Unitec Information Literacy Framework 2017

Definition

- Information literacy is the set of integrated abilities encompassing the reflective discovery of information, the understanding of how information is produced and valued, and the use of information in creating new knowledge and participating ethically in communities of learning. (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2015)

Introduction

The enormous changes in education, in ways of learning and a highly dynamic information world mean that students have different information-seeking behaviours from in the past. They also have new ways of using the information they have found. Learning has become student-centred and active. One of the characteristics of Unitec’s Living Curriculum is described as “curiosity-led” curricula (Unitec, 2011). As well as actively seeking out information, our students may now generate new knowledge themselves. They must therefore understand how the information world works so that they can determine the validity of information and what it means to use it ethically.

A core part of information literacy is digital literacy. Jisc, a not-for-profit organisation which advises UK universities and colleges about digital solutions, defines digital literacies as “those capabilities which fit an individual for living, learning and working in a digital society” (2014). What it means to be digitally literate is always changing, but includes:

- Thinking critically about information
- Learning to be mindful of the information one consumes and creates and be able to distinguish fact from fiction (Chua, 2016).
- Taking great care when developing an online identity.
- Knowing how to use a range of digital devices and applications.
- Ability to learn effectively in an online environment (Jisc, 2014).

The significance of digital literacy and the greater emphasis on online information seeking and knowledge creation suggests that digital literacy should be part of this framework as it would benefit student learning at Unitec. The diagram below clarifies how information and digital literacies share common areas.

(Secker, Coonan, Webster & Wrathall, 2014)
Context

Unitec’s multicultural student population calls for a flexible information literacy framework which will work for students from all cultural backgrounds. In its *Investment plan for 2017-2018*, Unitec states that its purpose is “to enable better futures for students, communities, and public and private enterprise”. To achieve this, Unitec’s second critical success factor is “highly employable and enterprising life-long learners” (Unitec Institute of Technology, 2016.). New Zealand’s Tertiary Education Commission asserts that “New Zealand needs to ensure that more people, including more people from priority groups, have the transferable skills in demand as employment rises, and that will support them in all other areas of their lives” (2015). The focus for priority groups are:

- 20-24 year olds to ensure they are able to gain qualifications that will enable them to find reasonable employment
- Improving success rates of Maori and Pasifika
- Ensuring the tertiary sector will “offer a diverse and flexible range of foundation skills programmes that reflect learners’ different needs and abilities, and help support their achievement” (2015).

Information and digital literacies are abilities that are crucial for Unitec’s priority students. Students’ education and work future depends on being able to think critically and evaluating information wisely. Soft skills such as information and digital literacy are highly transferable to life outside the classroom. Priority groups are often the very ones who do not have easy access to information.

Earlier in 2017, Unitec’s Business Intelligence Unit conducted the U Matter Student Survey (2017). The survey results include the following statistics:

- One third of Unitec students are the first in their family to attend a tertiary institution
- One third of students had considered stopping their studies in the previous 12 months
- 35% of our students have a child financially dependent on them
- 56% of our students were not born in New Zealand.

Many Unitec students fit all four of these U Matter survey characteristics. They are from diverse backgrounds. usually time-poor, they may lack family support and sometimes there is a language barrier. A third of Unitec students are first in family to study at tertiary level. It is critical that
Unitec examines the effect of this on academic retention and success. In her HERDSA article “First-in-family learners and higher education: Negotiating the ‘silences’ of university transition and participation,” Sarah O’Shea shows there are poor educational outcomes in many countries for students who are first in family to attend tertiary study (2016, p. 6). Professor Keithia Wilson of Griffith University notes that students are more likely to drop out if they “work more than 25 hours a week if enrolled full time, are the first in their family to attend university (low social capital), or are a member of a minority or disadvantaged group (e.g., Indigenous, rural, refugee, disability, international, single parents, primary caregivers)” (2009). Developing students’ information and digital literacies will support their learning, provide confidence and a better understanding of self-directed study and the nature of information. This will set them up for success at work and in their personal lives.

Many of Unitec’s Māori students fit the first three of the U Matter survey characteristics above. 45% are first in their family to study at tertiary level, many have dependent children. This creates stress and financial pressure, which leads to students seriously considering withdrawing from their studies. We can support these students by ensuring our information literacy programme is relevant to their needs. We need to move past deficit-thinking and acknowledge the strengths that our Māori students bring. One of Unitec’s key values is to be Bicultural, and to live the partnership contained within Te Noho Kotahitanga. (Unitec Institute of Technology, 2017). Also, one of the characteristics of Unitec’s Living Curriculum is to embed Mātauranga Māori: “Māori concepts and perspectives are woven into the holistic learning experience” (Unitec, 2011). It is important that we embed Mātauranga Māori perspectives into our information literacy training, and use inclusive learning and teaching practices. This will enable all students to be strong in their learning journeys.

Nearly 12% of Unitec students classify themselves as Pasifika. According to the U Matter Student Survey, more Pacific and Māori students have seriously considered stopping their studies in the previous 12 months than the total student population. As well, 40% of Pacific students are the first in their family to study at a tertiary institution (Business Intelligence Capability Centre, 2017). The 2016 Unitec Learning and Technology Survey states that Pacific students are over-represented in the Unitec student group that must negotiate the use of laptops with other people at home (Unitec Institute of Technology. Business Intelligence Capability Centre, 2016). These facts, combined with TEC’s requirement to focus on improving success rates of Pacific students, mean that a framework for information literacy should emphasise Pacific students’ needs especially around digital literacies.

