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Does Anyone Need Help Out There? Lessons from Designing Online Help

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SUMMARY. In order to provide online help for distance students, as well as the increasing number of on-campus students who regularly access library resources, a team of librarians from the Marshall University Libraries created an online library assistance site (HELP). This site brings together traditional print handouts, FAQs, online subject guides, course-specific guides, learning modules, and instructional videos in one central location where users can get assistance with library-related questions at their point of need. This article discusses the rationale for developing the site, the process of creating it and incorporating user input, ongoing content development, the impact upon the Libraries' Web site and future development plans.

INTRODUCTION

Assistance to online users, whether they are distance learning students or campus users who do not physically visit the library, is an important dimension of a library's service. Whether that assistance involves answering a specific question or delivering a strategy for finding that answer (reference service), or teaching the user how to use a library resource (instruction), the goal is the same: to help users find the information they are seeking. Increasingly, a library's Web site is assuming a greater role in the reference/instruction transaction between the library and the user, and for online users, it is often their sole means of interacting with the library.

Because many of these primarily online users may use the Web site and a library's resources physically removed from in-person assistance, we have a responsibility through the Web site to offer them a way of obtaining online reference help or instruction. Not surprisingly, "Help" is a feature found on most Web sites, and common components of a library's online help often include Ask a Librarian (frequently an interactive opportunity with a librarian through e-mail and/or chat reference service) or more static help designed for independent use, such as FAQs, tutorials, subject and course guides, citation style guides, virtual tours and maps, library videos, and database searching help.

Library literature indicates that users want to be independent, self-reliant, and empowered to help themselves. In an article discussing interviews that contributed to development of the LibQUAL instrument, Cook and Heath report the significance of self-reliance to users;[1] similarly, the national LibQUAL norms for 2003 reveal that Personal Control-the desire to be an independent user-claims the highest desired mean among all of the study's dimensions.[2] A recent LibQUAL study (2003) at Marshall University supports these findings. The Personal Control responses (ability to navigate library resources independently) to survey items "A library Web site enabling me to locate information on my own" and "Easy-to-use access tools that allow me to find things on my own" and "Making information easily accessible for independent use" received desired means of 8.18, 8.16, and 8.16 respectively (on a 9-point scale), and were among the highest user priorities in the study.[3] While valuing independence, if users do choose to seek assistance, the

literature has shown that they want it at their point of need, not well ahead of time.[4]

Another expression of the desire to be an independent user may be a reluctance to seek help. Recent articles on the usability of library Web sites have supported the experience of Trevor Grayling in "Fear and Loathing of the Help Menu: A Usability Test of Online Help" by observing that users will avoid help menus at all cost.[5] When designing their help pages, the University of Arizona named them "Tips" to avoid the term "Help" because it suggests that the user has failed.[6] Similarly, Battleson, Booth, and Weintrop (2001) studied usability of the University of Buffalo Libraries' site and found that "while there was little direct feedback as to why 'Need Help' was not regularly selected, it was apparent that when this link was chosen, students were not at all satisfied with the information obtained."[7]

A survey by Liu and Yang (2004) at Texas A&M University revealed that for distance education students, the availability of help ranked at the bottom of the factors that these users considered important when they selected information sources.[8] Referring to user behavior in the library, Barbara Fister writes of the "Fear of Reference," describing avoidance of help and the reference desk,[9] recalling the earlier findings of Constance Mellon's 1986 study on library anxiety where students avoided asking for help because they feared they would show their ignorance of the library.[10]

Despite this evidence that users prefer to be independent and tend to avoid help, libraries invest a great deal of time and other resources into making Web-based help available and attractive. While there are abundant discussions on developing and establishing many of these help components, such as virtual reference, subject guides, and tutorials, there is little in the literature that addresses the overall design or effectiveness of Help sites. Grayling (1998), mentioned earlier, found that his users (Ph.D. chemists) preferred popup and dialog boxes for help.[11] Faiks and Hyland (2000) demonstrate card sorting as a method to establish the organizational framework for an online help system. In their initial study, the project team found the avoidance phenomenon at work and while the team "realized that it could not change aversion to online help in general, it could try to create a more user-friendly system."[12] Through the card sort technique, they were able to create the Table of Contents structure for their Help pages. An earlier article by Byrne et al. (1996) addresses the difficulties in creating help documentation both in print and online by suggesting guidelines for writing help documentation.[13]

