Strategic approaches to teaching and learning development for art and design librarians

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At the University of the Arts London (UAL), Library Services and the University's educational development department have collaborated to ensure that teaching and learning development for its librarians is approached strategically and can be linked directly to the institutional teaching, learning and enhancement strategy. In doing so the librarians at UAL are provided with opportunities to develop pedagogic skills and techniques which acknowledge the arts education environment in which they are working and some of the specific differences which need to be considered when teaching art and design students. This paper presents some of the approaches and initiatives that have been deployed to achieve this.

Introduction

The University of the Arts London (UAL) is a large, specialist arts university comprising six colleges: Central Saint Martins, Camberwell College of Arts, Chelsea College of Arts, London College of Communication, London College of Fashion, and Wimbledon College of Arts. The University offers an extensive range of courses in art, design, fashion, communication and performance from Foundation through to PhD level, and attracts students from all over the world (49% were international in 2015). It also has a strong research profile within the arts disciplines, supporting a community of active researchers and doctoral candidates. Currently 74% of students study at undergraduate level, 14% at postgraduate level, and 12% at further education level.

Library Services is university-wide department within UAL, including a library located in each of the six colleges, two Learning Zones and a University Archives and Special Collections Centre, as well as central Resources and Systems teams that provide infrastructure and technical support. Library Services itself is part of a broader Library and Academic Support service which includes an Academic Support team and a Language Centre.

This paper will outline some strategic initiatives that have been introduced at the University to develop the pedagogic practice of academic librarians who have a responsibility for information skills teaching and training. It will also outline professional collaborations that have been set up to ensure these librarians are equipped to play a proactive role in curriculum-based teaching and learning activity. There is existing literature on how information and library skills training can be developed and delivered in art and design education that explores differences between information literacy in art and design education and multi-disciplinary environments. For example: Bennett[1] argues for the development of a more creative approach to teaching information literacy in order to attract studio based art students into the library; Zanin-Yost and Tapely[2] present a case for an action research approach to teaching information literacy to art and design students; and, commentators, such as Schwarz[3] and Chaterjee[4] discuss the potentials of incorporating practice-based research and object-based learning (OBL) within arts contexts. UAL librarians have indeed embraced these approaches, but the main focus of this article will be to consider more broadly how strategic staff development in teaching and learning provides a fundamental building block for the development of information literacy in art and design.

1. Bennett, H. (2006). Bringing the studio into the library: addressing the research needs of studio art and architecture students. *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America*, 25(1), 38–42.
2. Zanin-Yost, A. & Tapley, E. (2008). Learning in the art classroom: making the connection between research and art. Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America, 27(2), 40–45.
3. Schwarz, G. (2008) Balancing Literacies: Using Graphic Novels for Many Literacies. Balanced Reading Instruction 15(1), 1–10.
4. Chatterjee, H. (2009). Object-based learning in higher education: the pedagogical power of museums, p.179–182. In Putting University Collections to Work in Teaching and Research – Proceedings of the 9th Conference of the International Committee of ICOM for University Museums and Collections (UMAC), 10th–13th September 2009. Berkley : ICOM.

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Background to Library Services and teaching information literacy at UAL

Academic support at UAL is explicitly framed as an enhancement model, rather than a curriculum embedded model, which means that academic support staff (including librarians) are responsible for developing 'value added' enhancement support for individual students as well as for groups of students and whole curriculum areas where appropriate. Unlike other university libraries, academic liaison is not a centrally managed function; nor is it the specific activity of a dedicated 'liaison librarian' role. Because of the dispersed nature of the UAL college libraries, each has its own local management structure, and each college library team has a number of academic support librarians whose job roles include elements of academic liaison (and induction and information literacy delivery) as well as collection development and customer service activity. In their academic liaison role, all academic support librarians have a subject specialism and a portfolio of programmes and courses for which they are responsible that includes collection management, stock selection, enquiry services and, of course, academic support. Academic support for the UAL librarians comes in several forms, including inductions (introduction to the library, its collections and services), information skills sessions, referencing sessions, special collections OBL sessions and, on occasion, bespoke sessions developed and delivered collaboratively with academic colleagues or academic support tutors. The onus is on the individual academic support librarian to liaise with curriculum areas and develop the desired academic support sessions. With this focus comes an integral requirement to be able to teach, and in the past there has been an assumption that academic support librarians are already equipped to fulfil this aspect of their role. In reality this is not always the case.

