

Transitioning between Secondary and Tertiary Study

How prepared for the rigours of academic study and research really are our students when they leave secondary school at the end of Year 13 and head off to their chosen field of higher education?

The more time I invested in developing a cohesive information literacy programme at James Hargest College, the more I began to realise the importance of providing a meaningful as well as practical course to offer students intending to move onto some form of higher education. This realisation grafted another branch onto my information literacy tree and is an area I've now researching, developing and trialling for more than 18 months.

Background

So, how did my Information Literacy Tree get planted? My vision for James Hargest College is to create a platform which would allow the school to embed the teaching of information literacy and research skills seamlessly into the curriculum. This would extend across curriculum areas, across departments, across year levels, and in our particular case as Hargest is a two-campus school, across campuses. This platform now has a solid foundation to build on.

This vision first sprouted through my involvement in the Teacher Designed School's project which Hargest undertook in 2006. Every staff member had the opportunity to be involved in setting the vision for what the future direction of teaching and learning would look like at Hargest. As a non-teaching staff member this was an excellent opportunity to work with teaching colleagues on a level playing field. Research groups were established and I elected to investigate how information literacy could evolve in our school as part of the Seamless Transition Research Group.

And so the roller-coaster adventure, that was to entirely change the way the library integrated into the teaching and learning in our school, began!

The Foundation

Spring-boarding out of my research came a trial of an information literacy (IL) module at the end of 2006 which incorporated our English, Social Studies and Science departments in a joint collaboration. The success of this trial led to the embedding of research units with specific IL skills taught. These units are taught to all Year 9 English and all Year 10 Social Studies classes. The Science department has units at both Year 9 and Year 10 which also embeds other specific teaching of IL skills. Intentionally targeted teaching of online IL skills particularly [database](#) usage happens through Year 11 to Year 13 classes through a wide range of curriculum areas. All of these units are collaboratively designed and taught by me in collaboration with the Head of Department and the classroom teacher. Work has already begun towards creating a research unit with embedded IL skills for our Year 8 classes for the 2012 school year.

Tertiary Prep

As I began to target extending the vision for seamless transition of IL skills into the senior level of the school, I began to consider which skills were most essential for those students continuing their education beyond Y13 level.

Initially I spoke to some recent ex-students about what they felt they would've been useful to know about research and study before they started their tertiary course. Out of these sessions came some over-arching ideas which influenced, confirmed and clarified my thinking.

I developed an initial scoping document which I discussed with our assistant principal and listed the following lesson ideas:

- Using online databases – specifically advanced searching techniques
- Ways of utilizing Google features for better searching
- Bibliographies – one style doesn't fit all
- Note-taking techniques - Dot Jot, Cornell, digital
- How to get the best out of your academic library
- Study skills/preparing for exams

These initial six areas covered skills I identified as being essential for any student going on to higher education, based on my growing experience of working with multiple classes.

As a way of clarifying my thinking and collecting together resources in one place, I created the [Tertiary-Prep](#) website. As I continue to develop the sessions this will become more relevant to students and hopefully well used.

As Invercargill doesn't have a university, I decided to speak with the librarians managing the Southland Institute of Technology and the University of Otago, College of Education-Southland Campus to "pick their brains" and reassure myself I was indeed on the right track.

Through a serendipitous and ultimately fruitful discussion with the manager at the Southland Campus library I was put in touch with the policy, planning and evaluation librarian working for the Otago University Libraries. I was able to meet with him to discuss my project and found him very supportive and affirming.

I participated in the university library orientation session in February, which saw a team of librarians from the university libraries deliver interactively information about using their [libraries](#) to over 200 first year students. I also attended a two hour study skills seminar run by a lecturer from the Higher Education Development Centre ([HEDC](#)), a department in the university where both staff and students can access help with professional development requirements, programmes in teaching and learning resources. I gained an enormous amount from attending this session which was practical, hands-on and well facilitated. It provided me with a mechanism to measure how the classes offered at Hargest fit with the first year level of academic study.

Opportunities and Barriers

As with any new venture there are always the opportunities and the inevitable barriers. That's what "trial and error" is all about. The proof is in the pudding, and when you're designing something from scratch then you have to tweak your ingredients till they all work together nicely. But no matter what your new venture may be, you need to accept that it's going to be harder and take longer than you expect it to. That's just how it is. Relax and go with it. Remember, you can't move the mountain, but with the right gear, expertise, time and diligence all wrapped in a good dollop of patience, you can scale it. So here are some of my opportunities and barriers to this project:

Opportunities:

- A supportive leadership team who are prepared to listen to any and all of my crazy ideas and schemes and are very permission-giving.
- Working with enthusiastic and encouraging colleagues here at Hargest, at Otago University Libraries and my own flock-mates (FM-D and FM-C, you are awesome!). You can be the most hardworking and committed librarian, but without the support of others the mountain may be just a bit too steep to summit alone.
- Practical experience: Attending first year orientation opportunities was invaluable. Grab hold of any and all opportunities. Don't be afraid to ask and don't be afraid to create your own. It's always good to think outside the square.
- Research, research, research! I cannot emphasise enough the value in continually seeking information on your chosen field of interest is to get a feel for how the pieces you are trying to bring together might actually work. I have now begun pulling together a solid body of information regarding the topic of tertiary prep, and thanks to July O'Connell's presentation at July's SLANZA conference, I have chosen to collect it together using the curation tool [ScoopIt!](#)

Barriers:

- Time. There is never enough of it and the sheer nature of working in a very busy school library environment means continuity of thought for a sustained period is rare. There is always a class to be taught, a book review to give, a meeting to attend, a staff member to work with or a student to help so we catch snatches of time where we can. There is little we can do to change this as it how school libraries operate, so we work with it.
- Timing. When to offer these tertiary prep tutorials has been problematic to say the least. It is the main reason for my inability to so far sustain the programme. Fitting into curriculum and timetabling has proved very difficult, but I don't believe these to be insurmountable. Sometimes you just have to rethink strategy or go back to the drawing board. The key is not to

become disheartened or give up.

Next Steps

The number one barrier to making these tutorials sustainable is cementing a time where students are able to attend on a regular weekly basis. Over the course of the past two school years I've attempted a various ways of doing this. Unfortunately none of them have provided a suitable answer. So for the 2012 year I have decided to promote the tertiary prep tutorials to our Y12 cohort, who all share the same study period each week. I will run an initial six week block of sessions at the beginning of term 2 and if there is sufficient interest I will run another one in term 3. These sessions are strictly voluntary but hopefully the staff who teach Y12 students will promote the sessions and encourage their students to attend.

Alongside this, I plan to develop a completely online module to make available to Y13 students to work through some of the information and modules on the [HEDC](#) and Otago University [Libraries](#) websites. I will offer support to those attempting this in a number of ways including forum discussions, emails and sessions during study periods. For next year I will also offer sessions to Y13 students who would like to participate in the tertiary prep sessions during our weekly after school study centre.

Should next year's Y12 trial prove successful, there are plans to create specific roles within our student library team for students who have successfully completed the course to work as IL mentors. While these students are rostered on duty they would be available to help others find and use information when studying or researching in the library. This concept could possibly even be extended into the classroom setting.

I will continue to work closely with the Otago University libraries team, particularly the local campus. Plans have been discussed to take students to the university library for a tour by the library manager, who would also give them training in using the university library catalogue and the Endnote citation generator.

I will also continue to evaluate and reflect, not only on the work and programme happening at Hargest, but also keeping up to date with what's happening in this area globally. I have recently become aware of the [Journal](#) of Information Literacy which has some excellent articles and reviews. There is also the Librarians' Information Literacy Annual Conference, [LILAC](#) where one of next year's themes is *Transitions: from School through to Higher Education*. There was also a recent [article](#) by Murdoch University published on their website about a unit they run to help students adjust to the demands of academic study.

These global trends only serve as an encouragement to continue with the programme I'm developing as there is obviously a recognition of the need for both secondary schools and academic institutions to work more closely in smoothing the transition to higher education. Finally, and importantly, it fits well into the James Hargest [College](#) vision, part of which is:

To fulfil the vision of the New Zealand Curriculum by the development of confident, connected, actively involved lifelong learners in a way that reflects the expectations and needs of the Hargest community. Our strong achievement focus is of prime importance, with sights set firmly on the pursuit of excellence

and best performance by all.

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Used - Link to my tertiary prep website <http://bit.ly/gfkm1E>

Used - Link to resources on Otago Uni Library website <http://bit.ly/rrihKe>

Used - Link to academic skills for students' website <http://bit.ly/pf0LOY>

Used - Link to Aussie Uni Experience article <http://bit.ly/telPdU>

Academic Health Check – see PDF

Recommended readings:

Put this book in <http://www.alastore.ala.org/detail.aspx?ID=2889>

BA (Google): Graduating to information literacy – see PDF

Used - Scoop It - Tertiary Prep <http://bit.ly/p5mxoE>

Report - Preparing HS students for transition <http://bit.ly/tTt4Q6>

Used -LILAC - Librarians' Information Literacy Annual Conference

Guidelines for learning Otago Uni <http://bit.ly/rPjFpr>

Used - Journal of Information Literacy <http://bit.ly/mOL8IF>

Used - James Hargest College <http://www.jameshargest.school.nz/>