THE BIRTH OF HELP CENTRAL

Marshall University, a Master's College and Universities I institution, has a student population of approximately 16,000 students, with as many as 1,500 students taking online courses in this highly rural state. Following a re-design of the Libraries' home page in summer 2003, a Marshall University Libraries' team, consisting of the Web Librarian, Digital Resources and Automation Librarian, Instruction Librarian, and Reference and Extension Services Librarian identified the need to organize all existing reference and instructional assistance into a single location on the Web site. Perhaps falling into the "librarians know best" syndrome described by Dickstein and Mills,[14] the team envisioned a centralized Help page as an effective way to consolidate all types of help and offer a convenient, one-stop method of accessing it. They targeted first-year students and online users as primary audiences. The team hypothesized that these groups would appreciate the ease of finding a variety of help in one single, predictable location.

The impetus for creating a Help section on the Libraries' Web site was partially influenced by a decision to create an FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) Web site. The FAQ site offers a menu of 11 categories that provide quick answers to commonly asked questions. Examples include "How long can I check out a book?" and "What are the library's hours?" The FAQ resides in an SQL database that can be edited by librarians; however, this model is structured around library functions so does not lend itself to learning situations where students need more in-depth knowledge.

The developing Help site was also influenced by an existing html Page that had listed links to several pages of "General Research Help." Beginning with these established pages of subject guides, print handouts, and Library FAQs as a base, the development team formulated a long-term plan to transform this basic Help page into an online assistance site with learning modules and streaming video.

Experience with students shows that most do not have general research questions, so using the phrase "General Research Help" did not seem likely to appeal to them. Most students have specific needs, so a centralized sub-Web site made more sense. The site was initially titled "Help Central" and linked from a Help button in the Assistance category on the Libraries' homepage. Plans for development included these steps:

1. Identify all current online content that could serve as Help
2. Identify print content (handouts, pathfinders, etc.) that could serve as Help
3. Convert print content to digital format
4. Organize content into categories
5. Develop a graphically pleasing Web site
6. Expand content to include mini-tutorials and streaming video
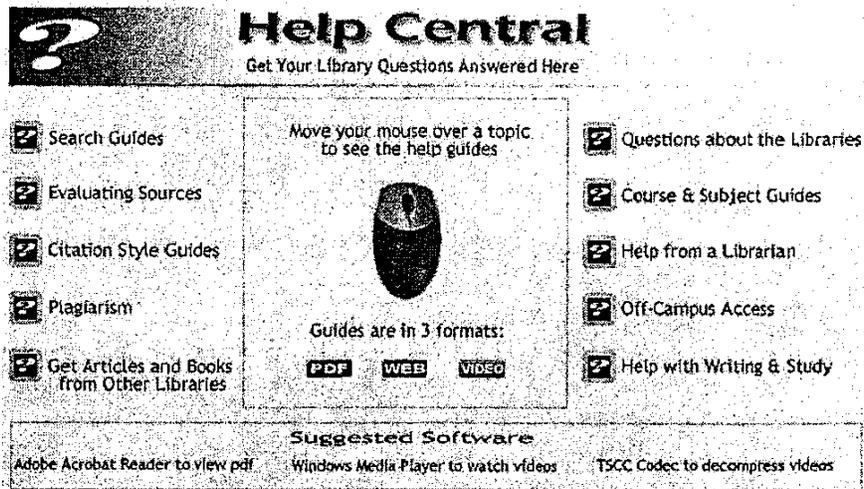7. Refine, re-categorize, and redevelop as needed

During implementation of these steps, a format problem arose. Because some Help content was in PDF as well as html format, signaling the difference posed a challenge. Providing a link to a PDF handout or a Web-based subject guide without indicating format could prove troublesome for users without Adobe Reader software, and Web courtesy requires displaying the format type so that users are not surprised or frustrated after clicking. For some topics, the same content was available in different formats to allow for varying student needs and purposes. Distinctive graphical buttons were created to clarify the mode of accessing Help content in PDF, Web (html) and video (wmv) formats. The new Help page, Library Help Central ("Get Your Library Questions Answered Here"), used these graphical buttons (WEB VIDEO PDF) to define the available formats of ten categories of Help, such as Database Guides, Subject Guides, and Evaluating Sources, among others. The design featured a bright yellow background with black accent bars, a color scheme that demanded attention like traffic caution signs.