Library Services managers at UAL have recently been developing new ways to support the teaching aspect of the academic librarian role through various strategic initiatives and collaborations. To achieve this, some underpinning principles to the approach were established:

- Create and embed a vision for holistic academic support for UAL students
- Align library teaching and learning development to institutional strategic drivers
- Facilitate discussion and generate awareness and understanding amongst librarians of what it means to be a teacher in an 'arts education' environment.
- Encourage collaboration and partnership working with curriculum areas and key support areas, such as Academic Support, Teaching and Learning Exchange (teaching and learning development), Widening Participation.

A vision for holistic academic support for UAL students

Teams within Library and Academic Support Services share a vision for academic support that spans study skills support, information and digital literacy, and English language support, and all these elements form the university-wide offer that specifies a core entitlement for academic support to ensure parity of provision for students[5]. This vision was initially expressed in a strategy for academic support that aimed to 'enable all students to become confident and competent independent learners, and achieve to the maximum of their potential through the development of their academic skills, literacies and professional attributes.'[6]

Embedding Library Services' academic support activity within the wider institutional and college level academic support activity provides an advantageous model for students: 'This distinctive offer seeks to enhance the students' own learning abilities, strategies and knowledge that underpin progress, achievement and future success in an anticipatory and innovative manner. Sessions are often co-created and co-delivered (...) so that students benefit from the differing expertise of the staff involved'[7]

The overarching support structure at UAL also means that there are many library staff involved in academic liaison and the provision of academic support and strong relationships have developed across all curriculum areas. Academic support librarians are very much part of their course/subject areas' academic teams which often enables research and information skills teaching and training to be embedded into both the design and delivery of curriculum programmes,

5. Christie, P. (2015) 'Revisioning academic support as an innovative and inclusive offer for creative arts students' [online] SCONUL Focus 64. Available at http://www.sconul.ac.uk/sites/default/files/documents/14_17.pdf [Accessed 30 Sept 2016]

6. University of the Arts, London, (2013) Academic Support Strategy http://issuu.com/artslondonlibraries/docs/academic_support-8

7. Ibid Christie, p. 52.

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from unit level to degree and above, as well as offered on a 'drop-in' enhancement model basis. As an underpinning principle, this shared vision is important in that it establishes academic support librarians as equals within the teaching environment, therefore allowing subsequent development to have a relevant context.

Alignment of library teaching and learning development to current institutional strategic drivers

Two key University strategies underlie the Library Services ambition to develop the teaching skills of its academic support librarians. First is the UAL 2015-22 strategy, which has the title *Transformative Education for a Creative World*. One of four key areas within that overarching strategy is labelled Transformative Education, which identifies a requirement for the University to ensure that all students reach their full potential by working in partnership with them to develop and deliver an education that is responsive, responsible, imaginative and inspirational.[8] Four related objectives include:

- Placing curiosity, making, critical questioning and rigour at the heart of our curriculum;
- Using teaching methods based on best creative practices, and expanding the use of work-based and research-informed learning to ensure that our students are thoroughly equipped for their future careers;
- Engaging with our students to develop flexible modes of teaching delivery, taking into account the particular characteristics of a London-based education and advances in digital technologies;
- Placing diversity and inclusivity at the core of our recruitment and education for staff and students.

Two specific initiatives identified to enable these goals resonate especially well with the proposed work of Library Services:

- the development of our academic support services in order to improve retention, attainment and student success, all in a manner that reflects the diverse nature of our student community;
- increased support for staff in the development of their pedagogy and in their use of existing and emerging technologies.

