

Forging the library courseware link

Providing library support to students in an online classroom environment

by Julie George and Kari Martin

Today's university and college libraries operate in an ever-changing environment. A key catalyst in change on many campuses has been the implementation of course management software packages (CMSP) such as Blackboard. A CMSP enables faculty to teach fully online courses or use the Web to enhance their traditional courses with online content. Faculty can meet students in a virtual classroom, post messages regarding assignments or upcoming class sessions, answer questions, organize group projects, and much more. In short, this software extends learning beyond the classroom. If learning is taking place, librarians know that support, specifically library support, is needed. Yet the question remains, how does the library provide adequate support to students in the online environment of a CMSP?

A shift in library philosophy

In fall 2000, Eastern Kentucky University (EKU) Libraries experienced a shift in philosophy as a result of an H.W. Wilson professional development grant. The grant funded an initiative that encouraged librarians to focus more on collaborative relationships with teaching faculty members to better meet the information needs of EKU stu-

dents. We began seeking new opportunities across campus, such as serving on university-wide committees, holding office hours in various academic departments, attending departmental meetings, promoting library instruction, and assisting with the design of research assignments.

While EKU Libraries underwent this shift, the university was planning to implement a CMSP on campus. From the many options on the market, EKU selected Blackboard and began faculty training and awareness initiatives in fall 2000. The Blackboard implementation was directed by the Information Technology and Delivery Services Department, while faculty training was provided through the campus Teaching and Learning Center (TLC).

Librarians quickly recognized the potential for Blackboard to serve as a tool to further collaboration with individual faculty members, academic departments, and specialized centers such as TLC. We also recognized Blackboard as one tool to help solve the many reference and instruction issues we faced on a daily basis. For instance, constant changes in technology made it difficult to keep students informed of resources and searching methodologies. Students were inundated with online information they were often

About the authors

Julie George is reference team leader, e-mail: julie.george@eku.edu, and Kari Martin is planning and assessment program officer at Eastern Kentucky University, e-mail: kari.martin@eku.edu

© 2004 Julie George and Kari Martin

unprepared to evaluate or use effectively. A number of faculty members were disseminating assignments requiring resources the library no longer owned or subscribed to. Likewise, faculty often prohibited the use of the Internet in research assignments. This approach failed to help students understand and learn the difference between a Web site and a Web-based database.

EKU Libraries embraced Blackboard with the goal of using it to create a more informed and information-literate campus.

Benefits of integration

Integrating library resources into Blackboard courses has resulted in positive benefits for students, faculty, and librarians. Given the vast capabilities of a CMSP, the integration of library resources creates a seamless venue for students to access information on and off campus. Their CMSP courses already serve as a “one-stop shop,” where students can view course syllabi, access grades, review assignments, and chat with classmates in the virtual classroom. Now they can also conduct, or at least begin, their research through the CMSP.

In most cases, the courses we integrated were accompanied by a library instruction session. Library instruction enables us to teach the research process, demonstrate databases and other electronic resources, communicate one-on-one with students, and answer their questions all within the CMSP environment. Although this is not required, doing so has better equipped students with the tools and the knowledge necessary to use the resources placed in the CMSP and to conduct effective research.

Integrating library resources has also helped faculty members develop effective research assignments. A CMSP provides an open door for librarians to make suggestions and share ideas regarding assignments, online collections, and databases. This open door ensures students of the best possible assignments and guarantees faculty are well informed about available library resources.

In the past, some librarians hesitated to approach faculty with suggestions or ideas regarding research assignments. They traditionally took a more passive stance, in turn limiting the potential of collaboration between faculty and librarians. A CMSP, however, empowers librarians to share creative ideas proactively with instructors. It encourages librarians to contact faculty and other campus departments, discuss research assignments and resources, design the library presence within CMSP courses, and teach training sessions for faculty interested in the integration process. This proactive approach has in turn lead to stronger library relations across campus.

Seven steps to integrating the library

The integration of library resources into a CMSP does not need to be a daunting task. Simply follow these seven basic steps to begin integrating CMSP courses on your campus.

1. Work with the CMSP administrator. Begin with the campus CMSP administrator, and work with him or her to set up a training session for the librarians. If everyone cannot be trained, train two or three librarians who can in turn work with their colleagues. Ideally, the CMSP administrator should enroll each librarian in the capacity of an instructor. This enables the librarian to explore all facets of the software as if they were a member of the teaching faculty before working with individual faculty members and their courses.

