

Paper for USTLG Meeting, 26th Feb 2000

Introduction:

Leeds University Library has, particularly over the last few years, fostered a liaison based approach to Teaching and Learning Support. The creation of Faculty Teams (teams of Subject Librarians who liaise directly with both students and academics to provide appropriate Library services) has been a significant factor in pushing this forward. Leeds University has also embraced the concept of the 'Managed' or 'Virtual' Learning Environment in creating both the Nathan Bodington Building and the Virtual Science Park. These environments are becoming increasingly used by academics to support their students work.

The Hybrid Library Project at Leeds University Library aims to build upon these existing services, liaison and environments by creating integrated access to the appropriate traditional and electronic library services for seven trial modules. These modules have been selected to represent all faculties and student levels (i.e. 1st years, finalists, taught Masters students) within the University.

These library services are then accessed from within the student's current learning environment, so the library is going to the student rather than the student coming to the library. This may mean siting the resources on a departmental website, a room in Nathan Bodington Building, or a tenancy in Leeds' 'Virtual Science Park'. As well as gathering a collection of resources specific to the module, it was felt that the students should also have access to the broader universe of information available to them, i.e. by having links to the library catalogue, internet search engines, and contact information for the appropriate library staff.

The Project is funded for 15-months and began in June 2000. The project has one full-time member of staff, the project officer, plus part-time project management and technical support.

The project aims to support undergraduate courses and taught postgraduate courses both on and off campus by investigating the liaison aspects of library support of modules within a M/VLE and developing co-operation and communication between the library and academic staff. Technological development is not a central concern of the project as there is insufficient funding and staff time available for this. The E-Lib Hybrid Library projects have been investigating the more technical aspects and it is hoped that we may incorporate some of the results of these projects into our 'Hybrid Library Services' in the future.

Background to the project:

As users become increasingly able to use Library services without physically visiting the library, libraries are being forced to reconsider their role within the University and to reflect on the added value that they are able to bring to the teaching/learning and research processes. At the same time, the growth of the 'Virtual Learning Environment' is providing an arena in which Library resources are an integral component. In June 1998 Michael Emly submitted a paper to our Management Team suggesting various projects that the library might undertake over then next 3 years. (At this time, e-lib was funding 5 Hybrid Library projects which were each looking at different aspects of the hybrid question such as cross-searching of resources, authentication, impact on students, student needs, etc) and these became

incorporated into the 'Hybrid Library Initiative'. As the university already had a 'Virtual Learning Environment' that was aimed at supporting undergraduate teaching and learning, it was decided that this could provide the ideal host to the 'Hybrid Library', although academics would not be forced to use Nathan Bodington if they had already got their students using another environment such as departmental web pages or the 'Virtual Science Park'. After some false starts a Project Officer finally began work in June 2000.

Progress so Far:

Liaison was thought to be key to the project's success, so it was vital to ensure that relationships were formed early on that would facilitate this. To get liaison relationships going with various members of the faculty teams, and thereby to get liaison going with the academics who might be interested in participating in the project, the project officer immediately got involved with the faculty teams both by visiting them and by attending the 'Liaison Group Meeting'- a meeting of Faculty Team Librarians that takes place monthly and discuss issues related to their liaison activities. As it was planned that the project would be handed over to the faculty teams to roll out, it was also important that they were either directly involved in the project or at least knew what progress was being made, so regular meetings have taken place with them to update them and get feedback and their views on the project so far.

Once the initial contact with faculty teams had been made they were contacted and asked to suggest appropriate modules for the project. Meetings were then set up with interested academics. The meetings were used to explain the aims of the project and detail what sort of 'product' could be created for the module.

The liaison from there on has varied between phone calls, emails and more meetings. Some academics preferred more liaison than others but all seem happy so far with the amount of contact they have had.

The Hybrid Libraries are either created from scratch, or library resources are added to an existing Nathan Bodington Room/ Webpage/ VSP folder and the academic is kept informed throughout the process. When the Hybrid Library is finished it is up to the academic to ensure that the students are aware of its existence and are encouraged to use it by being expected to access it in a class. For this reason, Hybrid Libraries may work particularly well in Information Skills courses, as has been the case with both the semester 1 modules so far.

