Use of information for assignments by Loughborough University students

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Executive summary

In 2008, Loughborough University Library held three focus groups with students to explore how they used information in their assignments. It was apparent that students use a wide range of print and electronic information for their written work. The Library needed to develop a better understanding of their approaches so that services (including information literacy) could be amended accordingly.

Students from across the disciplines participated in the focus groups. The groups were facilitated by Library staff and took place in early 2008. The student experience in using information for assignments was the focus of the study. Aspects included the different sources used, role of the Library, views on citation, role of lecturers, group information seeking, Google, quality, acquiring the necessary skills and knowledge of plagiarism.

The Library found that students in the focus groups used a wide range of information, some of which was provided by the University Library and some of which was freely available via the Internet. Books were important for all students and academic journals became more crucial as the course progressed. Google and Wikipedia were also valued but students were aware of the shortcomings of these sources. Students showed a high level of insight into issues such as plagiarism, quality and accurate referencing. Acquiring effective information skills for assignments had been done mostly through trial and error. Students identified the following roles for the Library in helping them with written assignments: supplying information, making support available and providing a physical learning environment.

This study has proved very useful to the Library in helping develop future services. It has highlighted the value students place on access to information in the Library as soon as they are given assessed work. The information literacy sessions provided by the Library should also cover freely available information, as well as that provided by the Library. When Library staff help students with assessed work they should be aware of the findings from this study. More consideration needs to given by the Library to the inter-relationship between library stock and reading lists/short loan and recommended texts.

Contents

1. Introduction

Over the past year, there have been various views/explorations/debates about changing learning styles for undergraduate students (for example: Reiza, 2008, UCL, 2008). General tenets include:

- learners now look for 'instant gratification' where, if information is 'more than 3 clicks away', it does not exist.
- Wikipedia and Google are major sources used by university students in their academic work.
- Print based information resources (including textbooks and journals) are used less and less.
- Students are not knowledgeable about areas such as plagiarism, citation and quality information.
- Good information literacy skills are not prevalent amongst university students.

There is very little evidence which confirms or contradicts these perspectives as most are based on opinions and anecdotes. Indeed, the UCL (2008) report highlighted the need for educational research to produce evidence about the patterns and nature of information use by today's learners. This theme around the importance of understanding the information seeking behaviours of students and academics, was reiterated in a recent US study (Housewright and Schonfeld, 2008). For these reasons, Loughborough University Library undertook a project during the 2007/2008 academic year which examined how students use information in written assignments.

The overall aim was to generate findings and insight that could be used to develop future Loughborough University Library service delivery and information literacy programmes.

2. Methodology

A core project team was set up to oversee the project, including developing the methodology, collecting the data and producing the final report. The project team consisted of the following Library staff:

- Becky Jones, Academic Librarian,
- Ruth Stubbings, Academic Services Manager (Social Sciences and Humanities)
- Dr Graham Walton, Service Development Manager

Various others helped out at times during the project with guidance and advice, including Sophie Driscoll of the Loughborough Students Union, Dr Mark Hepworth from the Department of Information Science and Marian Smith, a PhD student from the Department of Information Science.

It was decided to gather the data using focus groups. This approach would generate interaction between individual students and allow discussion around complex, inter-related topics. A pilot focus group took place and some minor changes were made to the questions used. A template was produced for recording the focus groups' discussions along with relevant prompts (see Appendix 1). Two project members were present at each focus group; one to facilitate and one to record the discussions. The project team encountered some problems in recruiting people for the focus groups. E-mails sent requesting participants did not generate much interest and the most effective approach proved to be circulating printed invitations in the Library on the day of the focus groups.

Three focus groups took place between January - March 2008 with 4, 7 and 12 students respectively. Undergraduate students across all years participated in the groups and the following degree programmes were represented: Aeronautical Engineering, Economics, Architectural Engineering, Business, Chemical Engineering, Civil Engineering, Communications and Media Studies, Design, Electrical Engineering, English and Drama, Marketing, Product Design and Manufacture, Psychology and Water Management.

3. Discussion

The results from the focus groups are included in Appendix 2. The following section examines the results and explores their impact and significant for the Library.

3.1 Initial sources of information

A variety of practices emerged when students first look for information for assignments. Google and Wikipedia were used by some as a way to start gathering information but there was an awareness of the limitations of both sources. It was clear that students used a mixture of print and electronic information provided by the Library with other web-based sources when first looking for information. Some preferred to use Library books at home because they found aspects of the Library's physical environment difficult, whereas others preferred to use information within the Library. For another group of students, MetaLib (subject portal provided by Library) was an important resource when starting the search for information. Some 3rd year students regretted not knowing about important information sources until a late stage in their courses. This was especially the case with MetaLib. For many students, the reading lists provided by lecturers were a key source to use at first. Some lecturers gave explicit direction on information to be used whereas others were less clear.

