Enhancing student induction to library and IT services in higher education

Julie Moody and Jason Truscott
Plymouth University

Corresponding author(s): Julie.Moody@plymouth.ac.uk; J.Truscott@plymouth.ac.uk

Abstract

Student induction to library and IT systems in higher education is challenging. Students complain of information overload and often remember little detail. The Academic Support, Technology and Innovation (ASTI) team at Plymouth University set out to combine their skills to produce a memorable welcome talk and a professional set of online materials and support to provide the details needed to become course-ready. This paper outlines and evaluates the approach taken.

Background and Rationale for approach

It has been well documented that it is challenging to make the student induction to library and IT systems effective and memorable. As Trefts and Blakeslee (2000) point out, library instruction, although important, can be boring to deliver and to listen to. At Plymouth University, we had started to develop an “industrial model” of library induction to ensure consistency but we needed a different approach; one which students would not be expecting to grab their attention.

“The unexpected is a great way to bring humor into the classroom. The unexpected plays off the element of surprise, which is really what comedy is all about. It works because it startles or shocks the students to attention. It can also be a good way of challenging the stereotype of the librarian as a passive, calm, mild-mannered individual” (Trefts and Blakeslee, 2000, p.375)

As part of our research, we examined pedagogical approaches which could enable us to enliven our initial input. Baid and Lambert (2010) discuss the use of games or other fun activities as teaching strategies and it was felt that this would be ideal for induction or welcome week. Race (2002) highlights the need to move away from traditional chalk and talk teaching to allow students to become active and participate and there is a wealth of examples of creative library inductions which incorporate these theories. Morgan and Davies (2004) pioneered the Cephalonian method; others have used video, i-pod or Prezi tours (Potter, 2012) or tours based on murder mysteries (Else, 2013). Hassanien and Barber (2007) have discussed the importance of the social aspects of induction and that activities should appeal to
students and encourage social integration; helping to break the ice.

To engage and motivate the students, we decided to develop a quiz show format for the face-to-face part of our induction, delivered in lecture theatres by the team of Information Specialists. Having surveyed the first year undergraduates about what they needed to know within the first three weeks of their course to get them course-ready, we realised that previous inductions had had such a low impact that many students had forgotten them. Our primary aims were to make the students remember the induction and view their information specialist as approachable and fun. Any detail about using the Library or IT systems could be provided in a follow-up online tutorial. With these aims in mind, we developed a “Pointless” style quiz, based on the show broadcast on BBC1. Teams would compete to answer library and IT questions with the aim being to find that all important Pointless answer that none of the 100 people questioned beforehand knew.

Working group

A development group was established to investigate the way forward and tasks assigned to each member of the group (see Figure 1).
This new approach coincided with the formation of a new team within Technology and Information Services at Plymouth University. The ASTI team, comprised of Learning Technologists, Digital Skills Developers and Information Specialists, contained people with the right mix of skills to approach student library and IT induction in a new way.
Approaches to induction

It was decided that there would be four strands to the induction; the face-to-face welcome with the Information Specialists including a library film, the Pointless quiz and information about the importance of using the library for study based on research conducted at the University of Huddersfield (Goodall and Pattern, 2011). The second, main part of the induction (i.e. the key information) would be provided in online tutorials, produced using Adobe Captivate. Students were encouraged to work through these tutorials to become course-ready. We wanted students to prove that they had worked through the tutorials to their personal tutors so aimed to include assessment activities with a print out or badge (Educause, 2012). This would enable us to gauge the impact of the materials.

The third strand involved extra staff being posted in the library and open access computing areas to help students, once they had completed the online tutorials, with setting up WiFi, accessing the university’s mobile app and answering any questions.

Finally, the Information Specialists ran Library Bite-Size sessions at the end of September entitled “Lost in the Library” and “Get that Book” to catch any students who were still struggling with basic library procedures.

Results of student survey: student opinions

At the end of the first term, students were sent a link to an online survey requesting feedback on the success of all four strands. 89 students completed the survey. The free comments were a mixture of positive and negative (Figure 2); some students...
preferring a library tour or a “boring talk” while others enjoyed the fun aspects of the quiz and made suggestions for improvement.

It was interesting to note that of those who said that they had attended the face to face welcome, the Pointless quiz was the most memorable aspect (Figure 3). It was fun to deliver, although it did depend to some extent on group dynamics. Comments suggest that its management with larger groups needs more thought to ensure that all team members can participate. However, the aim of providing something memorable was largely achieved.

![Figure 3: Feedback on welcome talk](image)

**Part 1 - Induction Quiz**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did you attend the welcome week library and IT Induction?</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Yes (85.4%)</strong></td>
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![Pie chart](image)

**Which aspects of the session do you remember?**

- Being told where to find the online tutorials (23.5%)
- Library introductory film (23.5%)
- ‘Pointless’ quiz (31.9%)
- Meeting your Information Specialist (21.1%)

Although not all had completed the online tutorials, a majority of those who did agreed or strongly agreed that their confidence in using the library and the IT systems had improved as a result (Figure 4). The collaboration between the members of ASTI ensured that the final products looked professional and worked technically. However, the online tutorials were added to the main University induction website. We relied on students noting the URL to locate them after our sessions. We expect this to be solved in future as the University moves over to using Moodle for its digital learning environment. For technical reasons, the assessment activities were separated from the main tutorials and therefore, were ineffective. Although some course tutors required students to print off a certificate of completion, this was not widespread and diluted the impact of the tutorials.
Part 2 - Online tutorials

The drop-in sessions generated a variety of enquiries (Figure 5), indicating that a more personal approach is welcomed by some students.

Part 3 - Open Access

During induction week did you visit the open access area in Babbage or library reception for any of the following?

Figure 4: Feedback on online tutorials

If you completed the online tutorials did they improve your confidence with...

Figure 5: Feedback on drop-in sessions
The Library bite-size sessions might have been better scheduled for induction week. The take-up at the end of September was low (Figure 6); by this time most students had got the answers they needed.

Part 4 - Library Bite-Size sessions

As a follow up to the online tutorials, we offered Library bite-size support sessions (get that book/lost in the library). Did you attend either of these?

Figure 6: Feedback on the Bite-Size sessions

Conclusions

In conclusion, our “industrial model” had improved and the interactive aspects worked better. We aim to consider these key points for next year:

- Improve accessibility of tutorial
- Improve the assessment - ensure cooperation with personal tutors
- Mix online and face-to-face support with extra drop in possibilities for less confident students
- Manage expectations of students - the welcome talk is only the start. Other opportunities to learn the basics
- Improve balance between fun and information in the welcome talk - provide key information and use Pointless to reinforce

References


