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STUDENT AMBASSADORS FOR DIGITAL LITERACY (SADL):
PROJECT FINAL REPORT

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1 Introduction and background

Student Ambassadors for Digital Literacy (SADL) was a project at LSE funded by the Higher Education Academy as part of their Changing Learning Landscapes programme that ran from October 2013 until July 2014. It was led by Learning Technology and Innovation (LTI) (formerly Centre for Learning Technology) and colleagues from LSE Library, Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC) and the Students' Union. SADL recruited 20 undergraduate students from the Departments of Statistics and Social Policy.

SADL sought to understand the academic practices of undergraduate students in terms of their digital and information literacies. JISC define digital literacy as "the capabilities which fit someone for living, learning and working in a digital society." The project sought to combine digital literacies with the more established information literacies taught by LSE Library, which include knowing how to find, evaluate, use and manage information in all its forms. The project explored how these combined literacies support student learning and was interested in the role that technology might play in the learning process. SADL was also an opportunity to work with students as partners to develop appropriate digital and information literacy resources for all LSE undergraduates and to explore the potential of peer support.

Underpinning this project was the belief that digital and information literacies are increasingly important for students, to ensure they know how to find, use and manage information and digital technology effectively in their studies, but also beyond higher education in their personal and professional lives. Students come to LSE from a wide variety of cultural and educational backgrounds. Their understanding of and desire to use technology in their studies and in their social lives varies considerably. With this in mind, we rejected the notion that LSE undergraduates were 'digital natives', but wanted to understand more deeply the role that technologies play in undergraduate education and future employability.

SADL was also part of ongoing work to embed digital, academic and information literacy support into the undergraduate curriculum following a review carried out in 2012 (Bell et al, 2012). This study had found that undergraduate students rarely attend optional information skills workshops run by the Library and that in many departments these literacies are not embedded in the curriculum. This happens for a variety of reasons including : time pressures, a lack of expertise from teaching staff, a belief that these skills are covered elsewhere, or that students had (or should have) these abilities already.

The 2012 study was presented to the Teaching Learning and Assessment Committee (TLAC) in February 2013 who agreed that digital and information literacies were important for undergraduates and that further work should be done in this area. One recommendation was to engage students in establishing a network of champions. In 2013 the team developed a Digital and Information Literacy framework (LSE, 2013) and funding was received from the Higher Education Academy to explore the role of student ambassadors.

2 Project Aims and Objectives

SADL was an opportunity to engage with students to understand their needs, beliefs and abilities in terms of digital and information literacy and it had the following objectives:

- To recruit 20 Student Ambassadors in two departments to understand the specific needs of two distinct disciplines;
- To deliver a series of workshops to the students to improve their digital and information literacy abilities but also to gain valuable feedback about their actual needs;
- To explore the potential of peer support for digital literacies;

- To seek advice and opinions from student ambassadors to ensure existing and new digital and information literacy resources are fit for purpose;
- To develop new digital literacy and information literacy materials that can be re-purposed and embedded into courses either face to face or in Moodle;
- To share best practice on embedding digital and information literacies into the curriculum with the teaching and learning community at LSE.

3 Methodology

3.1 Recruitment and rewards

Twenty ambassadors were recruited from the Departments of Social Policy and Statistics in October 2013. The project was open to all undergraduate students in these departments. Promotion was led by the Students' Union who distributed a poster on the campus and made it available on social media and Moodle. The SU Education Officer also attended several core lectures in Social Policy and Statistics to promote SADL via 'shout outs' to students.

SADL was promoted to students as an opportunity to improve their digital skills, but they were also offered Amazon vouchers for each workshop they attended and for some key activities such as blogging or sharing what they had learnt with peers. They were also given a statement on their Personal Development Aide Memoire (PDAM) record. Finally the project experimented with Mozilla badges which were given to students for workshops and activities: http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsesadl/badges-and-recognitions/

3.2 Research Practices Survey

At the outset of the project the team distributed a survey on students' research practices using a questionnaire developed by Purdy (2013). The survey was designed to capture information about the research abilities of students and to set a benchmark. The survey suggested that students were reliant on their reading lists in Moodle and tutors for guidance with finding material. They tended to use Google to search for sources with a lesser number using the library search engine or Google Scholar. Many students found it hard to do research, to evaluate sources and to focus their research so they found the right types of sources. They also felt it was easy to be distracted by the volume of information they found.

Some of the questions were repeated this at the end of the project as part of a longer questionnaire to evaluate the overall programme. While the findings were not significantly different, the research suggested that students had a greater awareness of the resources that were available at LSE and the importance of evaluating the information they found. The team produced a SADL Evaluation Report (LSE, 2014) and further details are about the evaluation of the project are included in Section 5.