Second, is the Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Strategy, which complements the University strategy and aims to restore a focus on teaching and teachers as well as on student experience and learning[9]. Within the strategy, the notion of creativity is applied to both teaching and learning with the recognition that all creative subjects can also be taught creatively. In foregrounding creativity, the strategy aims to open up the 'synergies between the creative practices of teaching and making'. Collaboration between colleagues and students is also identified as a key underlying value with an acknowledgement that outstanding learning experiences result from bring together the expertise, inventiveness and unique perspectives of both. The strategy also claims that creative teaching necessarily involves challenging orthodoxies, experimenting, innovating, and take creative risks as pedagogically informed and highly skilled educators.

These are all values that Library Services felt the academic support librarians should be encouraged to embrace in order to be fully immersed in the pedagogic practices of the University and to feel confident as arts educators. Consequently, as well as building on the strong collaborations that Library Services already had with college curriculum areas and academic support teams, it also seemed essential to develop a strategic and pro-active partnership with the University's Teaching and Learning Exchange, which is the centre responsible for education studies and educational development at UAL and a key stakeholder in implementing the institution's Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Strategy. Collaborative working with colleagues in the Exchange has enabled Library Services to meet other strategic objectives identified with the strategy such as supporting the pedagogic staff development needs of UAL teaching staff (i.e. recognising academic support librarians as teachers), increasing engagement in the UK Professional Standards Framework, and developing and disseminating expertise in enquiry-based and object-based learning.

8. University of the Arts London (2015) Strategy 2015–22: Transformative Education for a Creative World http://www.arts.ac.uk/about-ual/strategy-governance/ual-strategy-2015-22/

9. University of the Arts London (2015) Teaching, Learning and Enhancement Strategy 2015–22: Delivering transformative education http://www.arts.ac.uk/about-ual/teaching-and-learning/about-the-exchange/teaching--learning-strategy/

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Arts education at UAL

In order to situate the identified strategic aim to support the teaching development of academic librarians, it is useful to provide a brief note on some of the specific features and challenges associated with art and design pedagogy and to highlight particular approaches being taken to teaching and learning at UAL. Key overarching questions relate to what is distinctive about teaching and learning within creative disciplines and what special contribution these disciplines can make to more general debates within education studies. Following on from that, is the matter of how academic librarians can draw from and contribute to these larger educational projects.

In terms of distinctiveness, it would be simplistic to list a set of features that define teaching arts subjects and how these might be addressed through teacher training. This is partly because there is a high degree of variance between subjects and underlying educational purposes even within this specialist area, and partly because there exists a healthy uncertainty about how individuals learn to be creative within their domains of interest. As Elkins[10] points out, there is a long history within western thought stretching back as far as Plato and Aristotle that contends art cannot be 'taught' at all. Elkins identifies four things that can be taught in art classrooms including art criticism and theory, professional skills, visual acuity and technique, but also highlights that these fall short of expressing either what actually happens in art instruction or what is deemed most important.

10. Elkins, J. (2001). Why Art Cannot Be Taught. University of Illinois Press

A study by Shreeve et al[11] undertaken as part of the UAL Creative Learning in Practice Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning provides some useful insights into how art educators perceive their roles. Their study collated data from a series of interviews with tutors across four subject areas to identify a set of 'signature pedagogies' associated with art and design education. Using Schulman's definition[12], signature pedagogies describe the fundamental ways in which future practitioners are educated across three dimensions: operational acts of teaching, assumptions about best ways of imparting knowledge and know-how, and underlying beliefs about attitudes, values and dispositions. Shreeve and colleagues identified the following key aspects of art and design teaching and learning:

11. Shreeves, A., Sims, E. and Trowler, P. (2010) 'A kind of exchange': learning from art and design teaching, Higher Education Research & Development, 29:2, 125–138.

