Allison Rossett, Felicia Douglis, Rebecca V. Frazee Learning Circuits 2005	Strategies for Building Blended Learning
Martin Oliver and Keith Trigwell E-Learning 2005	Can 'Blended Learning' Be Redeemed?
John Morkes and Jakob Neilsen www.useit.com 1997	Concise, Scannable and Objective: How to Write for the Web

Further information on Moodle

http://moodle.org	The main Moodle site
http://www.pteppic.net	Moodle support and consultancy
http://www.howtomoodle.com	Moodle training
http://moodlemoot.org	Moodle conference

Biography

Liz Polding is a Principal Lecturer at the Oxford Institute of Legal Practice.

Bridging the Gap: the Information Skills Training Partnership at Manchester Metropolitan University

Abstract: This paper by Nicola Wakefield was presented at the BIALL 2006 Conference in Brighton. The presentation discussed the formation of a working partnership between the School of Law Staff and the Law Library at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU). The two parties have worked together successfully for many years to embed legal information skills training into all law teaching programmes. The paper looks at how collaboration occurred, what training materials have been developed, working methods, and the reasons for the project's success.

Keywords: e-learning; law schools; academic law libraries; project management; legal information skills training; training materials

Introduction

MMU School of Law runs a number of information skills training projects. Each law course taught at the University, at every level from first year undergraduate to the Bar Vocational Course (BVC), includes an element of legal information skills training, embedded as part of its teaching programme.

Collaboration between the School of Law and the law librarian to deliver effective information skills training began in 1998. The librarian at this time was struggling to

63

deliver computer based training sessions to the 1500 enrolled law students. In 1996 the law librarian delivered 38 hours of training in legal information during the first academic term. With the boom of legal electronic resources at this time, the number of hours the librarian trained students continued to steadily climb. By 1998 training hours were up to 75, projected to reach over 110 hours by 1999/2000.

Delivering hands-on training sessions was time consuming. Sessions had to be repeated frequently as computer training rooms were designed to hold just 15 students. The law librarian experienced low job satisfaction and found work repetitive. In 1998 the librarian approached the Legal Practice Course (LPC) tutors, one of the law courses at MMU with the highest student numbers, to discuss solutions to this problem.

The academic teaching team welcomed the opportunity to overhaul the induction programme, as timetable space was limited during the first academic term.

A project team was established, consisting of the Practical Legal Research (PLR) module staff for the LPC and the law librarian.

Developing information skills training

The project team created a four stage plan to develop new legal information skills training:-

1. Identify the information skills needed.

2. Identify the most appropriate delivery method for teaching materials.

3. Develop relevant materials.

4. Embed training materials into teaching programme.

By working together, teaching staff and the law librarian ensure that any materials created by the Library are developed in line with pedagogical considerations. Since the initial joint information skills project in 1998, the four stage process has formed the foundation for the development of other legal information skills training packages.

1. Identifying Information Skills
Figure 1 illustrates the basic list of information skills identified by the project team as necessary for a law student to hold. The list has been used since as the foundation for developing training materials, for all levels of students. Materials are created at an appropriate level for each student group.

2. Identifying delivery of training materials
In 1998 MMU purchased the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) software, WebCT. Delivering teaching via a VLE combats the problem of repeating sessions and squeezing increasing student numbers into small

- **Planning a search**
  - Planning searches and defining topics
  - Understanding the reason for searching
- **Finding materials**
  - Primary sources – printed and electronic
  - Secondary sources – printed and electronic
  - Using the library catalogue
  - Using legal encyclopaedias
- **Evaluating information**
  - Tracing the status of a case/statute
  - Evaluating the quality of materials
  - Evaluating/abstracting materials
- **Organising and using information**
  - Utilising materials within own tasks
  - Referencing

Fig. 1: Identifying Information Skills

computer training rooms. Students can participate in training from any networked computer, anywhere in the world, at a convenient time.

As new technology has developed it has been used to enhance the delivery of information skills training on WebCT. Incorporating INFORMs software into existing online e-learning modules enables students to study interactively with a 'live' electronic legal resource. In 2006 pod-casting has been explored as an innovative facility for delivering library tours, introductory guides to using law reports and finding case law and legislation in the law library. Students are able to download audio tutorials to their MP3 player and follow training instructions through their headset.

