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Introduction to a snapshot overview of library induction methods

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For a task so seemingly simple – telling people how we can help them – the delivery of library inductions to new cohorts of students continues to tax academic librarians. Many will be all too familiar with the problems of reconciling the need to impart information – on a range of services that may well be completely alien to incoming students – with the knowledge that the new session's competing academic, administrative and social activities make it likely that little they're told in their first week will remain with those students as they progress into the term.

The following short articles outline some of the varied approaches universities use to introduce students to our services. Most of these methods – the use of quizzes or 'treasure hunts', the 'Cephalonian method', virtual tours – will already be familiar to readers of SCONUL Focus. What is most noticeable in these pieces is our desire to make use of a wide mix of media in the delivery of library induction – for example, University of Sussex library combining the Cephalonian method with a more straightforward presentation and a video recording, or University of Salford's information services division combining videos, VLE (Virtual Learning Environment) modules and quiz sheets – rather than trying to find 'the one' method of induction.

Also noticeable is the push towards greater interactivity in introductory sessions, both to improve students' retention of the information given and, perhaps more importantly, to emphasise the friendly, approachable image we would like students to have of our services. Allied to this is a desire to make inductions less of a chore,

and even rewarding: more than one contributor describes the use of prizes and other incentives to encourage student participation and feedback.

There are contributions from large and small institutions, with the contributors from Durham University demonstrating clearly that approaches to induction must take local institutional contexts into consideration. They note that services should not seek simply to implement 'flavour of the month' induction methods, but to explore different methods until they find the most effective for their own circumstances. This willingness to explore new methods and media is what marks out the induction approaches described.

There is little discussion of the actual content of library inductions in the majority of pieces – perhaps a topic for another series of contributions? – but for those wanting to think again about the *how* of library inductions, the following may provide some useful pointers.

Large-group induction at the University of Sussex Library: adapting the Cephalonian method

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In 2005 we became a smaller team of staff dealing with the challenge of induction for new undergraduate and postgraduate students. The immediate implication of this was that fewer induction sessions were now necessary, meaning our new group size could be up to 500 students!

'Sheer terror'

This was the typical staff reaction to the prospect of so many attendees. To make matters worse, they were to be delivered in the Gardner Arts Centre theatre in front of rows and rows of eyes … how would we cope!?

We had begun to change the format of our teaching sessions within the library, which mostly covered electronic resources. Keen to change from

'show and tell' methods, we had been introducing a clear structure to the sessions, setting learning objectives and ensuring the emphasis was on interactivity. It therefore made sense for us to rethink our induction sessions, so that they could echo our in-house teaching.

WHY CEPHALONIAN?

We discovered the Cephalonian method[1] (which gets students to 'drive' the session by asking predetermined questions from cards) and threw it into our melting pot of new ideas. It immediately seemed to be a great way of meeting our induction needs … we could have interactivity, but in a controlled way, the informality that we like and could also mix up our format using a tried-and-tested method that seemed to guarantee good results.

ADAPTING IT

As our audiences were to be so large, we thought that the Cephalonian method would work best applied to one segment of the session. We decided to also include a straightforward PowerPoint presentation and a library video. The students couldn't possibly get bored with such a mix of styles and we thought that the formats would cater for differing learning styles, especially important with such big groups.

It seemed sensible within the timeframe to get students to ask just four questions in total, each reflecting a different aspect of using the library, with fuller responses. These areas would be facilities, borrowing, rules and help. A humorous question would start us off ('Can I have a picnic at my desk?') and there would then be a corresponding PP slide with information about the topic, for our benefit, as well as the audience.

To encourage the students to ask a question in the session, we would offer the cards as they filed in, with the carrot of a £5 book token!

DOING IT

We started our one-hour session by bargaining with the students over the book tokens (one chap said he would do it for £2.50!). The PP presentation covering library basics came first, then our 'how to find a book and issue it' film and finally the Cephalonian style Q+ A session to keep them on their toes and end with a flourish. The results were brilliant. We took feedback from every ses-

sion and had a resoundingly positive assessment with a typical comment being:

'interesting, engaging & good mix of media'.

Staff enjoyed the buzz of a new format that worked and we were all rather crestfallen upon returning to the office for 'normal' work! We will certainly be sticking with the content for the foreseeable future and it feels good to have created something that everyone can enjoy.

REFERENCE

1   For a full description of this method, see N. Morgan and L. Davies, 'Innovative library induction – introducing the "Cephalonian Method"', *SCONUL Focus*, 32, 2004, pp.4-8

Getting the message across: library induction at Richmond: the American International University in London (RAIUL)

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For several years the induction of new students at RAIUL had taken the form of a joint PowerPoint presentation offered by the IT department and members of the library staff, although in reality the onus had generally fallen on one member of library staff. Over time it was felt that the PP presentation was not the best means of reaching out to the students. The session, at one hour's duration, was too long for new students to be able to take in everything that was being verbally communicated to them by both the IT department and the library. Instead library staff came up with the idea of offering induction in the form of a 'treasure hunt' (albeit without a wonderful prize, except perhaps the honour of joining the library!). This is the format that has now been in place for the last four years and library staff believe it works well.

