

Connecting with Faculty and Students through Course-Related LibGuides

Kelly A. Clever

Public Services Librarian, Seton Hill University, clever@setonhill.edu

Academic librarians face increasing challenges when trying to connect their services and resources with faculty and students, especially as courses move online and are taught by adjunct faculty. Online research guides, most commonly LibGuides, can be automatically inserted into course shells within learning management systems (LMS) using learning tool interoperability (LTI) protocols, but an alternative to automatic integration is for librarians to match and suggest appropriate subject guides to faculty for inclusion in their courses. Personally matching and recommending LibGuides to faculty can be an effective form of library outreach and relationship-building. This article describes a pilot project of suggesting specific LibGuides to faculty and its success in forging and strengthening several library-department connections.

Introduction

Academic librarians have always faced challenges when marketing their collections and services to faculty and students. In-person outreach, email lists, social media, flyers on bulletin boards, programming, and more have all been tried with great success in some situations and less success in others (Edwards, Norton, Tennant, Stoyan-Rosenzweig, & Daley, 2015; Piekart & Lafazan, 2015). Now, with a large percentage of courses being taught online or by adjunct faculty who may not attend department meetings, librarians face new challenges in outreach to instructors and in turn their students (Lederman, 2018; National Center for Education Statistics, 2018, 2019). LibGuides are a tool that librarians can leverage to reach both faculty and students with instruction and library resources, regardless of course delivery format or faculty status. In this project, I personally selected and recommended specific LibGuides to faculty for inclusion in the course learning management system as a form of outreach to both professors and students.

Literature Review

Existing literature indicates that LibGuide usage is strongly correlated to library instruction. In particular, guides that are created or edited in consultation with the course instructor show higher levels of use (Adebonojo, 2010; Gonzalez & Westbrook, 2010). This collaboration with subject faculty can be done at a casual level, in which the faculty member merely reviews the completed guide and makes suggestions for additions or improvements, or the course instructor can determine the level of detail on the guide and can have very specific requests (Adebonojo, 2010).

In many cases, face-to-face meetings and library instruction sessions are not possible, and some librarians see opportunities for LibGuides to help fill the gap for distance and online programs (Fagerheim, Lundstrom, Davis, & Cochran, 2017; Gonzalez & Westbrook, 2010). The Association of College and Research Libraries' (2008) standards specify that all constituents of an educational institution should have equitable access to its library's resources and services, regardless of where or how they work or take classes. LibGuides can be a powerful tool to facilitate this access (Kickham-Samy & McCarthy, 2018).

Many libraries with the necessary staffing and technological support have chosen to embed LibGuides into classes via the course management system, or learning management system (LMS) (Adebonojo, 2010; Fagerheim et al, 2017; Gonzalez & Westbrook, 2010; Hristova, 2013). The most popular method of integrating LibGuides into LMS courses is to use a learning tools interoperability (LTI) tool to automate the process. Many libraries use the LTI tool available in Springshare's own CMS package (Richards, 2016), but some institutions have created their own LTI program (Daly, 2010; Fagerheim et al., 2017). Automating the integration process can present technical or logistical challenges, but the alternative of manual linking has been viewed as unsustainable and/or inconsistent (Chiware, 2014; Fagerheim et al, 2017; Garofalo, 2014; Hristova, 2013).

Still, an alternative to automated integration is for course instructors to personally link to LibGuides from their LMS courses. This faculty involvement typically leads to the faculty having a greater understanding of the resources and services offered by the library (Gonzalez & Westbrook, 2010; Hristova, 2013). They often find the effort well-repaid, particularly if they teach the same course repeatedly and do not have to re-import or re-add the library guide into their course shell from term to term (Hristova, 2013). New Mexico State University saw high usage of the guides that were embedded by faculty (Gonzalez & Westbrook, 2010). Jarrell and Wilhoite-Mathews (2014) observe that the most effective marketing typically takes place one-on-one, and Fagerheim et al (2017) believe that subject librarians should make an effort to follow up on an individual basis with faculty members to encourage them to promote LibGuides.

The literature does not address librarians matching guides to courses individually and then personally suggesting them to faculty for inclusion in the LMS in a systematic fashion. While this is a time- and labor-intensive approach to the situation, it has the potential to reap significant returns on the investment in the form of better library-faculty relations, more information literacy instruction sessions, improved student research products, and increased usage of library resources. Librarians seeking to improve their departmental liaison relationships, to increase the awareness of particular library resources, or who lack access to an LTI tool to do the matching for them may find such a project to be worthwhile.

