

THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN TEACHING A CAMPUS-WIDE INFORMATION LITERACY COURSE

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ABSTRACT

It is crucial for university students to become information literate in order to succeed in their studies; even more so in the current social media environment. Educators need to become part of this social world in order to ensure that their teaching stays relevant. This article reports on a project undertaken at the University of Pretoria with the aim of introducing social media to the campus-wide Information Literacy (IL) course offered. A research project was launched in which the IL course was assessed and new ways of presenting the current material were developed. This involved repackaging the course content and developing a toolkit with built-in activities for students. Interactive class exercises to ensure student engagement aimed at acquainting students with various social media tools and encourage academic networking and cooperation were introduced. It is believed that this new approach in presenting and teaching the IL course will not only have long-term benefits for students in their on-going studies, but will impact on their future work-lives as well.

KEYWORDS

information literacy, social media, undergraduate teaching, collaborative learning, information literacy training

INTRODUCTION

The skills required for an individual to effectively find needed information and subsequently use this information for successful decision-making and problem-solving have changed substantially since the concept of information literacy was introduced for the first time by Paul Zurkowski in 1974. Being information literate is increasingly being recognised as an indispensable skill both for student learning and in the work-place; it has in effect become the ‘critical literacy’ for the 21st century (Bruce 2004; Farkas 2012; Horton 2007; Tess 2013).

One of the most frequently cited descriptions of an information literate person is someone who is able to 'recognise when information is needed, and have the ability to locate, evaluate and effectively use the needed information'; a definition developed by the American Library Association in 1989 (Bruce 2004). Another widely accepted definition, much in the same vein as the above, is that of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) which states that 'information literacy is knowing when and why you need information, where to find it and how to evaluate, use and communicate it in an effective manner' (Godwin 2007).

Approaches and ideas as to what it means to be information literate are continuously changing to adapt to changes in the social, educational and technological environments. In November 2005, for example, the Alexandria Proclamation was adopted by the High Level Colloquium on Information Literacy and Lifelong learning. The Proclamation defines information literacy as a means to 'empower people in all walks of life to seek, evaluate, use and create information effectively to achieve their personal, social, occupational and educational goals' (Horton 2007). This description highlights the fact that in the digital age, to merely understand the tools and technology and to know how to obtain needed information from them is not enough; it provides people with a wider view of what it means to be information literate by emphasising the effective use of these diverse and powerful technologies for making decisions and resolving problems in all of the many areas of their life (Horton 2007).

The current technological environment, with its focus on the use of social media to facilitate online collaboration and information sharing, has become an integral part of people's everyday lives. It is therefore not surprising that even more adjustments to the understanding of the concept have evolved. The prevailing opinion is that a further qualification/specification to the accepted descriptions of information literacy has become necessary: namely, to become truly information literate it is also essential to have the specific ability to use social media in a critical and meaningful manner (Bruce 2004; Farkas 2012; Fernandez-Villavicencio 2010).

The influence of social media on students' learning habits and the overall approach to their acquiring information is experienced by educators on a daily basis. Today's young people think and process information differently than previous generations. They use digital tools and enquiry; are able to multitask; are characteristically visual and prefer to learn from pictures, sound and video rather than text; have a preference for interactive activities instead of individual study; and desire entertainment and excitement and non-linear learning (Godwin 2007; Mason & Rennie 2008). Educators need to adapt to this changing environment and its associated demands and expectations, engage the youth where they are, and thereby ensure that teaching stays meaningful and relevant.

It is within this context that the University of Pretoria undertook a project with the aim of introducing social media to its compulsory campus-wide Information Literacy (IL) course. This article provides an overview of the rationale for undertaking the project;

discusses the key issues which form the basis of the adapted IL course; and provides an overview of the implementation and content of the course. The article concludes by highlighting some of the challenges experienced with introducing social media to the IL course and provides a glimpse into the way forward.

2 THE INFORMATION LITERACY PROJECT

It is crucial for students to be information literate in order to develop the necessary critical thinking skills needed to succeed in their studies (Farkas 2011; Johnston & Webber 2010). Brevik and Senn (1998) make it very clear that an educated graduate student can no longer be defined as one who has absorbed a certain body of factual information, but as one who knows how to find, evaluate and apply the needed information. Universities and educators world-wide understand this and acknowledge the specific need to train students in the effective use of information (Bruce 2004; Tess 2013). University libraries have traditionally been associated with the role of providing guidance in this regard which takes place in the form of library orientation; instruction in the use of the library; use of information resources; and so forth. However, it is increasingly felt that IL training should form part of the formal academic curriculum and where possible, be taught by academic staff. In response to this need, more and more higher education institutions/universities are developing credit bearing IL courses that form part of their general academic programmes (Adolphus 2009; Dupuis et al 2007; Eisenberg, Lowe & Spitzer 2004; Secker & Coonan 2011; Tess 2013).

