

The Quarterly Interview: Heidi Steiner Burkhardt

Norwich University

-Edited Transcript-

LOEX: *Where do you work? What is your title and main responsibilities? How long have you been in this position?*

Steiner Burkhardt: I work at Norwich University, a private military college in Vermont. We support traditional civilian undergraduates and those in the Corps of Cadets, as well as completely online students in our College of Graduate and Continuing Studies (CGCS). My title is Head of Digital Services, which I have held since June 2012. I originally came to Norwich as the Distance Learning Librarian in August 2009 and fulfilled those duties through early 2014. I currently lead all things technology and interwebs. My main duties are overseeing WorldShare Management Services and WorldCat Local, providing leadership for the library's web presence and managing all website content, administering technology related procurement and budget lines, and supervising our Electronic Resources Librarian. I also serve as liaison to our School of Business & Management and School of Nursing.

What books or articles have influenced you (up to three)?

1) *Don't Make Me Think* by Steve Krug (2005). An essential read for anyone interested in usability and/or customer service. It is focused on web usability, but the ideas are applicable to many of the things we do.

2) *Reflective Teaching, Effective Learning: Instructional Literacy for Library Educators* by Char Booth (2011). Fantastic book for librarians with teaching responsibilities of any flavor. It is extremely approachable and digestible even for those of us who teach capably, but maybe do not feel the passion for it. I really appreciate her instructional design model and focus on thoughtfully integrating technology.

3) "What's a Library Worth? Piecing Together the Structure of Value" by Eleanor Jo Rodgers in *American Libraries* (2007). This article presents a simple, significant premise: all libraries are part of a host ecosystem that we need to sustain and must create value for. This is something I think about a lot, but Rodgers frames it wonderfully.

How did you first become interested in distance/online teaching and digital services?

Complete accident of course! I love research and digging for information, so I decided to go for my MLIS. Academic librarian was always my goal, but I honestly did not realize how much else was out there and just assumed the reference and instruction route was for me. If I knew what I did now, my coursework probably would have been very different! During my time at Oakland University, I recognized a love for providing reference help virtually and I really liked creating tutorials, videos, and guides. When I saw Norwich's

Distance Learning Librarian posting, it was not the kind of job I had ever considered, but the duties were the exact things I enjoyed.

About a year into the job, I found myself getting more fired up about the usability of our website for online students than the instructional design of my synchronous online classes. Recognizing user experience as a key personal value was when things fell into place. I also had the opportunity to dabble in e-resources and started noticing that I thrived on leading projects. Being entirely self-taught with all technology things, my penchant for figuring things out and general fearlessness about breaking stuff came in handy. Organically and gradually, digital services just kind of happened when our previous Head of Library Technology moved on. The first year had terrifying moments like losing five-figure technology in Canada during delivery and server woes, but I love it now because so much of my job is working with colleagues to help them build solutions with technology and enable their work.

What are the key aspects of a successful library online environment? How do you know they are successful?

One aspect I am especially interested in is web writing. Good web writing is simple, can make a huge difference in user experience, and anyone can execute it. Putting careful thought into web writing is critical to any online interactions with our patrons: text on our websites, email notifications, and virtual reference interactions. This is where you establish your voice and how your library presents itself online.

Consistency is another challenge. Libraries have their own websites, but also send patrons to outside vendors. Someone may go from our website to a LibGuide to WorldCat Local to a database to our link resolver to ILLiad. Plus, our website uses the University template, which is hard to replicate. Finding ways to be consistent and provide a "true north" so patrons do not constantly feel lost is vital. We use a consistent header and the same colors and fonts across all our external web services.

There are many ways to evaluate success, but it is also a moving target. Expectations are always changing, especially in academic libraries where new students come in and graduate every year! Use is one and we rely on Google Analytics, WMS analytics/reports, e-resource statistics, and LibGuides Statistics for keeping up. Watching patrons use our online environment, whether casually or through usability testing, is an option. Internally, I know our librarians and staff are successful when everyone is following our Web

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Style Guide. I hate the phrase “building a culture”...but that is what it is.