At these early stages it was not possible to offer anything in the way of technical innovation for modules being taught in semester 1 and so instead the project officer undertook work such as making 'electronic' versions of course documents, in order to compensate for the technical work that would be undertaken on semester 2 modules. The Hybrid Libraries for modules in semesters 1 and 2 were completed on time and have since been put into use. One of these modules has now finished and some evaluation has taken place with both the students and the academics. The Project Officer has liaised with the academic on the other course in order to improve the Hybrid Library for Semester 2 and a teaching session has been undertaken, incorporating features from the Hybrid Library, to ensure that the students know how to make best use of it and what the benefits are. Technical work has been undertaken for the modules that are starting in semester 2, including manipulation of the library's subject by subject website listings and web harvesting.

What goes into a Hybrid Library?:

More or less whatever the academic wants. The key components that the project has identified are: electronic reading lists, digitised versions of key course texts such as book chapters and journal articles, past exam papers, lists of websites, lists of databases, library contact information, library information including a link to the catalogue, tutorials and guides including bespoke ones and pre-existing resources, discussion rooms, etc. These can be fitted in around existing pages of lecture handouts and course materials that the academic may already be making available electronically. Additionally, manipulation of the ROADS database and the application of Web Harvesting software have been undertaken to provide extra functionality:

Subject by Subject databases and websites:

The Library's webpages currently include subject by subject listings of websites and databases approved by the Library. However, given that the approach taken by the Hybrid Library Project is a modular one, it made sense to experiment with producing lists of resources relevant to a particular module i.e: 'credit risk management' rather than a broad subject like 'business' or 'accountancy'. The current subject by subject lists require students to search up and down tree structures to find a list of resources closest to their subject, and the subject headings used in ROADS are quite general, so by creating more specific lists and placing them in the Hybrid Library the barriers between students and the precise resources they need are removed.

Webharvesting:

Webharvesting involves using a piece of software like a 'spider' to harvest the content of a collection of specified websites word by word. The software creates a database of these words that can then be searched. It works in a very similar way to a search engine like Altavista. This technology has been applied in the Hybrid Library Project to make the Library's subject-lists of websites more user friendly and appropriate in a modular environment.

Evaluation:

The project's evaluation strategy aims to discover not only how the Hybrid Libraries are used and valued (or not as the case may be) by students and lecturers, but also what impact they are having on the students work, either by improving their grades or increasing their success in locating appropriate library resources to support their work. The evaluation activities include questionnaires for students, one to one structured interviews with academics, focus groups and cohort studies. Thus far, interviews have been conducted with two academics and completed questionnaires have been received from the students on one module. One thing the project has learned is that not all academics may refer to the resource as a 'Hybrid Library' and therefore asking students for feedback on it leaves them rather confused as they are not sure what they are being asked to comment on. Thus, while the term 'Hybrid Library' is useful in describing the concept behind the resources that we have created during the project, it is not necessarily a useful label to use for the resources

themselves The interviews have been an excellent opportunity to see how the academics feel about the Hybrid Library now that they have taught a module that has been supported by one. So far they have been very positive about the project and what it has done for their module. The aim of the cohort study will be to measure any change in the student's grades as a result of the Hybrid Library by comparing grades across two core modules over several years.

The Future:

The way in which the project is handed over to Faculty Teams will be vital to the successful continuation and roll out of the project into a scaled up service, therefore a properly planned and resourced exit strategy is crucial. It is already clear that the amount of work that has gone into the seven modules for the project would not be sustainable by the Faculty Team Librarians for all the modules that they could potentially support, therefore the project needs to produce a method by which a good deal of this work could be passed onto the academic without the need for them to have high levels of IT competence. In this way the FTLs could concentrate on what they do best- liaison and support, rather than spending large amounts of time on content creation. To this end negotiations are currently ongoing with the creators of the Nathan Bodington Building regarding the creation of a Hybrid Library 'toolbox' or template that would facilitate Hybrid Library creation while still fostering communication with the library staff. Academics would merely need to cut and replace text on templates and would ideally have the facility to submit reading lists or course texts such as book chapters to the library for digitisation.

As I stated at the beginning, the emphasis of this project is on close liaison with the academic, working within the student's learning environment and on experimenting with all kinds of taught modules and taught students,(on and off campus, first years to Masters across all major subjects).

By address these issues then it is hoped that the project can be successfully scaled up to become a key part of they libraries' services to students and a familiar part or the teaching and learning process.