LINKING THROUGH LIBGUIDES: COLLABORATING WITH FACULTY THROUGH AN ADAPTABLE TEACHING AND MARKETING TOOL

KIMBEL MAY AND ANNA LEYBA DELGADO

INTRODUCTION

Librarians at St. Philip's College (SPC) began creating LibGuides as online research guides in the Spring of 2009, and students and instructors quickly began utilizing them. The librarians realized the value of LibGuides not only as stand-alone online research guides, but also as teaching tools for interactive use in the classroom and as marketing tools to promote greater collaboration between the library and academic departments that benefit from information literacy instruction. Our LibGuides have been successful with a variety of academic departments, including one that had never sought information literacy instruction from the library before.

COLLEGE BACKGROUND

St. Philip's College is one of five two-year institutions that make up the Alamo Colleges in San Antonio, Texas. SPC graduates a high number of at-risk students: in the Fall of 2008, 10,337 students registered at St. Philip's College, and of those, 31 percent were academically challenged, 51 percent were financially challenged, and 29 percent were first-time in college students (Salahuddin, 2008). Ninety-five percent of the first-time in college students required remediation (Alamo Colleges, 2009).

As observed by the SPC librarians, many of our students have had no previous experience in doing research prior to college enrollment. Librarians have also observed frustration among faculty with their students' lack of research experience.

May (Reference Librarian) and
Delgado (Serials Librarian)
St. Philip's College [San Antonio, TX]

Currently, incoming students are not required to take a course in information literacy or research skills; faculty members are constantly encouraged by librarians to bring their classes to the library for instruction, but not all choose to do so. In this challenging environment, librarians at SPC are always looking for methods to enhance student learning and improve the manner in which students go about the research process. Librarians began creating LibGuides to help meet the challenge.

LIBGUIDES AS RESEARCH GUIDES

SPC librarians created their first LibGuides as online research guides, concentrating on the various academic programs in their assigned liaison areas. This resulted in a number of LibGuides on broad subjects such as history, English, speech, physical therapy, and automotive technology. These LibGuides were useful, but did not reach a large number of users. Most SPC students and faculty seemed unaware of the existence of the LibGuides, even with a link to the LibGuides placed alongside other online resources that are heavily used by students and faculty, such as the library's online catalog and electronic databases.

At the same time, the liaison librarian for Science and Culinary Arts began working closely with faculty from the biology and culinary arts departments that were teaching an introductory nutrition course. Experimenting with the way the librarians first started using LibGuides, both instructors were asked to send their course syllabi and learning objectives for that semester to the liaison librarian. Using their syllabi and learning objectives, the librarian developed a Nutrition LibGuide that combined both faculty members' objectives as a point of reference for the students. The LibGuide also combined library resources, such as relevant electronic databases and e-books, with non-SPC online resources such as YouTube videos and a variety of useful websites.

Usage statistics generated by the LibGuides application show that the Nutrition LibGuide experienced more than ten times the number of hits than most other LibGuides created in the Spring of 2009 without faculty collaboration. In addition, this LibGuide was instrumental in having the biology professor request a library instruction session to familiarize the students with the LibGuide and receive other information literacy instruction. The faculty member was certain the LibGuide would be an invaluable tool in encouraging students to do research with ease. As a result, students taking the nutrition course used the tool as a new venue for beginning their research assignments. Additionally, it should be noted that this was the first time a faculty member from this discipline had approached the library for assistance in teaching research skills to students, despite previous efforts by librarians to do offer assistance.

Seeing the benefit of collaborating with faculty in the creation of LibGuides, SPC librarians created more LibGuides that were specifically designed for academic courses. These included LibGuides that focused on the study of microbes, food borne diseases, blood borne diseases, nursing, occupational therapy, anatomy, and physiology. These LibGuides have all been met with interest and approval from students and faculty.