With categories and all help topics crowding a single page, excessive scrolling and information overload quickly prompted a redesign in January 2004. With fewer choices and interactive mouse-over effects (see Figure 1), users could move the cursor across different headings and see the corresponding information displayed in the center panel.

DESIGN REFINEMENTS

While this design was an improvement and momentarily satisfying, the team's continuing desire to improve the appeal of the page and to accommodate the rapidly developing video and tutorial content prompted them to re-think the Help page design once again; in June 2004 a newly designed Help page (see Figure 2) re-organized and re-labeled many of the original components.

FIGURE 1. Help Central Revised

Help Central
Get Your Library Questions Answered Here

Search Guides

Evaluating Sources

Citation Style Guides

Plagiarism

Get Articles and Books from Other Libraries

Move your mouse over a topic to see the help guides

Guides are in 3 formats:

PDF   WEB   VIDEO

Questions about the Libraries

Course & Subject Guides

Help from a Librarian

Off-Campus Access

Help with Writing & Study

Suggested Software
Adobe Acrobat Reader to view pdf   Windows Media Player to watch videos   TSCC Codec to decompress videos
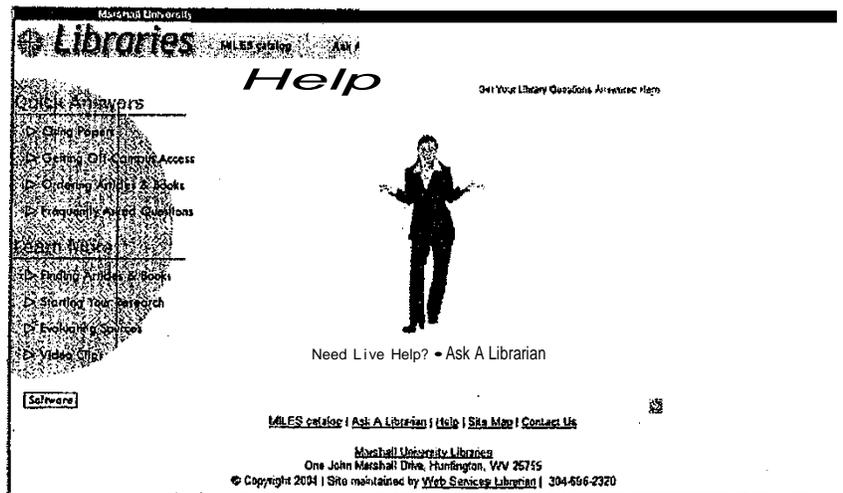
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Labels that more clearly represented the evolving content and that employ terms that students recognize were substituted. Two headers, each with four subcategories, replaced the listing of 10 randomly organized categories. "Quick Answers" was added as a way for students to get brief instructions, such as "Citing Paper" and "Frequently Asked Questions." The second header, "Learn More," leads to more in-depth research assistance offered by subject guides and mini-tutorials.

Soothing earth-tones replaced the "cautionary" yellow and black color scheme to convey a welcoming atmosphere. A half-circle background was placed beneath the left navigation menu to emphasize it and to make it more inviting. In the center, several rotating professional stock photos display generally happy people with outstretched arms (as if they didn't know the answer) to convey to students that not having the answer and asking for help are acceptable.

At this point, though aware of the advisability of usability testing, librarians were nonetheless still dictating both design and content for students. An article, "Going Mental: Tackling Mental Models for the Online Library Tutorial," by Veldorf and Beavers (2001) caught their attention and presented a compelling argument for re-examining the "librarian know best" model. This article explores the disconnect between student and librarian mental models and analyzes how the disconnect affects the

FIGURE 2. Current Help Page
http://www.marshall.edu/library/help/default.asp

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effectiveness of library tutorials. Through a series of tests, Veldorf and Beavers found, as one example, that "while students tend to view library research as a means to an end, librarians tend to teach research as if it is an end in itself. "[15]

In an effort to diminish this disconnect, in June 2004 the development team solicited student input through an informal survey of five questions about use of online or Web-based help. Responses from 14 students provided guidance in refining the design of the page. Almost all of the students preferred face-to-face interaction with a librarian rather than using e-mail, live chat, telephone, or online help on the Web, a revelation that underscored the importance of including Reference hours and contact information that would lead to live assistance. Student feedback supported the page and site terminology; the labels "Help," "How do I ..." and "Ask a Librarian," the various terms used to lead into the Help page and topics, were ones that students preferred. The most popular topics for help suggested by the survey respondents were: "How to search for articles," "How to search for books," "How to evaluate sources," and "How to cite sources," topics that are already covered in the Help site. In response to preferred format for the help, students verified the need for Web-page guides, tutorials, printable handouts, and videos.

