

USING WEB 2.0 TOOLS SUCH AS GOOGLE APPS IN LIBRARY INSTRUCTION SESSIONS WITH NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Much has been written about traditional undergraduate students and their familiarity with Web 2.0 tools. But how “tech savvy” are non-traditional students? How can tools such as Google Apps be used in library instruction with these students?

Librarians on the Troy University Montgomery Campus surveyed adult, non-traditional students in library instruction classes to find out their knowledge and use of specific Web 2.0 tools such as social networking, image and video sharing, collaborative authoring tools and blogs. Survey results show that many of the non-traditional students were not very “tech savvy”. Not only had the students never used most of these tools, but they had never even heard of many of them.

As a result of these findings, librarians wanted to expose the older, non-traditional students to some of the newer Web 2.0 technologies with the hope that the students will find these tools useful throughout their college career. Librarians emphasized one Web 2.0 tool in particular, Google Apps, in part because of its use as a collaborative authoring tool. They demonstrated the use Google Apps by designing, creating assignments for students, and evaluating library instruction.

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BACKGROUND ON THE TROY UNIVERSITY MONTGOMERY CAMPUS

When designing instruction programs, it is important to know your learners. The Montgomery Campus of Troy University is an evening institution catering to the needs of the non-traditional adult learner. The typical Montgomery Campus student works full-time and has family responsibilities. Roughly two-thirds of the student population, including both undergraduate and graduate students, are part-time students. As of Fall Semester 2007, there were 2,873 undergraduate students enrolled at Troy University Montgomery Campus (Troy University 2008 Fact Book, 194).

The age distribution for Fall Semester 2007 is typical for the Montgomery Campus. In Fall Semester 2007, the average age of undergraduate students was 28. Well under half (36%) of the undergraduate students were in the “traditional” college age range of 18-24. Significantly, there were large percentages of more mature undergraduate students: 23% were ages 25-29, 16% were ages 30-34, 11% were ages 35-39, 10% were ages 40-49, and 4% were ages 50-64 (Troy University 2008 Fact Book, 198).

The Montgomery Campus is also racially diverse, with the two largest ethnic groups in fall 2007 being African-American (62%) and Caucasian (33%). (Troy University 2008 Fact Book, 194).

TROY 1101 UNIVERSITY ORIENTATION & THE “TECH SAVVY SURVEY”

All Troy University students are required to take TROY 1101 University Orientation. This course is a required

one-credit hour freshman orientation class designed to help students adjust to campus life and covers information such as studying, note-taking, effective time management, financial management, choosing a major, career planning and library services. Some sections of these classes are taught by librarians who teach as adjunct faculty.

Undergraduate students enrolled in TROY 1101 were surveyed to find out their knowledge and use of specific technologies such as social networking, social bookmarking, image sharing, video sharing, communication tools, collaborative authoring tools, social games/spaces and blogs. Survey results showed that many of these students not only had never used these tools, but they had never even heard of them. For example, 67% of students had never heard of Del.icio.us., 63% had never heard of Wikis, 61% had never heard of Flickr, 68% had never heard of Google Docs (formerly Writely), 75% had never heard of RSS feeds, and 71% had never heard of Second Life. In contrast, results showed that the non-traditional students were relatively familiar other Web 2.0 technologies: 70% use YouTube, 72% use MySpace, 54% use Facebook, and 62% use Wikipedia.

Since these survey results revealed that Troy University Montgomery Campus undergraduate students were not very familiar with many Web 2.0 tools, librarians wanted to change the way they teach library instruction classes. They decided to explain and incorporate online tools such as Google Apps in library instruction sessions with TROY 1101 students.

GOOGLE APPS FOR EDUCATION TEAM EDITION

Google Apps continues to gain in popularity as a Web 2.0 tool for communication and collaboration. Every year, the Centre for Learning & Performance Technologies compiles a list of the *Top Tools for Learning* from the contributions of over 200 learning professionals who share their Top 10 Tools for Learning, both for their own personal learning/productivity and for creating learning solutions for others. In 2008, Google Docs (part of Google Apps) was ranked 8th on the list. In 2009, Google Docs moved up to 5th on the list of “Top 100 Tools for Learning 2009” and Google Apps came in at number 38.

Librarians elected to use Google Apps for Education Team Edition to design, teach, and evaluate library orientation classes. Google Apps for Education is free for the students to use (and anyone else with university email accounts). It includes components/tools such as Google Docs, Google Calendar, Google Talk, and Google Sites. With Google Apps, there’s no hardware or software to install or maintain, since everything is delivered via the web.

One part of Google Apps is the Google Docs application. Google Docs is a web-based word processor, presentation and spreadsheet application that allows the user to create and edit documents, presentations, and spreadsheets while collaborating online in real-time with other users. Users can invite others to collaboratively read and edit uploaded material. Multiple people can view and make changes at the

same time using an onscreen chat window. Presentations can be viewed by groups of people in various places simultaneously or separately. Documents are saved online automatically. A revision history of the document is available for viewing so users can review earlier drafts of a document and see the changes others have made to it. Documents and presentations can also be published to the web.