3.2 Group work and finding information

There was a strength of opinion expressed about group work and finding information for assignments. The majority of students had worked in groups which had been charged with finding information on specific areas. They were aware of the benefits that this process would engender which included both developing life skills and gaining wider perspectives. Alongside this insight into the value of group work, there were also strong views about the frustrations that also exist.

3.3 Range of information used for assignments

3.3.1 Web based sources such as Wikipedia and Google: as expected, various web based information sources were used by most students to find information for assignments. These students also demonstrated an awareness of the problems in many web based sources. They were able to distinguish between web sites which provided accurate and reliable information and those which are unreliable. It was not seen as acceptable to solely use Google or Wikipedia. Sources such as Google were used to find broad, background information and also for 'quick and dirty' searching. In some cases, students had been given explicit direction from their lecturers not to use Wikipedia or Google.

3.3.2 Academic journals: the majority of students in the focus groups perceived academic journals as important for assignments. They were seen as being more up-to-date and more authoritative by some. It was also clear that they were seen as being more important by those in the 2nd or 3rd year of their course. One person indicated their use of journals was as a result of an information literacy session supplied by the Library.

3.3.3 Books: as sources of information for assignments, books were used by most students. A Masters student observed that they were not encouraged to use books in assignments. The limitations around books were their availability and also their coverage.

3.3.4 Lecture notes: apart from Art and Design students, all participants indicated that lecture notes were an important source of information for assessed work. Lecture notes were useful for establishing key points and the basics for assignments.

3.3.5 Other information sources: a wide range of other information sources were used by students from the various disciplines, including government reports, expert forums, information on LEARN

(University's Virtual Learning Environment), personal interviews, RSS feeds, company information and dvds.

3.4 Nature of use of different information sources

All students agreed that the information sources they used the most would vary and depended upon the nature of the assignment. Web-based information was used for all assignments however. In one group, books were cited in assignments, which despite not being read, the students thought should be included. Citing sources in assignments did prove difficult to some students. As students progressed through their courses, it became obvious that citing sources in assignments influenced the final mark.

3.5 Plagiarism and citation

The students felt that they had an understanding of what plagiarism is and each pilot group were happy to give a definition. These included "using information in a report and not citing it", "passing off others' work as your own" and "stealing ideas". However, as the discussions progressed it became clear that there were at least two individuals or more in each in each group that had not got to grips with the complexities of plagiarism and good practice in academic writing. For example, one student said that they included references in their bibliography even if they had not read them (several students nodded their heads at this). Another stated that they copied information from the Internet without citing it. Again more than one student agreed that they also did this.

Three quarters of the students had received talks at the University on what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it. Most believed it was a "hot topic". A few students felt that they had been told "Don't do it!" and had not been provided with enough guidance on how to avoid being a plagiarist. Most students recognised that guidance was in either the departmental or module handbook. One student had been disciplined for plagiarism, and another wondered whether you could self-plagiarise.

Approximately two thirds of the students knew their departmental citation style. One student had never cited ideas in their text and had only used bibliographies at the end of their assignments. Worryingly the student had not been recommended to change their writing practices. In one focus group an interesting discussion took place on originality of thought and how much of an undergraduate piece of work can be original. There was a general consensus that some material is harder to cite than others and that students would like more examples available.

3.6 Learning about finding the right information for assignments.

As one would expect, the participants tended to follow the national trends and learnt how to find information mainly through trial and error. Additional ways included:

1. *Lectures or workshops that were embedded in their modules.* Comments relating to this included: 'the session on the Library seemed obvious', 'course made sense at the time, but have had problems using MetaLib since', 'had a session but had no idea at that point what would be needing to use and how important it was' and 'think should have one session each year.'
2. *Attendance at the Library's generic courses.* Only one student had attended this type of course. Generally focus group members knew the Library ran these workshops, but had chosen not to attend them.
3. *Asking tutor for help.* 'some tutors are willing to help and some not'.
All thought more training would be useful. No discussion took place on how to encourage students to attend Library courses.

3.7 Role of the Library

All participants felt that the Library had an important role to play in helping students find information. The Library's role tended to be broken down into three areas; the purchase and organisation of stock, the provision of help, and the provision of a physical environment for students to work. Comments relating to the provision of stock tended to focus on the great competition for books, there not being enough multiple copies and the fact that some participants were prepared to either accrue fines or hide books. Students tended to appreciate the mixture of study environments provided by the Library and comments included: 'study carrels and group study rooms are excellent', 'there are distractions at home, the Library is a place to concentrate on work', 'get more done in the library than at home'. Negative comments related to the heating and lighting of the building.