When asked about the "best" and "worst" of the page, a sampling of responses praised the simplicity and look: "Looks easy and helpful," "Many different topics in help-very helpful!" "It is easy to find the information that you have questions about." The "least liked" features included a few unappealing graphics, which were subsequently removed. Comments also suggested annoyance with the graphical format buttons (WEB VIDEO PDF) and a need to simplify the display even more. The buttons were very colorful, but in the context of this latest design they contrasted too much with the more subdued earth-tones. As a result, simple text links replaced the graphical format buttons.

This newly re-designed Help site has already shown a substantial increase in use. In June 2004, there were 577 page views for the Help homepage. For February 2004, at a time when considerably more students were using the Libraries' Web site, only 418 page views were recorded.

IMPACT ON WEB SITE DEVELOPMENT

A need to display this new Help page more prominently prompted modifications to the Libraries' homepage (see Figure 3). A link to Help was added to the Libraries' homepage in the top navigation bar that resides on all pages, replacing FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions), since FAQ was moved into the Help site. In addition, a new "How do I ..." button was added under the "Assistance" category. Major help topics, such as "use databases off campus" and "cite books and articles," along with several others, are offered in a pull-down menu; each of these selections links into the appropriate portion of the Help site.

Linking the Help pages more prominently from the newly revised homepage redesign led to considering ways to embed Help links within other areas of the Web site. Future refinement of the database pages will involve inserting Jinks to Help topics that pertain to specific databases, a strategy recommended in an article by Wells (2003) on the importance of the location of the chat button.[16] The goal is to catch the attention of students at their point of need for citation or searching help by placing help links next to a database URL.

According to a sampling of Web statistics and usability testing from various academic libraries, Reeb and Gibbons (2004) reveal that due to mental models that differ from those of the librarians designing the subject guides, students fail to connect their information queries with them.[17] To be truly useful, the article suggests, the guides must be la-

FIGURE 3. Marshall University Libraries' Homepage
http://www.marshall.edu/library
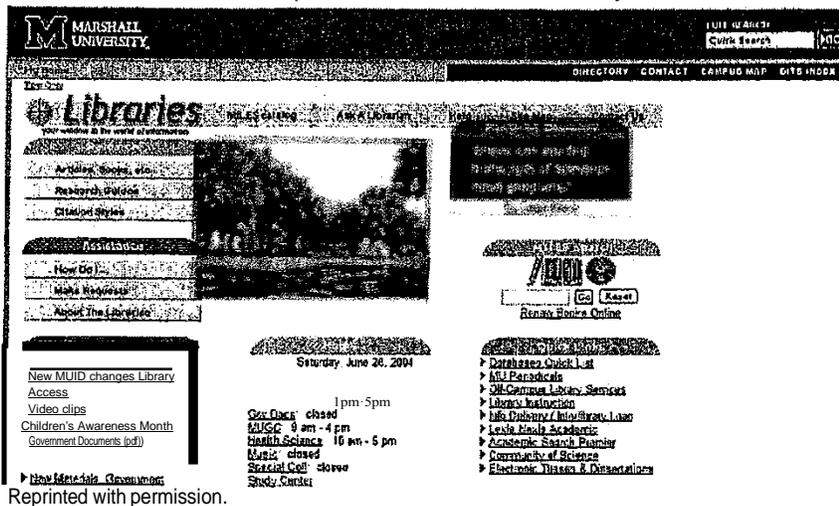
beled with meaningful terminology and available through a variety of access points within contexts where students are likely to need assistance; linking guides from appropriate database listings could increase their value.[18] Re-examining the role of subject guides in the Help site has also prompted the development team to revise the subject guide template and standardize content guidelines as well.

Other ways to extend the functionality of the Help site can be extrapolated from recommendations by Reeb and Gibbons; these include embedding Help topics in the online catalog, in databases, and in online course environments such as WebCT or Blackboard.[19] The ability to search the Help site specifically would also add significantly to its functionality. Continued student interviews and usability testing should keep the design on track.

