Staying alive: Maintaining relevance in the online university

Key Words

digital literacy, online learning, student transition, innovative AALL practices

Abstract

How have Academic Language and Learning units navigated the transition towards the online university and how will they evolve in the future? How can they develop innovative programs to support (both campus-based and online) students who increasingly engage with the university wholly online, and in addition are more likely to be mature-age, have family commitments, be studying part time and come from low-SES backgrounds (Stone 2016; Devlin 2017)? This potentially sets the scene for a mismatch between learner expectations of the online experience and their skills in navigating the digital environment, which O'Shea, May & Stone (2015) suggest is taking place now in higher education. This is not often addressed at the university-wide level; however, ALL practitioners are well placed to take the lead in supporting students to develop skills in this area of digital literacy. Drawing on Stone's (2016) national guidelines for improving access, participation and success in online learning, this paper will explore how over the last three years the ALL unit at Deakin has adapted to the online university by: broadening the scope of our core service (not only around developing reading, writing and referencing skills, but also skills around accessing online systems, preparing for online learning, and establishing good online study practices); reaching different student cohorts through marketing campaigns and via multiple channels, such as social media, the student portal and LMS; collaborating across the university with academics, peer mentors, Library, Teaching and Learning and IT staff to create more relevant programs and resources that are mindful of the online student experience; getting the balance right between generic and course-specific student support. We will also be discussing some of the ongoing challenges in meeting student expectations; enabling students to be self-supporting learners; creating sustainable digital resources; putting in place effective procedures for resource and program design; building staff capacity; and promoting ALL services and maintaining relevance in the online university.

References

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