In South Africa the University of Pretoria stands at the forefront of the approach that sees IL as a 'cross-cutting consideration that affects the entire curriculum, and permeates all subjects and courses' (Horton 2007). The university offers an IL course for all students who register at the university for the first time. The IL course is unique in that:

- It is a compulsory, credit bearing course for all first year students; students who do not pass this module during their time of study are not eligible for a degree.
- It is therefore a university-wide course that spans the whole spectrum of students who enter the university; it is not limited to individual subjects, departments or faculties, or to individual collaborations between the library and faculty.
- It is in effect a 'mega class' comprising approximately 8 500 students per year who have to complete the course over a period of 14 weeks; a time span which requires careful planning with regard to occupation of computer labs, number of lecturers, teaching, and scheduling of time tables.

The Department of Information Science is responsible for compiling the IL course material in the form of a prescribed textbook. The content covers all areas relevant to acquiring and developing information literacy skills such as, for example, information

on various resources to use; where and how to search for information; search strategies; evaluating information; legal and ethical issues; writing assignments; referencing and plagiarism; and so forth. The chapters in the textbook are arranged according to a number of core (personal) questions that students have to ask in the process of becoming information literate, namely: How do I know that I need information before starting a task?; How do I know what information I need for my task?; How do I find the information I need?; How can I organise the information I find so that I can use it when I need it?; What are the ethical and legal issues concerning the use of information?; How do I know that the information I find is the 'right' information for my task?; and, What other competencies do information literate people have? (Bothma et al 2011).

Although the content of the textbook is revised and updated biannually, and serves its purpose as a textbook more than adequately, it became clear through feedback from students and lecturers over the years, that the methods used for presenting the IL course needed attention in order to satisfy the diverse needs of the wide range of students registered for the module.

With the aim of developing an effective and innovative approach to 're-thinking' the course, a project was launched involving staff from the Department of Education Innovation, a faculty Education Consultant, staff from the University Library, senior lecturers from the Department of Information Science (i.e. authors of the textbook), and junior lecturers who teach the information literacy classes. The goal, *inter alia*, was to assess the current content of the course and the methods of teaching, and work towards creating alternative and new ways of presenting the textbook material. This was to be accomplished by repackaging the course content and developing a toolkit for use by the lecturers with built-in interesting and challenging activities for students. In order to make the renewed course not only more attractive, but also more meaningful and more relevant for the students, it was self-evident that social media would be introduced as a key vehicle for presenting the teaching material.

Regular project meetings were held over a period of six months in which an 'idea-plan' for each individual chapter of the book was compiled and face-to-face solutions and/or e-learning strategies were developed. The result of this endeavour was a 'new' IL course which comprises a blended model of weekly face-to-face classes conducted in dedicated computer laboratories, supplemented by e-learning components incorporated in the teaching, delivery of course content, and assessment.

After commencing with this new approach of presenting the classes and their content, regular weekly discussion sessions with the junior lecturers were conducted which included feedback on their personal experiences and observations regarding the revitalised course. Feedback from students was built into their weekly class activities and this was also discussed at the sessions with the lecturers. This feedback format/model is still being employed as an integral component of the course.

3 THE INFORMATION LITERACY MODULE

3.1 BACKGROUND

In 2011, student registration in formal programmes at the University of Pretoria amounted to about 45 000 contact students. The university aims to grow its enrolment substantially over the next decade or so which will put its physical facilities under great pressure. In order to manage this future increase in the number of students, the need for a teaching model to supplement the current traditional, mainly face-to-face teaching model, became obvious.

It was with this in mind that a *Draft Framework Towards an E-learning Plan* was drawn up for discussion by the various stakeholders on campus (Kilfoil 2012). In this Framework it is clearly specified that the University of Pretoria has a strategic mandate to (continue) to develop a teaching and learning model that will include various blends of face-to-face, multimedia and online learning depending on the nature of disciplines and the teaching strategies and delivery methods planned by designers. A recent complementary development in this regard is the offering of a campus-wide course in e-learning facilitation which commenced in May 2013. The course is aimed specifically at teaching staff in order to illustrate the use of blended learning and thus facilitate learning in both web-dependent and residential courses (Mashoene 2013).