CONTENT DEVELOPMENT

As the site's appearance evolved, so did its content. Employing the unique ability of the Internet and using a Web page to continually update and refine content and design, Marshall University Libraries: Help

site continues to be a work in progress. Starting with some of the traditional forms of help-reference service, pathfinders transformed into Web-based subject guides, mini-tutorials in the form of online learning modules-the site began developing some of the common components of an online Help site.

VIRTUAL REFERENCE

Marshall University had already begun to offer online reference assistance, with an e-mail service that began in 1996. This Ask a Librarian e-mail page set the precedent for the centralized Help site, and in 2003 a Chat Reference component was introduced. Advertising Chat Reference was done through a text graphic on the Libraries' homepage in May 2003, and in spring 2004 an animated Flash advertising replaced the graphic.

Much of the literature on virtual reference is devoted to discussions of specific systems, surveys of use, case studies of individual libraries setting up digital reference, privacy issues, and analyses of the types of questions.[20] An entire issue of *The Reference Librarian* (Issue 79/80) is dedicated to the concerns of virtual (or digital reference) and explores issues such as the history and future of the service, communication strategies, and evaluation and analysis of use, as well as several case studies.[21] Many articles focus on the differences/similarities between virtual and traditional reference and how it is being implemented at various libraries; there is limited discussion of the service as a form of "help" and how to design it so that it is apparent to users.

One exception is an article by Duncan and Fichter (2004), who point out that few articles report user involvement in the creation of the service. In their article they discuss how, inspired by the model of the National Cancer Institute, they solicited user feedback to help label and locate a virtual reference service. Through preference testing they found that the term "Ask a Librarian" was the most recognizable to users.[22] After having placed links to the live reference service "on many pages of the Web site, particularly those where users might experience difficulty"[23] they experienced some success in usability testing when three out of five users actually found and clicked on the Ask a Librarian service; a fourth user saw the button but refused to use it, demonstrating the avoidance of help phenomenon.[24] Their article offers many excellent lessons on user behavior as well as a good model for applying usability studies in the design of online systems.

Organizing the virtual reference component of the Help site required consolidating all forms of reference service into a single entry point, giving users the option to select the mode for their reference question: phone, e-mail, or chat. The Ask a Librarian page (see Figure 4) was a re-design of a much simpler Reference Department page that had listed librarian e-mail addresses and phone numbers. To it was joined the existing Ask a Librarian e-mail service, and with the development of the FAQ and the promotion of Chat with a Librarian service emerged a need to bring these services under one umbrella.. The Ask a Librarian page functions as a companion to the Help page, in that it offers the services the Librarians provide directly to students while the Help page features stand-alone assistance.

The major goals for this page included: no scrolling so information is not hidden; an appealing and easy to use interface; and professional and friendly looking graphics and photos. "Effective customer service" was the message to be conveyed. Macromedia Fireworks MX was used to create the site with rollover images. Important links to e-mailing a librarian and chat with a librarian were featured on the opening screen.

Since Help and Ask a Librarian function as companion pages, offering both side by side on the top navigation bar signals their importance to students. Both terms are generally used in libraries, so choosing them meant students were more likely to understand their purpose, a principle

FIGURE 4. Current Ask a librarian Page
http://www.marshall.edu/library/help/default.asp
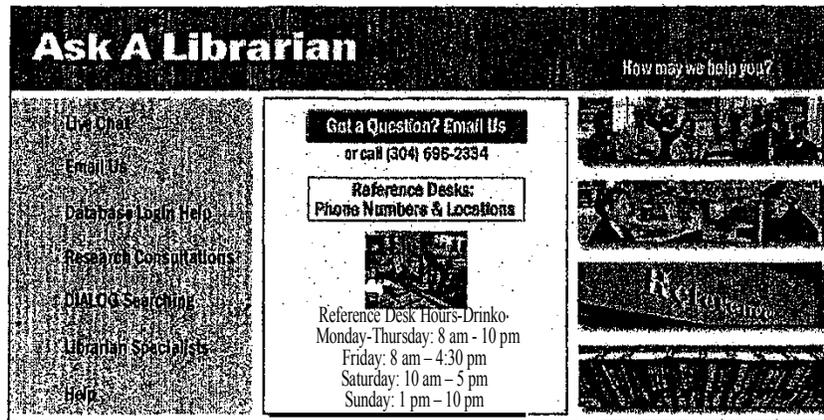
that the student feedback verified. Adding them to all of the Libraries' Web pages was made easy by Server Side Includes (SSI) for the standard header and footer, originally set up in the summer of 2003 during a site-wide restructuring. (In order to implement SSI, all of the pages needed their extensions changed from .htm or .html to .asp.) Each page points to one html file to pull the header and footer information, thereby making it easier to make changes across the site.

