

Organizing Instructional Materials using SharePoint and Blackboard

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Organizing and sharing instruction materials developed by librarians who serve multiple academic programs is a challenge whether the academic programs are distributed across a single campus, or across campuses and partner-schools worldwide. At City University of Seattle, a private not-for-profit university whose library is located in Bellevue, Washington, librarians work collaboratively with faculty as members of course development teams to create instruction materials that support programs offered in the Americas, Europe, Asia, and Oceania. As CityU transitioned from a traditional face-to-face library instruction program to a solely online information literacy instruction program that is fully integrated across the university's curriculum, methods for organizing and sharing instruction materials also evolved. Having experienced the challenges and frustrations of trying to locate the most current version of documents housed across shared drives with multiple individualized folder hierarchies or within individual faculty members' email inboxes, a small group of CityU academic program-liaison librarians each invested 20 to 25 hours over four to six weeks to establish standards for organizing the instruction materials created by faculty and librarians. The library's goal is to work with tools that are familiar to faculty in order to develop a simple, easy to access system for organizing, sharing, updating, and tracking the use of information literacy instruction materials.

City University of Seattle Library uses two main software programs to create and manage instruction materials: Microsoft SharePoint 2007 and Blackboard 9.0. Both SharePoint and Blackboard share widespread adoption by faculty. The use of Blackboard is a university requirement for all courses in all delivery modes, and SharePoint was chosen by CityU's IT department in 2007 for university-wide use for CityU's faculty and staff intranet. Librarians use SharePoint within the library department to prioritize, develop, and track instruction materials for specific courses and programs of study. SharePoint also allows librarians to collaborate with each other on the development of instruction materials and to organize and store all related documents. Blackboard 9.0 is the primary environment in which librarians and faculty customize and disseminate the librarians' information literacy materials, in the form of reusable learning modules, into the online course environment.

Adopting SharePoint

Building an efficient taxonomy for all of the library's internal documents, including instruction materials, took considerable time and effort by the library staff. We migrated content from a shared network drive, which had grown increasingly jumbled and redundant, to SharePoint

when CityU adopted this software for its faculty and staff intranet. SharePoint had immediate advantages over shared drives, such as version history and centralized document editing by multiple contributors to keep all documents current and accessible to everyone. One example document would be the spreadsheet that librarians use to track which CityU courses have up-to-date course resource documents and which courses need edits for a future quarter: Since each liaison librarian is responsible for roughly one-third of the classes offered at CityU this spreadsheet is constantly being edited by three people, yet it always reflects a current snapshot of course resource development. Version history for this document allows users to view when the document was updated and by whom.

Along with these advantages, however, came decisions about how the documents should be organized and maintained. We held several staff meetings to identify all document types in our collection and to develop a folder hierarchy for them. Next we reviewed the types of metadata fields in SharePoint to determine the most relevant fields for our use patterns. We concluded that each "document library" (or high-level folder) should display at least the following metadata: Document type, document name, name of person who has the document checked-out for editing, who last modified the document, and the date of the last edits made. These descriptors gave us much more information about our documents than we previously had using the shared drive and allowed us to keep track of one single copy of important documents -- each with a detailed version history provided by SharePoint.

Next we developed naming conventions for all documents to be stored in SharePoint. Like adding metadata, setting naming conventions standardized and streamlined our collection by providing more useful information at the folder-level display. Some of our naming conventions were that file names should be short and meaningful (e.g., Library Orientation Outline, or Information Literacy Self Assessment), that file names should match document titles, and that dates should be used in titles only in designated cases such as meeting minutes or financial spreadsheets. Overall, the goal of our meetings was to decide how to best use SharePoint to keep our documents organized in a straightforward hierarchy, to establish regular reviews of SharePoint by each content-area specialist, and to weed or archive all extraneous documents that had accumulated. What remained was a collection of easily-found, up-to-date documents that freed librarians to focus on other things -- namely, creating instruction materials!

SharePoint now houses all document-based instruction materials created by librarians, including course resource

documents they have built along with the faculty members in charge of developing each course (known as course managers), learning activities organized by school or program which may be integrated into classes at the appropriate time, information literacy curriculum maps that indicate the key courses within an academic program in which information literacy instruction is integrated, and the related procedures librarians follow when creating instruction materials. There is also a historic folder in each school's SharePoint folder to encourage only the most relevant content to be viewable at the top level of each section (see Figure 1). Librarians and course managers can now contribute, individually or in teams, instruction materials to be organized and stored in SharePoint for future re-use or customization in the classroom.