3. Developing materials
The law librarian is responsible for the technical creation of content for each online module. Academic staff influence content and are responsible, with the librarian, for reviewing all teaching materials to ensure the pitch of materials is suitable. Originally, course materials were created using hyper-text mark up language (HTML). As new web-authoring technology, such as CourseGenie, has emerged, HTML skills are no longer required to create online content.

Each virtual tutorial follows a similar format. After students read an introduction to the tutorial, which highlights the benefits of legal information skills, the estimated timescale of work and the session's learning outcomes, they work through a series of mini-tutorials, which cover information resources appropriate for the students' level of study, INFORMs based activities, tasks and self-test questions. At the end of the virtual training all students complete an online evaluation form and a compulsory quiz to assess their learning. If necessary, participants can gain assistance directly from the law librarian, academic tutors or interactive help guides. Alternatively students can download help sheets, attend drop-in help sessions, or contact the virtual helpdesk for support.

An overview of the virtual training packages at MMU

Student training materials

The original WebCT based training course is PoLeR (Practical Online Legal Electronic Research) [see Figure 2]. This course introduces LPC students to the legal database, LexisNexis Butterworths. After PoLeR was released in 1998 as part of the LPC PLR module, a PLR tutor commented that, "Since the inception of PoLeR, the first time pass rate for PLR has gone from 75% to 98%". The news of PoleR's success resulted in a number of enquiries from other academic tutors wanting to include virtual information skills training tutorials in their teaching programmes.

Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL) tutors wanted to switch their library based training sessions, part of the English Legal Systems academic module, to an online format due to the number of part-time and distance learning students enrolled on the course. The module, Legal Information Skills, was launched in 1999. [Figure 3]

Following on from the success of PoLeR for the LPC, a BVC version was created in 2000 for BVC level PLR. [Figure 4]

In 2001–2002 the Big Blue Project investigated information skills training for students studying in further and higher education. As a result of the highlighted training gap in this area, MMU Library established a dedicated information skills project team, InfoSkills, in 2002. By creating a generic teaching toolkit, the team aimed to embed information skills training in all first year undergraduate degree programmes at the university. The teaching toolkit created includes a PowerPoint based presentation, workbook and virtual training tutorial. With 325 undergraduates enrolled on the first year programme, using a workbook would pose similar problems already faced by small computer based training sessions: too many students, small teaching rooms and too time consuming to deliver. Through discussion with academic teaching staff on the first year law programme,
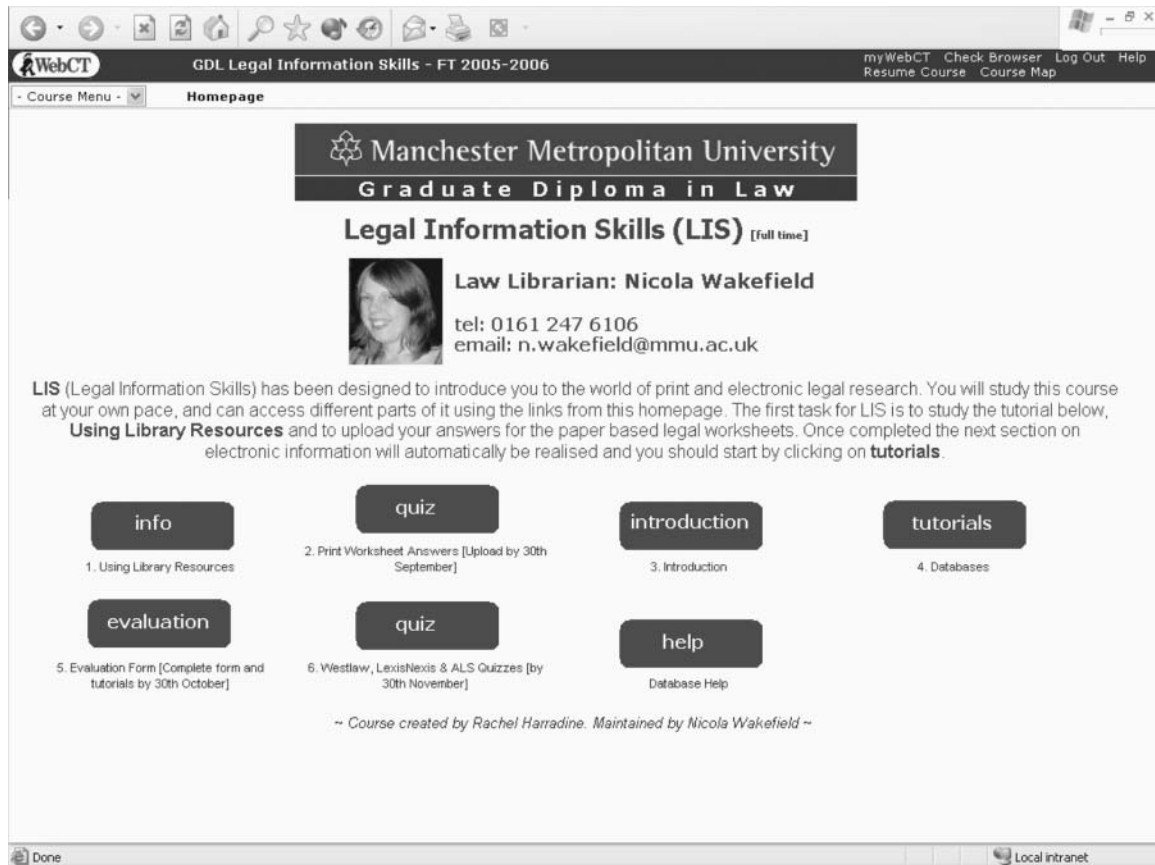