The blended model of teaching and learning being implemented in the IL course therefore not only fits very well with these future plans for teaching at the university, but actually pre-empted this educational vision.

3.2 COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

The IL course takes cooperative/collaborative learning underpinned by the constructivist paradigm – where students are seen as active participants in their own construction of knowledge, and instruction as a process that involves supporting that construction – as a major point of departure.

The consensus in today's literature on higher education is that there is a role for cooperative and collaborative learning at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels (Barkley, Cross & Major 2005; Mason & Rennie 2008). From a learning perspective collaboration not only appeals to young people, but allows students to take responsibility for their own learning which plays an important part in personal development and student satisfaction. Students learn by looking at the contributions of others in collaborative workspaces, and through conversations and dialogue they are better able to internalise their learning (Armstrong, 2012; Johnson et al 2013). Collaboration is furthermore an important life skill which provides students insight into their own scholarly attitudes

and practices and thus stands at the heart of their future business practices where it is seen as the key influencer of innovation (Shah 2010).

Social media tools offer a variety of powerful information sharing and collaborative features involving learners in their own construction of knowledge and can thus be seen as a unique enhancement in an innovative teaching and learning environment (Mason & Rennie 2008).

3.3 THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

There are many examples of the use of social media in libraries for library instruction and orientation as well as for more formal (academic) information literacy education (Click & Petit 2010; Fernandez-Villavicencio 2010; Godwin 2007). Although some concerns have been raised as to the suitability and value of social media for formal teaching and learning (McCarthy 2010), the general consensus is that learning has evolved from the traditional step by step learning to learning through connections with people as manifested in the social media environment. Students need to be prepared for a world that requires continuous informal learning (Farkas 2012). Confirmation of this perspective is found in the most recent Horizon Report where it is recognised that the skills needed by university graduates for appropriate and effective use of technology is more often acquired from informal collaborative learning experiences than formal learning (Johnson et al 2013).

The use of social tools has also become an integral part of the academic research and publishing processes. To a great extent communication lies at the heart of research, that is, research is scrutinised and accepted by colleagues in order to be truly regarded as 'research'. This scholarly communication has become a social process as collective knowledge is documented and passed around via social media (Cann, Konstantia & Hooley 2011; Farrell 2012).

In addition the use of social media assists students in developing team-working skills and online collaboration and communication skills which will help them to fit easily into work settings. Social software tools are increasingly being used in the workplace, for example, wikis as intranets, blogs for marketing, podcasts for customer education, web conferencing for meetings, and social networking groups for campaigns, and so forth (Shah 2010). Moreover, students need to know how to use social media not just in the actual work environment, but also to shape their online presence and conveying the skills they have for future employment. For example, in 2012 the University of Central Lancashire developed a social media initiative whereby architecture students could engage with prospective employers by exhibiting their work via Twitter (Swan 2012).

Effective teaching of IL and transferring these skills to everyday life results in people becoming habitual seekers of new knowledge, critical thinkers, and informed decision-makers (Hinchliffe 2001; Secker & Coonan 2011). The knowledge and application of social media in this regard is therefore vital. In many professions it is acknowledged that

to become informed in this digital world is constantly changing, making it necessary to embrace the concept of learning as a lifelong endeavour (Farkas 2012).

4 PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INFORMATION LITERACY COURSE

4.1 INTRODUCTION

For this IL course, the advanced version of the Blackboard course management system is the main electronic vehicle used for providing information on class assignments, lecture notes, and so forth. In addition, apart from implementing other general social media tools, Blackboard's interactive and sharing features, for example the blogs, are used to provide various ways of promoting conversation and dialogue in the course.

At the first meeting with students at the beginning of the semester, a site with a collage of social media tools is created to introduce students to what will be covered in the course. Interactive class exercises to ensure student engagement form the core of the course material for the rest of the semester. Classes are aimed at getting students to collaborate; to know the characteristics of the social media environment; and to experience the use of various tools, keeping in mind the underlying principles and aims of becoming information literate.

In the final class of the semester, students are divided into groups. Each group is allocated a social media tool which they have to demonstrate and evaluate. The aim is that students reflect on the benefits and uses of such tools specifically for academic purposes.

