

# VIDEOS ON THE RESEARCH TRAIL

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## USE OF VIDEOS IN ACADEMIC LIBRARY INSTRUCTION

Video creation and use in an academic library instruction context has a long history (Islam & Porter, 2008), and in the last ten years, instructional videos have become a ubiquitous part of library instruction. Consider that in ACRL's PRIMO (Association of College and Research Libraries' Peer-Reviewed Instructional Materials Online) database of selective, high quality instructional projects, ten percent of the entries include a video component. Many academic libraries have created videos and uploaded them to video-hosting Web sites (such as YouTube); these videos do not just instruct but also promote library services and collections (Ariew, 2008). Some videos highlight services and resources specific to their institutions of origin, while others that are not institution-specific can be used by other academic libraries.

Islam and Porter (2008) offer a comprehensive review of the more recent use of video in library instruction and orientation in academic libraries and divide current efforts into three genres: the "dramatic features" video, the video tour, and a combination of both resulting in the "dramatized video tour." To their merit, some libraries continue to produce such labor-intensive professional looking videos. However, students are now accustomed to viewing personal, casually edited videos online and are less judgmental of more amateur efforts (Pressley, 2008). Therefore, a substantial drawback to libraries creating videos in-house has been removed, as it is now sufficient to capture images, edit lightly, and release the video.

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## OUR VIDEO PROJECT

At Colorado College, we had an opportunity to create a video project through a Technology Incubator Grant offered by our campus Academic Technology Support (ATS). This grant provided us with an ATS staff member to coach us in using filming equipment and train us in using editing software. Learning that librarians found in focus groups that students preferred video to audio or text files as a means of acquiring information (Pressley, 2008), we were determined to use videos with our students. The grant application process further solidified our focus as we answered the question: What do we want videos to add to the instruction session? Our answer formed a threefold approach: Videos are appealing visually; they can be used to personalize services and experiences; and they put a fun face on the library. Expanding on those purposes we listed the reasons behind our project. First, fourth year thesis students were graduating and we wanted to capture their stories before they left to show to our first year students and beginning thesis scholars. Second, we wanted student voices talking about the value of library services and products. And third, we are always trying to make library instruction more effective and appealing.

## TESTIMONIALS

We decided to focus on testimonials, especially the testimonials of graduating seniors, in order to incorporate an element missing from our library instruction sessions and from our lists of resources on our web pages: information about a service or resource from an experienced student peer. Although our students write long research papers earlier than their senior year, it is most often during senior thesis research that our students experience the "aha!" moment of not simply realizing but truly appreciating the value of some of the many skills and

resources librarians had been sharing with them in instruction sessions and in one on one reference interactions. We settled on testimonial videos because research in presenting health information indicates that testimonials are more persuasive in video form than in text form (Braverman, 2008). Moreover, business literature found that “browsers identified more strongly with characters on a site featuring audio/video testimonials than they did with characters on a site featuring text/picture testimonials” (Appiah, 2006, p. 83). Furthermore patrons rated products advertised on a web site more favorably when the site included audio/video testimonials than when they contained no testimonials or only text/picture testimonials (Appiah, 2006).

We thought about how to use the videos in library instruction sessions. Our videos serve multiple purposes. Some videos enhance a librarian’s lecture by using student peers to explain key concepts. Some are promotional, e.g., describing the positive impact of RefWorks on a student’s manuscript. Sometimes they replace discussion when one video juxtaposes a student saying he never uses Google Scholar with another swearing she loves it. In another video a student talks about how he created a dataset, emphasizing that the data was not all in one source – a concept that that students typically distrust when heard from the librarians. A video of a student’s humorous definition of the difference between scholarly and popular sources can replace a librarian’s tired old examples. Others point to resources outside the scope of the typical library instruction session, for example, why students should use the Writing Center. They can affirm the importance of topics discussed in library instruction – one of our videos has multiple students declaring how they could never have completed their project without a librarian’s assistance. Some videos acknowledge student research habits, such as starting their research too late in the semester, while urging this year’s students not to make the same mistake. Many, as we first envisioned, are straight testimonials about the value of a resource, and when not to use Wikipedia. And lastly, one of our videos shows off an extra-curricular activity of the library staff – a compilation of our comical library book truck drill team performances.

Our initial brainstorming session showed us how easy it would be to use video technology as a classroom instructional aid. We quickly realized that the same videos created for library instruction sessions could be profitably embedded on library web pages and course pages to illustrate and explain topics and to promote services and resources. Furthermore, they could serve as promotional ads for library instruction with faculty since some of the taped students’ comments reveal what students learn from library instruction while showing what students don’t know about doing research. And as a bonus, we have a video highlighting the benefits of using another campus service – the Writing Center.

