

Lynne Bisko and Rebecca Pope-Ruark

# Making the video

## Tips for successful library-class collaborations

Elon University's Belk Library doesn't have a problem getting students in the door—the library is well-loved and well-used. Unfortunately, we don't have the staff to reach all of our students through formal instruction sessions, and not as many students ask questions at the information desk as we would hope.

So when approached with the opportunity to be a client for the Center for Undergraduate Publishing and Information Design (CUPID), run by Professional Writing and Rhetoric (PWR)

faculty in the Department of English, we jumped at the chance. CUPID is an active teaching lab and program that provides students with opportunities for long- and short-term collaborative project experiences.

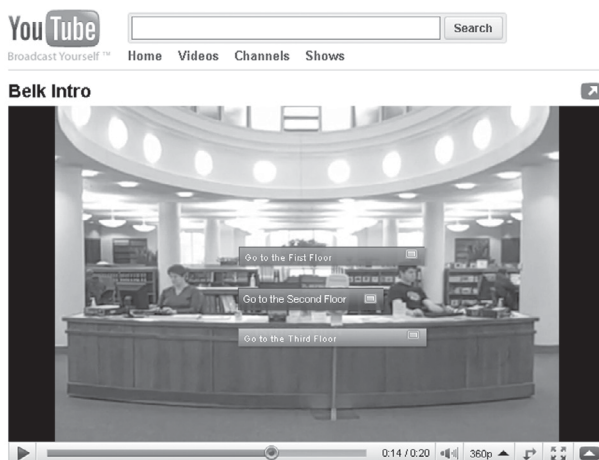
This article describes the collaboration between Belk Library and a PWR class supported by CUPID to create short, effective, audience-driven instructional videos that will give Belk Library an alternate way to reach and instruct students.

In addition to discussing our experience, we offer several tips for libraries considering working with students on similar communication projects.

### The idea

The initial concept for this project came about when student representatives on the university library committee repeatedly commented that their peers often didn't realize how many resources were available to them

at the library, that the familiar resources were only used superficially by most, and that most college students won't ask for help from a librarian. One of the students suggested the idea of short YouTube videos that students could watch to



Navigating Belk Library.

learn more about library resources.

At the same time, Rebecca Pope-Ruark, a member of the university library committee, was looking for a semester-long project that her advanced PWR students could run during fall semester 2009. The goal of the course, titled "Publication and Project Management," was to create an environment mimicking a consulting firm, from which the

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students would conduct rhetorical assessments, initiate primary research, use their research to make informed proposals to fit a client's needs, and complete the proposed publication project to the client's satisfaction. The video idea also showed promise as an ongoing project in which future CUPID students could collaborate with the library. The library committee enthusiastically agreed to the collaboration because of the likelihood that real, useable videos would be produced by the end of the project and the potential for continued CUPID student support to keep the video library growing.

### **The project**

At the start of the semester, the class interviewed the librarians about library resources and services we felt were important for students to know. We discussed the project, our goals and needs, and everyone's roles. The librarians ultimately requested that the class identify topics they thought would be interesting and useful to students and then propose those to us.

The students conducted extensive primary research to collect information from the student body regarding perception of library resources and interest in potential instructional videos. Instruments included a large-scale survey, informal polling, and observation of student-librarian interaction near the reference desk. A one-question e-mail was sent to teaching faculty asking them to identify the most important library resource for students.

Using the data collected, the students crafted specific video project proposals, and four competitive teams presented their recommendations to the entire library staff at midterm. After compiling staff feedback, we then provided written and verbal comments to Pope-Ruark in a small group meeting, indicating our likes, dislikes, and which videos and features we wanted the students to implement.

Our final list included seven how-to videos: 1) navigating the physical library, 2) accessing databases from off-campus,

3) printing with our print management system, 4) printing in color, 5) using the copier machines, 6) using the DocSend to scan documents, and 7) finding leisure and recreational resources in the library. We asked that the students provide storyboards/scripts for us to approve, descriptive handouts to accompany the videos online (a student proposal), and a video/handout on how to create future videos. Based on one of the student group's proposals, we also requested that the students use interactive YouTube videos that let users choose their paths by clicking on links embedded within the videos.