2. Brainstorm about content. Brainstorm with your colleagues about ways library resources can be integrated into your CMSP. Look at what you have traditionally done through face-to-face instruction and with electronic and print resources. What translates well into an online environment? This will better prepare librarians as they work with faculty on course design.

3. Network with faculty. Start small. The number of faculty you can work with in a given semester depends on your experience, available time, and the amount of involvement required by a particular class. Partnering with

a few faculty members will allow more time to familiarize yourself with the software and the integration process.

Select faculty members with whom you have worked in the past and who have a natural enthusiasm for the library and its resources. Make sure participants have time to collaborate on the project. Discuss the details of the research assignments, what type of library instruction would best suit the class, and how they can be integrated into the CMSP. The assignments should help determine the role of library instruction in the course.

Is traditional or nontraditional instruction best? Traditional library instruction allows the librarian to walk students step-by-step through the CMSP site, demonstrating how to use library resources within the software. Nontraditional formats are also an option.

For example, Blackboard's virtual classroom enables faculty, librarians, and students to meet and converse about library instruction issues within a chatroom environment. The chatroom can also serve as a supplement to traditional library instruction by providing the librarian with a venue to discuss additional library resources, present new research concepts, and answer students' questions.

4. *Integrate resources.* To begin the actual integration, request that the faculty member add you to the course as what Blackboard calls a "course builder" (or the equivalent in other CMSPs). This enables you to add content to the CMSP course by adding Web links, posting messages, creating library assignments, and much more.

Your level of involvement with the class will guide your CMSP design. For instance,

Ideas for integrating library resources into a CMSP

External links

- Add a link to the library Web page.
- Add a direct link to a pertinent database students should use to conduct their research.
- Add a direct link to an online journal article that is required reading.
- Add a direct link to a full-text electronic journal related to the course.
- Add links to credible Web sites pertaining to the particular topic or assignment.

Assignments

- Follow up the research assignment with a link to a predetermined library resource that will offer students the best information.
- When discussing research tools during library instruction, refer to the assignment they pertain to.

Course documents

- Make a course articles folder so that students can link directly to journal articles that are required reading.
- Post library instruction handouts for easy access after class.

Tools

- Schedule library instruction to coincide with an assignment that requires research. Place the time and location of the library instruction on the course calendar.

Staff information

- Add your name and contact information so students can easily contact you after the library instruction session.

Announcements

- Post an announcement reminding students of upcoming library instruction and letting them know you are anxious to meet them.
- Post an announcement about new resources students can use in a particular assignment.

Virtual classroom

- Chat with students instead of providing traditional library instruction.
- Chat with students after library instruction to answer any questions they may still have.

if you will have a great deal of interaction with the class, you may choose not to include as much content in the CMSP course. On the other hand, if you will have minimal interaction with a class, you would want to consider a more thorough and extensive integration. Similarly, on the academic level of the class, English 101 students have little or no experience conducting research at the college level and will need more assistance, while English 301 students have experienced the research process and are more familiar with library resources.

5. *Teach the sessions.* Successfully integrating library resources into a CMSP comes down to the instruction session. Given a traditional library instruction setting, this is your opportunity to use the CMSP as a teaching tool. You can demonstrate how to access electronic resources, such as online databases, electronic journals, and appropriate Web sites; how to use handouts and think about assignments; where to find articles for further reading; and how to access and communicate with library staff after the session.

For instance, we taught a traditional library instruction session for an upper-level managerial report writing class. Based on the assignment and in collaboration with the instructor, we selected information resources to integrate into Blackboard. We began with the basics—contact information, a link to the library's homepage, and a direct link to the library catalog. We then linked sample scholarly articles to the Blackboard site, enabling students to compare articles they had found on their own to the posted scholarly articles. Because the students were also required to research a particular company, we provided links to Web sites with extensive company information and created a folder with links explaining how to cite Internet sources and evaluate Web sites, as well as links to popular search engines.

6. *Evaluate the integration.* After the session, or after the semester has ended, elicit faculty and student responses regarding what worked and what didn't. What changes might make the CMSP/library integration more ef-

fective in the future? Conduct a follow-up discussion with faculty and disseminate an online evaluation for students.

