INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of academic context on students’ approaches to and perceptions of learning, with a particular emphasis on information behaviour.

Statement of the Problem
- My research will include consideration of the three main study approaches often cited in the literature: deep, surface and strategic.
- My research will focus on the people involved in information behaviour, as opposed to information systems.
- I am particularly interested in students’ perceptions of what constitutes relevant information.
- Given the wealth of information now available via the Web, I also wish to determine the extent to which students experience information overload.

Research Question
To what extent are student approaches to and perceptions of learning affected by the academic context in which learning takes place?

Sub-questions:
- In what ways do students approach learning? (i.e. deep, surface or strategic)
- To what extent does learning in an academic context affect students’ approach to learning?
- To what extent does students’ approach to learning affect their perception of learning?
- To what extent does students’ approach to learning affect their information behaviour?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The notion of study approaches was first described by Marton (1976), and has since received a great deal of attention in the literature. One particular strand of research has looked at the potential impact of academic context. A key study is that by Ramsden and Entwistle (1981 : 370), which sought to discover “...the extent to which approaches to studying can be explained in terms of students’ perceptions of their courses”. It was concluded that a deep approach to learning may be facilitated through “greater freedom in learning” and “avoidance of overloading” (1981 : 381). Conversely, those students who feel constrained by their environment may tend towards a surface approach.

More recent research has begun to explore the relationship between study approaches and information behaviour. Ford et al. (2003), for example, examined the relationship between Web search strategies and approaches to studying using a quantitative methodology. It was concluded that “study approaches might affect choice of search strategy in Web-based information seeking” (2003 : 486-7). The authors also acknowledged that further (qualitative) investigation of searchers’ intentions, perceptions and motivations is required.

References:

METHODOLOGY

Quantitative inventory
The quantitative inventory takes the form of an online questionnaire, which will assess the extent to which students’ study approaches may be classified as deep, surface or strategic.

Qualitative interviews
Participants will be asked to take part in a one-to-one interview with the researcher, during which they will be asked a series of open-ended questions about their course perceptions and information behaviour.

Participants will include students on masters level programmes at the Department of Information Studies.