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Ain't no party like a LibGuides Party

'cause a LibGuides Party is mandatory

What is currently on your librarian backburner? We'd be willing to make a few bets on the content of those pots growing cold. Maybe we would find a weeding project on pause, a draft of an article gathering dust, or that meeting agenda you know you can throw together only hours before the actual meeting. LibGuides maintenance would probably be found on most of our backburners, too.

When the academic year begins and the instruction requests, committee meetings, and consultations begin to crowd our calendars, LibGuides upkeep can easily fall by the wayside. Updating broken links, tweaking code for enhanced accessibility, and cleaning up our asset lists can be tedious, and often uninspiring work. Anyone who has faced down a long list of broken links can likely attest to this.

Guide maintenance may be a mundane task to perform, but their upkeep and accessibility are crucial for our users. LibGuides, a web-based content management system from Springshare, serves as an essential pathfinding tool for users to easily access library resources. Librarians can create web pages to organize and curate a selection of resources for a topic, subject, or course without any website development skills. The LibGuides platform can be found at academic libraries throughout the world. According to Springshare,¹ more than 5,500 libraries use LibGuides in 98 countries. The ubiquity of this tool is in no doubt due to its easy functionality, website integration capabilities,

customization features, and strong support services from the Springshare team.

For many libraries, LibGuides remain a popular entry point for users to access library resources and, in many cases, are one of the most visited pages on the library's website. More than just a repository of information, guides can serve as synchronous and asynchronous instructional tools,² proxies for reference services, and important tools for outreach with user communities.^{3,4} Their currency, upkeep, and accessibility are vital to maintaining excellent user experience.

In an effort to create a productive and motivating space to focus efforts on guide maintenance, librarians at the University of North Carolina (UNC)-Charlotte organize a yearly event that brings together LibGuides editors for a day of learning, collaboration, and productivity. We throw a party that allows us to collectively move LibGuides maintenance from the backburner to a rolling boil. It isn't just any old party . . . it's a LibGuides Party.

Since 2016, LibGuide editors at UNC-Charlotte's J. Murrey Atkins Library have come together each summer for this annual tradition created by now retired Education

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and Psychology Librarian Judy Walker. The annual LibGuides Party was developed as an opportunity for editors to gather, share tips and tricks, and make use of time set aside for LibGuides-related tasks. Librarians at Atkins Library manage more than 600 LibGuides, with the majority of guides published to support academic fields of study and individual courses. Overall, librarian LibGuides use is fairly autonomous, with individual editors encouraged to use their professional judgement on their guide's design, layout, and content.

Throughout the academic year LibGuides work is, by and large, solitary work. This summer gathering offers a chance for editors to rub elbows, compare guides, ask questions, and get done what they've been meaning to get done all semester. Beyond the benefits to the library's LibGuides, this gathering also serves as a de facto team retreat. It's a chance for folks to get outside of their normal work setting, enjoy a leisurely lunch together on a mid-summer's day, and connect over the value of both their individual and collective work.

With the intrusion of COVID-19 into our lives, we've been thrust out of our normal work settings, and the idea of holding an in-person gathering, let alone a party, is currently unfeasible. All types of gatherings, from our one-on-one consultations to department and all-staff meetings, are being translated to function within a virtual world. Our own planning team will need to think of ways to creatively adapt this event.

Preparing for a LibGuides Party

Since Walker's retirement, a group of four librarians in the library's Research and Instructional Services subunit now serve on an informal LibGuides working group, which leads efforts in managing LibGuides training, best practices, accessibility, and general guide support. Starting in 2018, this group has taken the helm of planning for the yearly LibGuides Party.

Beginning in the spring, this group meets monthly to sketch out what the main goals will be for summer's event and start to de-

velop the day's agenda. In 2018, librarians formulated an integration workflow that would allow guides to appear in the course management system's (CMS) student view, creating another access point for students to use our guides. We used the LibGuides Party to introduce this new development, lead a tutorial on enabling guides to appear in the university's CMS platform, and provide editors with time to edit their metadata. Besides supporting this large-scale platform integration, the planners filled out the agenda with accessibility training, a refresher on editing broken links, ways to use new widgets, and encouraging guidance on deleting unused course guides and assets with zero connections.

