

LibGuides: Improving Student and Faculty Access to Information Literacy

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Abstract

Technological innovations have transformed our lives in unprecedented ways. These advances are being felt across all areas of life but most especially in institutions of higher learning and their research core, the academic library. To keep pace, academic librarians continue to adopt new technologies into their daily work as they strive for meaningful ways to serve their clients. This article examines Information Literacy LibGuides in several academic libraries, those who use LibGuides for Information Literacy tutorials and those who use it to support the subject.

LibGuides: Improving Student and Faculty Access to Information Literacy

Over the years libraries have developed subject guides or pathfinders to connect patrons to many available resources. Recently a new technology shift, commonly referred to as Web 2.0, has given libraries a virtual presence in cyberspace. Moving pathfinders to a virtual version on the web has been a no-brainer for most libraries, as they have used new and evolving technologies, including LibGuides, to accomplish this. Libraries currently use LibGuides not only for subject guides, but also for teaching research and information literacy skills. This article examines how LibGuides are presently being used to help students learn critical thinking and research skills.

Brazzeal found that few libraries posted course level research guides on their web pages because of the effort and skill required to create and maintain them with limited knowledge of web development, as well as lack of time and/or resources.¹ According to its web site, LibGuides combines web development tools, such as HTML editing software, with wikis, blogs, RSS feeds, web-based videos, and other social networking tools, such as Meebo, all of which makes it easy to create and update them.² Springshare, LibGuides's producer, also provides training sessions. However, a librarian with no web design experience can master the use of LibGuides fairly quickly because firsthand knowledge of HTML and coding scripts is not required. As an added bonus, the software keeps statistics on the number of views--which can be helpful in determining the usefulness of the page. The LibGuides system automatically detects a user's mobile browser and easily gives patrons access to research content wherever they may be. They can also stay connected using email alerts and RSS updates. Tweets from librarians using LibGuides can be found on Springshare's Twitter account "Favorites" link.

Because of its feedback capabilities, using LibGuides can be a powerful tool for realizing the ultimate goal of an academic library, which is to connect students and faculty with improved services. This online connection is a step toward the collaboration that Cawthorne speaks of in his article on building relationships. He writes that through “meaningful partnerships with students, teaching faculty, departments, research centers, and institutes, library outreach can have its greatest impact on the manner in which the educational community deals with lifelong learning.”³

The LibGuides Community Web Site (<http://libguides.com/community>) is a good place to examine information literacy guides.⁴ A keyword search on this site for the term “information literacy” yielded 37 hits in August 2011. However, this number, while seemingly small, is misleading since the website indicates that there are currently 175,391 existing guides in existence--used by 33,515 librarians at 2361 libraries worldwide. Since other words and phrases are used interchangeably with information literacy, it can be assumed that more than 37 libraries use LibGuides for information literacy pages. This article is limited to the phrase “information literacy” because it is the term used by the Information Literacy Coordinating Committee of the Association of College and Research Libraries.

A literature search in EBSCOhost Research databases in June, 2011, for the terms “information literacy” and “LibGuides” did not yield very many articles on this topic either. It is conceivable that universities teaching information literacy in a credit course may employ a course management system instead of LibGuides, and others might have tutorials or other web sites for students to use as needed. Since LibGuides is relatively new, it is possible it could be embraced by more libraries when librarians learn more

about its availability, affordability, and ease of use.

As an example, the librarians at Bloomsburg University (BU) in Pennsylvania created an information literacy course with LibGuides, which was chronicled in a 2006 issue of *C&RL News*. In the past the library had used both tutorials and a credit course to teach these skills. When this approach was evaluated, the decision was made to transfer as much of the course content as possible onto the library's LibGuides website.⁵

According to the librarians involved with the project, one of the biggest advantages of using LibGuides is that it doesn't require a "high level of technology expertise to create Web pages."⁶ The content of the information literacy guide was modeled after James Madison University's "Information-Seeking Skills Test" which had been developed in close connection with faculty and other libraries that were given permission to copy and customize the page as needed. The BU library team added their own content and ensured that the LibGuides pages were consistent with the tutorial pages. Two separate assessments were created after consulting with the university's instructional media staff: one in Blackboard for faculty wishing to use the LibGuide in their courses, and the other as an online quiz for self-assessment.

The Use of LibGuides for Information Literacy Tutorials

Many libraries have done an excellent job of using LibGuides for Information Literacy tutorials. A description of four of them follows along with highlights of their pages.

- Harvey A. Andruss Library

<http://guides.library.bloomu.edu/genedtutorial>

Called “General Library Research Tutorial,” the LibGuide has tabs for eight modules and an assessment for both pre-testing and post-testing. The home page states that libraries from around the world have contacted the university librarians responsible for the page asking to use their tutorial and have been allowed to do so. There are many useful features, such as the clear directions on the page that show students how to navigate the tutorial and the creation of subject lists. The main advantage of creating subjects for a library’s Information Literacy LibGuides is that all guides connected to the topic can be found in one place

There are several examples of using LibGuides that are connected to the for-credit course offered by a library or a university. The following is a list of some of those guides.