12. Shulman, L. S. (2005) Pedagogies of uncertainty. Liberal Education, 91:2.

- Learning has a material and physical dimension: requiring engagement with material and development of ideas through media such as sketch-books or performance, and also 'whole person' engagement including mind, emotions and senses.
- Learning involves living with uncertainty and unknown outcomes: challenging to students and sometimes to tutors who have to support their uncertainty.
- Learning has a visible dimension: learning products exist as artefacts and are often open to public scrutiny which enables dialogue about the learning process.
- Aspects of learning take into account the audience: the creation and performance of work is carried out with an audience in mind.
- The intention is to develop independent creative practitioners: the tutor's role is to foster individuals who understand where they and their work fits within a practice.
- Learning is fundamentally social: practice is visible and discussed.
- Process is important and developmental: student and tutor interaction often centres on work in progress.

Two key features of higher level arts education that link well to at least some of these features and which are part of UAL's information landscape are practice-based research and object-based learning, both of which emphasise learning through material means. These approaches establish an arts higher education environment in which there is often little demarcation between where the classroom stops and the studio starts, and also allow for a similar transition between the studio and library facilities. Such a continuum allows for creative approaches to delivering library services, particularly when it comes to library and information instruction. In particular students at UAL have responded well to object-based learning as a technique to develop research and critical enquiry skills. This approach uses objects to inspire discussion, group work and lateral thinking and to elicit independent responses and divergent thinking.[13] Grounded in museum based pedagogy object-based learning is often used to teach verbal, critical and

13. Ibid Chaterjee, p.179.

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visual literacies and as such is seen as versatile practice to accomplish the discussion of multiple literacies[14].

14. Ibid Schwarz.

Putting strategic drivers into practice

The second section of this paper will describe how the above mentioned institutional strategic drivers along with some of the underpinning principles, values and approaches to arts education have resulted in a series of initiatives to develop teaching practice within UAL Library Services staff. Initiatives include:

- A staff development programme designed to develop the teaching practice of UAL academic support librarians
- The introduction of regular 'Teach-meets'
- Involvement in the Library Services staff development programme
- Continued engagement with the UAL Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice Art, Design and Communication

Teaching and Learning Staff Development Programme

As the profile of the enhancement model of academic support at UAL increased, so too had the demand for classes and sessions run by the academic support librarians. At the same time several academic support librarians expressed a requirement for some customised professional development in this area to equip them with the teaching and learning skills to be able to do a good job. Whilst participation in the postgraduate certificate in education continues to always be an option for librarians, some do not wish to pursue this path and others feel that something more tailored was required, and that the PG Cert is too general and does not necessarily respond to their needs. There was however a definite demand for developing something that would respond to these observations and feedback and so, as mentioned above, the strategic partnership between Library Services and the Teaching and Learning Exchange truly began and the resulting teaching and learning programme is detailed below:

The programme

From the outset, the overall aim of the programme was to introduce librarians involved in teaching to some of the main features of art and design pedagogy within a context of providing library based academic support, with the more specific objectives of:

- Introducing librarians to learning theories and enable them to contextualise theory into practice
- Raising awareness of the development and design of curriculum within an art and design context
- Exposing librarians to different techniques and styles of teaching
- Increasing librarians' confidence in teaching and presentation skills
- Introducing a range of technology enhanced learning methods and strategies
- Developing librarians as reflective practitioners

The programme was developed around five stand-alone sessions, which the librarians were encouraged to attend. The sessions comprised of:

- An introduction to teaching and learning in the arts
- Approaches to teaching and learning
- Presentation skills
- Educational technology
- Using reflection for professional development and evaluation

Each session was offered twice in order to give flexibility over attendance. The programme was designed as such that attendance at any one session was not a pre-requisite for attending subsequent sessions. The colleagues who delivered the sessions included a range of different people from different departments and colleges including: educational developers from the Teaching and Learning Exchange; learning technologists; Head of Widening Participation (London College of Communication); Associate Director of Library Services; academic

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support librarians themselves; academic support co-ordinators; guest speakers from other universities.

