

Introduction

Librarians and staff at the University of Toledo Libraries endeavored to create a virtual library (eLibrary) utilizing Blackboard, the web-based course management system, to provide unique services to distance-learners.

Method/Strategy

- A task force of librarians and an instructional designer from the University Libraries, eLearning and Academic Support was assembled
- A timeline was created to establish a working model
- A statement of purpose was composed
- Goals and objectives were outlined
- Existing projects were explored
- An introductory page on the Distance Learning Web Site was created (Figure 1)

Adding Content

- Relevant content for the site with emphasis on electronic resources was selected
- Information categories were chosen
- Objectives for each category was selected
- Information under each category was organized

Integration Into Blackboard

- The selected subject categories were submitted to the instructional designer to create templates
- The selected subject categories were submitted to the graphic artist to create icons for the main eLibrary page (Figure 2)
- A Bookmark design recently created by the UT Marketing and Communications Department was selected for a banner (Figure 2)
- The colors of the bookmark were chosen as the overall color scheme for the pages and icons (Figure 2)
- A Link to eLibrary was prominently displayed upon login to Blackboard (Figure 3).
- Links to librarian's photos and bios were included for a personal connection (Figure 4)

Assessment

- A survey was placed within Blackboard to assess usability, gather demographic information, and provide an avenue for feedback
- A usability study using students was proposed



Figure 1: e Library Page Linked from Distance Learning Page



Figure 2: e Library Home Page in Blackboard

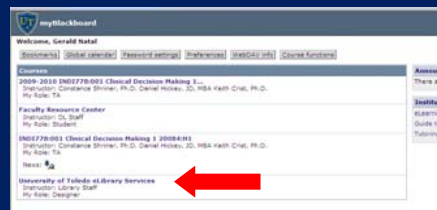


Figure 3: e Library Link in Blackboard



Figure 4: Librarian Biographies

Figure 5: eLibrary Usage from 5/26/09 through 8/24/09

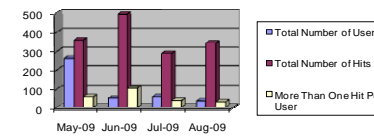


Figure 6: Summary of User Comments

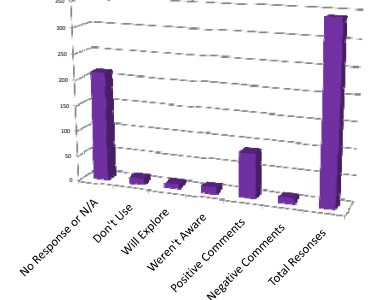


Figure 7: "I would recommend the eLibrary site to my fellow students."

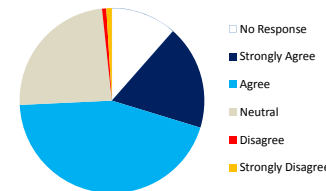


Figure 8: Responses to "I would use the eLibrary site again."

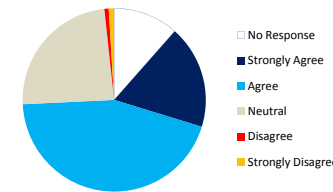
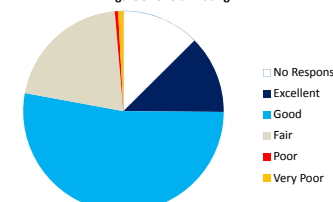


Figure 9: Overall Rating



Marketing

- Library Blogs
- UT News
- Emails to Faculty
- Distance Learning Newsletter
- Library Facebook Page
- Letter to faculty from library administration

Results

The eLibrary was accessible in late May. Students began to utilize the site immediately, despite there having been no promotion. Usage statistics depict an initial surge of hits; total hits decline with time, but with an increasing number of individuals using the site more frequently (Figures 5-8). The decline in usage in August was likely due to the ending of summer classes.

A summary of 932 user's comments submitted from May 26 through September 3, 2009 show overall satisfaction with the eLibrary, with 85.5% of comments being positive. Typical positive comments include:

-- "Helpful and easy to use!"
-- "Locating the library search prior to use of the Blackboard was often confusing and hard to find on the UT site. I am delighted you have created a way to make access easier."

From some of the negative comments surveyed, it was evident the users had misconceptions about the eLibrary and its purpose:

"don't use it, waste of money"
"I think the eLibrary is useless and unnecessary. I don't want to be paying for this service."

Discussion

Important Factors to consider for maximization of use and success of an eLibrary Support Center:

- Link to the site is prominently displayed upon login to Blackboard (Figure 3)
- Allow students to "connect" to UT librarians through biographical information (Figure 4)
- Have a representative on the administrative end of Blackboard to attend to technical details and reduce the time necessary to make changes or fix problems
- Install EZProxy to facilitate access to databases

Conclusion

The eLibrary Support Center illustrates one way librarians can utilize current technology to reach students beyond the brick and mortar library. Future plans include usability studies to improve the site and the addition video tutorials and instructional sessions.

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For More Information Contact:

Gerald Natal, MLIS
Health Sciences Librarian, Mulford Library
419.383.4227
gerald.natal@utoledo.edu