Unitec’s learning and teaching strategy includes face-to-face, blended, work-based and self-directed models (Unitec Institute of Technology, 2014). Because of the greater emphasis on self-directed and blended learning, it is important that students learn critical thinking skills. They
must learn to understand the quality and value of information. Schwenger explains how teachers using blended learning tend to expect students to be self-directed and to know how to critique concepts and information (2016). In fact, students need opportunities to develop these skills in a supported environment so that the processes can be learned. The most effective way to do this is to embed the learning into the teaching through assessments.

**Unitec Library Information Literacy Framework Strategy 2017**

It is useful to start with the learner. An information literate person has specific attitudes and abilities that enable them to understand and make good use of the information around them. A prescriptive or standards-based framework for identifying information and digital literacy, as has been used in the past, is now possibly over-simplistic for current needs. Expertise in information use is context-dependent and its development is not linear or finite. It is an ongoing, continuous process, where people may be highly literate in some areas, but novice in others. Information seeking and creation is an iterative process: the searcher will examine results, refine and search again. It is complex and not a step-by-step process (Foster, 2005).

The Unitec Library framework is drawn from recent international research and is adapted to suit the Unitec setting. It is based principally on the recent *Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Framework for information literacy in higher education* (2015). The other main influence is the British *A new curriculum for information literacy* framework (ANCIL) (Secker, 2011). Like these frameworks, the Unitec Library framework has the information searcher or researcher at the centre. There are six capabilities linked to the searcher, which are focussed on at different times.

The intention of the framework is that Librarians and teaching staff will both use it to establish the strengths and the weaknesses of student information literacy in academic courses and then to develop information literacy goals. Librarians and teachers can collaborate to plan information literacy workshops and embed information literacy skills into courses.
**Library staff roles**

Library Knowledge Specialists will use the framework to inform their information literacy work by:

- providing leadership in planning and providing information and digital literacy at Unitec.
- partnering with Te Puna Ako Academic Advisors to raise awareness of information literacy as a characteristic of lifelong learning, providing a model for embedding the competencies into programmes.
- partnering with Kaihautū to embed Mātauranga Māori and facilitate information literacy on campus
- contributing to new course design and programme renewals, particularly transition to tertiary courses.
- collaborating with academic staff to embed information skills into academic programmes in a range of teaching and learning modes.
- working with academic staff to evaluate the effectiveness of the information literacy programmes.

**Core concepts**

The Association of College and Research Libraries frames are:

1. *Authority is constructed and contextual*
2. *Information creation as a process*
3. *Information has value*
4. *Research as inquiry*
5. *Scholarship as conversation*
6. *Searching as strategic exploration*

(association of College and Research Libraries, 2015)
Unitec Library Model: The Information Literacy Environment

Searchers and Researchers

- Reflect
- Question
- Explore
- Converse
- Contextualise
- Attribute
**Searchers and researchers:**

are students, staff or anyone doing any kind of information seeking, whether it is formal academic research or not.

**Frames**

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<td></td>
<td>• Continually question with self-awareness and scepticism</td>
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<td>• Interrogate information, looking for gaps</td>
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<td>• Question traditional concepts of ‘author’ and critically examine a range of perspectives</td>
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<td>• Keep an open, but critical mind.</td>
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<td>• Brainstorm to formulate questions and sub-questions based on information gaps</td>
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<td>• Search using a variety of appropriate tools and strategies</td>
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<td>• Browse, think, search, refine the question, search again – it is an iterative inquiry process of discovery</td>
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<td>• Carefully sift for relevant information and manage the results appropriately</td>
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<td>• Persist.</td>
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<th>Converse</th>
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<td></td>
<td>• Research is an ongoing conversation</td>
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<td>• Debate ideas and possibly contribute to the conversation at an appropriate level</td>
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<td>• Critically evaluate information and see how it fits into the bigger picture</td>
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<td>• Share and discuss information in a variety of formats, depending on the context</td>
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### Contextualise

- Evaluate information and the authoritative voices based on the information need and the context
- Synthesise ideas gathered from various sources
- Draw conclusions based on evaluation and analysis
- Organise the information in useful ways.

### Attribute

- Value the skills needed to produce information
- Respect and cite the ideas of others
- Understand that intellectual property is a legal and social construct
- Take care of online identity and understand the concepts of privacy of personal information.

### Reflect

- Examine and critique own world view
- Value different opinions
- Understand issues of equity of access to information
- Learn to understand the information ecosystem.

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**A digital literacies strategy**

It is evident from the research undertaken here and following conversations with a range of Unitec staff that a Unitec-wide digital strategy should be developed and used. This work should commence as soon as possible and be led by a cross-campus group of staff, including Te Puna Ako, Student Experience, Te Waka Urungi, librarians and teaching staff. Students should also be involved. This information literacy framework can contribute to the conversation.
Reference List


Bibliography (further reading)