The students implemented the video library by scripting and storyboarding each video for approval; filming each video according to the approved script using simple Flip camera technology; editing the videos in iMovie and FinalCutPro; and adding transitions, music, and informative text. They also performed usability testing on each video with a focus group of peers and used these findings to revise the videos. Finally, the students created a temporary home on a YouTube channel to house the videos until the library decided where the videos would reside on our Web site. During this phase, library staff reviewed and approved each of the storyboards and videos.

The students met formally with the librarians twice during the semester, specifically during their initial project meeting the first week of class and when they presented their proposals. Most additional communication was mediated by the professor so as not to overburden the librarians with student questions. One student in this class also happened to work at the library, so he discussed the project frequently and informally with the librarians, which proved valuable.

### **Implementation**

At the end of the course, the students delivered the set of pilot videos, the "how to make a video" video, and a recommendation report with ideas to organize, continue, and promote the videos with the student popula-

tion. The student who worked in the library and collaborated individually with the librarians during the project volunteered to serve a ten-hour-per-week internship with the library in spring 2010 to implement several of the class's recommendations. His internship goals were to formalize the video library on the library's Web site, implement marketing initiatives to both encourage students to use the existing videos, and to make new videos, and do any necessary project maintenance.

The student intern investigated alternatives for the permanent home of the video library and decided to use a blog, which is easier to brand, manage, and maintain than a YouTube channel or the university's Web site. To retain the interactive feature used in the videos, which does not function in videos embedded outside of YouTube, we used a screen shot as the link to the actual video on YouTube. Our new about:belk blog hosts the video library and is accessed from our "How do I...?" frequently asked questions Web page, as well as from other locations on our Web site.

A key piece of the marketing plan was a contest for students to create and submit their own videos. We promoted the contest with posters in the library and campus center, table tents in the dining halls, and announcements on the university news feed, the library's blog, Facebook, and whiteboards in the library's study rooms. The student intern created all of the marketing materials, as well as developed contest guidelines and fine tuned the "how to make

a video" video. We also promoted the video contest as a part of our spring 2010 National Library Week celebration.

We received four entries, which we considered a success given the time of the semester. Our diverse marketing plans were worth the effort as we discovered that each of the entrants learned about the contest via a different source. The winning video met all of our criteria: it was creative, informative, engaging, and a good fit with the original videos. We felt that the other entries were of good quality and decided to also add them

to the video blog.

The premiere of the video library, as well as the announcement of the contest winners, occurred at an event during the university's week-long celebration of undergraduate research in



Take a break at the library.

April 2010. We publicized the winners on a poster in the library, the university news feed, and the library blog. After the contest, the university news feed published a longer article about the video project, which pointed readers to the blog.<sup>1</sup> During the seven-week period from the start of the contest until the end of the semester, the videos were viewed 251 times, with 179 (71%) of the views occurring after the contest ended. Since the topics covered in the videos are more likely to be useful to new students, we expect the number of hits to be higher in the fall when a new class of first-year students comes to campus.

Our future plans include featuring the videos in our fall 2010 library instruction sessions, promoting the use and creation

of new videos to the university's Elon 101 freshmen orientation classes, and assessing the effectiveness of the project. The student intern wrote a memo that explains the goals, process, and benefits of creating new videos as a class project. We plan to send the memo to faculty to encourage them to help us grow the video library. Should the project be successful in getting student buy-in, CUPID and Pope-Ruark can continue to provide rhetorically educated students through internships or the CUPID Studio project course.

### **Advice for librarians collaborating with students**

Based on our successful collaboration, we offer the following tips for creating similar partnerships.

- **Look for partnerships in unusual places.** The majority of similar projects we found in the literature partnered with classes or students in business departments/schools.<sup>2,3</sup> While no doubt these projects provided excellent collaborative opportunities, fruitful partnerships can be found all over campus.

The majority of the students participating in our project were English majors with a concentration in Professional Writing and Rhetoric, which is related to the disciplines of Professional Communication, Technical Communication, Business Communication, and Composition at different institutions. Because of the rhetorical and practical approaches to communication taught in these programs, students can apply the skills they've developed to design and implement research, create a variety of useful documents, and suggest innovative ways to reach unique audiences.

Imagine the potential of working with students in statistics classes to analyze usage statistics; multimedia authoring students to create unique interactive Web projects; psychology students to understand why students seem reluctant to ask for help in the library; computer programming students to create a library app for the iPhone; or education students to create reading initiatives for stu-

dents and the community. The possibilities are endless when you consider what faculty and students are doing on your campus.