LibGuides as Classroom Instruction Tools

SPC librarians then began exploring the development of LibGuides as a teaching tool when conducting library instruction. The librarians determined that LibGuides, which can incorporate information sources found as text, graphics, and video, connected well with our students and their wide variety of learning styles. This is very important with our student body, which includes a large number of non-traditional students. Librarians also discovered that the structure of LibGuides lent themselves well to instruction and students were returning to them as research tools after attending instruction sessions which utilized a LibGuide. Both faculty and students found the tool's format uncomplicated and readily accessible.

A good example of a LibGuide produced specifically as a classroom instruction tool is one created for a developmental psychology class. The librarian that created this LibGuide was asked to teach a library instruction session that focused on researching and finding scholarly journal articles that would help students write a term paper on a psychology topic of their choice. The librarian created a LibGuide for the instruction session, arranging the LibGuide's structure around the flow of the skills, online library resources, and websites she wanted to present to the students. The librarian asked the faculty member who requested the instruction to look at the LibGuide before the instruction session and to send feedback. The faculty member thought the LibGuide was very useful, and the librarian used the LibGuide to guide her instruction session when teaching the class. The librarian made sure to distribute the web address of the LibGuide to the students during the class session and encouraged them to refer back to the website when starting research for their term paper. The faculty member also distributed the LibGuide's web address to the students' developmental psychology course links within their web-based learning and services portal. Students have expressed satisfaction in using the LibGuide both in and out of class, and LibGuide statistics show continued use of the LibGuide throughout the semester after the library instruction session was held. The faculty member was impressed by the quality of writing and research submitted by the students, and the faculty member's continued requests for library instruction for the same class assignment attest to this LibGuide's success.

Similar success has been achieved with information literacy classes taught to students in a microcomputer applications course. These students are taught through a LibGuide to use effective search techniques, locate relevant information sources, and evaluate websites. The LibGuide was constructed by the Computer Sciences library liaison to cover all the points in a systematic and organized fashion, from the introduction stating what will be covered in the session to the learning activities that provide hands-on practice. This particular LibGuide also experienced continued use throughout the semester and is consistently one of the most highly used LibGuides at SPC.

LibGuides as Workshop Tools

Workshops are offered by librarians at SPC on a variety of topics aimed at students and at faculty. LibGuides have proved to be an important tool in engaging participants at these workshops and providing a way to access the information long after the workshop has concluded. One librarian, for example, incorporated the LibGuide model to demonstrate how to avoid copyright infringement in the academic arena. This workshop, aimed at both faculty and students, incorporated media clips and Internet sites. Faculty received insight on copyright issues relevant to distance education while students received demonstrations on both copyright and plagiarism dilemmas to avoid.

In another workshop, a librarian taught students how to avoid plagiarism and created a LibGuide to combine the various discussion exercises, small group work, and hands-on portions of her presentation, creating a very interactive tool that was still available to students when they began their research assignments. Students not only used the LibGuide as a visual aid but were able to further enhance learning components of the workshop by experiencing audiovisual elements, playing online plagiarism games, and reading and discussing plagiarism scenarios when broken up into small groups. Using the LibGuide made it easy for the students to gain a clear understanding of the topic, while the librarian found the LibGuide's format helpful in laying out the concepts to the students in a methodical yet succinct way. This workshop was first given as one in a series of student research workshops offered over the course of three weeks each semester; some faculty members offered extra credit to students who attended these workshops. In this instance, a number of students were pleased enough with their experience to mention it to their English professor, who then asked that the workshop be presented to five sections of his English classes. This professor has since asked for the LibGuide-centered workshop to be given to his classes for two consecutive semesters, and has expressed a wish to continue doing so in the future.

Other LibGuides developed in conjunction with a workshop include Electronic Books in the Health Sciences, created by the Health Sciences liaison librarian and presented to nursing and allied health faculty as part of their academic division's monthly professional development series, as well as a workshop presented to health sciences faculty on the use of ProQuest Nursing and Allied Health Source, a newly purchased database at the time. Attendees of both workshops expressed satisfaction with the LibGuides, particularly with the fact that workshop materials are available online at all times for later referral.