Blended learning normally starts from the premise of mixing one or two different ways of teaching and learning, media or tools (Oliver & Trigwell 2005). In this IL course a combination of approaches, media and tools is employed in an e-learning environment. The implementation of social media for teaching this module attempts to exploit the natural and self-evident relationships between all of these elements. This is an on-going project, and taking into consideration the constantly changing (social) technological environment, the content of the course, as well as the various tools demonstrated and used, have to be updated regularly. It must also be kept in mind that the wider IL curriculum comprises much more than can be expanded upon in the article. The following are therefore merely a few examples to illustrate the major ways in which social media are used for teaching in the IL course.

4.2 USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING TOOLS

Collaboration encourages and improves learning and e-learning and is an important factor in academic achievement and personal development (Sun et al 2008). Collaboration,

which forms the point of departure of the course, is the basic premise underlying the use of social media/social networking tools.

4.2.1 Blogs

Blogs have high visibility and popularity in the world of social media (Tess 2013). As primary sources they can contain some of the most current scholarly opinions and are becoming a valid source of information used by lecturers and researchers to get the latest ideas, for example, about specific subjects and research interests (Alexander 2008; Godwin 2007). Reading and writing blogs can be a productive learning and research experience. It is also a way in which students can keep up to date on what is happening in group or team projects and links can be added to other tools or resources. Lecturers can write blogs to host a whole course with the 'community of students' following teaching and learning events (Adolphus 2009; Alexander 2008; Luo 2009; Mason & Rennie 2008). The use of blogs could furthermore encourage students to work harder since their work is published online and read by fellow-students as well as lecturers (Click & Petit 2010).

The immediacy of blogging and its ease of use make this an ideal tool for use in the IL course. The first chapter of the IL textbook provides an overview of what the subject comprises as well as the various skills that need to be acquired in the process of becoming information literate. At the introductory meeting at the start of the semester students are asked to provide their individual answers on a blog to two core questions: *Why is it important to become information literate?* and *What are the characteristics of an information literate person?* The consolidated answers provide a set of skills and goals that are discussed in class and which the students aim to achieve by the end of the semester.

In subsequent classes a topic relating to the current content being covered at that point in time is created on the blog. Throughout the course limited information on each specific topic is given in class whilst the core of the answer would be lying on the blog. Students are expected to find the information there and put the answers on Blackboard. Marks are given for participation as well as for correct answers.

4.2.2 Social bookmarking

Social bookmarking presents many opportunities for networking with other persons or scholars with similar interests. On a personal level students can browse social bookmarking sites to find links to resources that can help them in their studies. Applying tags in a social bookmarking system can help students to understand how various terms can be used to describe a concept (Farkas 2012). By using a course tag lecturers and students can also work together to build a 'course library' of relevant links to research and resources.

The issue of organising information in order to find the information again as featured through the use of social bookmarking, is central to becoming information literate (Godwin 2007). In the IL course students are introduced to a number of general social bookmarking sites as well as library specific sites and they are shown how the University of Pretoria library practically employs social bookmarking to interact with clients.

4.2.3 Combination of blogging and social bookmarking

These two tools are combined in activities in a number of ways. In one assignment, for example, students are expected to search for articles on a specific topic on the library's bibliographic databases; a typical information literacy assignment. These results (i.e. relevant articles) have to be shared with at least one friend on a social bookmarking site of their choice. Students then have to post a blog providing reasons for selecting the specific social bookmarking site, and also comment on other students' blogs, that is, write an appropriate comment on another student's blog regarding his/her sharing of the article or choice of bookmarking site. Marks are given for content and quality of the blog as well as for constructive and insightful comments.

4.2.4 Social networking

The social networking environment can be used to set up 'learning communities' in which students can meet and communicate with one another. Millions of people use Facebook every day to keep up with friends, upload photos and learn more about the people they meet online. On an academic level, various studies have indicated that increased interaction and participation in course discussions are seen as anticipated benefits of using Facebook (Tess 2013) and could thus be the ideal host site for a blended learning environment (McCarthy, 2010). Facebook is also increasingly being used to promote information literacy at various institutions (Click & Petit, 2010; Fernandez-Villavicencio 2010). Microblogging enables real-time interaction where students can ask questions and get immediate, timely replies, and it can keep students up to date with course news. Twitter, for example, can be used for activities such as a low stress means of asking questions, and posting class reminders. The use of microblogging also stimulates concise writing and writing for an audience (Tess 2013).