3.8 Influence of marking schemes

The majority of the students who took part in the focus groups were aware of marking schemes. There was a consensus of opinion that more marks equals more effort, with students making comments such as 'for high marks they would use MetaLib' or 'if there were lots of marks at stake they would order a journal article or pay for access online'. The word count is also used to indicate how much work is necessary, as is the weighting of coursework to exams. There was some discussion amongst finalists about the quality of feedback given by tutors, and how they can interpret their marks and improve, as well as how degree classification schemes operate.

3.9 Importance of quality information

Participants were aware that they need to use good quality information in their assignments. They do attempt to evaluate resources, and some students were adamant that they would never refer to websites in their work. Books and journals are the main sources of information, and some of the participants had considered how the passage of time may relate to the quality of information, e.g. 'if a study was 50 years old I would still use it, as it was relevant at the time'.

In one of the focus groups a forceful debate was initiated between participants from different departments about the quality of information, with one student directly asking the question 'What is good quality information?'. The reply of 'up-to-date books' was dismissed with the comment that books can be wrong or out of date. This shows the degree to which participants have considered issues of quality and evaluated the resources we offer. Some departments encourage students to avoid these issues by directly contacting experts in the field, and will suggest relevant research groups. A consensus was finally agreed by the group that good quality information is 'journal papers from a respected institution/respected body'.

4. Conclusion and recommendations

This study has provided the Library with some very useful intelligence on how students approach using information in their written assignments. An influencing factor on the responses in the focus groups could be that participants were all recruited when studying in the Library. The groups showed that students on a wide range of courses use a variety of information types from material provided by the Library and also from other sources. Students also use a diverse range of print and electronic information sources for their assignments. The students in the focus groups were informed about plagiarism and quality issues to a surprising level, but significant misunderstandings were present. It was apparent that the students identified a clear link between good marks and using high quality information sources. The focus groups also highlighted the stress and pressure brought to library stock when work is taking place on assignments.

The following recommendations are made:

1. Academic librarians need to be alerted to students' expectations for information to be immediately available once work on an assessed piece of work has commenced.
2. Information literacy teaching should be developed to ensure students can access good quality resources, both provided by the University Library and those freely available.
3. Preventing plagiarism is a primary concern at Loughborough University. The Library should promote its role to students and Departments in addressing this issue.
4. Customer Service staff should use the outcomes from this study to inform the enquiry interview (around the variety of approaches students use to find information etc).
5. The Library should explore in more detail the impact of assessed work on library stock and the inter-relationship with reading lists/short loan/recommended texts. This should be done in collaboration with academic colleagues.

Sources consulted

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Reisz, M. (2008) Hits and misses, Times Higher Education, (5th June), pp. 32 – 37.
UCL (2008) Information behaviour of the researcher of the future, UCL
http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/programmes/reppres/gg_final_keynote_11012008.pdf

Student subject range:	
Date of interview:	Name of person (s) conducting focus group:

1) Explain the purpose of the study

2) What is the first place students go to find information for an assignment?

Prompts:
Do lecturers tell you the information to use?
Do you work together with fellow students to find information?
Do you go to the Library first?
When do you use Google?

3) What are the different types of information used for assignments?

Prompts:
Do you use information from the Internet?
Do you use academic journals?
Do you use textbooks?
Do you use lecture notes?
Are there other sources used not previously mentioned/

4) How frequently do you use different types of information in assignments?

Prompts:
Which type do you use the most (between Internet, journals, books, notes) and why?
Which type do you use the least (between Internet, journals, books, notes) and why?
How many items are included in your bibliography?
Do you do any background reading?

5) What is the role of Library in helping you find information for assignments?

Prompts:
Which information sources from the Library do you use?
What is the role of the Library in your studies?

6) How important is to make sure you use quality of information in your assignments?

Prompts:
What sources are the best quality for assignments?
Is there a connection between high marks and quality information?

7) How did you learn about finding the right information for assignments?

Prompts:
How have learned about how to find information for assignments?
Does your lecturer tell you where to find information for assignments?
Would you like to know more about how to find information for assignments?

8) When you write assignments, what is your understanding of the relevance of plagiarism?

Prompts:
What does plagiarism mean?
How have you learned about plagiarism?
Do your lecturers talk about plagiarism?

9) How important is it to be effective at citing resources in assignments?

Prompts:
Are you aware of the aware of citation style preferred on your course?
Do you use quotations to acknowledge sources in your assignment?