## FILMING

Once we knew what we wanted to accomplish, we generated a set of interview questions, first a series of general questions about research (e.g., What do you like about research?) and then a number of specific questions about resources and

services (e.g., Tell me about your use of JSTOR?). We recruited appropriate students, which turned out to be surprisingly easy. Most of our library colleagues work individually with seniors on their senior projects and were able to give us names of good candidates to interview. This provided a sample group of students from the three academic divisions on campus: the natural sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities. Next we emailed potential interviewees outlining our project and asking them to participate. We also had students asking to participate after their friends did an interview. In the end, we interviewed a total of eight students from economics, history, biology, and Asian studies departments. We found that the students were eager to talk about the projects that had dominated their past undergraduate academic year.

Forty-minute interview appointments provided adequate time. After reviewing the purpose of the taping with the student interviewees, they signed a consent form which waived their rights to the recordings and provided us with the rights to use or not, to discard, and to display publicly. We set up a video camera on a tripod in locations which we chose because they looked “scholarly”: a library conference room with a wall of books and a study room with leather chairs and cabinets full of books. Focusing the camera on the interview student, we read from our set of questions. We freely added to the list of questions on the fly and changed the order of questions according to the flow of the interview. Since we knew we’d be editing the interview into topical segments the order was not very important. Nevertheless, we asked the same basic questions of each student (see Appendix 1).

## EDITING

We captured interviews that could be easily segmented into topics and then recombined to illustrate ideas we wanted to emphasize or to describe services or resources we wanted to promote. The bulk of film editing time was spent reviewing the interview, cutting the interview up into segments and splicing the segments together as needed. Each segment was coded as to topic (e.g., Refworks), and then we selected the best ones and combined them into a short three to five minute video. This resulted in a collection of videos each covering just one research topic from a variety of students (see Appendix 2). We followed the advice of the focus groups at the College Library at the University of California Los Angeles which recommended that their videos be made “more consistent, shorter and precise” (Mizrachi & Bedova, 2007, p. 254), as well as the suggestion that all instructional videos be modular (Monge, 2007). As a result of this process, we now have a huge selection of coded segments that can be easily combined and recombined to create videos targeted for a particular class. For example, we can combine several history students talking about how to best find primary sources.

## HOSTING

At first, like many librarians at other academic institutions, we decided to use YouTube, a free video hosting website, because of the simplicity of hosting, and ease of access

but are now considering alternatives due to the poor quality of image and sound (Pressley, 2008, Monge, 2007). The ease of use was more important than any expectation that our students would find our videos on the web. Other librarians' motivation is different, "The best thing about YouTube is that it has become the people's video library: a video Wikipedia" (O'Leary, 2008). YouTube enables us to easily and quickly embed the YouTube videos on our library web pages, in our campus course management software, and in our Tutt Library Facebook page. Hosting on YouTube saves us the trouble of accessing our videos from our campus network drives or bringing DVDs with our videos into the classroom. In the classroom, we have found that the YouTube location of our videos captures our students' attention and grants some familiarity. However, we are increasingly troubled by the low quality of image and sound of videos accessed through YouTube. We will probably continue to embed our YouTube hosted videos on our course web pages but will probably play a better quality (DVD, saved to network, etc.) copy of our videos in library instruction sessions.

## **SURPRISES**

From the interviews we learned a bit about student culture, students' approaches to writing major manuscripts, and their ideas on research. Students didn't always agree on the value of a service or product. Sometimes they were mistaken about an aspect of the research process. Often students eloquently described the complexity of a research process better than we could convey ourselves. Most importantly, students were hilarious. One student mentioned how he lived on "cigarettes and green tea" during the final writing of his thesis, another how she always "hated doing research" and upon completion of her senior project she still unrepentantly despised it.

When showing the videos in class, we learned that students love watching other students, and faculty love seeing former students on the screen. The personalization and localization of services is great. There is no classroom substitute for last year's successful senior history thesis student telling this year's "Introduction to Historiography" class that they had better sign up for an interlibrary loan account and learn to search WorldCat well. When a student's interview information is "incorrect", "Interlibrary Loan takes forever", we can address it with a smile in class or counter it with other student interview's positive experience, "I got most of my articles the next day!" Departments external to the library like the Writing Center love the promotion of their services. Often students mentioned librarians by name in the interview and our library colleagues appreciated that too.

