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Business process management and the "new" library instruction

Navigating technology and collaboration

The changing river

Library instruction is an evolving service ripe with requirements and processes for teaching, management, and technology. Like many businesses, management of library instruction has innovations that have changed the way services are planned, developed, and implemented.[1] With wide-ranging user needs, technologies, and time and budget constraints, the library instruction program can be hard to steer. Like the steamboat captain on the Mississippi, instruction coordinators and library instructors in this new age push learning forward on a tenuous river. Even with the best instruction system, information for library sessions, high school visits, reference questions, and library events can twist and ow across instructors, coordinators, and support persons.
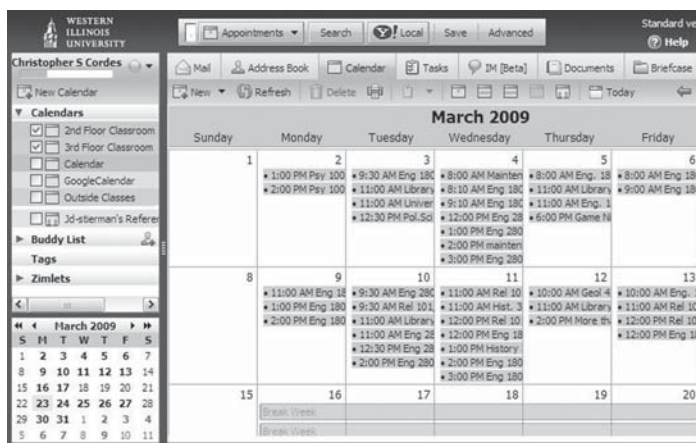
As the need for literacy and hands-on experience grows, the more complicated instruction systems become. Over time, online content can begin to form a sea of dead Web space with outdated pages. Best practices for teaching are shored up, only to have the banks collapse with the next new learning innovation. Where is the lighthouse that can guide the instruction program downriver?

The answer lies partly in the coordination between humans and technology. In spite of technology, learning systems are human driven, powered by interaction workers each with personal roles, responsibilities, and resources.[2]

Here, there, and everywhere

One thing that can help coordinate growing instruction demand is a scheduling system that coordinates instruction requests in a shared online environment. Free groupware (like Zimbra or Google Apps) provides shared access to calendar information at different levels, and shared e-mail messaging is used to coordinate times, dates, and responsibilities of instruction team members and external users.

A well-planned group collaboration system, engaged instructors, and staff can keep things on track. But there are still input errors, last minute cancellations, as well as the occasional wayward instructor and ghosts

Open source group well can help keep participants connected.

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in the technical machine. Optimally, these challenges will be met with a high degree of exibility and cooperation between the instruction team and other parties; and a smile never hurts when participants come together over a challenging issue.

Good Human Computer Interaction systems enhance and extend the way people work, communicate, and interact.[3] But in practice technology can be a blessing and a curse, especially in the classroom. What instructor hasn t experienced the anxiety and distraction of having the Internet connection or a database go down moments before class, forcing them to throw

The chat widget can help support users by drawing on distributed library brain power.

out his or her well-prepared lesson plan and just wing it. Likewise, how often have you been explaining an important point only to look across the classroom to see a majority of the eyes glued to Facebook, MySpace, or instant messaging? Ironically, technology can also focus student attention. Many instructors use technology to engage students with short, amusing videos, animated data displays, and even interactive games.

Perhaps the biggest advantage of technology in the classroom is that it supports interaction, even in large and distributed groups. An ancient Chinese proverb reads, I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand. What better way for students to learn than to try the database or other information tool for themselves and experience through trial and error, from anyplace, with guidance instantly available.