10) Other comments on information for assignments

Prompts:
Have you any other thoughts or comments on your use of information in assignments?

Results

2) What is the first place students go to find information for an assignment?

Focus Group 1: At the start of research use Google, Wikipedia or Library – or are in the Library using Google and Wikipedia.
Background reading, and if not understand texts, use Google and Wikipedia to help understanding. Used simultaneously (2-3 agree)
General information from Wikipedia then move to specialised information. 1 student "scared of Wikipedia" and would not trust the information they had found there as they had been told by lecturers not to use it. 1 student would never cite Wikipedia. 1 student followed the references they found on Wikipedia and would use any they could find in the Library.
Focus Group 2: Yes they do use the library.
Eng & Drama = uses the library at some point, but will get books to work on at home – finds the lighting too harsh to study.
English = agreed – only works here for an hour or so.
The study carrels and group study rooms are excellent – these are used as practice spaces by Drama students as there is a lack of book able rooms in the department. AED = there are distractions at home, the library is a place to concentrate on work.
Focus Group 3: 1st – panic.
Chem Eng = a week after assignment being set will do some research – the magazines through MetaLib are useful
Psychology = MetaLib first then books.
CMS = catalogue for books, MetaLib later.
Graham: 'How did you find out about MetaLib?'
Psychology = in the 1st yr they were told about MetaLib and the 1 CSA Illumina database they could use through MetaLib
Chem Eng = had a lecture at the start of their course which told them about Athens, MetaLib and the range of databases.
CMS = found by accident – didn't know about Athens
English = only found out this year about the range of resources available.

Prompts:
Do lecturers tell you the information to use?
Focus Group 1: Not really, (2 = definitely no and 2 = recommended readings; from the first lecture they use these to understand the module)
WDEC = always use recommended readings
1 = yes on my course
1 = on my course use web pages and current research as need to be up to date, and no books on the subject area
8/12 use Wikipedia
12/12 use Google
Focus Group 2: MSc IM = catalogue for reading list items, always goes for recommended reading.
AED = uses lecture notes, will always put together an introduction first, then looks at the Internet, recommended reading, databases.
Elec Eng = Internet then catalogue
English = looks up issues related to topic on internet, then uses catalogue to find books on those issues.
Focus Group 3: Yes by reading lists.
Psychology = reading lists are the first port of call
English = lecturers give direction
CMS = after completing dissertation now know how to use MetaLib, didn't understand full view *(getting full text?)*
English = better if knew in 1st year
Psychology = now know about MetaLib and use all the time, wish I had know how to before – got help form tutor.
Chem Eng = too many databases to chose from.

Do you work together with fellow students to find information?
Focus Group 1: Yes, everyone regularly works with other students to find information
Focus Group 2: AED = official meetings or email to meet at library. Working on 4 group tasks at the moment – useful preparation for the challenges of industry.
Drama = group work and peer assessment very important. Always working on group performances.
MSc IM = group work is time consuming, difficult to discuss and to negotiate roles. There are always freeloaders and it is hard to work without a leader, and to get equal respect.
English = good for developing life skills.
MSc Sport = likes it – no choice of group, get an insight into others perspectives.
Share stress.
Focus Group 3: Group work has a risk of plagiarism, so never – no incentive – not assessed in groups
English = had to work in groups on new modules which was difficult with people she didn't know.
Psychology = 2-3 hours of lectures a week so not much interaction and would like the opportunity to work in groups
CMS = hated being in groups in the 1st yr. Had to do all the work herself, found that others would withhold information to look better. It's better to work together in tutorials rather than for an assessed element.

Use of Google
Focus group 1: 1 student uses Google Text used to find e-books on the web (although not all pages available), then looks at library resources
Google enables searching of text for phrases, quicker than finding and using books in the Library.
Library catalogue is used to look for books.
1 student uses Wikipedia, then MetaLib, find journal references, but return to Wikipedia for definitions of terms.
Focus Group 2: Wikipedia>Google>Google scholar>Financial Times.
Google is a starting point, not really rely on the information, useful basis for understanding of broad subjects.
Drama = would never quote from websites. Will use Wikipedia as a starting point. Follows up bibliographies from the site.
AED = Government websites for engineering construction, building regulations & statutory information.
Focus Group 3: CMS = Google Scholar.
Psychology = uses Wikipedia for basic facts
Chem Eng = Google not sufficient.
Psychology = Google Scholar hard to navigate and often only get abstract and no further which is infuriating.
CMS = agreed – hard for dissertation not getting full text. Would not quote from Internet – not allowed.
Chem Eng = Wikipedia not an 'academically acclaimed' website.
CMS = lecturer would mark down for using websites.
Psychology = someone used Wikipedia in their assignment and they were named and shamed in front of everyone.
Psychology = for their Dissertations they were told not to use the web unless necessary.
English = there are 14 books on the topic they are currently covering, and 20 in the class. As finalists, with additional loan entitlements, one member of the class could come along and borrow all the books! Asked if it would be acceptable to use other resources, as there is lots on the Internet on this topic, but told by the lecturer that they would not be interested in web sites.
How can you tell what is an acclaimed web site?
English = the internet is a good resource to use out of library opening hours

3) What are the different types of information used for assignments?