Librarians have experienced LibGuides as an ideal workshop tool for keeping users interested and engaged in any topic being covered. As a result, SPC librarians plan to continue using LibGuides as workshop tools in the future.

MARKETING METHODS

LibGuides have proven themselves as a great marketing tool at SPC: they are resources that are relatively simple to distribute, and in turn their own popularity promotes the library and its other numerous resources. SPC's experience in promoting LibGuides among faculty has been relatively straightforward given the nature of the online tool and the ways in which they are created and utilized. Faculty members appreciate the fact that the tool is accessed easily through the Internet, and the LibGuide itself is visually appealing. The previously described biology faculty member who brought her class in for library instruction after a LibGuide-aided class is the perfect example of how successful a well-developed LibGuide can be in encouraging faculty collaboration and promoting information literacy instruction.

Marketing occurs naturally and easily within the classroom when using the LibGuides as an instruction tool. Faculty members, who are required to attend all library instruction sessions with their classes, observe their students working with the LibGuide and see how these tools improve student learning. This often leads to more requests for library instruction or the creation of additional LibGuides; both have been the case at SPC.

Another method is simply for LibGuide creators to be proactive. For instance, the Health Sciences liaison librarian created a basic LibGuide featuring resources that she knows are often utilized by students in the Occupational Therapy Assistant program. The librarian then emailed a link for the LibGuide to the program's director, asking the faculty member to look at the resource and provide suggestions for improvement. The faculty member was immediately impressed by the LibGuide and distributed the link to her students. From there, news spread by word-of-mouth about the online tool and as a result the librarian was asked to create LibGuides highlighting resources for the Diagnostic Medical Sonography and Medical Laboratory Technician programs.

Librarians can also ask instructors to place a link to relevant LibGuides within their courses in their online course management systems (SPC uses Blackboard Vista). One of our librarians has been successful in doing so, and is hoping that this eventually leads to the opportunity of becoming an "embedded librarian" within the online course.

ADVANTAGES AND DRAWBACKS

The librarians at SPC have noticed many advantages to using LibGuides in the methods described above, including:

- The ability to provide a visual and tangible research and instruction tool to help faculty members buy into the idea of library instruction, especially for those who have never brought classes in for instruction.

- The ability to give each LibGuide its own web address, which enables easy retrieval by users.

- The flexibility to accommodate a wide variety of academic areas.

- Greater collaboration between liaison librarians and their faculty, not only in creating additional LibGuides but also in other liaison duties and responsibilities such as collection development efforts and faculty professional development.

- Reduction in the amount of paper handouts given in library instruction sessions, contributing to the college's efforts in going green.

- Elimination of the need for librarians to physically bring instruction materials to each class, e.g., carrying a Flash drive with PowerPoint slides or other materials used in the session.

There are, however, some drawbacks to the use of LibGuides:

- Students that are afraid of using electronic resources find LibGuides daunting and tend to prefer paper handouts.

- Some students get lost on the number of mouse clicks it takes to reach the specific LibGuide they are seeking.

- LibGuides require upkeep and maintenance, e.g., updating links with web addresses that have changed. Our students are quickly discouraged by obstacles such as dead or misdirected webpage links. Therefore, maintenance is a must and can be fairly time consuming if not done regularly.

- As with any online resource, it is inaccessible when connection to the Internet fails or is unavailable. In the classroom, this would be a rare and unlikely scenario, but always possible.

CONCLUSION

Given the great demands on everyone's time and resources, LibGuides are effective tools that aid librarians in efficiently meeting the information needs of faculty and students. SPC librarians have found LibGuides to serve an additional purpose as tools that link librarians and faculty together in their goal to educate students in the research process. SPC librarians plan to keep creating LibGuides as research and instruction tools for our students, while marketing them to maintain and generate greater collaboration between the library and faculty.

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