To meet user expectation, library instruction must now happen everywhere. Robust tutorial software like LibGuides is one tool that helps librarians provide this opportunity. The software lets those with little Web design experience create tutorials with features that

students expect. LibGuides is easy to learn and has Web 2.0 features like chat, video, social tagging, and RSS. While the t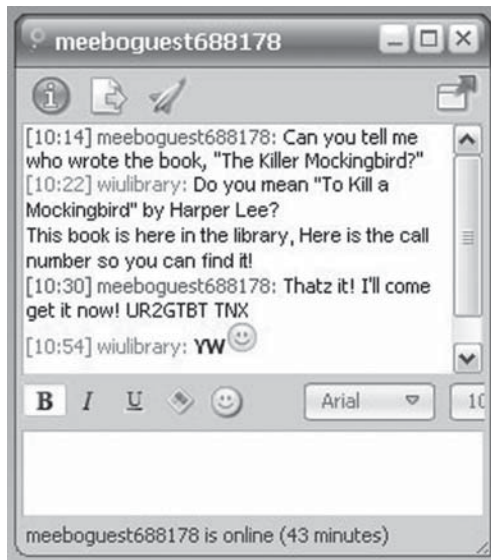ool was designed for library tutorials, the types of instruction it can be used for are almost limitless, including lesson plans, distance learning, career and job search assistance, staff training, and nancial aid.[4] It also reduces burden on library Web services; librarians can create content and navigation and post pages without assistance, and guides are kept consistent in general appearance and branding. All this peace of mind does come with a yearly cost, but there are alternatives.

Other tools such as blogs (like WordPress), wikis (like PMWiki), and content management systems (such as Moodle) offer a range of features and a fairly easy method for creating and publishing content. But these tools can require more technical and design knowledge and may require internal Web support. Regardless of choice, all these tools can be used to create and distribute effective instructional content across many Web environments, including Blackboard (learning management), Face-Book (social network), Flickr (photo sharing), and Delicious (social tagging).

Finally, because the library instruction program reaches from the classroom to the Internet, and even to (not surprisingly) the reference desk, perhaps the easiest way to stay connected with learners is by providing a chat widget, such as the MeeboMe widget, on the library reference or liaison page. It s free, embeddable on any HTML page, and lets online librarians provide quick support to distant users.

Snapshots of the system

Getting content to users is one thing; deter-

mining instruction impact is another matter. But this can be troubling when sessions are often short, one-shot affairs. One way to get feedback about library instruction is to develop online assessment forms. This gives library instructors feedback to improve teaching. It can also provide administrative data for the evaluation process so instructors can be guided and retained.

Key aspects of survey assessment are the questions designed to capture the information, and the tools to gather and review it. Evaluating library instruction using questions from the assessment tool used for student evaluations at your school can be an effective way to collect data to improve teaching. It also helps legitimize library instruction by using the same method department faculty use for student evaluation.

Effective surveys use the right questions and format to get the information you seek. Some resources for creating questions include the Student Instructional Report Overview (SIR-ll), IDEA, Educational Testing Service (ETS), and the Purdue Cafeteria System. There is also a large body of literature on survey development. For example, Barbara Gross Davis *Tools for Teaching* has a useful chapter for developing your own student ratings. Check with your Institutional Planning or Faculty Development Of ce to see what survey resources might be available, and any policies for doing evaluations.

There are also many free or low-cost tools for gathering data; SurveyMonkey and Zoomerang are two popular ones. As with many online technologies, things don t always goes as planned. But, you can err with caution. If all else fails, paper forms will do the job, although this can require extra effort to compile and present the data.

Once data is gathered, it requires organization to be useful. Low-cost technology can be used to manage data to improve effectiveness and ef ciency across the program. This can be as easy as developing an Excel workbook with a sheet for each assessment area. Typical instruction data includes the number of sessions, number of upper- and lower-level courses, session length ratios, and subject areas taught. The insight gained can be applied to help instruction coordinators, instructors, and administrators manage resources more ef ciently, identify underrepresented audiences, and optimize instruction for critical areas, such as rst-year students. As data begins to grow, more robust systems using Access or other database tools can help ease management and provide more powerful analysis.