7. *Seek other opportunities.* Be on the lookout for other faculty members who may want to develop such collaborative relationships. Likewise, look for opportunities to provide a library/CMSP integration training session for other departments. Involve the library in other campus CMSP initiatives or spearhead your own.

Challenges

Of course, integrating library resources into CMSP courses does not come without its challenges. For instance, librarians must consider factors surrounding off-campus access, such as a proxy server or the provision of passwords for electronic resources. Librarians working with proxy servers must make sure links provided in their CMSP are compatible with the proxy server software. Libraries without a proxy server must consider whether they will post passwords within the secure CMSP site. Second, linking electronic resources is often the easy part; keeping them current is the challenge. Do not forget to keep links live in the CMSP courses you've integrated. Finally, changes in library personnel make it difficult to keep all librarians trained and up-to-date. As this integration becomes part of the library culture, so should adequate training for current, curious, and new librarians.

Looking to the future

We hope the integration of library resources will no longer be unique to some CMSP courses. Instead, we think the integration should become a standard, with a library presence in every online course. The software is designed to enable personalization of the basic template used campus-wide. This personalization should include a research element focused on the integration of library resources.

The future also holds potential for growth in new and old relationships with faculty.

(continued on page 613)

Intelligence Reform Act of 2004 passes in Senate—Makes way for national ID card

The National Intelligence Reform Act of 2004, S 2845, was passed by the Senate on October 6, and one provision of the bill makes way for the establishment of a national identification card system. The provision, introduced by Senator John McCain (R-Arizona), essentially creates a national ID card system by requiring all states to conform to database standards for driver's licenses and state IDs. Once federalized, driver's licenses would become the key to access personal information about the holder.

ALA has long worked in opposition to proposals calling for a national ID system and other initiatives that needlessly intrude into personal privacy. The creation of a standardized system across all states threatens to open the door to a national ID card system, but without the full and public debate that should occur regarding such a proposal.

The National Intelligence Reform Act is based substantially on recommendations from the 9/11 Commission report, but the McCain provision for a national ID card was not one of the 9/11 commission's recommendations. Library supporters are asked to call their senators to express their concern with this part of the bill. You may call any member of Congress toll-free at (800) 839-5276.

Court decision on PATRIOT Act may affect libraries

September 29 marked an important victory for civil liberties when U.S. District Judge Victor Marrero struck down Section 505 of the PATRIOT Act, which permitted the FBI to obtain subscriber information and toll billing records and other records from electronic communications service providers without any judicial oversight or opportunity for challenge.

Section 505 authorizes the FBI to issue National Security Letters (NSL) to compel production of certain records whenever the FBI certifies that those records are relevant to

a terrorism or counter-terrorism investigation. And, like Section 215 of the PATRIOT Act, NSL recipients are subject to a limitless gag order that forbids disclosure of even the fact that the FBI has sought or obtained records.

Since many libraries may be electronic service providers if they provide public access to the Internet, libraries are among the entities that may benefit from this ruling.

In striking down the provision, Marrero found that the secret administrative subpoenas violated the Fourth Amendment because they effectively bar or substantially deter any judicial challenge to the NSL. The court further found that even if judicial review were provided, the gag order violated the First Amendment because it represented a prior restraint on speech that was sweeping in scope and appeared to apply in perpetuity.

While the judge's order represents an important milestone in the fight to cut back on the worst excesses of the Patriot Act, it does not have any immediate effect because the judge stayed enforcement of its judgment for 90 days in order to allow the government time either to appeal to the Second Circuit or to raise objections in the District Court. The Department of Justice has indicated that it will appeal the decision.

However, longer term, the decision may have an impact on pending litigation challenging the gag order in Section 215, which is virtually identical to the gag order struck down by the court. ■

("Forging the library. . ." cont. from page 597)

As a result of the integration of library resources into CMSP courses, we have developed strong collaborative relationships. We look forward to watching how the integration of library resources in CMSPs will alter the dynamics of our daily responsibilities as librarians.

Ultimately, we hope the CMSP integration will enable us to reach a larger number of our students, teaching them the information literacy skills they need for academic and professional success. Students are, after all, the number one reason we pursued and will continue to pursue this integration. ■

Bernadette Murphy is communications specialist at ALA's Washington Office, e-mail: bmurphy@alawash.org