Prompts:
Do you use information from the Internet?
Focus Group 2: Drama = Wikipedia, Google – browse sites and ignore things that might be wrong.
AED = Look at manufacture websites and building research organisations.
MSc IM = MetaLib & e-journals. Protection of copyright articles not accessible and issue.
MSc Sport/Drama/English not know how to use MetaLib. Takes ages and they can't access full text articles.
AED – Lexis is hard to use, but good once you know how.
Drama = MetaLib used for quotes – asks for help form Library staff.
MSc Sport = currency important. Searches on Google with +2007 or +2008 to narrow down results to the most recent. Or finds research on staff web pages.

Do you use academic journals?
Focus Group 1: Most use journals – but varies by subject
Focus Group 2: Yes all round. MSc Sport uses text books but needs journals too. More up to date, more authoritative viewpoints.
AED = more respected/relevant. More credit if you use a range of resources.
Elec Eng = journals too hard and not enough detail.
Focus Group 3: English = started using journals this year as have had several sessions devoted to find resources for dissertation. Had a lab session with a member of library staff which showed how to access the electronic resources.
Chem Eng = used journals once – queried our holdings of the New Scientist.
CMS = No – used catalogue for books and MetaLib for additional information.

Do you use textbooks?
Focus Group 2MSc IM = useful for exams but not encouraged to use them. Books often not available in library, have to use the week loans. Can't afford them and can't get them from the library, therefore not able to read them for assignments.
Elec Eng = lists of text books which are ignored.
Focus Group 3: Chem Eng = Yes sometimes get a good relevant text book. Noticed that some books fall open at the correct experiments as so regularly used.
CMS = for elements of the course such as concept and cultural theory books no good
Psychology = all module have 1 key text book as preliminary reading.

Do you use lecture notes?
Focus Group 1: Use lecture notes a lot. There was a feeling that these are the foundation for study in the 1st year and are less useful as you progress in your course. Get basics from your notes, but it's up to you to do your coursework. Need to "look elsewhere"
Lecture notes give you guidance, some can be very detailed. The style of the notes you take **Focus Group 2:** MSc Sport = lecture notes point you in the direction you need to go and read.
Sometimes get slides for lectures
Drama = notes not so useful all about own ideas.
AED = do drawings rather than essays so notes important.
Yes
Drama = supposed to
MSc Sport = got to, to get the marks, to get a distinction, but sometimes things are too pressing and there isn't time for background reading.
impacts on whether you use them or not.
Focus Group 3: Yes for Psychology and Chem Eng.
English = read through specific lecture as key points for assignments, and has quoted form the notes in an assignment.
Chem Eng = A formula can be different in a book to lecture notes, so depends.

Are there other sources used not previously mentioned?
Focus Group 1: RECAP: Internet/journals/text books/lecture notes
Others: stats, census, civil aviation data.
Aero Auto = "Athens database" not always used – depends if the course is based on research or not
Blog on web used by 1 student to help figure out his coursework
Forums used by engineers as you can directly ask experts, also by English & Drama who had come across 'weirdos' on the Internet.
LEARN server used – post message and hope the tutor responds
Interviews with Experts in the field for software – all the information was promotional so it was a good way to get balanced background information and find out how the software implemented
WEDC found interviews stressful **MH Asked**: why? When dealing with sensitive issues face to face – in Africa.
(Wikipedia> Books>Journal articles)
News for developments in new technology, from the BBC, papers, radio
1 student reads Flight International every week
Engineers = yes Business = yes
Economics = yes, RSS feeds used for weekly updates in their subject area
English & Drama no need as material used is from 1500 – 1970. Theatre Archive and New York Times archive used
Air Transport Management = keep up to date for some modules and exams, not necessary but beneficial
Company Information although this is limited and mostly promotional, or you have to register to access sites.
Science Direct = WEDC lots of articles on sustainability in Africa.
6/12 aware of Science Direct)
Focus Group 2: Drama = commentaries on DVD's to find out about the direction.
English = useful to watch adaptations of novels.
Focus Group 3: English = was in Singapore last year and thought it was much better than here. The audio visual section was second to none, media students were able to watch films on DVD and video in quiet rooms or book big screen rooms for groups. Films are a good secondary resource to get the dramatic perspective. This library doesn't have the films of course texts. If they are old films there is no other way to get them, so why not? Last semester used an audio tape of a set book to get the hang of the text.
CMS = Guardian, independent, Times online newspapers, very important after books.
Psychology = for a seminar had to read 3 newspaper articles, and present them in 500 words, with photos, then stand up and present the assignment. Very hard – couldn't do CMS.

