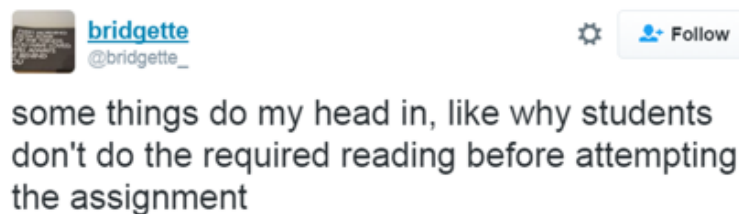# Interactive Reading Lists

By Mark Hangartner

In 2015/2016 a large project for University of Auckland Libraries and Learning Services has been to introduce an automated course readings list system (Talis-Aspire). This paper looks at some of the advantages of this system, and the challenges of reading lists in general.

Two views exist about reading lists in the academic literature. One view sees reading lists as a necessary and useful tool which was more a feature of the pre-digital age when the provision of reading material was hampered by long waiting times when ordering books, but should be jettisoned where possible to allow more freedom to explore ideas collaboratively (Davis, 2012). A contrasting view which I believe is more common is that guided reading is a vital part of learning, and reading lists should serve as a stepping stone for students becoming information literate (Chad, 2012).

In any case creating and maintaining reading lists has become a big task for teaching staff and is sometimes seen as a burden. At the start of a course students are typically given lists of material for required and recommended reading normally arranged week by week.

bridgette @bridgette_ ⚙ ➕ Follow

some things do my head in, like why students don't do the required reading before attempting the assignment

Lames @JamesToRemember ⚙ ➕ Follo

I thought uni would be staying out late and drinking lots, but all I do is sleep and cry over my huge reading lists

Reactions to reading lists from staff and students on Twitter exemplified two problems. From the staff member frustration that students don't do the reading and from the student despair at long reading lists.

Interactive reading lists offer features to enhance the experience both of staff and students.

- A bookmarking tool to make it easy to add in books from the library catalogue, online articles, websites, online videos.
- Streamlined processes to make book purchasing and digitisation requests easier both for academic and library staff.
- Interactive tools to make it easier for students to record their reading intentions and make personal notes.
- A streamlined process for gathering data for copyright compliance.
- An attractive online reading list which integrates easily into a learning management system.

These features are not unique to Talis Aspire, other systems which advertise similar features are: BLUEcloud, Curriculum Builder, eReserve Plus, Ex Libris Leganto, rebus:list.

The University of Cambridge (Jones, 2009) investigated the introduction of a standard system for reading lists. A survey of their students identified reading lists as "the dominant source of information about books, journals and other course materials." The report goes on to state that "reading lists are a natural point of coordination between pedagogic support bodies, and are also a major conduit for communication between these bodies and the Faculties and Departments."

Bevan (2012) agrees that technology has a role to play in reading lists, but warns that unless teachers and librarians put students at the centre of this process then it is likely to remain "typically frustrating and sometimes very stressful."

At the end of the short presentation at the ANZTLA conference participants contributed thoughts and questions using post-it notes (where a similar idea was expressed I have used a ✔).

Reading lists - thoughts on post-it notes.

Positive		Negative	
Student	Staff	Student	Staff
Students value Reading Lists in unit outlines from their lecturers. It is only when the lecturer highlights a resource in the list that they	Reading Lists useful for communicating the resources which the Library needs to support the course and the students. Helps with	Reading Lists only include the prescribed text, especially if it is the	Having to provide a Reading List to the library in advance, and having to update the list.

notice it and search for it.	Acquisitions and building the collection. ✔	lecturer's book.	
Reading Lists are authoritative ✔	Shows that the academic is up-to-date with the literature in this area.	Way out of date	Lecturers don't want to check for new resources or update lists. ✔
Saves time ✔	Presents material at the appropriate level for all students.		Students need to do their own research and evaluation
They contain the main readings needed to pass the assessment.	Covers assignment topics.	Too much means we won't read them.	Students don't read what is on the list.
Reading Lists work best with headings and categories rather than just a long list.	Challenges students with new concepts.	Unchecked URLs are often dead links	Students won't learn research skills. ✔
Relevant	Reading Lists focus students research	Too many readings	Spoonfeeding ✔ ✔
Reading Lists have material students can actually access ✔ ✔ ✔	RL provide a wide range of scholarship of a given subject.	Reading Lists include works not available to the student. ✔	Students only read what is on the list.
A good starting place ✔	Reading Lists can focus on the most recent materials	When staff don't update.	Too prescriptive.
Provides accurate citations in the correct style ✔ ✔		Errors in citations.	

Brevity works, short readings and short lists. ✔	Reading Lists must define what is required.	Not enough readings	
Students want to know what is the minimum they need to read to still get by.	Archiving Reading Lists essential for applying prior learning		
Lots of readings			
Students can find answers simply and quickly			

Questions
Does the Reading List present a realistic level of content for the average reader – i.e. do not create the impression students must read all the works on the list.
Can providing some information but not the actual link encourage skills?
How much should the library staff help with compiling Reading Lists?
What are the copyright issues?
Do faculty and students get distanced from the Library which is an intermediary and essential part of the process?
Can we flip the model and get students to contribute to Reading Lists? This would create engagement and skills.
What has been the reaction of faculty to Talis?

Conclusions

As software solutions for reading lists mature some positive trends are emerging. Requests for purchase can be initiated easily by academic staff, lists are updated and made available instantly, mechanisms for checking copyright compliance are integrated into the system.

Reading lists embrace the online environment, making material available as often as possible online and also encouraging students to interact with the list giving feedback on their reading and taking personal notes.

A balance between challenging students with difficult material and spoon-feeding must be maintained. Student feedback can be valuable for maintaining this balance. Opportunities for students to propose readings and develop critical skills should be encouraged.

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