Background

Seton Hill University is a small liberal arts university which serves more than 2000 students in 80 undergraduate and 13 graduate programs. It is divided into five schools: Business; Humanities; Education and Applied Social Sciences; Natural and Health Sciences; and Visual and Performing Arts. Every academic school is served by a liaison librarian; each librarian is partnered with one or two schools. Liaison duties involve attending

academic school meetings, serving on academic program review committees, performing some collection development work, and teaching instructional sessions as requested by faculty.

Many close working relationships have developed between faculty members and liaison librarians, and these faculty frequently request classes, guides, tutorials, and reference assistance from the library. Other instructors, however, have been more difficult to reach. This is particularly true of adjunct and online faculty, who do not attend academic school meetings and who may rarely or never be on campus. The library has not had a presence at faculty orientations, so reaching these “invisible” instructors and thus their students has been a challenge.

Point-of-need research help that is directly related to course content is generally understood to be an effective form of information literacy instruction and also as a way to forge connections between faculty and students and the university library. While the Seton Hill librarians believed that placing LibGuides into course LMS shells would be tremendously helpful to the students, we did not have the ability to automate the process. Due to financial and personnel issues, neither the Springshare CMS solution nor an in-house LTI option was possible. Late in the fall 2018 semester, I decided to personally match and suggest guides for each course being taught in the spring 2019 semester in my liaison area, the School of Education and Applied Social Sciences.

Reaching Out

I sent an email in early January 2019 to the faculty teaching courses in the School of Education and Applied Social Sciences for the spring 2019 semester. The email suggested that they add a specific LibGuide to their Canvas course(s) (Appendix A). I contacted 29 full-time and adjunct faculty who were teaching a total of 58 course sections. At mid-term, I sent a check-in message to say hello, and near the end of the semester, I sent a follow-up email, asking them to provide their feedback via a brief questionnaire (Appendix B).

The faculty questionnaire needed to be brief to encourage participation. The survey asked whether or not they had used the suggested guide; if not, why not; and if so, whether or not they believed it had been helpful. It also asked if they would like to receive similar suggestions in future, and faculty were provided with the opportunity to leave any further feedback that they wished.

To determine whether or not the LibGuides themselves saw increased usage as a result of the outreach effort, I also compared usage statistics from the previous spring semester with the numbers for the spring 2019 term for the selected guides.

Response and Impact

Faculty Feedback

There were only seven responses to the faculty survey, though four other instructors shared thoughts and suggestions via email, for a total response rate of 37.9%. Two of the survey respondents said that they did not add the guide(s) to their courses because they received the suggestion too late to incorporate them into the courses. One of these instructors did indicate that they forwarded the link on to the students, however. Of the five survey respondents who did add the guide, three believed that it had a positive impact on the quality of the students’ work, while the other two were unsure. All of the respondents indicated that they would like to receive similar suggestions in the future.

The four instructors who responded via email indicated that they did not use the guide suggestions. The reasons they gave were: a lack of research assignments in the course; not teaching the class, though they had

originally been scheduled to teach it; personal issues that had distracted them from adding the guide; and being unable to make changes to the course because the degree program was ending.

The feedback on the faculty questionnaire indicated that they would like to receive similar suggestions in the future, but that guide suggestions should be sent earlier (I sent the initial emails a week and a half before the beginning of the spring semester, with the thought that course preparation would be at the forefront of faculty's minds). One instructor indicated that, due to some accelerated-format courses beginning in early January, the information should be sent out in early December. Another stated that the beginning of the term "was a little crazy... so [I] wasn't able to get to everything I wanted to."

While only seven of the 29 faculty instructors completed the formal questionnaire, 14 individuals did respond via email to one or more of the three email messages throughout the semester. Several of the email responses indicated that the guide suggestions should be sent farther in advance of the beginning of the academic term. From the faculty comments, it seems that they would prefer to receive guide suggestions approximately one month before the start of the course.

One instructor who completed the questionnaire indicated reluctance to link directly from the LMS, explaining in the survey, "I did direct my students to the LibGuides on the library site. Actually, I want them to get used to both using the Reeves [library] site and visiting the library, so I am a little conflicted about putting everything in Canvas and not requiring them to engage in resources; they can find other stuff when they do that!" This echoes concerns that the Seton Hill librarians have heard from faculty in previous years about potentially doing too much of the work for the students. By contrast, however, another professor who responded by email said "After you... recommended sharing the LibGuide... in Canvas -- which I thought was a fantastic idea -- I've been including that in the first module with the 'important information for the class' in all my classes." Recommending the guides to the instructors personally instead of automating guide inclusion in course shells thus allows instructors to integrate the material in a way that they feel best achieves their information literacy goals for the course.