SUBJECT GUIDES

Web-based subject guides, a variant of the print pathfinder, are another popular help component that can assist online users. In a 2000 survey by Morris and Grimes, 88% of librarians responding reported having Web-based guides available[25] and feel that subject guides help students begin their research with quality print and Internet resources even while librarians may not really know if or how students are using them.[26] Some libraries have transformed the Web-based subject guide from a static html format to database-driven Web sites where users can select or type in topics and receive a customized listing of resources, such as the Research Wizard at the University of Nebraska-Omaha described by Hein and Davis (2002);[27] however, as a 2003 article by Magi reports, these research tools also introduce a complexity that students may find more difficult and less helpful to use than a print pathfinder.[28] In her study of Canadian university subject guides, Dahl (2001) argues for guidelines and cautions that to be useful the guides need to be easy to find on the library's Web site,[29] a point reinforced by Reeb and Gibbons (2004), who also emphasize that many usability studies show that students do not use them.[30]

Like most libraries, the Marshall University Libraries have offered numerous paper pathfinders on a wide variety of subjects, providing concise, directed information about library-based resources in specific subject areas. Updating the pathfinders, however, has always been an issue, particularly with the inclusion of Internet-based resources, URLs, and suggested Web sites. Transforming pathfinders into Web-based subject guides enabled an easy and more affordable way to update as well as a way to assist students in new ways by embedding hyperlinks, a particularly important feature for distance students who can simply click on the link to be taken to an important resource.

The Libraries' subject and course guides range from general ones, such as how to determine if a periodical is popular or scholarly, how to

do research in biological sciences using the Libraries' resources, and how to find literary criticism to course-specific guides such as SFT630: Current Literature & Research in Occupational Safety & Health. At present the site offers nearly fifty guides with more in development. In addition to the appropriate database links, these guides lead students to pre-configured subject searches in the catalog, to significant online journals, valuable Web sites, and relevant print resources. Contact information for the appropriate librarian is also a standard component of the subject or course guide. In addition to serving as online help, these guides are frequently used in library instruction sessions.

TUTORIALS AND LEARNING MODULES

Librarians also sought ways to assist and instruct off-campus students, often at remote sites that lacked the requisite technology to show students how to access and search library databases and other scholarly resources. That need and challenge gave birth to another method of developing and delivering instructional assistance: the learning module.

Web-based tutorials are a popular and burgeoning area of online assistance. The LOEX site registers over 60 examples, [31] and a recent article by Hollister and Coe identifies online tutorials as one of the three current topics in the library instruction literature. [32] Though not exactly identical to a help page, where the user looks for quick answers, tutorials contain a curriculum and a sequenced plan. [33] Most tutorials are developed as instruments of information literacy instruction and are often designed to be assigned, rather than a stand-alone tool for the independent user seeking help on how to do research.

Nancy Dewald examined nineteen tutorials for "good practice" and found that 68% could be used independently, but she noted that "students will have more incentive to study the tutorial carefully when they know they will be required to produce something as a result of what they have learned."[34] In their usability testing of their QuickStart tutorial, Veldorf and Beavers (2001) also found that "Unless incorporated into a course curriculum, grading, and instructor expectations, the majority of student testers made it clear that they would not likely usc the tutoriaJ."[35] While doing usability testing for a tutorial on searching for books, Tempelman-Kluit and Ehrenberg (2003) noted that "we learned that our users were not interested in committing much time to lengthy tutorials, and wanted succinct information on how to use the library quick1y."[36] So, while the idea of a stand-alone tutorial for help may be

appealing, it would require a highly motivated user to take advantage of it. Tutorials seem best suited to be assigned in combination with classroom or other instruction. Instruction librarians surveyed by Hollister and Coe agree. While they consider online tutorials effective instructional tools, they add that tutorials need to be supported with other instructional methods.[37]

The concept of a learning module using a Web-based PowerPoint slide show offers a shorter, more specifically focused tool that students can use with a minimum investment of time. The team developed a series of PowerPoint slide shows that were easily transformed into Web slide shows. Rather than the usual text-heavy slide shows, these modules are highly visual, using numerous screen shots, photos, and graphics to present small pieces of information simply. Topics such as renewing an ILL book or retrieving online articles are some examples of the learning modules that were developed.