## **BUDGET**

The cost of producing these videos was very affordable. We borrowed the filming equipment, a camcorder and a tripod, from the campus audiovisual department. We did not use a separate microphone yet the sound quality turned out fine. We purchased two re-useable 90-minute tapes for recording purposes for \$10 each. We used campus-licensed software for video editing (iMovie) and a free audio editor (Audacity). Each

interview took two hours of initial processing time to view, cut, splice and edit the resulting "raw" video clips. At the end of those two hours, we had at least one and up to three videos. Making future videos took an average of 20 minutes once useable sections were identified and splices made. We gave each student interviewee a \$5 gift card to the local coffee shop in the student union, which totaled \$40. However we found, unlike when generating student interest for library student focus groups, gift cards were not needed to get volunteers because students were eager to speak to us. Finally, we bought inexpensive writeable DVDs to copy videos to, at \$5 each.

## **WHAT WE PLAN TO DO NEXT**

Assessment is an important consideration for most academic institutions. Instead of adding more tests and measures, we realized a further part of our project could be to use the raw interviews as data for judging whether a student had achieved information literacy objectives over his/her time in college. We are exploring ways a video project can be used in assessment through self-disclosed descriptions of library use and changes in research skills.

We will revise our questions for this year to elicit more detailed explanations and descriptions of the research process and to align with a rubric. This rubric, created this past year, will be used for assessment of students' research abilities as they match ACRL Information Literacy Standards. In this way, instead of subjecting students to yet another test or survey, we will be digging in the soil of "fresh" thesis students, seeing how they have applied their skills and knowledge to produce their senior project. This dovetails with the college's concerns with accreditation initiatives by providing reliable data straight from the students by means of interview to match up with other assessment data on student performance. However, that isn't to say we have given up on surveys; we will be asking the students we interview to complete a survey to follow up on the questions we asked during the interview.

We want to continue the interviewing process with new students this year. We hope to explain the breadth of academic study by getting students from departments not represented in our current interviews. We are thinking of ways to capture student views outside of our interview process – quick filming during office consultations is one idea. We would like to interview faculty regarding their use of library resources. If student testimonials have proved so powerful, a faculty authority figure, wielding a grade book, might prove more so. And we'd like to continue to show the fun side of the library.

## **CONCLUSION**

These videotaped interviews have proved to be a gold mine of nuggets that we can quickly combine and remix in endless variations. The completed videos have been well received by students, faculty and our librarian colleagues. While cautious of the amount of time and effort we believed it would take to create useable videos, we both found the process fairly straightforward and not as time consuming as we at first

thought. Interestingly, we found that students addressed much of the content in the four Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education in their interviews. We look forward to further exploiting this discovery in both instruction and assessment.

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## APPENDIX 1

### List of Questions Asked of All Students During Videotaping

1. Tell me about your approach to research.
2. What do you like about research? What is your favorite part of doing research?
3. What do you really dislike about doing research?
4. Do you have any tips for doing library research that you'd like to share with us?
5. Is there something about research you wish you had known before starting your project?
6. What was helpful to you in doing your research?
7. What do you wish you had done differently?
8. What advice would you give to someone just starting their research?
9. What was the most difficult part of your research?

### Additional Questions Asked Depending on Student Responses

1. How did you work with a librarian or any other library staff?
2. What databases did you use?
3. Tell me more about using JSTOR, EBSCO, Science Direct, other databases, etc.
4. Tell me more about using Google Scholar, Google Books, Google, and Wikipedia, etc.
5. How did you use your thesis blocks, winter break, and spring break for writing and research?
6. Describe your research timeline.
7. How did you find your primary sources?
8. How did you use bibliographies at the end of books and articles?
9. Tell me more about using Interlibrary loan?
10. Did you use other libraries, either remotely or by travelling?
11. Did you work on your thesis at a library carrel and/or elsewhere?
12. How did you keep track of your research notes, sources, and citations? Did you use Refworks, etc.?
13. Tell me more about working with the Writing Center.
14. How did you find the data and statistics that you needed?
15. Tell me a little about selecting an advisor and working one on one with her/him.

## APPENDIX 2

### Sample List of Videos Created

“Refworks take 2” (two students discuss the benefits of using Refworks)

Interlibrary Loan

“Librarians: pretty incredible” (several students agree, get to know your librarian)

Literature Review

“Just Look Harder”

Shotgun Method (searching multiple databases)

“I’ve Always Hated Research”

Wikipedia (when not to use Wikipedia)

“It Feels So Good” (pleasure of becoming an expert researcher)

Writing Center (student raves about consulting the Writing Center)

“The 3rd Step is Research”

Primary Sources (value of using bibliographies to find primary sources)

“Make My Own” (finding data and creating a dataset)

Book Truck Drill Team (collage of book truck drill team performances)