Three instructors requested librarian class visits as a direct result of the outreach effort. They indicated that the LibGuides had served as examples of what the library and the librarians had to offer to them and their students. In two cases, the courses had previously featured information literacy class visits, but the library session had been dropped when new instructors took over the courses. After reviewing the emailed guide suggestions, the new course instructors reached out to the library with class requests, reinstating the library involvement in those courses. The third class had never incorporated a library session or dedicated information literacy instruction before and was an entirely new opportunity to connect with the professor and their students. All three instruction sessions were well-received, and in two cases, resulted in a close working relationship between the faculty instructor and the liaison librarian. These faculty began referring students and colleagues to the library for reference help and copyright questions. One began consulting the library for help identifying appropriate venues for publication.

Six of the 14 instructors who responded via email at some point in the semester were adjuncts; four of them taught on-campus classes and two taught only online. As a result of the outreach initiative, the Dean of the School of Education and Applied Social Sciences also invited the library to participate in orientation for new faculty, including adjunct and online-only instructors. These closer partnerships will hopefully endure and grow going forward.

Guide Usage

Table 1 presents the guide usage statistics for the spring semesters of 2018 and 2019 for the 11 recommended guides.

Table 1
Guide Usage Statistics for January 1 – May 31, 2018 and 2019

<u>Guide</u>	<u>2018</u>	<u>2019</u>
Addiction & Recovery	131	59
Children’s Literature	10	26
Criminal Justice	36	149
Health Sciences	139	98
Law	1	19
Psychology	377	370
Sociology	14	33
Spirituality	15	21
Social Science Research Methods	24	246
Human Behavior & The Social Environment	11	13
Teaching Health	6	4
Total	764	1041

Children’s Literature, Criminal Justice, Law, Sociology, Spirituality, and Social Science Research Methods showed significant increases in traffic over the same time period in the previous year. The other five guides did not. The total views for the 11 guides did increase by 36.2%, due mostly to increases in views on the Social Science Research Methods and Criminal Justice guides.

Limitations

The survey responses are from a self-selected sample of instructors, and the survey was not pre-tested. The low response rate to the questionnaire form was disappointing but not surprising, and it was somewhat offset by emailed responses from four other faculty. The surveys were distributed at a busy point in the semester in hopes that faculty would not yet be away from their teaching duties for the summer.

The guide use statistics may have been impacted by potential variables such as new instructors, different assignments, or differences in the students enrolled in courses. Many of the guides, particularly the Health Sciences and Law guides, are also used heavily by students and faculty in other academic schools.

Recommendations and Conclusion

As a result of the feedback from faculty, future guide suggestions will be emailed to instructors about one month before the beginning of the academic term. When workloads and time constraints prohibit matching and suggesting guides for every possible course, the suggestions may only be sent to select faculty. High-priority groups for this form of outreach would be online instructors, new faculty, faculty teaching newly-designed courses, adjunct instructors, and faculty teaching in programs that have been challenging for the librarians to reach via other outreach methods.

Feedback from faculty via the questionnaire and particularly by email indicates that instructors found the recommendations helpful and would like to receive them again in future. Proactively recommending specific guides and resources for courses opened the door for information literacy instruction and strengthened faculty-librarian partnerships, potentially making such projects a worthwhile investment of effort and time for librarians who are seeking to improve their liaison relationships.

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Appendix A

First Email to Faculty

Hi -----,

I am the library liaison for the School of Education & Applied Social Sciences, which makes me *your* librarian-- and your students'! I was reviewing the course schedule for the spring semester and see that you are teaching a few classes this coming semester. The library has online research guides that can help your students with any research projects you may be assigning for your course(s).

My suggested guides for the classes you're teaching are:

- SSW 122 Understanding Addictions -- Addiction & Recovery
<https://setonhill.libguides.com/addiction>
- SSW 271 The Helping Relationship -- Social Work
<https://setonhill.libguides.com/socialwork>

An easy way to help your students is to add a link to the guide right into your Canvas course. I've attached instructions for one way to do that.

I'm also happy to come to your class to meet with your students or to work with you to create a more tailored guide or tutorial video for the course. And please make sure that your students know that I'm always happy to help them with their research projects!

I'm also attaching the library's spring newsletter with some news and information about the library more generally.

Have a great semester, and please let me know if there's anything I can do to aid your teaching.

--(Author)

Appendix B

Faculty Questionnaire

1. Did you add the suggested LibGuide to your Canvas course? (Answer “yes” if you added a suggested guide to at least one course, even if you did not add them to others)
 - Y/N

- 2a. [CONDITIONAL] If no, why not?
 - Process too complicated
 - No research component to course
 - Didn't see the benefit
 - Other [optional short-answer]

- 2b. [CONDITIONAL] If yes, did you get the sense that it was helping your students and/or improving their work?
 - Y/N/not sure

3. Would you like to receive these guide suggestions for your courses again in the future?
Y/N/not sure