Focus Group 3: Psychology = new head of Department this year and discovered that they can joint the Psychological Society. Will use journals if find on MetaLib and they are in stock.

4) How frequently do you use different types of information in assignments?

Prompts:
Which type do you use the most (between Internet, journals, books, notes) and why?
Focus Group 1: Wikipedia and Journals
Depends on coursework and module.
Economics sometimes uses a wide range, other times just lecture notes or journals.
All the group agreed it was determined by what they were doing. They use general web browsing for everything though.
Depends on the marks for a piece of work, 1 student said if there were lots of marks at stake they would order a journal or pay for access online.
How many items are included in your bibliography?
Focus Group 1: Put in what is used. Aero Auto = put reading list at the top of the bibliography even if not used as stupid not to put it in, in case your tutor looks.
Other Aero Auto = "copy and paste from internet and change slightly – say you read the books", as it's not much effort to read books. "Find rated books on Amazon and put them in your bibliography, anything on a similar subject – stick it in!"
Transport Planning student asks for clarification on a Reference list and a Bibliography. Ruth explains difference and says departments do different things.
Aero Auto = not specified books used, and never looked at guidance on referencing. Also no citing in text – just puts at the end of the work he's used the resource. No one in the department gives feedback – more interested in research
Focus Group 2: English = there are marks for the bibliography
Drama = there can be 10, 20, 30 items
MSc IM = 2 pages
AED = 10+
M **Focus Group 3:** Psychology = not know how to reference until this year. Didn't know about including the page numbers, as this was not mentioned in the departmental handbook. Had been losing marks for poor referencing and did not know why.
CMS = magazines and newspapers are harder to reference, has to email tutor for help. Doesn't know how to do it as there isn't any guidance. On LEARN there is only information for books, journals and websites. Needs to be more detail.
Psychology = 5-10, now 20-30. has discovered that if they refer to an experiment, can't just give the book they found it in – has to reference the experiment separately
Chem Eng = 6-7
English = 4-5 in 1st yr. as not know the importance of referencing, no motivation. Will now put in a handful of references as looking for extra marks.
CMS = if not quoted in the text, can't include in the bibliography. Tutors will look at bibliography before assignment. After A level thought her own opinion counted, but has had to learn to quote others, which is frustrating.
English = originality of thought valued, but have to back up ideas.
Psychology = dissertation was on religion and superstition. Only 3 articles found via MetaLib. Was struggling and went to tutor for help, then checked MetaLib again and found a few more articles.
Sc Sport = 30 depends on topic

Do you do any background reading?
Focus Group 3: There might be stuff read that doesn't make it into the essay.
CMS = so much to read – only focus on what's in essay
Psychology = basic drafts, read stuff which might not get in final draft, but all extra knowledge helps.

5) What is the role of Library in helping you find information for assignments?

Prompts:
Which information sources from the Library do you use?
Focus Group 2: Books – computers – group study rooms
Always need a book, and can request if out on loan. Rooms are useful as no rehearsal space in Department – Drama.
Good for group work – often work together.
Focus Group 3: CMS = nothing to hand in if couldn't get to the library. Do all work here and not at home. For the past 3 months has been here from 9-10 every day.
English = only journals and books.
Psychology = work at home, but now in the 3rd year works here every day to read etc. Gets more done in the library than at home.
CMS = distractions here, but feel like have to work here.

6) How important is to make sure you use quality of information in your assignments?

Prompts:

What sources are the best quality for assignments?

Focus Group 1: Some answered yes, some said they are sometimes not specified. 1 student said if a piece of work was 20% of a module, that would govern how much effort they put into it. The word count was also used to indicate how much work was necessary. Effort is based on what the lecturer wants from you. Don't exceed the word count – you will be penalised.

1 student = for high marks they would use MetaLib, but not spend lots of time.

More marks equals more effort.

1 student = sometimes lecturers look at your bibliography, and you get marks if this is thorough, and they would comment on your wider reading. This depends on the lecturer. **Focus Group 2:** Books – reliable. Drama = journals, would spend more time using if knew how. Never quotes form the Internet.