Fig. 2: PoLeR

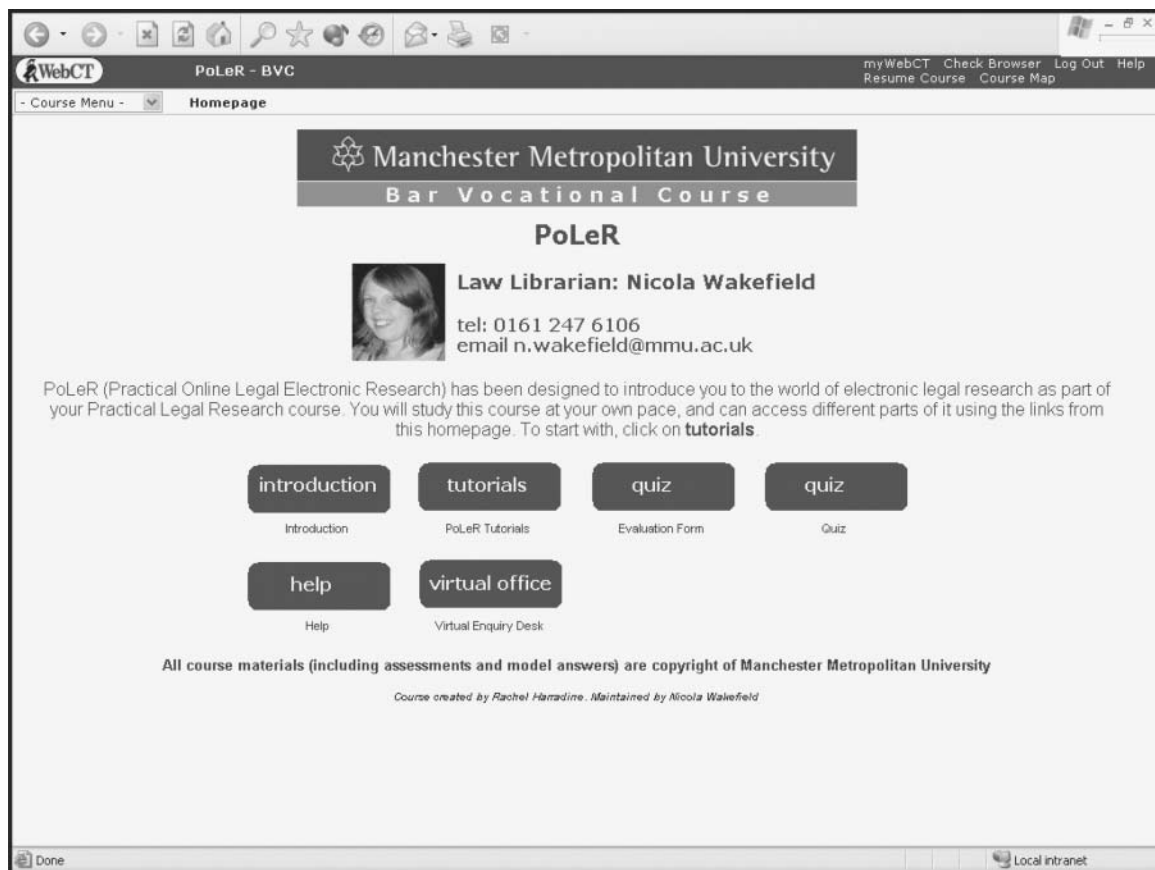Fig. 3: *Legal Information Skills: a course for Graduate Diploma in Law students*

