

Creating library vibes for students studying remotely

7 March 2022

Study sessions in the university library are, for many, a fundamental part of the student experience. Whether that's nostalgic memories of long nights surrounded by open books or what's in your calendar for the rest of this week, they are familiar experiences shared by many a hard-working student.

But what is it about the experience that makes study sessions in the library so integral to learning? And what happens if you take the physical library out of the equation?

It's a scenario remote learners have worked with for years but more recently campus-based students have also had their access to libraries reduced throughout various lockdowns and isolations.

Creating library vibes

A simplistic view might be to just study at home instead and take advantage of the many digital resources now available online, but a team at the University of Strathclyde recognised the shortcomings of this approach, and decided instead to find a better way to recreate those library vibes for students unable to visit in person.

Lynsey Sampson, senior library assistant, says:



“There’s so much more to studying in a library than just sitting at a desk with your laptop. You might be studying alone, but you inadvertently do it as part of a community of others doing exactly the same thing. That shared space makes people feel connected and less isolated.

“As the lockdowns went on, the importance of that shared space became clearer and clearer. Studying at home, alone, was not a substitute for the experience students get from coming into the library, where they are surrounded by their peers and all kinds of in-person support no more than a flight of stairs away.”

Inspired by an initiative she had heard about at another university library, Lynsey, together with other colleagues, began developing the idea of virtual study sessions as an addition to the existing programme of online sessions branded ‘library lounge’.

The library lounge virtual study session first launched in April 2021 with the goal of providing academic, social, and wellbeing support for students who were preparing for assessments in May. The initial popularity encouraged Lynsey and Kirsten, with the support of colleagues in the research and learning support team, to keep going and they have been running it ever since – now running twice a week instead of once to cater for overseas students in different time zones.

What makes a successful virtual study session?

Open to all students, the two-hour sessions are hosted on Zoom, with two of the library team acting as facilitators. They start with a five-minute welcome and general discussion where attendees are encouraged to share something about what they want to achieve from the session such as coursework, PhD research, or studying for exams.

At this point everyone goes on mute, turns off their cameras and gets on with their work while a slide is displayed of the library to provide that feeling of being ‘virtually there’. This same slide directs participants to the chat panel if they need any support from the facilitators.

Halfway through the session there is a break and informal chat for ten minutes, before everyone returns to their study. The last five minutes are then saved for everyone to come back together and summarise how the session has gone and what they have achieved.

What's been the response from students

By the end of 2021, the virtual study sessions had already had more than 500 attendees and an impressive 100% satisfaction rate.

Faculty librarian Kirsten Watson added:



"The initiative has encouraged feelings of 'belonging' to the Strathclyde community, with students feeling motivated to achieve the work they have set themselves during the two hours as well as an opportunity to meet other students.

"A number of post-graduate students who first met through the virtual study sessions now regularly meet and collaborate on work together which is a very rewarding and tangible impact of our work."

Building on the success so far

Further recognition came when the team won an award for the initiative in the university's celebrating innovation and resilience at Strathclyde competition. This helped to secure additional funding to promote the sessions more widely across the university as well as to other academic libraries at conferences such as Digifest. In time the team plan to create a toolkit to provide an open access resource for the wider community.

Lynsey concludes:

"There is still a very clear demand for these sessions. With extra resource being provided by colleagues and the additional funds from winning the award, we are hoping to realise our aspirations to grow them more and make them accessible to a greater number of students."

Lynsey and Kirsten will be speaking in detail about the **virtual study sessions on day two of Digifest 2022** [<https://www.jisc.ac.uk/events/digifest-08-mar-2022/programme>]. Their session will include video testimonials from attendees on why these sessions are integral to their independent studying.

For more inspiration, **take a look at other member stories** [[/membership/stories](#)] to find out how they are using technology to transform the **student experience** [[/learner-support](#)].