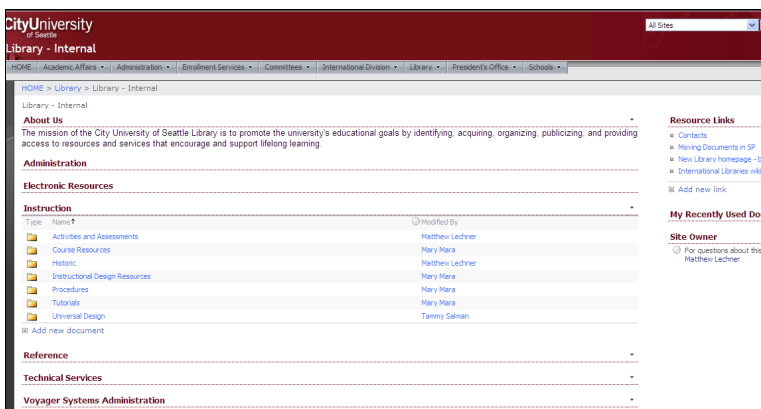


Figure 1: SharePoint folders

Adopting Blackboard Learning Units

While SharePoint is an effective tool for organizing document-based materials, CityU librarians also develop other forms of online learning objects, including reusable modules created as Blackboard learning units. A Blackboard learning unit is a collection of pages populated with content that allows students either to follow a prescribed, self-paced sequence through instruction material or to navigate to specific pages through the learning unit's table of contents (more info on learning units can be found here, http://library.blackboard.com/ref/a157ea6f-5acf-46fb-92c4-0bf85f24f1ac/learning_units.htm). Every course section at CityU (regardless of whether it is offered in a face-to-face, mixed-mode, or online format) has a dedicated Blackboard shell that is developed from a master shell. Faculty are required to use their Blackboard course shell which is pre-populated with a range of required and recommended instruction materials they may adopt.

As course managers at CityU began developing Blackboard learning units to organize instruction materials in master course shells, librarians also adopted Blackboard learning units as the method for delivering instruction and support to students. Librarians began to brainstorm with faculty to identify what students need to know and to be able to do. Based on these ongoing discussions, librarians

draft learning activities that will best support student learning for identified needs. Faculty then review these activities and work collaboratively with librarians to decide where they will be located in specific course shells. Sometimes a librarian will be scheduled to help present the instruction in a particular course. Librarians have always been allowed access to Blackboard master shells, so they are able to add these and other information literacy instruction materials when and where they are needed.

Learning units developed by librarians are now housed in and shared with faculty through a Blackboard shell. Faculty are given read-access to the library's Blackboard shell and may request to have any learning unit they like modified as needed and added to their Blackboard course shell. As with SharePoint, this centralized learning unit repository is organized with a folder hierarchy for general as well as school- and program-specific instruction material. With three librarians supporting over 25 programs, it is critical that we develop learning units (which may contain links to such items as Camtasia-created videos, web pages, text instructions, and/or Blackboard assessments such as quizzes or short-answer tests) that are easily reusable and customizable to specific assignments. From a single repository, learning units can be organized, repurposed, and copied into courses.

As with naming conventions established for SharePoint, learning unit titles are short and meaningful (e.g., Researching Fair Labor Practices, or International Literacy Research). Useful information at the top level includes the learning objectives of each module and the Blackboard master course shells into which it has been copied (see Figure 2). Display of the learning objectives facilitates faculty selection of the learning units they wish to have customized for inclusion in their program and courses. Display and tracking of the courses into which learning units are copied is useful when resources and/or their URLs need to be modified and also allows for easy collection of statistics for CityU's integrated information literacy instruction program. This information helps reduce the level of duplicate instruction provided to students.