Another form that the learning module took was the video demo. When librarians worked in off-campus instructional settings without live connectivity, they were challenged to create presentations that showed students how to search databases. The software SnagIt captured live screen shots showing how to access and search databases and other resources via the Marshall University Libraries' Web page; these short video clips were then embedded within a PowerPoint slide show. These presentations could be saved to CD, shown to classes meeting at remote centers, and even mass produced for distribution to students who wished to review them from home or office computers. As with traditional paper guides, however, updating these instructional videos on CDs became a legitimate concern. Even if librarians produced revised CDs, there would be outdated information on the CDs still in the hands of students who attended earlier sessions.

BEGINNING WITH INFORMATION DELIVERY

Nevertheless, working with video captures whetted the appetites of librarians looking for other means to offer effective online instruction and assistance. This experience opened doors, possibilities, and minds. Librarians began to consider offering short, "how-to" video demos online via the Libraries' Web site.

Information delivery service (IDS)-the topic of frequent queries from distance students and an "unknown" service for most undergraduates (particularly freshmen)-was selected as the first Help area to be ex-

panded. Working in collaboration with the IDS staff, the development team identified topics to be addressed:

- How to set up an IDS account
- How to order items from IDS
- How to retrieve online articles from IDS
- How to renew interlibrary loan books

In deciding how to present the information, the team considered the advantages of offering a range of media to attract different learning styles and to compensate for a variety of users and equipment. The first topic, setting up the account, was created using Camtasia Studio software in December 2003 as a video demo consisting of video screen captures enhanced with audio and annotation. For those who might not be able to access video, this topic was also available as a PowerPoint slide show, and as a printable handout in PDF format. The remaining topics were produced as PowerPoint slideshows, and are gradually being created as video demos using Camtasia. In the development process, it was discovered that creating the slideshows first streamlined the video demo production by offering a "readymade" script for taping.

However, the creation of the Information Delivery Services video demo introduced still more challenges:

- Screenshots and videos of less than ideal Web pages, although helpful, still force students to interact with these inadequately designed pages after the video is over.
- Redesigning the Web pages would build a better interface, which should diminish the need for help.

The impetus for re-design of the IDS homepage was born out of this realization. The original design of the IDS homepage was a confusing mix of bright colors and too many text instructions. This made it difficult to know where to begin. Thus, creating a large "First Time User Registration" button was a top priority. A photo of an approachable student working on the computer was incorporated to welcome visitors.

Tangential evidence suggests that this new design has made a difference for the better. The IDS office has seen a 50% reduction in telephone calls due to providing a range of media to attract different learning styles and redesigning the Web page. (The office now receives only two to three telephone calls a week from students and faculty need-

ing customer service.) In addition, more off-campus students are using the service, but it is not known if this is directly due to the page redesign or some other factors, such as a cessation of some full-text journals. Compared to the previous spring semester, IDS requests from distance students more than doubled in the spring 2004 semester.

TRANSITION TO STREAMING VIDEO

The next step, to add library-themed short films to the Help site, was logical and exciting! The team of librarians worked with student assistants and graduate assistants to develop short videos focused on library situations that undergraduate students often encounter. Librarians wrote scripts and shared them with the team of students, who edited them and inserted language that would be more natural and believable to the typical undergraduate. Librarians became directors and camera operators who had to consider lighting, sound, and spatial issues, and who also had to learn to appreciate the intricate, sometimes tedious, and time-consuming work of the video editor as they toiled for hours on editing what would become a three-minute video. Videos were shot with a Canon Elura 20 MC Digital Video Camcorder and a Panasonic PV-GS5OS Digital Video Camcorder, which use MiniDV cassettes. Microsoft Windows Movie Maker was used for editing and Smart Sound Movie Maestro added intrigue and enhanced scenes with music.

Throughout the video development process, librarians tried to keep the main audience in mind: undergraduate students, specifically first-year students who are just getting acquainted with the university setting and research and writing expectations. Videos needed to be short and concise (5 minutes, maximum), not just for the sake of attention spans, but also with respect to the requisite computer processor speed and the type of connectivity (high speed, not dial-up) these videos would require. In fact, alternate versions of the information covered in these videos were also proposed-PowerPoint versions and even copies of scripts for users who may not have the connectivity or means to view the short films.