In the IL course opportunities for interaction and collaboration between individuals and groups are introduced by the creation of open groups for the students on Facebook and Twitter as it is impractical for more than 8 000 students to individually 'befriend' one another! The lecturers serve as moderators on these sites. Announcements and tips for assignments are posted, to which students are expected to reply, or comment on, and students are encouraged to engage freely in general discussions pertaining to the course. This also serves as a valuable informal feedback and evaluation opportunity which lecturers can act on where necessary.

4.2.5 Really Simple Syndication

Really Simple Syndication (RSS) is an excellent tool for filtering and keeping up with information. Students and researchers can subscribe to RSS feeds to obtain information on a regular basis from news services, blogs and relevant content from databases (Godwin 2007). RSS feeds can also enable students to keep up to date on activities within the course itself or access any other course related information online. Another advantage of RSS is that users need not understand the technology of the tool to use it well (Click & Petit 2010) thus making it fairly simple to introduce in the course and to expect students to use it practically.

In the section of the IL course covering searching on databases, students are encouraged to create their own RSS feeds from any subject specific database(s) of their choice. With the wide variety of disciplines represented in the classes, this is an exceptionally relevant and meaningful personal exercise. In addition, apart from the more formal or scholarly social bookmarking and RSS products, students are also introduced to the various Google™ products as well as other products that can be used for similar functions.

4.2.6 Photo and image sharing

The use of photo and image sharing sites is very common in IL training (Click & Petit 2010; Fernandez-Villavicencio 2008). In the IL course the concept of organising information is practically demonstrated through the use of sites such as Flickr or Picasa where examples of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ metadata (tagging) show when and why needed information can be found or not.

Other activities include asking students to post photographs on a site of their choice, organise them, tag them and then compare their tags with ‘traditional’ metadata provided by the lecturers. As far as is possible marks are given for participation in the activity, if not always for the content or quality of the product as such.

4.2.7 Video sharing

Almost everyone with Internet access is familiar with video sharing through YouTube. Students or groups of students can create their own videos and share them in the class; videos acquired from public domains or Creative Commons licensed sites can also be used for assignments or in class presentations. Research has shown that information is remembered better if it is encoded both visually and verbally; YouTube as a tool could therefore be beneficial in many instances. Instructional videos can, for example, be used both as course material as well as a mechanism for creating a more visual learning experience (Luo 2009).

For example, a video demonstrating Boolean operators for search query construction is an integral feature of the IL course. In addition, individual lecturers use their own

choice(s) of videos to emphasise and/or enhance specific areas or topics covered in class. A considerable amount of interesting and unexpected material is introduced in the classes in this way, and lecturers are keen to share their individual ‘finds’ with their colleagues so that everyone can benefit from this.

5 OTHER ISSUES PERTAINING TO TEACHING THE IL COURSE

5.1 EVALUATION OF INFORMATION

The evaluation of information is regarded as a core skill of an information literate person. It is therefore accepted and expected that criteria and opportunities for evaluating traditional information sources such as scholarly articles are built into information literacy teaching, as is the case in the current IL course.

However, IL also needs to be focused on teaching students evaluative skills that go beyond determining whether something is ‘authoritative’ and peer-reviewed or not. Information is being produced regularly on sites such as Wikipedia, on blogs, and the myriad of other social sites and across various media; some of which may be relevant and valuable and some not (Farkas 2012; Spiranec & Zorica 2010). The information available in these formats may also not be of the same quality as found in traditional peer-evaluated academic sources. Both the credibility and authority of sources play a role here. With this in mind, throughout the IL course, students are expected to evaluate the quality and professionalism of information found on various social media sites that are accessed, using the guidelines for evaluation provided in Chapter Ten of the course textbook.

Studies have found that adults overall have higher information skills than young people and these skills allow them to better evaluate the quality and validity of information (Greenberg, Yaari & Bar-Ilan 2013). Throughout the course students are therefore consistently made aware of potential problems and issues that they need to keep in mind when accessing material via social media for their studies and personal use.

5.2 FLEXIBILITY IN TIME AND LOCATION

It has been shown that providing students with a choice as to when and where they complete the work expected of them – thus allowing them to take responsibility for their own learning – results in a whole new attitude towards learning (Janisch, Liu & Akrofi 2007) and facilitates overall satisfaction in e-learning specifically (Sun et al 2008).