- Sims Memorial Library

<http://selu.libguides.com/content.php?pid=115796&sid=999406>

Southeastern Louisiana University at Hammond, Louisiana, has developed an excellent LibGuide to accompany its LS102 course called “Introduction to Information Research.” The guide contains eight tabs with sub-menus and as a bonus, an entertaining YouTube video called “Library: the Movie.” Southeastern seems to be a pioneer in the initiative to connect LibGuides to course content in Louisiana.

- Polk Library

<http://libguides.polk.edu/informationliteracy>

The Lakeland campus at Polk State College in Florida provides course integrated information literacy instruction that offers the university faculty four options in their modules for Moodle course software. The library also offers two one-credit courses:

“Introduction to Internet Resources”, which is online; and a three week shorter course called “Basic Library and Information Skills.”

- Evansdale Library

<http://libguides.wvu.edu/infolit>

West Virginia University’s Evansdale Library developed a LibGuide with the basics for faculty who are involved in what their university calls the “Information Literacy Enhancement Project.” A toolkit contains assignment ideas, rubrics, articles on integrating information literacy into courses, and a PowerPoint presentation on plagiarism avoidance from the ULIB 101 course.

Libraries developing LibGuides relating to information literacy can tag the guide with this term and/or create the subject “Information Literacy” within the LibGuides framework, as was done here. In this manner all guides relating to the subject are easily found from the library’s LibGuides home page.

The Use of LibGuides to Support Information Literacy

Other libraries offer information literacy pages that are not connected to courses. These pages describe information literacy and the resources that the library has to support information literacy as a learning outcome. Examples of these pages seem to be more prevalent than LibGuides that are connected to a for-credit course or tutorial. A selective list includes the following:

- Dean B. Ellis Library – Arkansas State University

<http://libguides.astate.edu/cat.php?cid=8310>

- Loras College Library - Loras College
<http://libguides.loras.edu/cat.php?cid=28026>
- Louis J. Blume Library – St. Mary’s University
<http://stmarytx.libguides.com/cat.php?cid=24222>
- Run Run Shaw Library – City University of Hong Kong
<http://libguides.library.cityu.edu.hk/content.php?pid=103622&hs=a>

Conclusion

The examination of the various Information Literacy web sites validates LibGuides’s claim that it can be a valuable tool for libraries because the guides quickly and easily incorporate interactive features that the current generation of college students has come to expect. The guides also allows for experimentation and feedback. Cohen states in the blog *Librarian’s 2.0 Manifesto*, “I will not wait until something is perfect before I release it, and I’ll modify it based on user feedback.”⁷

The use of LibGuides is in the experimental stage at Grambling State University. The page created as help for login to off-campus databases had over 500 hits this semester without any publicity for the new resource. The library’s local area network is maintained separately from the campus infrastructure, so there is limited support for technology in the library. The pilot test of LibGuides for electronic database login has demonstrated it is a useful resource in filling the gap between the university’s web page and the librarians, who for the most part have limited web page design skills. Armed with this information, the A.C. Lewis Memorial Library now looks forward to integrating LibGuides pages with class instruction.

Creating academically meaningful online content for today's students is more of a challenge than in the past due to the rapid transformation of technology. Therefore, LibGuides can be ideal for the development of information literacy pages that have real meaning to the students due to the collaboration of the library, students, and faculty to connect with course content. Librarians have a new tool that will keep pace with rapid technology changes while they focus on what they do best, no matter the format—and that has always been connecting patrons to the information they need.

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1. Bradley Brazzeal, "Research guides as library instruction tools," *Reference Services Review*, 34:3 (2006)
 2. LibGuides for Academic Libraries, available from <<http://www.springshare.com/libguides/academic>>
 3. Jon E. Cawthorne, "Integrating outreach and building partnerships," *College & Research Libraries News*, 64:10 (2003)
 4. LibGuides Community, available from < <http://libguides.com/community>>
 5. Kathryn Yelnick, "Using LibGuides for an information literacy tutorial," *College & Research Libraries News*, 71:7, Aug. 2010
 6. Ibid.
 7. Cohen, Laura, "Librarian's 2.0 Manifesto," 8 Nov. 2006, available from <http://liblogs.albany.edu/library20/2006/11/a_librarians_20_manifesto.html>

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Rosemary Mokia, PhD, is an Associate Professor and Head of Acquisitions and Serials at Grambling State University. She earned her BA from the University of Yaounde, Cameroon, an MLS from Simmons College, and her PhD from Indiana University. She has been co-principal investigator of three grants and co-writer of two proposals for A.C. Lewis Memorial Library that brought the library over \$900,000. She is the library liaison for the College of Business and serves on several committees at the university. “Even though Grambling is in the beginning stages of using LibGuides, I can already see how it will help me better serve the business faculty and students by linking the library’s resources through Blackboard.”

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She is the library liaison for foreign languages, English, and history. “I was surprised at how fast I was able to create a subject guide page. Things change so quickly now, but I could instantly make user guides available to both our on-campus and distance learning students by linking to them on the library’s electronic databases page. Until now, I needed to know HTML codes and web page design for this.”

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