3.3 The programme

The SADL team organised four workshops for the ambassadors which aimed to develop student's digital literacies. Each workshop was run twice to encourage as many students to attend. Different members of the project team led each workshop, which were taught mainly by two members of staff at a time.

The workshop topics included:

- Introduction to SADL: finding and evaluating information (Michaelmas Term)
- Academic Practices: Reading and Research (Lent Term)
- Managing and sharing information (Lent Term)
- Managing your digital footprint and the digital future (Summer Term)

The workshops were interactive, so as well as students learning from the staff, they were encouraged to share techniques and tools they used already and provide feedback to the workshop leaders. Each workshop included activities where students worked in small groups to discuss ideas and then share their thoughts using post-it notes, posters and various online tools.

Between session students were encouraged to blog about their experiences using the SADL Project Blog. The first workshops introduced students to using the blogging platform, and they were set an exercise to write their first post before the second workshop. Amazon vouchers were used as an incentive to encourage students to contribute to the blog. Vouchers were also encouraged to share ideas with students on their course either through study groups, email or social media.

3.4 Resources

The project developed a number of new teaching resources for the workshops which are available at: http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsesadl/resources/

These will be released as open educational resources and the team will share the lesson plans and slides in the UK teaching and learning repository Jorum.

Other resources produced during SADL include:

- Student Ambassadors profiles: http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsesadl/our-ambassadors/
- Student blog posts: http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsesadl/category/student-post/
- Student made videos produced during a workshop now on You Tube on
  - 'What you learnt as part of SADL'
    https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=CIkcP7s3tHc
  - Why the Digital Ambassador role is important'
    https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=gtAHCZiRg7w
  - 'What you learnt about your digital identity'
    https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=afM_iYaN9A8

3.5 Dissemination

The project website / blog was the main way of disseminating information over the course of the project, although Twitter (@LSESADL) was also used.

The team gave a number of external conference presentations during the course of the project, indicating the interest from other universities in the project. These included some national and international conferences including:

- University of London RIDE conference (November 2013)
- Librarians Information Literacy Annual Conference (LILAC) (April 2014)
- CILIP Academic and Research Libraries Group Conference (June 2014)
- Higher Education Academy conference (July 2014)
- Academic Practices and Technology Conference (July 2014)
- European Conference on Information Literacy conference (October 2014)

The slides from these conferences are available from the project website: http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsesadl/conferences-presentations-and-staff-development/

Resources are also being developed for a staff development workshop on embedding digital literacies into the curriculum scheduled to run in spring 2015 at LSE. SADL was also presented at the LSE Teaching Symposium in May 2013 which has led to expressions of interest from 3 additional departments.

4 Project findings

Evidence suggests that student ambassadors were more aware of the various technologies that can help them to find, manage and use information effectively at the end of the project. They were also far more aware of their digital footprint following workshop 4 and many took immediate steps to improve their web presence.

The student-made videos also captured their thoughts on why the student ambassador role is important, what the most important thing they have learnt from the project was and what they found out about their digital footprint. Many students stated in their videos that they were more aware of resources and support available at LSE. Some mentioned specific tools they learnt to use e.g. the Library Search tool. The session on plagiarism was also well received by students. Students were overwhelmingly positive about their involvement in the project. Two students took up the opportunity to speak to some Year 12 pupils at an outreach session with a sixth form and they also spoke at a HEA event in May 2014.

During the course of the project the team made a number of observations about students, based on their experiences during the workshops and interacting with the ambassadors. These include:

- Undergraduate students have varying levels of digital literacy; many in their first and second year have limited knowledge about scholarly search tools and the support available at LSE to develop their digital literacies. However, students were enthusiastic to learn about technologies and practices that support their studies.
- SADL explored how students can act as peer support for developing digital literacies. We found students were willing to share their knowledge with their peers but unsure how to do this in practice. It was clear the project team needed to provide students with tools and structures to help them support others, as the feedback showed this was difficult.
- Motivating students to attend workshops was helped by use of Amazon vouchers, however the key motivation was that students wanted to develop their digital literacy skills. This meant that overall attendance at the workshops was very good. The project team were aware that students volunteered to be part of the programme so were likely to be more motivated to develop their digital literacies than other students.
- Disciplinary differences between students in qualitative and quantitative social sciences were significant, due to the different expectations of the type of work and activities they undertake on their courses.
- SADL found that there was considerable merit in bringing the students from different departments together to compare their practices. It was also beneficial to have a mix of first, second and third years involved to see how their practices evolve over the three years of study.

5 Evaluation

Students were sent a survey at the end of the SADL project to capture feedback about their experiences. The SADL Evaluation report (LSE, 2014) discusses the value of each workshop they attended and the overall success of the project. The fourth workshop which was held in the Summer Term received the most positive feedback however it was disappointing that only half the ambassadors attended. Feedback was

captured on other topics that could be covered in the workshops, how to improve the ambassadorial role and the timing of the workshops.