Fig. 4: *PoLeR for the Bar Vocational Course*

66

Fig. 5: InfoSkills for Law

the generic online WebCT based module was tailored to include legal specific examples and information. 'InfoSkills for Law' [Figure 5] takes first year students studying on the Legal Research Methods module through a five step process of research:-

1. Defining a topic and planning a search.
2. Finding legal information.
3. Evaluating information.
4. Organising and using information.
5. Reviewing the process.

Until the launch of 'InfoSkills for Law', there had been little law library involvement in undergraduate legal research skills training. Students received a Library Induction and a one hour training session covering electronic resources. No further training took place until students began planning their dissertation. With the success of 'InfoSkills for Law', it was felt that an element of legal research skills training should be included throughout the undergraduate degree programme, so

that students could build on their knowledge. In 2004 'Advanced InfoSkills' was released as part of the second year 'Law Reform' module. This module builds on knowledge gained during the first year e-learning module, expanding the range of resources students use to include internet subject gateways and Parliamentary Papers. During the academic year 2006–7, an online module for third-year students based on information skills for dissertations will be released.

• **Staff training modules**

The arrival of the VLE at MMU also changed the delivery of training for both library and academic staff. In 2002 the School of Law and law library moved to the main MMU campus. Helpdesk staff required training in basic legal enquiries. Because staff were based in two locations, training was delivered via an online module [Figure 7]. Using e-learning as a staff training tool has been hugely successful. Library staff appreciate learning in their own time and at their own speed. Staff continued to refer to the training module to assist students when the law librarian was unavailable.

67

Nicola Wakefield

Fig. 6: Advanced InfoSkills

Much work has been undertaken by the law library to improve students' legal research skills, providing training in an appropriate, innovative forum. Academic staff, however, received training on an ad-hoc basis. When surveyed, law staff commented that attendance at e-resources training sessions was not possible due to timetabling pressures. Also, the training received was too general and specific tailored training for their specialist areas was preferable. As a result of receiving the SCONUL (Society of College, National and University Libraries) Staff Development Award 2005, I created 'InfoSkills for Law Staff' [Figure 8]. This academic staff training module centres on using databases, journals, e-journals, subject gateways and e-books to locate information for specific subject areas. As the comments below illustrate, InfoSkills for Staff, launched in March 2006, has been well received by academic staff in the School of Law:-

- "So accessible – everything you need in one place"
- "The current awareness section will save me time and energy. I no longer need to worry I have missed updates"

- "I didn't know you could get table of contents alerts, I'll definitely be using those"
- "The subject specific resources are very useful"
- "It's given me the confidence that I am searching along the right tracks"

4. Embedding training materials

Ensuring that students complete the training modules created for them and take the informal assessment quizzes is an issue. The informal quizzes are essential to gauge student skills levels and to monitor that all students complete the training.

Examples of embedding techniques

All VLE systems can be set to release areas of information dependent on participants' completion of specific tasks. Selective release can be done by time, date or by achieving a specific mark on a test quiz.

