

# COLLABORATING ACROSS CAMPUSES AND CONTINENTS: WELCOME TO THE FUTURE!

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## INTRODUCTION

Historically, course-specific library instruction has depended upon collaborations between librarians and resident faculty in specific disciplines. As interdisciplinary research and coursework become more prevalent in universities, new models for library instruction are needed to accommodate students and faculty with diverse backgrounds who may be geographically removed from the library and campus.

This paper will describe how one model evolved to support the research needs of graduate students enrolled in the International Programme in Addiction Studies (IPAS). The field of addiction studies is a highly interdisciplinary, drawing students from a variety of backgrounds. In addition, IPAS is offered simultaneously by three universities on three continents: the University of Adelaide (Adelaide, Australia), Virginia Commonwealth University (Richmond, Virginia, USA), and Kings College, London (London, England). Collaborating across campuses, disciplines, institutions, and time zones requires forethought, attention to detail, and creativity in the use of available library instruction tools. It can be a rewarding experience leading to new partnerships and insights.

## PROGRAM BACKGROUND

The International Programme in Addiction Studies (IPAS) is an online academic program leading to a Master of Science in Addiction Studies. While it is offered jointly by

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Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), University of Adelaide, and King's College London, it is administratively hosted by VCU for the academic years of 2011-2014. IPAS coordinators at VCU approached VCU Libraries about providing library instruction and support for the current cohort of students. The first point of contact was James Brach Cabell Library, which is located on VCU's main academic campus. Because of her liaison responsibilities to the Social and Behavioral Sciences, Nita Bryant took on the project. Given the interdisciplinary nature of the field, she decided to bring in another librarian from VCU's medical campus. Kimberly Brady, an Education & Instruction Librarian at Tompkins-McCaw Library for the Health Sciences joined the team, and both librarians met with IPAS coordinators shortly after. The initial meetings involved introducing IPAS faculty to useful library resources including PubMed, CINAHL, PsycINFO, and Refworks. Existing subject- and course-specific LibGuides were also introduced as examples of what might be generated for this program. This initial meeting with the faculty was instrumental in demonstrating the librarians' capabilities in research and instructional support as well as earning buy-in from the IPAS program faculty.

## CROSS-CAMPUS COLLABORATION AND INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH

The weeks leading up the start of the fall semester, September 2011, were quite busy as we collaborated to create a new LibGuide for the IPAS program. Although part of the same University and library system, James Branch Cabell and Tompkins-McCaw Libraries are located on separate campus about 1.5 miles apart. Working in a group presents challenges which are somewhat magnified by geographic separation; it is often difficult to accommodate two work schedules, especially when allowing for travel time. Intermittent communication

was accomplished by phone or e-mail. However, we found that the cross-campus collaboration had numerous benefits; each librarian had subject-specific knowledge that helped in recommending databases and creating tools. This was particularly relevant because IPAS is highly interdisciplinary, drawing from fields such as psychology, psychiatry, sociology, public health, pharmacology, law, policy, and health care. A further benefit of collaboration between academic campuses was that each librarian had experience working with different audiences, from undergraduates to graduate and professional students to faculty and staff. International Programme in Addiction Studies students are working toward a Master of Science degree, but come from a variety of academic and professional backgrounds. Some have recently graduated with a Baccalaureate Degree while others have graduate and professional degrees in a variety of fields; still others are working professionals who have been out of school for some time. This group dynamic generated a challenging opportunity as we prepared instructional materials to meet a broad range of needs. We offer the following advice for meeting the needs of a diverse group:

**Know your audience:** Work in advance with faculty to understand the backgrounds of your students. Learn about the curriculum and assignments and try to anticipate information needs.

**Create ready-to-use tools:** Use your initial assessment to make some tools before your first interaction with the students. For example, this might include handouts or tutorials on the search process, citation management, or specific databases.

**Advertise your capabilities:** Work with faculty to learn the most effective way to share the tools you have created, whether via e-mail, through course management software, on a course website, or by other means. What is their preferred mode of communication? Make sure students know you are available to answer additional questions.

