upGrade your study skills

by Amanda Crossley

Snapshot

This article, by Amanda Crossley, describes the Western Australian Santa Maria College library's highly success ecourse program, upGrade. This online initiative to support learning, research and skill development, in a range of areas, was the 2022 recipient of the SLAV Innovators Award.

From little things big things grow. No, this isn't an article on superannuation, it's about the growth of a small Study and Information Literacy Skills program that has taken off and is now a highly utilised elearning platform within our college.

Rewind. In an effort to establish our new Year 7s with sound study habits and a solid foundation in information literacy, we approached our college leaders to see if our teacher librarians could teach our Year 7s study skills during their class time. Fortunately, our college supported this idea, and we were given four lessons to teach our Year 7s organisational skills, memorisation techniques, note taking and referencing. We decided that we would complement these face-to-face lessons with several ecourses, giving students a chance to learn at their own pace and revisit the material at the point of need.

And so, our upGrade platform was born! upGrade started out as an eplatform on study and information literacy skills, but soon grew into a vibrant elearning hub for our College. Our Year 7s loved the elearning format where they could access the material at any time. What really got our students engaged was upGrade's gamification elements. On completion of each upGrade ecourse, students earned coins. Like credit card points, they could buy items with their coins. We offered a range of incentives, but students couldn't go past spending their well-earned coins on our canteen vouchers!

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The popularity of the upGrade program caught the attention of our technology staff, and the platform then grew to include 'How To' lessons on using College technology – from how to print student assignments to how to use video editing tools. Not only could our Year 7s access these 'How To' ecourses, but new students were directed to the platform, utilising the 'How Tos' in their own time and pace.

Teachers also began to recognise the potential of upGrade. We started to receive ecourse requests. This included courses ranging from essay structure and paragraphing to spreadsheet skills. Our teaching staff began requesting lessons and directing students to the platform to brush up on their skills. Much to our excitement, some staff have even made some of our ecourses compulsory, such as our plagiarism courses, so that students were required to complete these courses prior to starting their assignments.

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It has also proved to be a pleasure collaborating with teaching staff on creating many of our ecourses. Our teachers provided valuable insights on specific skills that students needed to develop. Collaborating with our teachers to identify areas where students needed more support helped us with our course design.

The program has been very popular with students, with a student survey revealing that they thought upGrade helped them develop more effective study habits and information literacy skills. The success of this program highlights the importance of providing students with opportunities to develop their skills at their own pace and at the point of need.

upGrade is now well and truly part of the teaching and learning program at the College. The whole student population has access to upGrade and students know they can access the platform at any time and brush up on their skills needed for their learning. There is always the big bonus that students can earn coins for their efforts and spend them too! The incentives proved to be a powerful motivator for students to participate in the program and engage with the lessons.

The upGrade program has quickly grown from ecourses in Study Skills: to wellness, leadership and many more. We have utilised many interactive learning tools in each lesson, including videos, quizzes and games. This has made the learning experience more engaging. The look and feel of the platform is designed to appeal to our students. Even some of the digital artwork has been provided by students who won our digital design competition.

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We have found that our online program has been a powerful tool to help develop the study habits and the information literacy skills that students need in the digital age. By collaborating with teachers, using interactive learning tools, and offering incentives - we have created a program that is engaging, popular with students and has become part of the teaching and learning fabric of the school. It has been a whirlwind of a journey plunging ourselves into the world of ecourses and we're looking forward to seeing what the next chapter brings.

Amanda Crossley is Head of Library at Santa Maria College, in WA. Amanda is passionate about online learning, information literacy and developing the library's role in an online environment. Amanda and her team are proud to be the 2022 recipients of SLAV'S Innovators Award for their elearning platform, upGrade. Amanda is keen to see where the upGrade journey takes the Library team and enjoys being part of a vibrant school library community.