Students now have a half-hour session with the IT department, which takes place in the library com-

puter room. Since all students attend this – as they are keen on gaining their network log-in details – the library has a captive audience for its own induction. So, at the end of the IT presentation, library staff introduce themselves to the students, offer them a registration form and a hand-out on library services and then get them all to complete a 'quiz'. This is a two-sided A4-sheet comprising half a dozen questions, designed to get the students walking around the library to discover its services, amenities and hidden treasures. One question will get the students logging on to the library catalogue; another introduces them to the library's website; yet another steers them in the direction of the video/DVD or reference collections.

WHY DOES THIS WORK?

Although we have not gathered any data on how successful this type of induction is compared with the former PP presentation, anecdotal evidence suggests that the 'treasure hunt' is much more successful.

Students are encouraged to help each other find the answers, so offering the chance for new students to get to know each other. In this way the library contributes to a social element of the orientation experience.

All library staff can be involved in this induction, so the onus does not fall on just one person. It needn't even be just the librarians who present this: all ancillary staff can take part as and when needed.

The quiz is not designed to be a test, but rather a means of orientating the students to this particular library, so staff are on hand throughout to enable students to get the right answers to the questions. This is a means by which students come into contact, in a friendly and non-intimidating manner, with their library staff at a very early stage, and so has the positive benefit of proving library staff to be very approachable people. This pays dividends later in the semester.

We are fortunate in being a small university so that the numbers of new students each semester is very manageable and allows us the luxury of being able to offer this type of induction, with the added personal contact which we believe to be so important.

The Durham difference: considering our context

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This article reflects on the experience of Durham University Library staff in promoting services as part of undergraduate induction. It challenges the perception that all methods of marketing are equally valuable to all institutions and explores some alternatives.

SETTING THE SCENE

We began working at Durham in August 2005 as part of a restructured academic support team. One of our tasks is to prepare and deliver library induction to freshers. From the start we wanted to combine formal and informal outreach methods. Manchester Metropolitan University's (MMU's) 'big blue' project[1] demonstrated that information skills training is most effective in engaging users when it is embedded in the curriculum, and we have had considerable success integrating this into first-year courses. Whilst we continue to pursue this route with face-to-face and online delivery, we have also explored ways of marketing generic training to new students.

INITIAL CONTACT

In October 2006 all new undergraduates and postgraduates received a welcome e-mail from the library encouraging them to explore our online materials and attend induction events. This communication had a measurable impact on the library website usage statistics, with hits on the freshers' and generic online training pages showing a six-fold increase. Other marketing routes

included generic and subject-specific guides, e-mails to departmental library representatives, posters and advertising on the 'University Events' web page.

AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH

In October 2005 we had attended Freshers' Fair at the Students' Union and found this to be a stimulating experience. Similar findings were reported by MMU in a recent issue of *SCONUL Focus*.[2] However, for 2006 we reviewed our attendance as we had doubts about its effectiveness. Clearly the fair was dominated by student societies and we felt the impact of the library's presence was lost in the hunt for freebies.

In recognising the potential of informal methods of outreach we rejected Freshers' Fair in favour of a promotional event mid-term, believing students might have a greater need for library assistance once they had received their first assignments. We chose the Students' Union as the fair had given the impression that the building was a hub of activity. We distributed promotional literature and offered individual support, but students we spoke to expressed surprise as to why we were there and, despite booking what we thought would be a busy lunchtime slot, the Union was virtually empty.

THE DURHAM EXPERIENCE

Durham is a collegiate university and this may be a contributory factor to the absence of students in the Union at lunchtime. In reviewing Induction 2006 we ran focus groups that alerted us to the fact that some students feel intimidated by the library, suggesting that therefore informal outreach remains a valuable approach.

We are now exploring the colleges as a possible avenue for promotion and have contributed to a CD-ROM sent to students before their arrival. The colleges run study skills sessions as part of their tutorial system and we are pursuing opportunities to integrate with these.

THE WAY FORWARD

These experiences have given us the confidence to recognise when popular methods of promoting induction are not appropriate for our particular institutional context. We are continuing to explore the most effective marketing methods to communicate with students in Durham, including social networking tools. We have already investigated the use of *Flickr* for virtual tours and are excited about the opportunities presented by other Web 2.0 technologies.

REFERENCES

1   Manchester Metropolitan University, 'The big blue: information skills for students, 2004'. Available at http://www.library.mmu.ac.uk/bigblue/bigblue.html (Accessed: 9 March 2007)

2   D. Matthews, E. Shields, R. Jones and K. Peters, 'Got the knowledge? Focusing on the student: Manchester Metropolitan University's (MMU) library welcome campaign', SCONUL Focus [online], 38, 2006, pp 36-41, Available at http://www.sconul.ac.uk/publications/newsletter/38/ (Accessed: 6 February 2007)

Developing induction – the University of Salford experience

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CONTEXT

Information services division (ISD) provides integrated library and computing services at the University of Salford. ISD inductions are delivered to around 5,000 students across multiple sites each year. These are planned and organised by a designated induction team, drawn from across the division, who meet throughout the year.