**Ask for feedback:** Encourage students to comment on your tools so that they can be adapted and improved. This is particularly useful if you anticipate working with the same or similar courses in the future. It also helps students to feel engaged and connected to the library.

**Be prepared to provide individual support:** In most groups, some students will need more help than others. This will be particularly true in a group with diverse academic and professional backgrounds.

## RESOURCES FOR A GLOBAL PROGRAM

To ensure the widest possible geographic reach, IPAS is a fully online program with no campus attendance required. Currently, there are 16 students enrolled; students are from the US, Canada, England, Australia, China, Japan, Indonesia, Brazil, Ghana, Republic of Maldives, and Republic of Kosovo.

To address logistical challenges posed by this distance, all students have a VCU eID, and the university provides access to required readings through its Course Reserves service. To address instructional challenges, we leveraged many tools that are commonly used for asynchronous distance learning and interaction, including a LibGuide, screencasts and video tutorials, Blackboard course management software, and e-mail.

The IPAS Addiction Studies LibGuide<sup>i</sup> was created to serve as a one-stop source to direct students to helpful databases, websites, and other relevant resources. The “Home” screen includes a welcome message, pictures of and contact information for the librarians, as well as a clock which displays the local time in Richmond, VA. We thought this would be important for students in other time zones when sending e-mail inquiries and anticipating response times. This home page, along with every other page, also includes an embedded “Chat with us” box, which allows students to send instant messages to the librarians in real time as they are available. The LibGuide also includes a dedicated instructional page (“How do I?”) with short videos on navigating library services, developing search strategies, using PubMed, CINAHL, and PsycINFO, and evaluating sources. A Faculty Information page includes resources on plagiarism prevention, copyright, course reserves, and library contact information.

Usage statistics show that the LibGuide “Home” tab received over 690 hits between September 2011 and April 2012. The “Evidence Based Sources” tab received the second-highest number of hits with over 430. Total hits for all tabs between September 2011 and April 2012 exceeded 1,890. The least-used tabs were “Faculty Information” and “Country Profiles.” While less use of the faculty tab was expected, in the future, we may consider disseminating this information in a different format in order to simplify the guide. The “Country Profiles” tab will be evaluated for utility, and may need a more descriptive title.

Screencasts and video tutorials were essential teaching tools because they allowed us to record instructional sessions which could be viewed asynchronously by students. The video tutorials link on the LibGuide included some previously created by VCU. Additional videos were created specifically for this group, including “PubMed Introduction,” “PsycINFO Introduction,” and “CINAHL Introduction,” which demonstrated the databases’ functionality using search terms relevant to addiction studies and emphasized tasks such as accessing full-text and ordering articles via interlibrary loan. All videos were created and edited using Camtasia Studio 7, a screen recorder from TechSmith, and uploaded to the VCU Libraries YouTube page<sup>ii</sup>. In addition, short videos and screencasts were created using Jing, a free tool by TechSmith, to answer questions as they arose. Among resources linked from the LibGuide, video tutorials for PubMed and CINAHL were the most commonly visited, suggesting that video content was helpful to students.

Virginia Commonwealth University utilizes Blackboard, an online course management system which allows instructors to post lectures, resources, and grades, and facilitates faculty/ student interaction via email and Discussion

Boards. We requested that IPAS faculty add us as “instructors” in their Blackboard courses, which had several advantages. First, we were able to access course materials for a more in-depth understanding of the content and assignments. Second, we participated in Discussion Board threads entitled “Internet Café,” where students and faculty introduced themselves to one another. This greatly enhanced our “visibility” and served as an initial opportunity to advertise library services and resources to the students. We also hosted Discussion Board threads entitled “Ask a Librarian,” where students could post questions about research, readings, and so on. This thread elicited questions and comments from many students and offered a highly visible platform for ad hoc reference help and links to the LibGuide and videos. For example, in the fall semester course “Biological Bases of Addiction,” the “Ask a Librarian” thread had 79 posts from 12 participants (2 of whom were librarians). The “Ask a Librarian” thread in the spring semester course “Treatment of Addiction: Pharmacotherapies” currently has 28 posts from 8 participants (2 of whom are librarians). In addition, over 120 other questions were fielded via email to individual librarians. Questions addressed a variety of topics including how to access readings, cite sources, use RefWorks, search PubMed, search Grey Literature, conduct literature reviews, locate statistics, and find drug legislation and policies from specific countries.

## ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES OF A GLOBAL PROGRAM

Throughout the first year of VCU Libraries’ collaboration with the IPAS program, we have experienced both successes and frustrations. We offer the following issues for consideration in meeting the needs of a global program.

**Time Zone Differences:** Time zone differences made it extremely important to pay attention to e-mail and BlackBoard communications in order to ensure timely responses to queries. We attempted to set reasonable expectations for responses to queries by sharing our typical work schedules and making the local time visible in the LibGuide. Time zone differences led to some confusion over due dates and times, which affected librarians as they provided reference assistance for assignments.

**Course Reserves:** Setting up online course reserves for electronic materials became problematic early in the program because the IPAS academic calendar is somewhat different from the typical U.S. semester system. The time frame for reserve availability had to be altered to ensure materials were available to students through the length of their modules. In addition, some faculty did not submit their reserves reading list with enough advance time to be processed, which caused delays. VCU Libraries and IPAS faculty exchanged nearly 60 emails regarding course reserve issues.

**Copyright and Licenses:** Not all existing readings posted by other Universities were compliant with the VCU copyright policy; they had to be scanned or otherwise acquired, and compliant copies were linked

in course reserves. We also discovered that VCU’s license to SPSS statistical software did not permit use outside the U.S.; our license renewal now allows global access for VCU students.

**Use of Appropriate Tools:** We found that the live chat option included in the IPAS LibGuide was not utilized, and hypothesize that this may also be due to time zone differences; students in other countries may not be as likely to catch librarians online during regular business hours, Eastern Standard Time. Virginia Commonwealth University Libraries have invested in web conferencing tools including Wimba Classroom and, more recently, Abode Connect. While these tools are excellent for communicating with distance students, we decided that web conferencing would be impractical for IPAS students because of time differences. We attempted to reconcile these challenges by creating readily-available tools, such as the LibGuide and instructional videos, which could be viewed at the students’ convenience.

## CONCLUSION

The IPAS program is a unique interdisciplinary cross-continental degree program which presented new challenges and opportunities in library instructional support. Virginia Commonwealth University Libraries collaborated across academic campuses to support the interdisciplinary nature of the program. While this engendered familiar challenges associated with geographic separation, it also allowed us to deliver broader subject knowledge and instruction experience to IPAS students. Because of its interdisciplinary nature, the IPAS program attracts students from a wide range of professional and academic backgrounds, requiring foresight and flexibility in library instruction, as well as a willingness to provide individual support as needed. With students across the globe, tools and techniques for distance education were implemented with special attention to the constraints of distance and time zones. A variety of tools, most notably a LibGuide and Blackboard embeddedness, were used effectively with positive feedback from IPAS students and staff. Virginia Commonwealth University Libraries’ work with IPAS has been a learning experience; we plan to harness feedback and personal experience to improve our support in the coming years.

Interdisciplinary, cross-campus, and multi-institutional collaborations create new relationships which can translate into new opportunities for librarians. For example, IPAS contacts within VCU’s Institute for Drug and Alcohol Studies recommended VCU Libraries as a partner in the Humphrey Fellowship Program for mid-career professionals from developing countries. This partnership cultivated a new set of professional contacts and allies for VCU libraries. Interdisciplinary, cross-campus, and multi-institutional collaborations are invaluable in showcasing libraries as organizations capable of spanning vast divides.

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i <http://guides.library.vcu.edu/ipas>

ii <http://www.youtube.com/users/vculibraries/videos>