Like any good party, planners must think about space, refreshments, and the guest list. For the past few years, planners have reserved a computer lab in our Center City building off of our main campus and in the heart of uptown Charlotte. Current editors responsible for multiple guides make the list to receive an attention-grabbing, GIF-laden party invite.

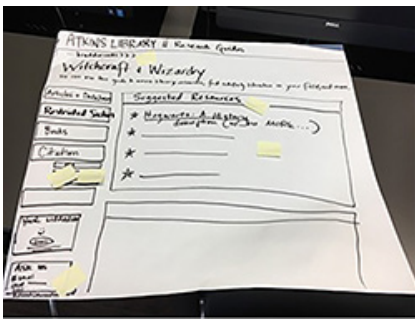
The main event

The summer 2019 LibGuides Party began on a Friday morning in mid-July when our instruction, research, and committee obligations had slowed to a summer's pace. The library was quiet with only a handful of summer session students, and our calendars had become more flexible. Editors were greeted with coffee, juice, and pastries to fuel a strong start to a day's LibGuides activities.

The day began with a presentation by our user experience librarian who had recently conducted usability testing on various guides. Her findings and recommendations framed the day's work by emphasizing the need for web-friendly writing, formatting, and visuals. Next up were short tutorials on how to map guides to a specific CMS (as a follow up from the past year's projects) and a project to recategorize guides. Representatives from our campus Accessibility Office provided a short training on accessibility strategies and tools within the LibGuides system. After each presentation, time was allotted for collective

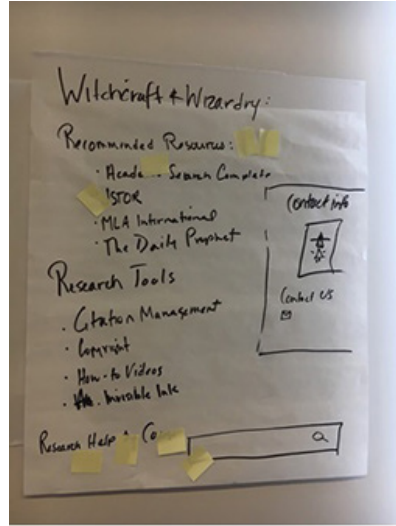
Q&A, discussion, and worktime to try out or implement all of the recommendations.

One of the main goals of this party was to collectively develop a subject guide template with side navigation formatting that would enable our users to have a more consistent experience. After reflecting on the goals of this guide type and reviewing examples from other institutions, small groups brainstormed what an ideal subject guide would look like for a new department. To add in a fun twist, we built a subject guide for the Department of Witchcraft and Wizardry, which is, sadly, not yet offering courses at UNC-Charlotte. After small groups designed an ideal guide



year, which asset was clicked on the most, and the debate-inducing, what is the correct pronunciation of “LibGuide”? Candy was widely shared, and the superlatives of Most Viewed Guide and Most Embedded Librarian were presented during the day’s wrap up.

The day ended with time to accomplish smaller acts of maintenance. Users could



Mock-ups of the Department of Witchcraft and Wizardry subject guide.

template, we did a gallery walk to highlight elements of each group’s template that we liked.

When dedicating an entire day’s focus to LibGuides, it’s helpful to include frequent breaks and levity, where possible. A rotating playlist of yacht rock and throwback hits provided a soundtrack to our work time. After a productive morning, partygoers saved their work, turned off their screens, and headed over to a local food hall for lunch. While eating with your colleagues isn’t required, we naturally broke up into smaller groups to eat together and chat about our future weekend plans.