USING GOOGLE APPS IN LIBRARY INSTRUCTION CLASSES

So how can Web 2.0 tools like Google Apps be used in library instruction? Google Apps can be used by librarians when designing instruction sections, by students in class assignments, and as tool for evaluating library instruction. Librarians can collaborate on documents and on presentations used in library instruction classes. Since documents, spreadsheets, and presentations can be created and shared, opened, and edited by multiple users at the same time, students can brainstorm topics and share information and pool resources when working on the same document from any computer. They can compare revisions, view the history of a document, read and react to inserted comments, and publish the final document, presentation or spreadsheet directly to the web. All of their library research is automatically saved to their accounts and is accessible via any computer. Students can use Google Docs to take notes, upload them, and then write and edit research essays and presentations, inviting their instructors and other students to view and comment on various drafts. Instructors can create access for groups of students to work collaboratively on group research assignments, with the ability to monitor and comment on their progress online. Students, instructors, and librarians can take or create surveys or tests using web forms. Results from student/instructor surveys can then be used to evaluate library instruction.

Using Google Apps to Design and Manage TROY 1101 Library Orientation Classes

Librarians teaching TROY 1101 collaborated on a presentation which was published to the web for viewing by students and teachers. They created web forms in Google Docs for library orientation teaching schedules. Librarians collaborated on the schedules which were published to the web so instructors can see which librarian is teaching their library orientation class and when. These schedules can also be used for tracking instruction which can be used later for evaluation.

When designing library orientations, librarians use Google Apps to:

- Collaborate on library orientation presentations
- Design library assignments/quizzes
- Create web forms including student surveys & library instruction schedules
- Email course instructors the library instruction schedules, library orientation presentations and assignments

Using Google Apps in the Classroom with TROY 1101 Students

Google Apps is incorporated into class activities and assignments. Examples of class activities/assignments used in Troy 1101 classes taught by librarians include:

Class one:

- Students watch “Google Docs in Plain English” and “Google Apps for Education videos,” which are available for free on YouTube
- Librarians explain features of Google Apps to students including Gmail, Google Calendar, and Google Docs
- Librarians show examples of Google Apps in action, including how librarians use it to collaborate
- Librarians show students how to access Google Apps via their university email accounts
- Homework: Students login to Google Apps, view the library presentation created in Google Docs and experiment with various features of Google Apps

Class two:

- Librarians review the library orientation presentation with students and take them on a tour of the library
- Students work on their library assignment in class
- Homework: Students complete the online library survey created using Google Docs

Class three:

- Librarians review the answers to the library assignment
- Librarians go over the results of the library survey

Using Google Apps to Evaluate TROY 1101 Library Orientation Classes

Librarians are able to analyze the results of the library orientation surveys completed by students. Survey results from the completion of the web forms are automatically sent to Google Docs spreadsheets. Librarians can also use web forms created in Google Docs to keep track of orientation statistics such as which librarians taught what classes, number of students attending, subject matter of session, etc.

LESSONS LEARNED/CONCLUSION

There are both benefits and drawbacks of using Google Apps in library instruction sections. Librarians at Troy University believe that it is important to introduce students to Google Apps in the required TROY 1101 freshman orientation class so they are aware of how they

can use it throughout their college career to collaborate with other students and instructors on papers, presentations, and other assignments. Using Google Apps for Education with students is free for anyone with a university email address so it's very easy and convenient to use. Using Google Apps saves time since it can be accessed online anytime, anywhere with Internet connectivity. Since Google Apps isn't tied to one computer but is web-based, students don't have to worry about carrying a flash drive around. They can collaborate in real-time on documents and see the results/edits almost instantaneously. Students have commented that they like having the library presentation online so they can view it as many times as they need to and have it to refer to later when they need it to work on, for example, an assignment for another class. Instructors like being able to send the presentation to students who missed the class. Librarians enjoy collaborating on documents, presentations and schedules without the hassle of numerous (and large) email attachments clogging up their inbox. They love being able to view their work anytime, anywhere.

However, there are several drawbacks for both students and teachers. There are size limits on how much a user can store on his/her account. For example, a presentation with a lot of photos or graphics may have to be shortened when uploading it into Google Apps. Privacy and security may be a concern for private records or sensitive data. Also, Google Apps also has relatively few “bells and whistles” such as fancy graphics, in comparison to some other web services and software available; however, Google is constantly adding new features. There have also been some technical glitches with certain types of files (e.g., docx files) but Google Help is available if needed. All in all, librarians at Troy University believe that the benefits of using Google Apps far outweigh any drawbacks and plan to continue to incorporate Google Apps for Education in library instruction classes.

FUTURE PLANS

In the future, librarians at Troy University Montgomery Campus would like to expand the library orientation survey and further analyze the survey results. Based on the results of the survey, librarians will make changes in library orientations as needed. More library information, including assignments and tutorials will be put on the web using Google Apps to increase student (and instructor) involvement in library instruction.

REFERENCES

- Institutional Research, Planning & Effectiveness (IRPE). 2008. *Troy University 2008 Fact Book*.
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