FROM GARBAGE TO GARDEN: COMPOSTING INSTRUCTIONAL CONCEPTS TO IMPROVE LIBGUIDES

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INTRODUCTION

LibGuides: we all have them (or something like them). If untended, broken links and out-of-date information can grow like kudzu. Most instructional librarians take a cursory glance over a guide before they teach a class, but subject guides and sites for courses that no longer come over for instruction may not get updated regularly. Knowing that hard work is better when done as a team, the Joyner Library Research and Instructional Services librarians roll up their sleeves each summer to conduct an annual cleanup project. The LibGuides Summer Project recycles common instructional methods used in college-level courses, including scaffolding, modeling, office hours, and peer review. At the end of the spring semester, the project leader creates and sends out a syllabus to lay out instruction and updates for the entire summer. The syllabus is broken up into 2-3 week modules with extra time built in for summer holidays, like the 4th of July and for conferences, like ALA. During departmental meetings, the leader presents a 10-minute instructional session that models the updates required for the LibGuides. Participants take the next two weeks to complete these updates to their own guides. An office hour can be set aside by the project leader for drop-in help for new concepts or support in completing the module. Additionally, peer review can be built in for each module or at the end of the entire project, if there is time. At the end of the summer, all of the LibGuides have been systematically updated, not only the ones that have come over for instruction in the past year.

PROPAGATION OF THE PROJECT

The LibGuides Summer Project was started out of a necessity to separate the wheat from the chaff in the Joyner Library research guides. When I started as the Instructional Design Librarian in 2011, LibGuides had grown wild with over 400 research guides. Some of the guides were transplants from a homegrown pathfinder system that predated LibGuides at ECU. Some classes, such as freshman composition classes, had multiple guides for each section or instructor. All of the guides were listed on a single master guide with all 400+ guides linked in 10-point font. During the summer of 2012, I was asked to eradicate a number of the guides and to come up with a list of best practices and naming conventions. The ultimate goal was reorganizing the list into a new design. Since each librarian was the owner of a fraction of the guides, this would have to be a group project. For the first year, librarians were asked during departmental meetings to review the Springshare statistics for their guides to identify those that would be set first to private and later unpublished from the system. The librarians renamed each remaining guide to fit a naming convention that would make the friendly URLs easy to remember. The redesigned list was much easier to navigate.

I did not have a syllabus that first summer, and although everyone worked diligently on deadheading old guides and renaming them, the guides still had some out-of-date information and links on them. The next summer, I planned the summer project in the form that it takes now. I developed a syllabus that taught common tools needed for making updates to the guides, including the Link Checker. Instruction included an overview of the template guide, fixing broken links, changing from our old chat widget to the new one, adding OneSearch boxes, and the addition of citation guides. I also asked librarians to create learning outcomes and put them on their guides. We worked to make the tab order similar on most of the guides and to add a “Career” tab to the guides, since we often fielded questions about career information at the desk. Because we had some new people on the team, I also offered an office hour during each module. By reusing common-sense instructional methods, our LibGuides ecosystem was beginning to grow into the cultivated garden we were hoping for.

When the change to LibGuides 2.0 came around, it was already the third year of the LibGuides Summer Project. Thus, instruction during the summer of 2014 was not only a
review of old information; the updated system was new to everyone. Other departments that also had materials in the system came on board to systematically cull the content we had on LibGuides 1.0 for the changeover. Unlike previous years, each lesson was presented three times: once for the Research and Instructional Services department, once for the health sciences librarians during their departmental meeting, and once more for those who could not make it to either of the previous sessions. Besides changes to the LibGuides system, there had also been changes to our catalog server and other important tools, so the updates were doubly important. Having the summer project in place made the switch to LibGuides 2.0 go very smoothly.

Summer 2015 built on the idea of adding new skills to the librarians’ toolkits—a large-scale video project was presented biweekly. We kicked off the summer project by watching a webinar about video editing for librarians, and then I presented lessons on how to storyboard and record a short video. Because the focus was not directly on the LibGuides, I also added a checklist for common guide updates to ensure that the librarians were able to make annual changes to each of their guides. When the summer was complete, we had 12 new videos in our template guide.

The LibGuides Summer Project takes a short time to plan, but the results in the landscape of an institution’s research guides can be like MiracleGro—impressive. By scaffolding the work into 2-week modules, an entire institution’s LibGuides are updated over the course of the summer, and all of the librarians are in it together. I have created a toolkit for you to plan your own LibGuides Summer Project, which can be found here: http://bit.ly/1N4pBCz
FROM GARBAGE TO GARDEN: Composting Instructional Concepts to Improve LibGuides

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Feel free to contact me, see files online, or borrow LibGuides!

Transplanting Ideas

Create
- Template Guide
- Tutorial Videos
- Buttons to share
- READ Posters
- Widgets

General Cleanup
- Run Statistics
- Set unused guides to "private" or delete
- Run Link Checker
- Check for outdated content
- Add alt-text for accessibility
- Create new guides

Additions
- Career Tab
- Get Help Tab
- Welcome Tab
- Learning objectives
- Top 3 Journals
- Citation guide
- Screenshots

Video Project
- Subject-specific videos
- Scaffold Instruction
- Embed in Template

Propagation of the Project

ECU Libraries have attempted to address issues with out-of-date content in LibGuides by conducting an annual group cleanup project during the lull over the summer. Librarians are provided with a brief weekly instruction session on a feature of LibGuides or a best practice in web design. They are then given one week to make the change to their guides.

Landscaping LibGuides

Step 1: Create a summer-long scaffolded lesson plan. Remember vacations & ALA-pad the time.

Step 2: Roll the idea out to staff. Provide the plan. Present each lesson in a weekly meeting.

Step 3: Provide weekly office hours and handouts to track progress. Set up peer review, if necessary.

Can You Dig It?

- ECU LibGuides: http://libguides.ecu.edu
- Template Guide: http://libguides.ecu.edu/template

Note: Feel free to borrow anything from my LibGuides via the Springshare Community. Contact me with questions!

Further Reading


LOEX Annual Conference 2016: Pittsburgh