Between the day’s presentations, tutorials, and work time, guests were treated to a fun mental break to play LibGuides Trivia. Pulled together from guide statistics, editors would work together to guess at interesting questions such as which date saw the highest number of LibGuides sessions over this past academic

delete or unpublish past course guides, fix broken links, consolidate menu tabs, and incorporate accessibility recommendations. Target due dates were shared for longer-term projects, and a follow-up survey was provided to gather feedback on the day.

Reflections

By dedicating an entire day in the form of a “party,” LibGuides editors can set aside their regular work and put their complete focus on bettering their guides. By breaking up the day into short training sessions, group brainstorming sessions, structured work time, and trivia, the day moves quickly and editors can feel accomplished by the end. Perhaps most valuable is the collaborative setting this editing takes place in. Instead of autonomous editing happening from lonesome offices, editors can get instant feedback, brainstorm ideas with their

tablemates, and lean on their colleagues for support.

Beyond the value of crafting more user-friendly, accessible, and relevant guides for our users, this day becomes a reprieve from our day-to-day office environment and an opportunity to bond with our colleagues. Organizing a full-day, retreat-style event around LibGuides not only communicates the value this tool brings to our users, but also allows our department to collectively learn about best practices, ensure consistency in quality across guides, and foster a department-wide bonding experience.

Parties amidst a pandemic

As an unsurprising addendum, COVID-19 put a wrench in our plans for LibGuides Party 2020. As we all scrambled to adapt to Zoom, WebEx, and Google Meet serving as our new gathering spots, we were forced to reassess strategies to have meetings that are both productive and not mentally draining. What did this look like for a day long retreat?

To combat so-called “Zoom fatigue,”⁵ we incorporated frequent breaks and opportunities to come in and out of our virtual session. Camera settings were optional and the food was, sadly, provided by oneself. What remained central, and perhaps even more so now, was the importance of bettering these digital pathfinding tools as we adapt to a culture of remote learning and research. We worked to transition guides to a side navigation layout to follow recommendations made by our user experience librarian, developed widgets to integrate LibAnswers into our guides, revised long-winded and jargon-filled database descriptions, and offered a guest presentation by a SpringShare employee on engagement and guide design. We even managed to fit in our new tradition of LibGuides Trivia.

While the reality of going back to an in-person party might be far away, the memory of our past LibGuides Parties can remind us of why we gather together in the first place and what is lost in translation on Zoom. For all that we’ve learned over these past few months

of isolation and virtual meetings, one simple element stands out to us: the ability to simply be in the same room with your colleagues is a valuable experience that shouldn’t be taken for granted. The true value of creating a retreat-style day out of a task or project goes beyond the potential for a burst of focus and productivity. This value appears in the collaborative spirit and relationship building that happens when colleagues gather in a room together. It’s in the small talk around the coffee thermos or sharing your weekend plans during lunch. It’s the ability to walk up to someone with a question or have some fun side conversations during work time.

We will get back to a place when we can safely gather again soon. We will go from Zoom rooms back to meeting rooms and chat room chatter to lunch table conversations. And when you and your colleagues are safely able to gather again, perhaps a party is in order. If you can make working on your LibGuides into a party, then you can make anything into a party. Stay safe and party on!

Notes

1. “LibGuides Community,” Springshare, 2020, <https://community.libguides.com/?action=0>.
2. Ruth L. Baker, “Designing LibGuides as instructional tools for critical thinking and effective online learning,” *Journal of Library & Information Services in Distance Learning* 8, no. 3-4 (2014): 107-117.
3. Sara Roberts and Dwight Hunter, “New library, new librarian, new student: Using LibGuides to reach the virtual student,” *Journal of Library & Information Services in Distance Learning* 5, no. 1-2 (2011): 67-75.
4. Ning Han and Susan L. Hall, “Think globally! Enhancing the international student experience with LibGuides,” *Journal of Electronic Resources Librarianship* 24, no. 4 (2012): 288-297.
5. Manyu Jiang, “The Reason Zoom Calls Drain your Energy,” BBC, April 22, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20200421-why-zoom-video-chats-are-so-exhausting>. ZZ