Count and Percent
Library Course Evaluation

	Count	Percent	
The lesson content was presented clearly and understandably.			Respondents: 583
Strongly Agree	361	61.92 %	
Agree	197	33.79 %	
Undecided	14	2.40 %	
Disagree	8	1.37 %	
Strongly Disagree	3	0.51 %	
Total Responses	583	100.00 %	
The session had practice activities that were useful for the assignment.			Respondents: 581
Strongly Agree	340	58.52 %	
Agree	182	31.33 %	
Undecided	38	6.54 %	
Disagree	11	1.89 %	
Strongly Disagree	5	0.86 %	
Not Applicable	5	0.86 %	
Total Responses	581	100.00 %	

The online student evaluation can help meet the needs of fast-paced library instruction.

The power of people

The effective use of technology plays an important role in the development of modern library instruction programs, but this tells only half the story. To be truly effective, instruction teams require resources, technical knowledge, training and coaching, and recognition of their efforts by the administration.[5] There are a number of management strategies that can help guide and empower the instruction team including:

> engagement and ownership
> compromise and negotiation
> integration and manipulation

Regular meetings, shared input in decision making, and open channels of communication can help instructors feel engagement with the program and enable a sense of ownership that can lead to increased responsibility towards program success. Giving instructors the freedom to select which classes to teach helps promote buy-in. Instructors feel more responsibility

and even perhaps more excitement for a class they have chosen to teach versus a class they were assigned by the instruction coordinator.

Shared scholarship opportunities can also promote group cohesion. There is obvious benefit in showcasing your program by sharing the unique tools and systems you are using; better yet that presentations and authorship reflect unique perspectives of the instructors as a group. Invite team instructors to coauthor an article (as we have done here) or be a copresenter at a state or national conference. Collaboration gives instructors opportunity to share in the success. Shared input can also build feelings of efficacy; a team that believes it can succeed is more likely to do just that.

At times, compromises must be made between library instructors, coordinators, and other stakeholders. This might mean satisfying librarian demand for software by providing a similar open source tool rather than an off-the-shelf product. Likewise it might require sacrifices by the IT department to implement and support a classroom control system in an already complex electronic classroom so instructors can improve teaching.

Negotiation between instructors is common as well. Often, one professor will sign up for three or four instruction sessions, one for each section they are teaching for a single class. Ideally, one librarian should teach all four sessions so all the students are getting the same lesson, but this rarely happens. Scheduling conflicts sometimes mean that each session will be taught by a different librarian. Instruction librarians manage this challenge by coordinating course requests to find the subject and time fit for each class, and plan lessons together so students get similar instruction.

Codevelopment of activities is an easy way to create uniform learning experiences. Have one librarian touch base with the course instructor to see what they want out of the lesson. Get a copy of the assignment and then share the information with the li-

brarians involved in the class. Occasionally, one instructor teaching later in the day may observe an earlier class to make sure they are both teaching similar lessons. If it is a particularly difficult or specialized lesson, share that information with your colleagues verbally, through e-mail, or even leave a cheat sheet at the reference desk. That way another librarian who wasn't involved with the class won't be blindsided when one of the students comes to the reference desk seeking more help.

Nonetheless, change can be hard to promote, and at times the library coordinator must use other means. This can include appeals to the administration for mediation regarding technology or personnel issues, alerting library instructors to responsibilities outlined in evaluation requirements, or the organization's strategic plan.

Despite change, the pieces are in place to move library instruction forward as a model for managing the complex business of getting information education to a wide variety of learners while meeting the demand for high outcomes on a shoestring budget. The key to success will be the ability to leverage the technology, skills, and experience that connect us together, and the ability to coordinate our all too human efforts to meet this goal.

Notes

1. Rickey W. Griffin, *Management* (New York, Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton-Mifflin, 1995).

2. Keith Harrison-Broninski, *Human Interactions, The Heart and Soul of Business Process Management* (Tampa, Florida: Kiffer-Meghan, 2005).

3. Jenny Preece, Yvonne Rogers, and Helen Sharp, *Interaction design: Beyond human-computer interaction* (New York, NY: J. Wiley & Sons, 2002).

4. Springshare LLC, 2008, LibGuides Community, libguides.com/community.php?m=g.

5. Andrew J. DuBrin, *Fundamentals of organizational behavior* (Mason, Ohio: Thomson/South-Western, 2005).