



Changing ALL identities in a disruptive world

Key Words

academic literacies; profession; legitimacy

Abstract

The imperative of advocating for our ALL profession has become more critical since Professor Marcia Devlin's call to arms in her keynote address at the AALL 2011 conference (Devlin 2011). We are under growing pressure to justify our relevance amid budgetary constraints and an expanding, diversifying and increasingly non-traditional student body. Restructuring is already reducing the number and level of ALL staff at some universities. Further, the introduction and uptake of online commercial tutor services and the use of student mentors threaten to replace rather than complement what we do. This is not a new challenge for the field and history has shown that providing a high quality service is not enough to ensure the survival of an ALL unit. As far back as 2002, Janis Webb and Patricia McLean's review of the profession highlighted the changing profile of students, increasing pressures on advisers to justify their often resource intensive service, and the need to change practice to remain relevant. As a profession, we responded by evaluating the efficiency as well as efficacy of our service in supporting student retention and success. However, anecdotal evidence strongly suggest that being a high quality, value for money service is simply not enough to ensure survival. Indeed, it has not saved many of our peers from restructures that have fundamentally changed the nature of their ALL unit. Arguably, then our professional identity is being redefined by others. Paradoxically even as the profession is in danger of being redefined by forces outside the field, the need for our expertise in academic literacies is more vital than ever. In this environment we need to counter the notion that academic literacies are a universal set of skills that can be taught in a series of easy-to-follow fixed steps independent of a students' identity, purposes and discipline (Case 2015; Kamler & Thomson 2008; Johns 2002). Instead, the profession needs to be at the forefront in shaping debates on how academic literacies are perceived and taught. How as a profession do we cut through to effectively communicate and champion our work? Our answer is that it is vital that the university community sees us as experts providing an indispensable service to the university's success that cannot be easily replaced by commercial competitors or cheaper alternative models. We need to do more than show that we provide a quality service. What's needed is a deliberate, institutional-wide strategy to promote our activities, improve our visibility and increase our credibility. This paper reports on our multi-faceted strategy at the Australian National University to establish as legitimacy as experts in our field that are central to solving university wide challenges: we detail our approach, successes and multiple frustrations to gain traction.

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