Varies on level of study. AED = 1st year – recognises he will need more information in his final year – not so much emphasis on references.

 Focus Group 3: CMS = books

Chem Eng = you think one thing – lectures another.

Is there a connection between high marks and quality information?

Focus Group 2: MSc Sport thinks so – will look at the marking scheme and do background reading rather than refer to one article.

English = recognises good quality information, if a study is 50 years old would still use, as relevant at the time.

MSc IM = Books and journals gets comments on bibliography

Elec Eng = for coursework 'does what supposed to do' but uses Internet for examples.

Focus Group 2: All aware of marking schemes

Elec Eng = some lecturers just give guidance.

MSc Sport = with a Master's this is vague.

Useful to know, work out 50:50 course work to exams, then decide how much effort to put into assignments and exams.

English = all coursework, so everything depends on the "quality of the essay". There is no guidance, so you have to have a good bibliography.

Focus Group 3: English = was at a Student/Staff committee recently where they discussed marking schemes. At A level A, B, C, D, etc then at University this changes to %, where 60% = 2:1, 70% = 1st. So what is the point of 80% or 90%? Where there is no right or wrong answer it is impossible to get full marks.

Psychology = For A levels you are told what you need to know to get an A, B, C etc. – here there is nothing, someone might get 95%, someone else 68%, no one would know the difference between them. No feedback from tutors, blind marking means no effective comments, can't improve.

CMS = end of 3rd yr still only basic understanding of what Lecturers want. Some Lecturers give more help than others – knows of one who will check work paragraph by paragraph before it's handed it.

Psychology = some tutors will give lots of help – others are very different.

English = has a friend at Southampton University who put in a draft dissertation for marking – very different here.

Psychology = knows someone in Politics who had the first 4,000 words of their dissertation checked. Needs to be the same for all departments.

General feeling of not knowing marking schemes.

Focus Group 3: English = books and journals not internet sites.

Psychology = journals and recent experiments, has to be last 20 years.

Chem Eng = no essays, all calculations but still use library.

7) How did you learn about finding the right information for assignments?

Prompts:

How have learned about how to find information for assignments?

Focus group 1: Trial and error – all with laughter. When asked they had seen advertising for library courses, but had never attended. Some had friends who had received our tuition and passed it on.

Focus Group 2: Drama = Library staff at start of course on finding books and journals – (Not referenced before coming to University)

Library should do workshops

English = had session on using the library, but found it obvious

MSc Sports = had a session on using the library – which made sense at the time – but has found using MetaLib a problem as it is not user friendly. (Seconded by English) MSc IM – attended a course by library staff on MetaLib and finding books etc. Knew nothing prior, spent 2 months learning how to search for Information on MetaLib as the design is not user friendly. Difficult to use as Chinese.

Focus Group 3: CMS = hit and miss, clicking by accident, or trial and error.

English = library lectures at the start of dissertation, and a session in the 1st year – but this wasn't very through, just a mention of the catalogue whereas this year it was all about refining searches.

All want more training.

CMS = thinks they should have one session each year. Had a library session in the 1st yr, but had no idea at that point what would be needing to use and how important it would be.

Psychology = need another session each year. Wished had better knowledge of MetaLib and journals earlier.
Focus Group 2: Did you learn before coming to University?
Focus Group 3: No
English = spoon fed before University – depending on school
College – advice not extensive
Focus Group 3: At school
Can't remember – references not a big part of things then, just used 2 or 3. The ability to argue was useful then.
Chem Eng = 3 yrs ago learnt about references as part of a history course.
Psychology = referencing is different here to at school.
English = different way of dealing with the text at school to here.

Does your lecturer tell you where to find information for assignments?
Focus Group 1: The library plays a role in finding information. Aero Auto the library facilitates finding information, would not know what to do without us, very important role, especially in the way we catalogue the books – helps find things fast.
We buy the right stock, the variety with magazine etc, much better than studying at home. We have books, journals, magazines, audio etc. Greater access here.
The Library is the place to go to help find stuff – especially difficult material.
Focus Group 2: MSc Sport = expected to use own initiative. Will ask tutors for help – some willing and some not.
Would you like to know more about how to find information for assignments?

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8) When you write assignments, what is your understanding of the relevance of plagiarism?

