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Mulherrin, E., Kelley, K. B., Fishman, D., & Orr, G. J. (2004). Information literacy and the distant student: One university's experience developing, delivering, and maintaining an online, required information literacy course. *Internet Reference Services Quarterly*, 9(1/2), 21-36. doi: 10.1300/J136v09n01_03

Summary of Article

Mulherrin, Kelley, Fishman and Orr discuss the need for a new type of information literacy instruction for undergraduate students at the University of Maryland University College. They begin their article by identifying the need for change at the University, and define the attributes of an information literate student by way of six standards. Their definition of an information literate student is then tied directly to the required, credit-bearing, asynchronous online course, through the use of guided discussions, interactions with peers and instructors, and student activities. A pre-test and a post-test are used to help evaluate the progress of the students. Evaluations are maintained and substantiated by a standardized rubric. Meaningful feedback to students is designed in such a way as to be immediate, thereby increasing student motivation, satisfaction and persistence.

The authors discuss the course's revision schedule, and modifications to course content are made when needed. This is an important part of effective student support as it speaks to the efficacy and stability of the course, and the quality and accuracy of the content. There is also an effective support system in place for faculty; a five week training session is required for all who teach the course, and an online forum is available to offer continuous assistance after the training is complete. A possible lack of student online course experience is taken into account as well,

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and an introduction to online learning is offered. The authors outline the lessons they learned and take action to remedy any shortcomings in the course delivery model.

With this project, the authors outline an effective change management plan and identify clear objectives that they want to achieve. They utilize appropriate resources to achieve their goals and realize their mission's aim.

Opinion

Mulherrin et al. put forth an excellent review of their achievements. As an instructional designer, I was impressed by their process and the care they took in designing this new library skills and information literacy course. I appreciated their careful, systematic approach. They analyzed the need, developed an effective plan for change, designed the course utilizing solid techniques, implemented at the appropriate time and using the proper resources, evaluated using successful methods and have a plan in place for consistent revision. They saw a gap in the information literacy skills of students and they decided to bridge that gap by way of creating a much needed update to an existing course by way of effective course design. In doing so, they have created a scaffold to better support students as they maneuver their way through their educational journey. With the increase of the distance education student population, this was extremely important. As the article states, the majority of UMUC's student body is made up of adult, part-time students who may have never been exposed to a formal information literacy course, or who may be out of practice with library skills. The course helps to set students up for success by effectively preparing them for what is to come. Efficient student support mechanisms are a major facet of all educational endeavors, but it is especially crucial in distance education, where transactional distance can hinder a student's progress and ability to succeed. The authors

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note that if this type of course, with its high student count, is to achieve its goals, more of the logistical tasks need to be automated, thereby allowing instructors to interact with their students and reduce transactional distance. This is a key point to student success rates in online courses. The authors have done an excellent job of addressing the information literacy needs of students in the most supportive way possible.

Conclusion

The leadership portrayed by Mulherrin et al. is notable. With their commitment to and completion of this project, they have displayed the high standards that are required to bring about innovation and change. The new course is a valuable asset to all who participate in programs of study at UMUC. Preparing students to succeed academically should be one of the most important missions of any university. This required library skills and information literacy course furnishes a solid anchor for students to steady themselves as they make their way through their courses.