Going the Distance: creating an eLibrary for non-traditional students

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Introduction

A task force of librarians and an instructional designer from the University Libraries, Marketing and Academic Support was assembled - a timeline was created to establish a working model.

Method/Strategy

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 were selected - information under each category was organized.

Integration into Blackboard

The selected subject categories were submitted to the instructional designer to create icons - 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 3) - 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.

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 592 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: “I don’t use it, waste of money.”

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

Graph 1: eLibrary Page linked from Distance Learning Page

Graph 2: eLibrary Home Page in Blackboard

Graph 3: eLibrary Link in Blackboard

Graph 4: Librarian Biographies

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

Graph 6: Summary of User Comments

Graph 7: “I would recommend the eLibrary site to my fellow students.”

Graph 8: Responses to “I would use the eLibrary site again.”

Graph 9: Overall Rating

Figure 1: eLibrary Page linked from Distance Learning Page

Figure 2: eLibrary Home Page in Blackboard

Figure 3: eLibrary 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

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