Prompts:
What does plagiarism mean?
Focus Group 1: Everyone knows what plagiarism is. Definition was "using information in a report and not citing it"
Passing off others work as your own.
Transport Planning student offers using more that 5% in referencing.
10/12 had heard lecturers talk about plagiarism.
Focus Group 2: Using someone else's ideas as your own with out referencing.
Don't do it – it's bad – quote properly.
AED = academic misconduct a hot topic in department – 5 students kicked out for cheating in exams. Electronic submission to catch people.
Drama – students get zero for assessments that have been plagiarised. Details in handbook.
Focus Group 3: CMS = biggest threat – scares the hell out of me, just by accident you could commit plagiarism and get thrown off your course.
English = in the 1st yr got done for plagiarism. Had an extension and took work away over the vacation, and without the original source material couldn't reference properly, submitted work by email. The plagiarism was discovered, all essays were flagged up, and similar mistakes were found in all of them. The department reviewed her work and accused her of plagiarism. She had to sign an official paper to say it had happened in error, and spent all Easter holidays trying to clear her name.

How have you learned about plagiarism?
Focus Group 1: Plagiarism always an issue on literature and opinionated subjects – difficult to state your own opinion and others.
Increased use of internet = "Everything is out there" = got to reference.
Civil Engineers had a module on communication and got talks about plagiarism and sources of information at the start of their course.
So did English and Drama.
Focus Group 2: MSc Sport = it's on the module outline and at this level there is an expectation that they won't plagarise.
Focus Group 3: Module handout referred to plagiarism – with big threats – but did not tell you how to reference, just told you it had to be done.
Psychology = no chance to reference properly. Not know how to do it at the start of the course and penalised for it.
Chem Eng = told in 1st yr. Not pay much attention, but will take it more seriously now after listening to these 3rd yrs.

Do your lecturers talk about plagiarism?
Focus Group 1: They say 'Don't do it'!
1 student = if you hand in a report of 1,000 words and no bibliography the lecturers will say is that all your own work? You're not that smart. Need to read around, be careful not to copy and paste.
MH Asked: Did you all know about this before Uni? Yes – told in secondary school and college.
Aero Auto = all the regulations are there – if you look. Not something the department really talks to them about.
Not plagiarism if you reference and cite.
Varies in departments.
Aero Auto – personal view and analysis counts for more.
Engineering = laziness – stealing ideas, one lecturer has assignments electronically and puts them through a plagiarism check.

Aero Auto = talked about the difference between analysing and understanding as one's own work, and referencing others.

MH asked: Are they trying to encourage you to look at information? Manually find and process critically? Encouraged to read around and discuss.

Focus Group 2: AED = yes very hot topic with lecturers

Chinese student s had a pre-session lecture in Chinese all about it, as they have a different attitude.

Focus Group 3: English = directly quoting or using sections of text and passing off as own. Paraphrasing. How do you reference when you are regurgitating? How do you avoid plagiarism?

Can you plagiarise yourself? Knows of a second yr students who used their own work form the 1st yr again and got caught.

CMS = literature review: list of people and what they wrote, hard to get evidence and use your own words.

Psychology = not know had to include page nos is this plagiarism?

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9) How important is it to be effective at citing resources in assignments?

Prompts:

Are you aware of the aware of citation style preferred on your course?

Focus Group 2: Yes = English + Drama = chose own style and stick to it, need to be very exact. Not get it at the beginning of their courses, lose marks when make mistakes.

AED = 1st assignment told to reference properly. Look at a construction journal and copy that.

Link citation and plagiarism – have to use quote marks.

MSc Sport = read something and it might reflect your own thoughts – very difficult to separate your thoughts from others, but you have to be careful. Think about paraphrasing and not pass other people's work off as your own.

Focus Group 3: Harvard.

English = not know.

Psychology = Harvard. **Do you use quotations to acknowledge sources in your assignment?**

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10) Other comments on information for assignments

Prompts:

Have you any other thoughts or comments on your use of information in assignments?

Focus Group 3: Chem Eng = would like more books

Psychology = wants more access to e-journals. ILL so long getting from other Universities can be 4-6 weeks and in a 14 week semester this doesn't work.

English = if there are 14 books on a subject in the library and 20 in the class – there are not enough to go round! First person to get to the library gets them all. Not returning books in time makes this worse.

CMS = seen people sprint to the library after lectures.

Psychology = 8 copies of key texts for 100 people. Can place reservation, but only get it for a week and during dissertation not enough time for additional reading.

English = has kept books does not care about fines. Can't borrow anything else, but is using friends cards.

Psychology = when doing dissertation although entitled to more books didn't happen automatically – had to complain.

CMS = reading for 5 topic areas. Couldn't take out enough books at one time, has to timetable use of books, hides then on desk in library – can't have anyone else use them.

Very competitive using library.

Short loan – really frustrating when people have SL books reserved and don't come and get them and you want them – especially at the weekend.