (1998)).

The next section of the program involved a discussion around the collections in the library and the expectations in an academic environment. A paper guide to ‘Resources for Indigenous Arts’ in the VCA Library was given to each student, reminding them of the types of resources available, and to bookmark the online linked version. In addition, a discussion evolved around the recognition that the library is not the only location for the storing of knowledge. This is an important point for non-Indigenous people to recognise and acknowledge. The library is a Western construct—housing knowledge in and on objects, and does not necessarily provide or sustain the non-print traditions of Indigenous societies.

Indigenous knowledge systems are ‘dynamic and changing, orally transmitted from generation to generation and produced in the context of Indigenous peoples’ close and continuing relationships with their environment. ...The role of libraries in the documentation of Indigenous knowledge involves fragmentation and isolation, despite the well meaning strategies of conservation and preservation, documentation, storage and dissemination. (Nakata et al. 2005)

The use of oral history, artwork, music, and audiovisual sources were emphasised to the students as valid sources, with appropriate documentation. Students were encouraged to use Indigenous Knowledge Centres which have been and are continuing to be developed in Indigenous communities. (Byrne et al. 2005)

A brief physical tour of the library then took place pointing out the locations of the different collections, the viewing and listening facilities and the areas to seek information and loans assistance. At all times during these sessions, students were

encouraged to ask questions assisting in establishing strong communication links and knowledge sharing. (Anderson 2000)

The second session was presented in a computer teaching laboratory. In this session, we focussed on the online access to library resources focussed in particular on the assignment requirements. The students were required to select a key issue for examination including: 'Walking in two worlds', 'Issues of identity', 'Relationship with land' and 'Cultural beliefs'. The session continued using each individual's choice of topic as the basis for learning. The components of this session included:

- A brief introduction to the library catalogue with a worksheet of activities and questions, focussing on their chosen topics, and establishing subject headings and relevant texts, searching for formats (eg DVDs), locations, call numbers and availability.

- Information about their patron record – renewals, checking how many items on loan, plus requesting inter campus loans from the Parkville campus was demonstrated.

- Introduction to the online VCA Library Indigenous Arts subject page.

- Brief introduction to Supersearch – online resources gateway for The University of Melbourne Library (including remote off campus access by password) highlighting APAFT/APAIS and ATSIROM. Basic instruction around search strategies with keywords and simple Boolean logic, e.g. Indigenous and arts and community

The third session was spent with the students in the library, as they continued on developing search strategies. The aim of this session was to locate books and journal articles (paper/electronic) to support their research. By the end of the session they were to have materials to borrow/download/print/photocopy. Two librarians assisted students at workstations, developing search strategies, seeking relevant books and electronic full-text sources. At the close of the session, we gathered around the table again, as at the beginning of the day. With growing stacks of books, photocopies, printouts, and files on USB flashcards the students were experiencing a positive sense of achievement. Some students were more advanced than others in the thinking around their assignment, and the resources needed to support their research, but all happy and feeling a sense of accomplishment. There was also a genuine sense of community amongst a group of students and staff who had not met before this day. The aim of developing a close relationship with library staff through a prioritising of social interactions at the beginning of the day proved a success. It had provided a less alienating environment than the students expected. (Tripcony 2000; Pusey 2003) Ongoing contact with the staff via email and phone calls for library assistance after the week of block-mode teaching, and continuing throughout the year, indicated that the students were comfortable in the environment and with the staff.

In addition to this information literacy program offered by the library, the students were introduced to the staff from the Academic Skills Unit (ASU) located within the Library. Library staff often make referrals to staff in this unit, and as their office is also located in the library. Promoted as a friendly place to visit – the students can

make individual appointments or participate in small groups to improve their academic performance in areas including essay writing/planning, journal writing, oral presentations, spelling/grammar and reading.

Evaluation

Evaluation of the teaching and information literacy programs is completed independently. The teaching evaluation is completed by a paper form at the end of each block intensive. Students complete the standard Quality of Teaching forms as well as course specific evaluation. Evaluation of the subjects have been instrumental in the continual development of the subject materials, teaching staff selected, and assessments used. The course is founded on an inquiry model of learning, and as such is subject to reflective action. The library evaluation is also undertaken via a paper form. Students respond to questions of relevancy to their assignment/assessment needs, adequacy of teaching materials/formats, what was useful, what wasn't, their confidence in the ability to undertake independent actions post-session etc. Feedback has been positive and helpful. The most valuable evaluation was anecdotal in seeing the students coming back into the library each day during the week of teaching, feeling comfortable in the library, and following up queries with staff via email and phone over the period of their study. Staff have undertaken reviews of the program after each cohort, updating resources, and utilising technologies as they become available. (eg Web 2.0 and learning management systems)

Relationship building

Relationship building – internal and external – is an essential process in the delivery of this course. The Wilin Centre engage a wide range of guest lecturers for the course. These have included political historian Dr Gary Foley, contemporary visual artist Brook Andrew, alumni including Liza Mare Syron (Coordinator of Indigenous Performing Arts at the Eora Centre) and non-Indigenous experts including *The Age* dance critic Hilary Crampton and Director of the South Project, Magdalena Moreno. In a recent initiative, all guest lecturers are now invited to register on the Collaborative Commons (CC) website and add content via a blog, answer further enquiries and interact with the VCA staff, the student cohort. and guest lecturers. The CC allows quick access to short term/guest lecturers, who would normally be constrained by the University IT protocols. Library staff contribute to the CC as well on the same terms as students and academic staff, providing access and advice to library resources as identified through the blog. It can be seen that relationship building grew quickly and smoothly through the information literacy program. Personal contact and a range of resources including paper guides, online webpages and group web sites, plus phone, email and fax when students were off-site were provided to allow as much flexibility as possible to assist students in optimising their learning and contributing through their preferred communication style.