- **Create multistage projects.** Large projects require smaller stages to be completed effectively. In our project, the students had milestones to accomplish throughout the semester. Each stage required some interaction with or approval from the library. By following this scheme, students not only felt a sense of forward motion and ongoing learning, but the librarians had an opportunity to provide feedback and help direct the project. Students are both engaged and accountable when they know the client will check in on their work.

- **Engage the students in a real partnership.** When students feel their work has real consequences for the target audience, they crave client contact and constructive feedback. During our partnership, Pope-Ruark limited the student/librarian interaction to one formal meeting and the project presentations, and mediated all other communication with us herself. Her intention was not to reduce student engagement, but to productively channel contact so the librarians did not feel overburdened with student questions. Because of this limited contact, the student library worker taking the course interacted with the client later in the project and regularly reported his conversations back to the other students in the class.

Despite good intentions on the professor's part, both students and librarians made it clear they would have liked more personal contact throughout the project. Even professional project teams develop a sense of community through their interactions. Be open to questions and interaction with the students throughout the project to ensure not only relevant products, but also continued engagement and community building.

- **Follow-through.** The experience of an entire semester dedicated to a single project was new for these students. Academic projects are often short-term and results rarely implemented, unlike real world projects

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business librarians were invited to a meeting with administration and department chairs to share the findings and to discuss the potential for a continuing relationship between the library and college.

The COB and library agreed that data purchases would go through the library. The library assists with purchases, examines license agreements, and suggests alternative resources, as necessary. The COB posted the spreadsheet on their intranet Web site for easy access.

In addition, faculty are encouraged to and do contact the librarians for data assistance. The spreadsheet is updated regularly. All of this encourages a continuing and valued relationship between the library and the COB.

## Conclusion

Inserting librarians into the management of data resources for the COB was a major accomplishment for MSU's seedling data services program. This would never have happened without persistent communica-

tion efforts, a clear objective, and a confluence of faculty and administrative interest. The complementary outcomes of increased positive regard for the library and awareness of data reference services were also a clear success of the outreach effort.

Just as cooperation with colleagues at the Business Library was important to the success of working with the COB, securing working relationships with other departmental liaisons is an important first step towards bolstering faculty and student awareness of data services.

More and more colleges and universities are starting library data service programs to meet the needs of quantitative researchers. It is essential to explain and promote the services that data librarians can provide to students, faculty, and other groups. MSU's successful data collection management and data reference endeavors—inside and outside of the library—have built a strong foundation for the new data services program to continue to grow. //

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in which results are important to success. Partners have a responsibility to the students to follow-through on project results or at least provide feedback at the project's conclusion.

In our case, the students know that the pilot videos are available on the Belk Library Web site for student access; that one of their own worked with the library to implement their final recommendations; and that their work was launched to the university community at a public event. They can show the results of their hard work to family and peers and see their work continued, reinforcing their learning experience and mimicking professional project work.

To make sure that the students' work becomes more than just an academic exercise, follow through on their ideas or communicate with them why you will not. Students will appreciate the life lesson in professionalism, and you might find students who are interested in continuing the collaboration in new ways.

In conclusion, library-class collaborations can be extremely fruitful partnerships when

they are planned and tended effectively. Libraries gain new ways to connect with and reach out to students, and students get real-world project experience. To see the initial results of our collaboration, go to [blogs.elon.edu/aboutbelk/](http://blogs.elon.edu/aboutbelk/).

## Notes

1. Eric Townsend, “Student Videos Promote Belk Library Resources,” *Elon University E-net!* [www.elon.edu/e-net/Note.aspx?id=945471](http://www.elon.edu/e-net/Note.aspx?id=945471) (accessed May 24, 2010).
2. Lynda M. Duke and Jean B. McDonald, “Working with Campus Marketing Classes to Improve Reference Service Visibility,” *Marketing Library Services* (November/December 2009), [www.infotoday.com/MLS/nov09/Duke\\_MacDonald.shtml](http://www.infotoday.com/MLS/nov09/Duke_MacDonald.shtml).
3. Eleonora Dubicki, “Business Students Chart a New Course for Promoting the University Library,” *College & Undergraduate Libraries*, 16, 2/3 (April 2009), [search.ebscohost.com/](http://search.ebscohost.com/) //