Some staff were only able to attend two or three session, whilst others chose the sessions which they thought were most appropriate to them. Having said that, all academic support librarians were encouraged to attend the sessions, and a final session included participant presentations, designed to bring all the learning from the previous four sessions together and to provide an opportunity to discuss reflection (and do some reflection). A more detailed overview of the content of the programme can be found in a recent issue of SCONUL Focus[15]

15. Appleton, L. and Staddon, E. (2017) Developing a Teaching and Learning Programme for Librarians at UAL Library Services. SCONUL Focus 68 https://www.sconul.ac.uk/sites/default/files/documents/6_9.pdf

Feedback and evaluation of the programme

UAL Library Services has 40 academic support librarians across the six colleges (including weekend and evening teams) and this training was targeted at this group of staff in particular. Of this group 28 completed four or five of the sessions, therefore getting the overall 'programme experience'. The programme was evaluated through a reflective exercise, where colleagues were asked to comment and provide feedback. The remainder were able to get to discrete sessions, depending upon their availability and needs. Whether the librarians attended all the sessions or just a selection of them, the feedback and evaluation was very positive:

> "I thoroughly enjoyed the training, and I'm glad you encouraged me to attend although I'll be studying on the PG Cert this coming year. I found that the sessions in the CPD Programme gave me a really good idea of what to expect from the actual PG course." (Academic Support Librarian, London College of Fashion)
> "It was excellent to have the opportunity to talk to librarians across the department, sharing good practice, challenges and anxieties. There are a number of practical things I hope to explore further: using games, screen recording, using learning outcomes more formally, using observations, increasing interactivity and fun especially in lecture based sessions." (Assistant Academic Support Librarian, Chelsea College of Arts)
> "Sharing the sessions with so many colleagues from CSM and other sites has given me the confidence and reassurance that I can now approach other academic support librarians to discuss the planning and delivery of information skills sessions. Sharing ideas and discussing our role in teaching and learning was the most valuable part for me." (Academic Support Librarian, Central Saint Martins)

The evaluation also revealed some of the personal development and realisations that the librarians had as a result of taking place in the programme. These included some 'epiphany moments' when the librarians realised that they "really are teachers", and that it is within their control to experiment and develop different types of teaching. For UAL Library Services this personal reflection regarding professional identity and librarians feeling empowered to 'own' their teaching development and activity is very important.

Teach-meets

Feedback from the teaching and learning programme suggested that the academic support librarians found networking and sharing practice with their colleagues from across the six UAL college libraries to be of particular benefit. A way to facilitate this kind of interaction on a more regular basis was identified in 'teach-meets', which were subsequently arranged and ring-fenced for the academic support librarians.

A teach-meet is a relatively new concept within the academic librarianship environment, whereby librarians involved in teaching activity gather to network and exchange teaching experiences. Teach-meets are informal 'unconference' style events where practising teachers give micro-presentations or micro-teach sessions in order to share their experience or approaches and then open up discussion amongst other participants. In effect the teach-meet is a form of collective reflective practice. As an informal mechanism, there are no strict rules or guidelines, and regional teach-meets have become popular during recent years amongst academic librarians who have a teaching and liaison role at their respective institutions.

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UAL academic support librarians have been encouraged to attend teach-meets at a variety of UK locations in order to observe practice from other higher education institutions and reflect on their own practice. They have found the meetings to be a great source of inspiration and new ideas as well as a way of sharing their own practice for critical appraisal by other library colleagues.

Having informally established UAL based teach-meets for academic support librarians during 2015, they proved to be so popular that they have now been embedded into the Library Services programme of staff development and attendance is open to everyone. Colleagues from other areas of the University such as Academic Support, the Materials and Products Collection and the Central St Martins Museum Collection have also been invited to attend and give presentations or micro-teach sessions.

Involvement in Library Services Staff Development Programme

UAL Library Services runs an ongoing programme of staff training and development that is designed to be timely and responsive to needs identified by Library Services staff. The programme includes a wide variety of training which is customised for Library Services and delivered by Library Services staff as well as colleagues from other areas of the University and occasional externally commissioned trainers. Sessions have included topics such as disability awareness training, cultural awareness training, IT Support, using specific software and customer service training. Having a cross-departmental programme also allows staff development to be co-ordinated in a way which keeps strategic aims and objectives in view.