The time librarians initially invested to design a system for organizing, sharing, and tracking instruction materials using SharePoint and Blackboard has simplified and streamlined the process of developing, sharing, assessing, and updating instruction materials in CityU's integrated IL program. The organization of library documents in SharePoint and Blackboard has remained remarkably consistent over time, indicating that the decisions made by library staff in 2007 led to stable and effective repositories. Our department was one of the first to migrate to SharePoint at CityU and the library's success using SharePoint served as a model for faculty on how to leverage SharePoint's version history and organizing features to manage collaborative curriculum de-

(Organizing Instruction...Continued on page 10)

(Organizing Instruction...Continued from page 9)

velopment. Library staff later visited other departments at CityU to advise on best practices in SharePoint, such as defining clear document hierarchies and naming conventions. At the same time, librarians noticed the trend towards designing instruction materials within Blackboard learning units, which are more widely adopted and used by faculty than previous document-based instruction materials. This give-and-take between the library and both faculty and staff has encouraged the effective use of two widely-used software programs to create customizable and scalable instruction materials within a centralized curriculum.

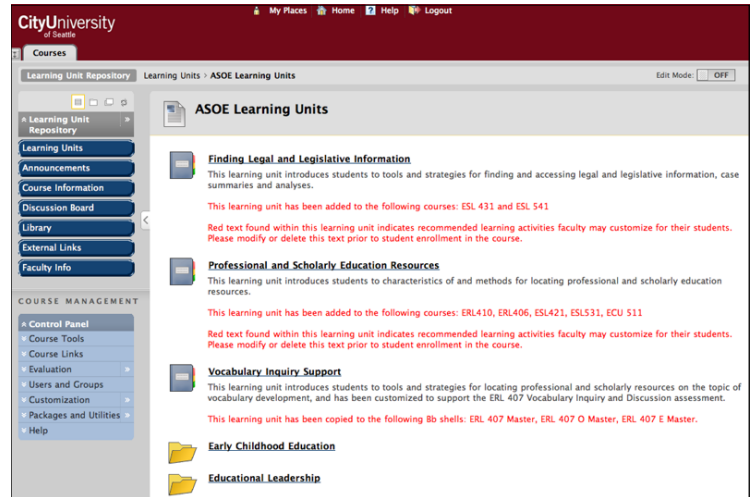


Figure 2: Snapshot of Blackboard Repository

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Bordignon and Klages said they choose their topics with their audience in mind, sometimes highlighting new technologies or library resources and services, other times troubleshooting or addressing questions that require more in-depth explanation. They continually assess their “branded-type product” and said SPARK has become popular with faculty because of its accessibility, applicability, as well as their own aggressiveness in promoting the service. While outlining challenges such as maintenance and workload, Bordignon said SPARK was worth the effort because they’ve learned that while serving the faculty, they are ultimately serving the students as well.

Ashlynn Wicke from University of Houston – Clear Lake began her highly valuable interactive session, “Rethinking the Instruction Session Handout,” by noting that handouts can serve many purposes: an outline for instructors, a place for students to take notes, a way to make instruction less passive for students, part of the historical record of a library, and a reference for students after the session. Wicke asked LOEX attendees to discuss what they liked to see on handouts and to critique a “before” and “after” handout from her library. General principles were discussed, such as 1) avoiding a “wall of text”; 2) using headings, bullet points,

and graphics appropriately; 3) making sure the purpose of the handout is readily apparent; 4) leaving room for notes; and 5) always clearly listing learning outcomes and the librarian’s contact information.

Wicke also pointed out a few more useful elements for handouts. One of the best ideas was to replace the boring list of relevant databases with a comparison table that lists databases in the leftmost column and database features as column headers. Cells in the table could be checked off by the librarian when she prepares the handout, or students could figure out which databases have which features as an in-class activity. Handouts could also feature screenshots of database or catalog searches, ice-breaker activities (e.g., library trivia), flow charts, etc. Wicke noted that sometimes librarians try to cram too much onto one handout and suggested that they prioritize by deciding on the top three things they want students to remember and reflecting that in the handout.

For more information about the conference, and the PowerPoints and handouts for many of the sessions, including from all the sessions listed in this article, visit the website at <http://www.loexconference.org/2011/program/sessions.html>

(Eye for Design...Continued from page 3)

One word of warning: everything in moderation! Use these techniques in moderation to avoid watering-down effectiveness. Remember, if you try to make everything stand out, *nothing* will. When in doubt, a quick tip for evaluating

the visual hierarchy of your design is to squint at the design. If you can still make out the important content, you’re on the right track.