68

Although the information skills quizzes do not contribute to a student's overall formal mark, they are compulsory elements of the academic programme. With the aid of academic tutors, a number of mechanisms have been put into place to ensure students complete their virtual training. For example, on completion of a quiz, students can complete the following tasks on the virtual system:-

• View and download formal assessment questions

• Open details of project group membership for formal coursework

• Access coursework submission areas

• Complete module options choice forms

• Download seminar preparation materials

If students are unable to complete the tasks listed above, they cannot progress with the academic module.

Working together in partnership

Once the online learning materials have been created and embedding mechanisms for each course have been put into place, the partnership between the Law Department and the library continues.

• **Roll-out of teaching materials to students**

To ensure the successful release of the e-learning training, course materials are passed to the students through a lecture based online demonstration. The session is not advertised as library led as often this causes a drop in attendance. Instead around 10 minutes are taken at the end of a lecturer's normal teaching session. Academic staff and the law librarian present the training material jointly, the tutor emphasis the importance of legal research training and its role in academic modules. The librarian explains how to navigate and complete the virtual tutorial.

• **Academic staff have access to each module**

School of Law staff can access limited control functions for the online information skills module run within their teaching programme. Staff can track students' progress, view who has accessed the course, which elements have been completed and the skills level each student has achieved. Selective release functions allow tutors to grant tutorial access extensions, similar to allowing assignment extensions.

Evaluation

Review and evaluation procedures are important elements of the success of all the online training materials. To guarantee that every student evaluates the module, students complete an online evaluation questionnaire before accessing the assessment quiz. Once the evaluation form has been completed, a new webpage displays a password which can be used to access the quiz test area. Periodically the password is changed to prevent students passing it between themselves. Annually, project team members involved in the creation of the original tutorial evaluate the teaching materials. The project team review student feedback forms and discuss how successfully the training worked. Any changes and improvements necessary are made in time for the next module release.

Reflections

Running information skills training projects jointly between the School of Law and the law library has united both departments. Before the release of the first virtual library training module in 1998, both departments worked separately with little consultation on the information skills training taking place. Often sessions experienced low attendance figures as students viewed attending library-led skills training as additional and unnecessary work. Library based legal research training is now embedded in each teaching programme at MMU. Students are able to progress and develop their information skills effectively.

The number of law enquiries at helpdesks has dropped as students learn basic research skills via the tutorials. Demand for more in-depth, one-to-one help sessions has increased, as students experiment with a wider range of resources and use more complex functions of a database or e-resource.

Tutors' contributions to the planning and reviewing of each virtual tutorial have ensured that training materials are pitched appropriately for students needs. Materials include tailored specific examples relevant to a student's course to provide a context of learning. With tutors' full support, training materials are embedded into teaching programmes. Embedding materials guarantees that all students complete legal information skills training, without which the virtual training modules would not be successful.

Further information
Clinch, P. (2006) *Teaching Legal Research*. 2nd Ed. UKCLE. http://www.ukcle.ac.uk/resources/tlr/index.html

Nicola Wakefield

References

The Big Blue Project. http://www.library.mmu.ac.uk/bigblue/bigblue.html
InfoSkills Project at Manchester Metropolitan University. http://www.library.mmu.ac.uk/info/infoskills.html
INFORMs. http://informs.hud.ac.uk
CourseGenie. http://coursegenie.com/info.htm

Biography

Nicola Wakefield has been working in academic law libraries since 2001. Currently she is the law librarian at the University of Salford, establishing a new law library opening with the School of Law in September 2007. Prior to this, she worked from 2002 to May 2006 as the law librarian at Manchester Metropolitan University. Before her work in academic libraries, she gained experience of the commercial legal information world working at two law firms in West Yorkshire. Nicola is the Vice-Chair of the BIALL Web Board and chaired the Manchester Legal Information Group 2005–2006. She has gained extensive experience of developing online learning packages to teach legal research skills to students, and recently contributed to a chapter on the use of virtual learning environments in the second edition of *Teaching Legal Research* by Peter Clinch.

Contact Details

Law Librarian
Information Services Division
University of Salford
Salford
Greater Manchester
M5 4WT
n.wakefield@salford.ac.uk
0161 295 6626