Early in the project, the development team envisioned this type of instruction as a series, not unlike a television series, with episodes devoted to pertinent library and research-based issues in a university setting. The 1980s series *Dallas,* with its legendary opener, inspired the team. Ideas ultimately coalesced into *CSI:·Confused Students Investi-*

gate Marshall University Libraries (http://www.marshall.edu/library/ help/list.asp#vide).

As noted earlier, the team's first video undertaking focused on an episode devoted to Information Delivery Services (IDS), which was designed as a way to extend to freshmen the topics in the already completed PowerPoint slideshows and Camtasia video demo. In the video, three students discuss an upcoming assignment, and two of them remark with frustration that they could not find the books and articles they need in the campus Libraries. One student, who is "in the know," shows her friends how to use IDS to obtain the materials they need. In this episode, as in the ones produced afterwards, scripts depict students helping and teaching other students. Classroom teachers have long recognized that in many situations students learn more comfortably and more effectively when taught by peers and the team wanted to incorporate this learning strategy in library-themed videos.

"MILES to Go Before We Read," the second episode in the series, used the same cast of students and depicted one student showing her friends how to search the Libraries' catalog (MILES) for the books they needed and telling them about other materials the catalog contains. The episode "Periodically Puzzled," focuses on a student's frustration trying to find articles on a particular subject for a paper she needs to write. Once more the scenario of "students helping students" becomes the theme as the confused student is assisted/bailed out by her friends, who discuss various ways to find articles using the Libraries' resources and where friendly help can be found at the Reference Desk.

Other episodes in the series are under development and include topics devoted to plagiarism, cell phone use in the Libraries, and a number of other relevant, library-focused issues and resources. The entire series is conceived as a fun, non-threatening way to introduce undergraduate students to the essential facts that they need to know about Marshall University Libraries to be successful and information-literate students. These short, focused episodes can serve as discussion starters in classes embarking on research and dealing with the issue of academic integrity, but they might also appeal to individual students visiting the Web site. Because the videos convey information in an entertaining and involving way, they enable the off-campus student (or any student not working face to face with a librarian) to have a more personalized exchange with the Libraries. Certainly, the videos will appeal to visual and auditory learners and learners who like material explained to them by another person.

CONCLUSION

Statistics confirm that students at Marshall University do access online help, so the effort involved in designing an attractive online Web-based Help site seems likely to pay off. In the period from August 2003 through April 2004, the Help pages recorded over 3,000 page views. Combined with the course and subject guides, the Help pages were viewed almost 13,000 times, or about 3% of the Libraries' Web site total page views (adjusting out the home page views), and the course and subject guides consistently ranked in the top 10-20. The citation guides ranked in the top 50 documents viewed in February and April 2004. In this 2003 survey of the Libraries' Web site users, 7.3% reported "reading research guides" or "learn about library research" as reasons to go to the Libraries' Web site; 3.6% indicated that they go to the site to "get help." Results from this survey also revealed that reading research guides and looking at the Libraries' Web site have been helpful for users in need of assistance.

The Libraries plan to market the video series and other elements of the Help site to the university community through numerous means, including showing the Help site in library instruction sessions; suggesting it as a focal point for University and Honors 101 classes, a freshman orientation course that has a library instruction session built into the curriculum; advertising it prominently on the Libraries' home page; publicizing it in the school newspaper; and sending informational postcards to professors encouraging them to use it with their students.

The process of developing a Help site has offered both challenges and lessons, not the least of which is that users tend to avoid help at all costs. Unwilling to let that stop the impulse to offer help, the development team persisted and in the course of developing the Help site realized that creating an attractive, inviting, and effective site is an iterative process. In order to create a truly workable site, design must originate in a combination of "librarian and student know best." While librarians may have a better concept of all that students need to know, students have valuable input to share on how to make that information attractive, understandable, and functional. Another realization is how much impact the help features of a Web site have upon the overall organization of a library's Web site. In order for online help to be effective, it must be fully integrated into the functioning of a library's Web

site and available at the user's point of need. The reality is that once that integration process begins, it impacts the design and function of the rest of the site. What may begin as a simple vision inevitably evolves into a more far-reaching project that involves modifications to the entire Web site.

NOTES

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