Overall the feedback from students was extremely positive and they stated they had learnt new skills and enjoyed the workshops. They said they would recommend friends to get involved in the project. The fourth workshop on digital identity despite having the lowest attendance had the most positive feedback and led many students to reflect on the information that was available on the internet about them. Many took immediate steps to 'smarten up' their digital profile and delete accounts they no longer used. Students gave constructive feedback on how all the workshops could be improved, new topics that could be included and the timing of the workshops. In general they felt the sessions needed to be run earlier in the academic year. This feedback will be valuable when planning the content and timing of the workshops for SADL 2.

Students were more sceptical of their ability to act as ambassadors for other students. They felt that mechanisms were not in place to facilitate this role and it was something they had not managed to do to any great extent. This is an area that should be addressed in SADL 2 and the team need to consider if they wish students to act as ambassadors and peer mentors, how students can do this effectively.

Attempts to measure whether the project has had any impact on students' research behaviour are less conclusive and this is an area that SADL 2 could spend a more time exploring. However some discernible differences in behaviour were suggested by the pre and post project survey. The students seemed to be more aware of the need to evaluate sources and the role of scholarly sources and academic search tools. It is recommended that further research into students' digital literacy skills is conducted with the wider student body in 2014/15.

5.1 Barriers and challenges

From the staff perspective a number of barriers and challenges were identified. Workshops were time consuming to prepare and run so scalability is an issue in the future. One option might be to involve student ambassadors in running the workshops. However much of the time was spent developing new materials for the workshops which are now available and can be reused.

Disciplinary differences meant that workshops could have been customised for students in different disciplines – workshop 2 was particularly challenging for statistics students who are not required to read as much as social policy students. However, if workshops are run within departments this would mean that students would not benefit from comparing their practices with another discipline so this needs careful consideration.

Students were less prolific users of social media than might be expected and hesitant about blogging on the public facing website. However, they did want other students on their course to know they were a Student Ambassador. We also found they wanted us to publicise the project more within their department once the project was underway.

The ability to act as an ambassador was questioned by almost all the students who felt that other than through word of mouth, this had been very difficult to achieve. Considerable thought needs to be invested in the structure of the ambassador role and how they can communicate with their peers to pass on their learning. The blog was not considered to be an effective tool for peer learning.

6 Recommendations

Throughout the course of the year the team learnt a lot from the students and from the experience of running the workshops. The project received highly positive feedback from the student ambassadors and has continuing support from LTI, the Library, TLC and the Students' Union for 2014/15. Some of the recommendations to improve the project include:

1) Student engagement and ensuring the workshops are relevant to actual needs is critical. Workshops need to be well planned with clear learning outcomes so that the participants understand what they will get out of the sessions. However, the team also need flexibility to cover new areas or issues that arise during the sessions. We tried to include 'quick wins' in each workshop but included activities to keep the students motivated, rather than demonstrating tools or lecturing them.
2) The workshop format: they were as much an opportunity for staff to learn from the students as visa versa so it is vital the interactive nature of the workshops continues. They were also an ideal opportunity to collect feedback on existing support materials, for example the Library support available in Moodle.
3) Active Learning: asking students to work in groups with flip chart paper to capture their research practices was particularly effective. The project produced numerous outputs from the students, for example to illustrate how they complete assignments and how their find and manage information. These will be made available on our website. However, the students must be asked to complete a release form at the outset of the project to ensure these can be re-used by the team in this way.
4) Vouchers and refreshments helped recruit students, however support from the Students' Union and the academic departments is also key to the success of the project.

Consideration also needs to be given to a number of other issues if the project is to continue:

1) How to expand the project to other departments and ensure this is sustainable. Funding from the Library and LTI has been secured for one year to extend the project to two additional departments to take this to 4 departments for 2014/15.
2) How students can effectively act as an ambassador to others and what support and systems they need to do this?
3) What the role of current student ambassadors might be, half the cohort from this year will remain at LSE and several indicated they wish to continue to be involved in the project.
4) How student ambassadors 'digital literacies' might be representative of or distinct from the wide LSE cohort. With this final point in mind, a wider survey of undergraduate student abilities should be considered in 2014/15 with input from the Students' Union.

7 Conclusion

SADL has been a valuable project to explore how best to support undergraduate students develop digital and information literacies. It has demonstrated that these skills are valued by students and that they are not currently embedded into the undergraduate curriculum at LSE consistently. It has provided information about LSE students' abilities and areas where they need more support. It has also suggested that peer support may be a more sustainable way of supporting a large cohort. The project has been a valuable collaboration between LTI, the Library and TLC and compliments other efforts that are being made to join up the learning support that is offered to academic departments. It also indicates that digital and information literacies can be taught in the context of an academic discipline but there are also benefits to bringing together students from different departments.

8 References

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