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God e-læring skabes i samarbejde

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Translated to english

Collaboration creates good e-learning

Today, the Faculty of Life Sciences, LIFE, at the University of Copenhagen, is proud to offer high-quality online courses to its students. However, this situation has not just happened overnight. Strong collaboration between the faculty's library, the e-learning unit and teachers has been a crucial factor for LIFE and e-learning hitting it off.

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Collaboration between the library, the e-learning unit and teachers at the Faculty of Life Sciences, LIFE, University of Copenhagen, has made it possible to develop e-learning so that the faculty is now able to offer students high-quality, global online courses. This inter-institutional collaboration is an important factor in the success of the project.

Through targeted and active collaboration, the three parties have successfully developed an online teaching model which is up-to-date, competitive and which also strengthens the students' information competencies. Here we describe how ...

Pedagogical and strategic work with e-learning at LIFE

Since 2002, LIFE has adopted a strategic and targeted approach to developing and offering pure distance learning via the internet. Experience from the first few years showed that the biggest challenge was creating a committed dialogue at a sufficiently high academic level. We have solved this challenge by using Professor Gilly Salmon's five-stage model, a step-by-step structured model where the emphasis is on promoting interaction between participants in the learning process.

The teacher's primary role in the process is to help the students acquire knowledge – in particular by promoting knowledge creation in smaller groups. E-learning is therefore characterised by being student-centred in its pedagogical form, as it builds on actively involving the students in written dialogues with the other students and teachers.

The teaching is thus not organised around lectures, but is based instead on students reading the literature which has been selected and made available online. Moreover, the students participate in online dialogue and/or tests in order to work more actively with the material they have read. In the pedagogical model, we have decided that the teacher organises the activities – the so-called 'e-tivities'. The individual student thus forms an understanding of his or her academic material through a mix of individual study and working together with the group.

Collaboration between the library and IT Learning Center

The strategic work with e-learning at LIFE has, as mentioned, been developed over the years, and here the particular support for e-learning offered by the LIFE management has been a crucial factor. The establishment of the IT Learning Center (ITLC) as an e-learning unit at LIFE made it possible to provide teachers with pedagogical and technical expertise to assist them in teaching online. Placing the ITLC at the library has meant more focus on using each other's strengths and learning from each other.

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The idea behind setting up full e-learning courses was for LIFE to be able to offer courses to students without them necessarily having to come to LIFE in person. The teachers and the e-learning consultants had soon realised that distributing teaching material in hard copy to distance-learning students all over the world was far too awkward. It therefore made sense to involve the library in making the teaching materials available online for the courses.

Dedicated collaboration therefore commenced with the clear task of preparing online reading lists for the pilot projects. This whetted our appetites to work even more closely together on developing e-learning. Then, when some of the teachers approached us with the excellent idea of setting up an international, interdisciplinary online course in climate change, everyone agreed that the library should participate from the outset. Together, teachers, consultants and librarians attended workshops and meetings about the future of teaching. During these meetings between the different experts, unique synergies arose which led to the creative design of the e-learning course.

In developing e-learning, we have been greatly inspired by the Open University's (OU) approach. The OU has a long-standing tradition of working closely with libraries, teachers and researchers/consultants in pedagogy, and the OU librarians also described how they became change agents in the interdisciplinary work.

Videos and speech PowerPoints

The collaboration between the library, the e-learning unit and the teachers is kick-started at meetings and workshops. Here, teachers are given assistance with the pedagogical design of the online courses, and the teaching materials are assessed and discussed. Practical challenges to do with access, copyright and conducting searches in new media such as YouTube videos, speech PowerPoints and pictures must be overcome.

Having to use videos, speech PowerPoints and pictures to design the teaching materials is new for teachers – while finding these materials and dealing with copyright issues is new for librarians. The teachers have to think about replacing parts of the online material containing speech PowerPoints with their own explanations due to copyright restrictions. This is a new way of solving the copyright issue.

Electronic reading lists

Library resources are a basic requirement for students being able to acquire knowledge on the online courses, as in all other study contexts. Making the resources available in the e-learning material ensures that the students supplement information from Google and the internet with research-based knowledge which has been searched for and found in research databases.

There are three important reasons for preparing electronic reading lists:

- By ensuring correct and stable remote access links, the students have access to course literature, wherever they happen to be.
- Every time a student downloads an article via a correct link, it is registered in the library's user statistics.
- When linking to provider platforms, the students learn to read and recognise the different sites.

This last-mentioned aspect is an important part of the literature search process and of developing the students' information competencies. The students become more competent library users, and they can independently search, find and access electronic articles or books in connection with their assignments.

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Working with electronic reading lists has also developed the pedagogical discussions. At a certain point in time, the teachers decide that the students must cite which references they are using in their online discussion entries. Thus, they teach the students how to work scientifically and quote correctly, and thereby avoid plagiarism.

Focus on the library's communication with students

The online courses have made the library more aware of the need to raise its profile in the teaching activities and of student use of the library. Recognising the fact that the online students do not have the same opportunity to communicate with teachers as traditional students, it is more important that all information is very visible and comprehensible.

During the course, it is important that the students are able to contact the library. For the climate course, the library had made a single staff member responsible, but this has been changed so that online students, like all other students at LIFE, can contact the library via its main email address.

Interdisciplinarity inspires

It is important that the collaboration starts as early as possible in the development of the online courses. Here, close collaboration between the e-learning unit and the library is critical. The library also participates in the ITLC's courses for teachers on how to use the University of Copenhagen's e-learning system, Absalon, where the library talks about what the teachers can use the library and its staff for. It is of even greater importance that good contact is made with the teachers. Once the contact has been established, it is easier for teachers to subsequently contact the library and discuss the possibility of collaborating on developing their courses.

Collaborating on e-learning is exciting because, where the disciplines meet, synergies are created in the form of renewed energy and creativity, leading to new solutions and methods that improve the way in which online students learn. Also, the experience from the online courses can be used in the traditional courses taught on campus.

We very much hope that this article inspires everyone to further collaboration on e-learning.

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