Norwich is not an exclusively online university but as more and more courses get offered online across the nation how can libraries help bridge the gap between the distance students and traditional students to ensure they are receiving an equal education? Why should libraries be concerned about library as place for distance learners? What is Norwich doing to ensure this?

Always considering distance students is the most critical. Anytime you make a decision about new services or resources, they need to be part of the equation. Further, distance learners physically do not get a chance to be part of an institution like you can when on a campus. Libraries cannot bank on the iconic nature of our buildings with these students. We have essential services and resources to offer, but they are inherently less visible.

This means making sure our distant learners have a space and are aware of our services and resources. I am in an interesting environment where our fully online students are all concentrated in the same college. We have had a Distance Learning Librarian position for almost 10 years, maintain a custom website for our online students, and built a strong relationship with CGCS and our Department of Academic Computing. CGCS also recently launched a portal called the Virtual Campus. All said, the practice of constantly considering distance learners has gradually become second nature to us and our environment has definitely aided that, but it required advocacy and a voice representing those students. All it takes is one person caring, ideally more!

What kinds of technologies do you use in your libraries’ online environment? What are the easiest and most complex tools you have used to enhance your online environment? What one tool would you say is most crucial for connecting with distance learners?

We use LibraryH3lp and the customizable chat widgets allow us to direct students to email when we are offline. Screenshots are easiest for quick visual demonstration and there are tons of browser extensions that make it easy to share via chat or email. I dabbled in screensharing using join.me. For short videos, Screencast-o-matic provides great quality with minimal learning curve. Captivate has its challenges, but we turn to it for videos requiring more editing. We also take advantage of Creative Commons licensed materials created by other libraries. We just migrated our website for online students off a Drupal site (the most complicated tool we have ever used) into a customized LibGuides group. LibGuides v2 is fantastic for online instruction and we love mixing, matching, and reusing content. I coordinated our transition by creating a project plan, setting timelines, and providing checklists for pre and post-migration to our liaison librarians. We

also have a storage guide for things like search boxes to ensure consistency and streamline maintenance, as well as established best practices for guide and content creation.

Obviously we need technologies to reach online learners, but the most critical tool is being human! I often joke about being on a mission to prove we are not robots. Chat services, using images, and providing video can obviously aid this, but I strongly feel being personable, writing like you talk and just genuinely showing you are there to help is the best approach.

With the rapid pace of change in not only technology but in how students want to learn how can libraries keep up?

As I mentioned earlier, keeping up with our students’ expectations is challenging because they are always changing. I read up on academic libraries generally, but focus on technology and digital services topics, as well as the broader higher education, technology, and business sectors. I share critical reports like the Horizon Report, the new Horizon Report Library Edition, and the ECAR Study on Undergraduate Students and Information Technology with colleagues. Also, one of my colleagues, Nikki, keeps us abreast of Project Information Literacy reports, which are so enlightening and valuable.

I also created an internal guide: Our Patrons. It contains visualizations of reference statistics, demographic facts from institutional data, key points from institution wide studies, personas for our primary audiences, and summaries with links for the reports mentioned above and some others. This is rooted in web usability, but much more than that now. The guide is the place to refer back to when we need a reminder of who we are there for. Tied to this is really building buy in and making everyone want to keep up through transparency and learning opportunities like workshops.

There is also going back to the idea of observation. I try to do at least a lap every day just to see how students are using the building. However, the biggest thing for us right now is a renovation! When it comes to technology and how students want to learn, asking does not hurt either. Our Director recently pushed for creating a Library Student Advisory Committee. It is now formed and we love having this group of students to bounce ideas off of and learn more about student life on campus.

See these links for the pre and post-migration checklists, http://bit.ly/412_pre-check and http://bit.ly/412_post-check