REDESIGN

Over the past three years, induction has moved from an information-heavy PowerPoint presentation to an interactive training session. This is delivered in three sections: a welcome video (filmed by media students under the guidance of the team); an online guide housed within Blackboard (the virtual learning environment), which provides information and interactive tutorials and into which all new students are automatically enrolled; and a task sheet for a practical introduction to key services during the session. Inductions are delivered by a team of presenters from across ISD, supported by tour guides.

A key element of the development was our focus on feedback and evaluation. At the start of the project, a focus group with first-year students showed our PowerPoint approach was not getting the message across and did not empower new users with the skills needed to engage with our services.

The most recent round of focus groups gave a very different impression. Overall, students reported induction 'gives a vibe of you can ask anything'. They felt the video 'was something different – it makes you pay more attention', and that the move to a training session had worked because 'having the hands on made you know what you were doing more – you had to apply it straight away and that makes you remember it'.

After each session participants complete an evaluation, which appears as a desktop icon. In 2006/07 97% found the session helpful. Students now have more interaction with presenters, which led to a huge number of positive comments describing them as 'supportive', 'dedicated', 'enthusiastic', 'welcoming', 'approachable'.

As the sessions have changed so significantly, we also evaluated the impact on presenters and received their feedback via questionnaires and focus groups. Presenters have responded enthusiastically to the changes, and have equally valued the increased interaction with students: 'I like the idea that we try to be welcoming, interesting as well as informative'; 'Students reacted really well to the video and got involved with the tasks'; 'I think you've hit upon a winning format.'

IMPACT ASSESSMENT

In November 2006 we conducted an impact assessment using an online questionnaire to gauge the longer-term effects of the induction on students' use of our services. The assessment received 329 responses, and provided a clear indication of which ISD services were being used by students and, more significantly, which of those they felt the ISD induction had helped them to learn. Overall the results were very positive, the highest scores being for services the induction sessions had focused on (77% said induction helped them use student webmail, 68% the library catalogue, 67% e-library, 83% Blackboard). The assessment demonstrated that induction does now get the message across, and in such a way

that it develops in participants the key skills they need to use our services in the long term.

THE FUTURE

The induction team continues to work on new developments, focusing next on ways of increasing future attendance by examining reasons for non-attendance, on delivering content via emerging technologies and on how best to meet the needs of different groups within our student population.

Innovative methods of delivering induction at Aston

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Historically at Aston University library & information services student feedback had suggested that its induction sessions were too long and that the library was trying to provide too much information and at the wrong time of the academic year. It was also apparent that the main questions being asked at the library enquiry point were based around how to find reading list material. Over the last three academic years the library has used a virtual tour as the main method of delivering the induction programme.

INDUCTION SESSIONS

Each induction session is assigned two members of staff: an information specialist leading the session and an information assistant helping. The sessions are timetabled at 30-minute intervals and are the same for postgraduate and undergraduate inductions.

Part of the library ground floor becomes a meeting area for students who are arriving for their induction. We have an A0 poster display promoting our chosen services or resources on the walls. This year our aim was to promote our self service facilities and the library subject web pages. Chairs are grouped together to form informal chat zones to encourage student interaction while they are waiting for the rest of their peers to arrive.

Both staff members hand out induction packs on arrival and greet students to make them feel welcome. The leader then takes the students to our seminar room where the chairs are arranged

in a semi-circle. Each chair has an evaluation form, produced in colour and that promotes a prize draw.

The students then receive a ten-minute virtual tour of the library and a ten-minute catalogue demonstration. The demonstration highlights how to find items off a reading list and how students can access their borrower record so that they can manage their own renewals and reservations. There is usually five minutes for the students to complete a three-question evaluation form and pop it in the collection box.

Over the last two years the prizes for the prize draw have been a £10 photocopying and printing card, an IPOD Shuffle and a one-month VIP pass for two people to a cinema.

INDUCTION PACK

The induction pack is very simple. We have cloth bags printed with the wording 'Aston Library & Information Services' and the library web address. Inside the cloth bag the students receive four pieces of literature: a library brochure, a fact sheet, floor plans and a referencing guide. In addition to our standard library literature we produce some additional 'fun' items. We also have close links with the university bookshop, which has provided wall calendars and leaflets, and with the learning and skills centre, which has supplied a promotional leaflet and a workshop timetable for the induction pack.

EVALUATION

The students' comments have been very favourable towards the use of a virtual tour. They like the use of multimedia to show them round the library, the fact that the whole session lasts thirty minutes and the freebies in the induction pack. Of the students who attended the induction over the last two years 4% requested that a physical tour 'might be nice' but no one attended our sign-up sessions. However, last year we introduced a 'happy to help' slot in the day where staff were timetabled for thirty minutes over the busier times of the day to help students use the catalogue and help with printing and photocopying. This ran for the first two weeks of term and we even received comments from returning students that the library was a much friendlier and welcoming environment as a result.