A number of the social media tools used in the IL course make provision for students to complete assignments on their own. In addition to providing them with the opportunity of making their own decisions as to the ‘when’ and the ‘how’ of doing some of the work,

these features address the frustrations that may arise when a wide diversity of students are present in a class. This is the case at the University of Pretoria, where there is not only the natural diversity of personalities but also the diversity between ‘sophisticated’ and computer-savvy students and less accomplished students who come from more disadvantaged backgrounds.

5.3 ASSESSMENT

Assessment in the e-learning environment – ensuring that assessment is aligned with the material covered and the course content – is critical for the success of a programme (Boylan 2004; Sun et al 2008).

Because of the large number of students compelled to do the IL module, individual in-depth assessment is not always practically feasible. However, to rely only on multiple-choice type of assessment, which is the most comfortable and practical option and also the most often employed in such instances, is not always in the best interest of the student. In this course therefore, apart from some traditional assessment opportunities, extensive use is also made of Blackboard’s resources as a course management system. Innovative use of its blog facility, for example, for group as well as peer-assessment, proves to be very useful. Peer and self-assessment according to specified guidelines is also built into various other assignments, for example, when using the image sharing and social networking sites. This not only solves the practical assessment problems, but in the process students are enabled to set their own goals and take ownership of their own learning and evaluation of their progress and others’ progress; which in turn results in a positive attitude towards their learning.

6 CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED IN USING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR THE IL COURSE

It is not always simple to introduce new approaches in teaching to students who may be more comfortable with traditional methods and approaches (Farkas 2012; Janisch, Liu & Acrofi 2007). One of the main issues to keep in mind when using sophisticated forms of information technology in the IL course is the diversity of types of students enrolled in the course. Not all the students who enter the University of Pretoria grow up with social media as an integral part of their environment and they are therefore not all equally comfortable with the tools implemented in the course. Apart from having to introduce a number of the students to these ‘new’ technologies, unexpected problems sometimes arise. One difficulty that surfaced was when lecturers wanted to place photographs of students on the class Facebook page with the aim of creating a more personalised space. A number of students were opposed to this as they felt that it would constitute what

they perceived as a serious invasion of their privacy. Some students also objected on religious grounds and the endeavour was thus abandoned.

In addition, although access to the Internet is universally accepted as the norm in most Western countries, especially at educational institutions, this is not the case in many countries in Africa. One of the problems therefore experienced when the use of social media was initially introduced in the course related to the fact that students at the university did not have unlimited free Internet access. Access for the duration of a specific class was provided, but it proved to be nearly impossible to get students to access social media sites for purposes of formal academic communication outside of the designated class times as they had to pay for this themselves. Inevitably this put constraints on the on-going interaction that was to form the core of peer interaction and collaboration. This problem has been partially resolved with the introduction of a new cable and broadband access in 2012, resulting in more (although not yet unlimited) free private Internet access for students.

Change also places new demands on the teachers/educators. Introducing new media to teaching changes the balance between teacher and what is taught, and the role and expectations of participants are altered (Fernandez-Villavicencio 2010; Mason & Rennie 2010). During the initial phase of the project, although it was apparent to the project team that the junior lecturers were all proficient with the various social media tools to be employed, it was noticeable that not all the lecturers were as enthusiastic in actively using the tools as might have been expected. Feedback from the students themselves confirmed these observations.

This initially caused concern and the issue was naturally addressed in the feedback sessions. Nonetheless, the precise reason(s) for this reluctance could not be clearly established. The only plausible conclusion that could be reached was that it was a case of individual personalities and their specific preferences that was manifested here. Fortunately the problem seems to have resolved itself over time and as new lecturers became involved in teaching the course. The new approaches and material have now become standard procedure and part of the regular class and teaching routine. There are currently 18 lecturers – most of whom are Master's students majoring in Information Technology related fields – who are enthusiastic and motivated and continuously provide innovative and new ideas of their own for using social media in the IL curriculum.

One of the major challenges to be faced on a continuous basis is the sheer, and sometimes overwhelming, number of students who are compelled to do the IL course. The blended approach and use of social media contributed to more opportunities for self- and peer-assessment, which in turn relieved the burden of the lecturers having to mark so many assignments. Tutors and other academic administrative assistants are also engaged in marking assignments with easy-to-score repetitive type of answers where necessary. The automatic grading feature on Blackboard is also valuable for similar type of marking occasions.