Recently there has been a lot of demand from Library Services staff, including from academic support librarians, for training and awareness raising in a number of academic support areas including using particular databases, bibliographic referencing, visual literacy and referencing visual resources and images. The academic support librarian team has been approached to develop and deliver this training, which has consequently given them an opportunity to collaborate with colleagues from other College libraries and areas of University. Working in this way has allowed for very practical and useful partnerships to form and those librarians involved in co-development and co-delivery of content for the staff development programme are very appreciative of the supportive environment that enables them to further acquire and develop their teaching skills.

Engagement with the UAL Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice Art, Design and Communication

UAL has always encouraged academic support staff to engage with its formal teaching qualification programme, but enrolment onto the programme was agreed at college level and Library Services were not given priority when it came to allocating places. In 2015, the Teaching and Learning Exchange formalised its admissions protocols and after liaison with the Director of Library and Academic Support allocated a set number of places each year to Library Services. Academic support librarians wishing to enrol onto the programme are now required to apply for a place via a central process to ensure parity of opportunity between colleagues. Since 2014, several members of library staff have completed the Postgraduate Certificate and it is hoped that this trend will continue and that those who successfully complete the programme will be able to contribute to the teaching development of colleagues who come after them.

Impact of strategic initiatives

The above mentioned initiatives stand out as having had a significant impact on the professional development of the UAL academic support librarians with regard to their teaching and learning activity. All professional development has not only been strategic in the sense of meeting the institution's needs, but it has also been responsive to the identified needs and requirements of the librarians themselves. Setting the development initiatives within an 'arts education' environment has clearly been beneficial because it has allowed the team of academic support librarians to develop their teaching practice through experimentation and exchanging experience in a context that is familiar to them.

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It is easy to identify some of the changes that have occurred in the librarians' teaching and learning practice as a result of the development programme. Particularly noticeable is a more creative approach to providing information literacy skills, which is manifest in a number of ways:

- Increased variety in information skills sessions: librarians are now incorporating different and creative approaches into their session planning and design.
- Collaboration and partnership across colleges and departments: librarians are now far more likely to work with other librarians, tutors or academics in co-developing and co-delivering sessions.
- Object-based learning has become more widely used as a technique by librarians, and a new range of special collections sessions has been introduced.

Another substantial impact of the staff development programme relates to the confidence of the academic support librarians. They are more empowered and responsible for the development and delivery of their training and many feel more valued and recognised as teachers within their academic teams. As a result, we predict increasing take up in registration onto the University's Postgraduate Certificate and application for Associate Fellowship or Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy.

Conclusion

Implementation of these initiatives has allowed Library Services to contribute to the institutional strategy, and the Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Strategy as well as to progress some of its own student experience and transformative education strategic objectives.

The teaching and learning programme for academic support librarians in particular has been very well received by all who have taken part, both in its development and delivery and by those who participated. It has had the desired impact on the teaching practice of the librarians and the Library Services department is in a better position to deliver some of its strategic objectives as a result. But the initiatives do not stop here. Participation in the rolling programme of staff development is ongoing, whilst attendance at teach-meets should also continue and current plans include opening these up to librarians at other art and design institutions. The UAL academic support librarian team now has an increased curiosity about how they can be creative and innovative in their approach to information literacy teaching so an opportunity to build upon this should be taken. In addition, colleagues from the Teaching and Learning Exchange are now working to develop the initial teaching and learning programme further into a stand-alone course for academic support staff and technicians across the whole University, as well as to members of Library Services staff who wish to refresh their skills or who have not yet taken part.

Overall the teaching and learning staff development initiatives that have been delivered over recent years have supported development of the teaching skills of the librarians at UAL and have raised their profile within their academic teams. The experiences discussed in this paper therefore suggest that taking a simultaneously strategic and responsive approach has effected a culture shift at UAL.

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