Outcomes

The program continues for all students in the GCIAM with updates and developments included. Wilin staff and guest lecturers regularly undertake the program as well, ensuring their information skills are also updated. In addition, the outcomes of this program have provided opportunities, ideas and a strengthening of the overall information literacy program for the VCA. An orientation program specifically for

Indigenous students has been introduced. This is offered to both undergraduate and postgraduate students across all disciplines. Using similar techniques for the GCIAM group, we bring the students together in the relaxed library environment, and layer the discussion, library tour and online demonstration. This has provided a forum for students to meet other Indigenous students across disciplines and levels, and allows the library staff to highlight the Indigenous collections and electronic resources in a more focussed way than in a general orientation session. The developments have also instigated initiatives for all students at the VCA. The conceptualisation and development of the Indigenous IL program has guided the programs for other small cohorts of students. The VCA is a largely practice-based institution with entry partially based on audition or portfolio. Prior to 2007, Victorian Certificate of Education ENTER scores were not used in selection, so that often there were small groups of students identified within their subject cohort as requiring assistance in information literacy. Continuing on with a similar collaborative model strong liaison links have been developed with Faculty staff to ensure students are receiving assistance where needed. (Dorskatsch 2003; Dearden 2005) Sessions have been designed along similar layered and flexible structures with success. It is an important reminder that issues of information literacy skills competence are relevant to all information users. (Giles 2003)

The importance of a strong library presence in course development and governance is indicated by the success of the Library Impact Statement supporting the GCIAM course proposal and the successful collaborative model it supported through collection development and information literacy. The ability to target new areas of collection building early in course development, and have time to build customised information literacy programs to allow 'optimal opportunities [for students] developing competence' (Tripcony 2000) were key factors in establishing a legitimate collaborative model. The development of a strong collaboration between staff of the library and the Wilin Centre has provided ongoing annual support with specific funding for collection development in Indigenous arts, providing an opportunity for a strengthened collection.

The information literacy program has highlighted the need for greater electronic support and contact via the library. In Semester 2 2008, the course will have a presence on the Collaborative Commons, a Web 2.0 environment providing course guidelines, links to scanned course materials, and a forum encouraging blogging between the students and staff, and which will be used assessment purposes. Library staff will subscribe to the blog, provide relevant web links for resources, and monitor and interact as required regarding information resources. The university's learning management system (LMS) (Blackboard) has not been selected for electronic communication for this course, as the CC provides more flexibility for the units the students are taking. This assists those students who are located away from the University. The library has a Library Community available on the LMS and a Wilin Centre/ Indigenous Arts/ Library community was under consideration, but the fast moving world of Web 2 .0 is paving the way for more innovative and appropriate tools for information sharing.

It is often difficult for GCIAM students to leave the abundant information resources of the university behind and go back to their communities. To encourage lifelong learning in the digital age requires adequate and ongoing resourcing. The internet can fill the gap, especially in smaller, isolated communities, but there is still a digital divide in access to scholarly information. To help bridge this divide, the University is shortly to trial access to online databases/resources to alumni. If successful this could fill the gap that is so often felt when a student graduates and dependant on work/life circumstances loses access to the depth of resources offered by the university.

Fan the flames of the fire

The collaborative model of information literacy and delivery has successfully developed the information literacy capability of students undertaking the GCIAM at the VCA. It may not be earth-shattering in its innovations, but it has proven itself over the three years of delivery to be appropriate and supportive of the students' information needs. The attentiveness that the Library staff have given to relationship building between students, the library, and the information they need and seek, has assisted the students in fanning the flames of their fire—the flames that will burn bright and alive after they leave the VCA, taking their newly acquired skills to contribute and undertake leadership roles in Indigenous arts communities in Australia.

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Relevant Websites

Wilin Centre for Indigenous Arts and Cultural Development, Faculty of the Victorian College of the Arts, The University of Melbourne
<<http://www.vca.unimelb.edu.au/wilin/>>

Resources for Indigenous Arts in the VCA Lenton Parr Library

<<http://www.vca.unimelb.edu.au/indigarts/>>

CAVAL Reciprocal Borrowing Scheme <<http://www.caval.edu.au/borrowing.html>>

University Libraries Australia (ULA) <<http://www.caul.edu.au/ula/>>

Academic Skills Unit (ASU) <<http://www.vca.unimelb.edu.au/academicskills/>>

Collaborative Commons <<http://www.collaborativecommons.com>>

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