7 THE WAY AHEAD

When starting on any new undertaking in the field of teaching and learning decisions have to be made as to whether the new direction is effective and whether it meets the students' needs. It is also necessary to review and demonstrate progress over a period of time before thinking of possible future developments.

Historically, from the point of view of the students, the IL course was one of those things that 'just had to be done'; they were unable to see the purpose and value of the course and complained of the time and amount of work involved which interfered with what they regarded as their 'real' academic work. This negative attitude of both students and lecturers was one of the main motivations for starting on this project of rejuvenating the content and the teaching and learning approach to the course.

With the aim of obtaining information regarding the opinions and feelings of the first group of students after the initial introduction of social media into the IL course, a formal survey in the form of an online questionnaire was conducted in the final sessions of the first semester of classes. To simplify the analysis of the potentially large number of answers, the questions concentrated on students' opinions on the use of Facebook, Twitter and Blogs only. Overall responses were positive regarding the use of the tools. However, many of the students (between 40–45%) thought that the venture would have worked 'better' if they had more time in class to actively participate. This response could be attributed to the fact that at that time, as mentioned above, Internet access was a problem and students were reluctant to do any work using their own time and money.

Feedback received from both the students and the lecturers in the regular and on-going weekly discussions throughout subsequent semesters confirmed that they find the use of social media for a collaborative and inter-group communication approach in the IL course interesting, stimulating and relevant. The feedback and discussion sessions also contribute significantly to sharing between the lecturers themselves with regard to both the content of the course, practical examples of teaching material, and any other practical issues that may arise; which in turn results in a generally positive and satisfactory teaching experience. In addition, now that the problem of Internet access has been partly resolved, overall student satisfaction has improved.

The implementation and future success of a project such as this also requires collaboration between various stakeholders.

First of all the buy-in of faculty members is absolutely necessary. They are the people who should ideally (also) benefit from the students' increased knowledge and everyday application of the skills acquired in the IL course. Their active support and references to the course in class could furthermore serve as validation of the need for and value of the IL course. Although no formal surveys have as yet been done to determine the overall feeling and opinions of lecturers, informal feedback has been positive. There have also

been specific requests for a similar course to be provided for post-graduate students; all of which is extremely encouraging for possible future undertakings.

Information literacy is inextricably bound to the use of sources and products in the library. The aim of the developers and teachers involved in the course has therefore always been to collaborate with the university library on as many levels as possible. At the beginning of the academic year, for example, new students attend a two hour introductory session on 'library literacy' in the form of an online game developed by library staff. In addition, staff from the Departments of Information Science and Computer Science developed a virtual library tour to assist the library in training students in using the library; a tool which is used at the introductory sessions as well as throughout the year. Subject specialists from the library were initially used to demonstrate and lecture on the various subject specific databases, but due to time-constraints they are no longer able to do this. The task has been taken over by a senior Information Science lecturer (and former librarian) who specialises in Information Retrieval

The University of Pretoria launched on-demand mobile access to Blackboard modules and library resources, news and campus activities, campus maps, and so forth on 24 May 2012. It is the first university in South Africa to provide such comprehensive mobile services to students. Introducing the use of mobile services in the IL course is therefore the indisputable next step in the future of the course. The ever-changing capabilities of mobile technologies and their integration with social media software open up exciting possibilities for new and different approaches to learning and teaching. Using this means of communication in the IL course would be pre-empting the way education is going to look like in the mobile, broadband future.

Furthermore, the new edition of the textbook currently in use is being upgraded as a fully interactive e-book. The aim is to deliver a product that will extend beyond merely replicating the physical book, and to integrate the physical book content with audio, video, built-in quizzes and numerous other interactive features. This new development fits ideally into the current blended model of learning and teaching followed in the IL course and envisaged for the university as a whole.

CONCLUSION

The benefits of implementing social media in the IL course were accepted as natural and self-evident within the 'shifting of educational paradigms to include online and hybrid learning and collaborative models' (Johnson et al 2013). In the light of the world-wide interest in social media and the desire to understand how learners can use IL to improve their lives, the hope is expressed that Godwin's (2007) definition that was quoted earlier can be paraphrased as follows: 'Information literacy is knowing when and why you need information, where to find it and how to evaluate it in an effective manner *through the use of social media*'. It is, therefore, believed that the unique combination of social

media and e-learning technologies in this IL course will continue to contribute to equip students with the necessary skills to make choices and decisions that will impact not only on their studies, but their future work-lives as well.

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