

Western Sydney University

Understanding the digital literacy needs of students

“The survey enabled us to understand that it is a mistake to assume all students are confident in their digital literacy skills. Training and resources in the digital learning space are both needed and desired by students of all ages and enrolled in all kinds of disciplines.”

Pat Loria, Associate Librarian Client Services

Rationale

Western Sydney University (WSU) library wanted to use the survey to help them understand the digital literacy needs of WSU students and to assess their overall digital ‘health’ relative to the national population of students taking the survey.

Implementation

The survey was launched on 3 April 2018 and the link was promoted to all students via student email, digital signage, and web and LMS news items. The insights community, email support service and webinars all helped the WSU team see how others were using the survey. Later in the process, the reporting templates were extremely useful in making sense of the data and communicating the results to other units within the institution.

Key findings and impact

While 83% of students rated their digital experience at WSU as good or above, and 73% rated the quality of digital teaching and learning as good or above, some gaps were discovered. For example, 26% of respondents mentioned that they would like more training and resources in digital skills development. In line with other universities, students were as likely to be ‘neutral’ as to ‘agree’ with the statements that the university helps to keep them safe online, and that the university prepares them for the digital workplace.

While the sample size was small (around 2% of the student population), the results were seen as a useful indication. They were used as part of a business case to initiate a digital literacies project in the library, developing a series of standalone and interactive online tutorials on key topics such as staying safe online and workplace digital skills. The tutorials are designed to be hosted in WSU’s learning management system for embedding into teaching units, but they are also publicly available via the Library website (see https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/studysmart/home/digital_literacy).

Participating in the survey and analysing and communicating the results represented a considerable workload, and future participation in the survey has been handed to another area in the university for consideration.

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